HERO TALES OF IRELAND

As Good as the Arabian Nights.

Collected in the Original Irish from the Lips of Irish Story Tellers.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH TALE.

Balor of the Evil Eye and Lug La'vada His Grandson.

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Long ago there were people in Erin called Firbolgs, and they lived undisturbed many years, till a King called Balor Beiman came from Lochlin with great forces, made war on the Firbolgs, killed their King, and drove them out of Erin.

The Firbolgs went to Spain, and there they were looking for means of support, but could find none, unless what they got for work in carrying mortar.

They carried mortar, and lived that way till at long last the Spaniards said: "These people are too many in number, let us drive them out of the country." So the Spaniards drove out the Firbolgs, and they came back to Erin. In Erin they attacked Balor and his Lochlin men, but were defeated with loss a second time. When they left Erin again the Firbolgs went to the lands of Gall'owna, and there they lived undisturbed and unharmed.

When the Firbolgs were driven out of Erin the second time Balor Beiman summoned his chief men, and said to them:

"I will go back to Lochlin now and live there in quiet. I am too old to fight with new enemies. I will leave my sons here with you to rule in place of myself, and do you obey them as I be as brave under them as you were under me."

With that Balor left Erin, sailed away, and never stopped till he reached home in Lochlin.

At that time there was a smith in Erin name d Gaivnin Gow, an l he had a cow called Glas Gownach. The smith had a magic halter with which he used to tie the cow every night.

Glas Gownach travelled three counties of Erin every day, an l came home in the evening; the halter had power over her, and she went always to the halter in the evening if left to herself.

They cow gave milk to every one on her journey each day, no matter how large the vessels were that people brought or how many, she filled them; there was no lack of milk in Erin w ile this cow was in it; she was sent to give food and comfort to all, and she gave it, but especially to the poor people.

Balor Beiman had his eye on the cow, and when going back to Lochlin from Erin he watched his chance and stole the halter. Gaivnin Gow saw the theft, but too late to prevent it. Balor escaped with the halter and made off to Lochlin.

Gaivnin Gow ran quickly to Glas Gownach, caught her by the tail, and held her that way till evening, when he drove her home carefully, an l shut her up in the forge behind the bellows, where he milked her.

Gaivnin Gow stopped work in his forge now, and did nothing but mind the cow. He went out in the morning, followed her through every place, and brought her back in the evening. He held her tail all the day, and never let go his hold of her till he had her fastened behind the bellows.

The people got milk as before from Glas Gownach wherever she went through the country, but the smith got no milk till he had the cow enclosed in the forge.

The widow of the King of the Firbolgs took a new husband in the land of Gall'owna, and had seven sons there. When the eldest, Geall Dianvir, had grown up, she said to him:

"I will give you ships now, and go you to Erin with warriors and good champions to know can we get satisfaction of those people who hunted us out of our country like hares or foxes."

The son took the ships and sailed away with champions and heroes, and never stopped till he sailed into Caola Beag (Eiliybegs, in Donegal). He landed in that place, left his ships safely fastened, and went forward trav. He never stopped on his way nor halted till he came to a place called Bian Rl. He halted in that place, for before him were three armies fighting.

When they saw the new forces coming the armies stopped fighting.

"Why are you fighting here with three armies?" asked Dianvir; "what is the cause of your struggle?"

The leader of one army said: "We are brothers; our father died not long since; he was King of three provinces, and I think it my right to be King in his place."

The leader of the second army, the middle brother, said: "I have as much right to be King after my father as he has."

The third brother said: "I have as much right to be King as either of them."

Neither of the three was willing to yield his claim or obey one of the others, but they were all ready to fight while their strength lasted.

"Your trouble can be settled easily," said Dianvir, "if you are willing."

"Settle it and do us a service," said the eldest brother.

"I will, but you must take my judgment and obey it."

"We will," said all the brothers. "We will accept your decision and do what you tell us."

"Listen then," said Dianvir; "you, the eldest, will be King for this year. You, the second, will be King in his place the second year; and you, the youngest brother, will be King the third year. The fourth year you, the eldest brother, will be King again for a year, and so it will go on, and you and your two brothers will be spending time happily all your lives."

The three brothers agreed and were glad. The eldest was King that first year. Dianvir went his way but he had hardly gone out of their sight when the youngest of the three brothers said:

"That man will make trouble for us yet; my advice is to follow him and put and end to himself and his men before they can harm us."

"Oh," said the eldest, "sure you would not kill the man who gave us good counsel and settled our difficulty?"

"No matter what he did," said the youngest, "he will give you trouble yet if you let him go. Follow him, put an end to him, or he will put an end to us."

They sent men after Dianvir. As Dianvir was a stranger in Erin he had no knowledge of the roads; when a lake was before him he was long going around it; when he came to a deep river he was long finding a ford.

Dianvir's men were cut off, most of them fell, and he himself fell with others. A small number escaped to the ships, took one of them and sailed to the land of Gall'owna. They told the whole story to the Queen, told how they had been treated with treachery.

"I will have satisfaction for my son," said the mother. "I will have it without waiting long." With that she had ships and boats prepared, and went herself with her other sons and strong forces to take vengeance on the brothers. The Queen and her forces were six weeks sailing hither and over, driven by strong winds, when one morning a sailor at the topmast cried: "I see land."

"Is it more or less of it that you see?" asked the Queen.

"I see land the size of a pig's back," said the sailor, "and a black back it is."

They sailed three days and nights longer, and on the fourth morning they were near shore and landed in Bantry (White Strand). The Queen fixed her house at Ardneevy and prepared for action, but instead of the three brothers it was the sons of Balor she had against her.

War began and the Lochlin men were getting the upper hand the first days. At some distance from their camp was a well of venom and into this well they dipped their swords and spears before going to battle, and the man of the enemy who was touched by a weapon dipped in the well was as badly off as the man whose head was taken from him. There was no chance now for the Queen's forces, so she called her sons and said to them:

"We'll be destroyed to the last one unless we find help against this venom. Go to the Old Blind Sage and ask advice of him."

The sons went to the Sage and the advice they got was this:

"There is a well of venom not far from the camp of the Lochlin men. Before going to battle they dip their swords and spears in that water, and the enemy who is touched by those weapons that day is killed as surely as if the head had been swept from him. You are to get twenty measures of the milk of Glas Gownach and pour it into that well in the night time; the milk will be going down in the well and the poison will be rising and going out till it flows away and is lost altogether. Take, then, a hundred swords and spears to Gaivnin Gow, the smith, to put temper on their points and edges. He will do this if you follow the cow all day for him and bring her home safely in the evening."

The Queen's sons did what the sage advised. The venom went from the well when the cow's milk was poured into it. From that night out the weapons of the Lochlin men were common swords and spears.

When the Queen's sons went with the swords and spears to Gaivnin Gow, he said:

"I cannot work for you. I am minding this cow, Glas Gownach, that travels three counties of Erin every day; I must go with her wherever she goes, bring her home, and put her behind the bellows in the forge every night. If the cow goes from me I am lost, with my wife and children. We have no means of support but her milk."

"I am as good a man as you," said the best of the brothers; "I will mind the cow and bring her back in the evening."

The smith let the cow go with him at last and went to work at the swords and spears. The young man followed the cow faithfully all day, brought her back in the evening, left her outside the forge, and went in himself. The smith had the swords and spears tempered.

"Where is the cow Glas Gownach?" asked Gaivnin Gow.

"Outside at the door."

"Bad luck to you, she is gone from me now, gone forever."

They went out. Not a trace of Glas Gownach. She had gone to Balor Beiman in Lochlin, for he had the halter.

There was a great battle on the following day, the Queen fell and her sons, except two. Balor's sons were all killed and the Lochlin men driven away.

Balor rose up in anger when the news came to Lochlin. "I'll have no satisfaction, for my sons," said he. "I will burn all Erin!"

Besides his two eyes Balor had a third one, an evil eye, in the middle of his forehead, with the power to burn everything in the world that it looked upon. Over this eye he kept seven steel shields and a lock on each one of them.

"I will destroy Erin, and no man can stop me," said Balor, "for no man can kill me but the son of my daughter. She has no son, and if she had itself he could kill me only with the red spear made by Gaivnin Gow, and it cast into my eye the moment I raise the last shield from it when I am standing on Muin Duv*

*This is the high point, "the size of a pig's back," which the sailor saw from the topmast.

(Black Back) to burn Erin."

One day the two brothers were talking, and Cian, the youngest son of the Queen of the Firbolgs, said to his only living brother: "We have done great harm to Gaivnin Gow. It is by us that the cow went from him, and we should bring her back."

"That is more than we can do," said the second brother, "unless we get help from Bark an Tra, the druid."

The two brothers went to Bark an Tra and told their story.

"The work is a hard one; I don't know can you do it," said the druid, "but you can try; I will help you. The cow is with Balor Beiman, in Lochlin. He stole her halter when he went from Erin, and she followed it the day your brother left her outside the forge. No man can bring the cow with him unless he has the halter, and it is hard to get that."

"Balor Beiman can be killed only by the son of his daughter; he has her behind seven locked doors. No living person sees the daughter but himself. He sees her every day, takes food and drink to her. To bring back the cow you must make the acquaintance of Balor's daughter. I will give you a cloak of darkness; put it over you and make your way to Lochlin. When Balor goes to see his daughter you go with him. He opens one door, goes in and locks it, opens the second, goes in and locks that, and so on. When he is inside in his daughter's chamber the seven doors are locked behind him."

Cian put on the cloak of darkness and no man could see him; he went to Lochlin then and followed Balor to his daughter's chamber. He waited till the night when she was sleeping, went then to her bedside, and put his hand on her heavily.

She screamed, saying: "Some one is in the chamber."

Balor came very angry and with an evil face to see who was in it. He searched the chamber through, searched many times, found no one. Failing to find any one, he returned to his own place and went to bed. Cian came again and put a heavier hand on Balor's daughter. She roared out that some one was in the chamber. Balor came, searched, and looked several times and went away. The third time the young man put a still heavier hand on the maiden, and she screamed louder. Balor searched this time more carefully, found no man, and said:

"Oh, you are a torment; it's dreaming you are. You are hoping for some one to be in the world to destroy me, but that is what never will be. If I hear more screams here I will take the head off you."

No sooner was Balor gone this time and the seven doors locked than the young man came again and put a heavier hand than ever on the maiden. She did not scream then; she was in dread of her father; but said slowly: "Are you a living man or a ghost?"

"I am so and so," said Cian, "the best champion in the world, and I have come here to win you." He talked on till he pleased her, they agreed then. He spent three days in her company. On the fourth day he followed Balor out of the chamber and away with him back to Erin. He went to Bark an Tra, the druid.

"Were you in Lochlin with Balor?"

"I was."

"How did you behave?"

"So and so," said Cian.

"You must be here again at the right time."

Cian was back in Lochlin at the right time unseen in his cloak of darkness, and brought away a child with him to Erin. The child was not thriving for three years, hardly lived, and was puny.

"The child is not doing well," said Cian to the druid.

"The child will do well yet," answered Bark an Tra. "Take him now to Lochlin as far as Balor, the child will not thrive till his grandfather calls him by name."

Cian went to Balor.

"Well," said Balor, "who are you and what journey are you on?"

"I am a poor man looking for service."

"What child is that you have with you?"

"My own child," said Cian; "my wife is dead."

"What can you do?" asked Balor.

"I am the best gardener in the world."

"I have a better gardener than you," said Balor.

"You have not. What can your gardener do?"

"The tree that he plants on Monday morning has the finest ripe apples in the world on Saturday night."

"That's nothing. The tree that I plant in the morning I'll pluck from it in the evening the finest ripe apples you have ever seen in your life."

"I do not like to have any child near my castle," said Balor, "but I will keep you for a time, even with the child, if your wages are not too great for me."

"I will work a day and a year for one cow."

Balor agreed to the terms and took Cian. Balor spoke no word to the child good or bad, and the boy was not thriving. One day Cian was bringing to Balor a lot of fine apples from one of his trees, he stumbled on the threshold, and the apples fell to the floor. All the people present ran to gather up the apples, the child better than others. He worked so nimbly that he picked up two-thirds of all that had fallen, though a whole crowd was picking as well as himself.

"Tog Cat Lug Lamh Fhada (Take away with you Little Long Hand)," cried Balor.

Cian worked his time out then, and said: "I will take my pay another day."

"You may take it when you like," said Balor.

Cian took his son to Erin, the child grew wonderfully after that, and was soon of full growth.

Cian went to the druid.

"The time is near," said the druid, "when Balor will stand on Muin Duv. He'll raise his eye shields, and if the red spear is not put in his eye when the last shield is raised all Erin will be burned in one flash. Go now and ask Balor Beiman for your wages, say that you want the cow Glas Gownach, for we want her and must have her. He will refuse, dispute, and quarrel, give bad names. You will say that he must pay you, must give the cow or go to judgment. He will go to judgment rather than give the cow, and do you choose his daughter as judge; she will give the cow to you."

"I will go to judgment," said Balor when Cian insisted on getting the cow. "What judgment will you have?"

"My case is a true one," said Cian. "I ask no judge but the one yourself will take. I ask no judge but your own daughter."

"Let her be the judge," said Balor.

Cian put on his cloak of darkness, and, going to the daughter, explained his case to her. Next day Balor went in and told her all the story of the cow Glas Gownach.

"I must have nine days to think the matter over," said Balor's daughter.

She got the time, then she asked three days more. On the thirteenth morning Balor went to her and said: "The judgment must be made to-day."

"Well," said the daughter, "go out now and stand before the window you and the gardener fell to yesterday. Whomever the halter comes from me he'll have the cow."

When they stood in front of the window she threw the halter to Cian.

"How could you do that?" cried out Balor.

"Oh, father, they say there is always a crooked cast in a woman's hand. I threw toward you, but it's to the gardener the halter went."

Balor let the cow go. He was very angry, but could not help himself. "You have Glas Gownach, but I'll have satisfaction in my own time," cried he, as Cian went away.

"We have troubled you greatly with our work," said Cian to Gaivnin Gow, "but here is the cow for you, and with her the halter. You can stay at home now and rest; you need follow her no longer."

Cian went that night to the druid and said: "I have the cow back in Erin."

"It is well that you have," answered the druid. "In five days from this Balor will be here to burn up Erin. He will stand on Muin Duv at daybreak. He will raise all the shields from his eye, and unless a spear made by Gaivnin Gow is hurled into his eye by his grandson that instant he will have all Erin in flames. You must bring Gaivnin Gow and the forge with you to Muin Duv, have the spear made, and all things there in readiness, and your son must be ready to throw the red spear at the right moment."

Gaivnin Gow came. They brought the forge, the spear, and all that was needed, put them behind a rock on the side of Muin Duv. On the fifth morning at daylight Balor was on the top of Muin Duv, and the instant the last shield reached his upper eyelid Lug Lamh Fhada* struck him with the spear and Balor fell dead.

*Pronounced as written in the title—Lug Longhand.

NOTE.—The cow, Glas Gownach, is identical with Glas Gaimach in the tale marked No. 11 in this series, Aug. 14, 1892. Gownach means a cow whose calf is a year old. This cow is very important in Gaelic mythology, and is undoubtedly of the same stock as the cows in the Sanskrit Rig Veda, *e.e.*, a cloud cow.

THE END OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH TALE.

DAVID BALFOUR.

(A Sequel to "Kidnapped").

A STORY OF ADVENTURE.

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON,

Author of "Treasure Island," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," &c.

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CHAPTER XIV.—THE BASS.

I had no thought where they were taking me only looked here and there for the appearance of a ship; and there ran the while in my head a word of Ransome's—the twenty-pounders. If I were to be exposed a second time to that same former danger of the plantations, I judged it must turn ill with me; there was no second Alan, and no second shipwreck and spare yard to be expected now; and I saw myself hoe tobacco under the whip's lash. The thought chilled me; the air was sharp upon the water, the stretchers of the boat drenched with a cold dew; and I shivered in my place beside the steersman. This was the dark man whom I have called hitherto the Lowlander; his name was Dale, ordinarily called Black Andie. Feeling the thrill of my shiver, he very kindly handed me a rough jacket full of fish scales, with which *I* was glad to cover myself.

ON THE BASS.

"I thank you for this kindness," said I, "and will make so free as to repay it with a warning. You take a high responsibility in this affair. You are not like these ignorant, barbarous Highlanders, but know what the law is and the risks of those that break it."

"I am no just exactly what ye would ca' an extremist for the law," says he, "at the best of times; but in this business I act with a good warrantry."

"What are you going to do with me?" I asked.

"Nae harm," said he, "nae harm, ava'. Ye'll hae strong freens, I'm thinking. Ye'll be richt eneuch yet."

There began to fall a grayness on the face of the sea. Little dabs of pink and like coals of slow fire came in the east, and at the same time the geese awakened and began crying about the top of the Bass. It is just the one crag of rock, as everybody knows, but great enough to carve a city from. The sea was extremely little, but there went a hollow plowter round the base of it. With the growing of the dawn I could see it clearer and clearer. The straight crags painted with sea-birds' droppings like a morning frost, the sloping top of it green with grass, the clan of white geese that cried about the sides, and the black, broken buildings of the prison sitting close on the sea's edge.

At the sight the truth came in upon me in a clap.

"It's no there you're taking me," I cried.

"Just to the Bass, mannie," said he. "Wham the auld saints were afore ye, and I misdoubt if ye have come so fairly by your preeson."

"But none dwells there now." I cried: "the place is long a ruin."

"It'll be the mair pleisand a change fur the solan geese, then," quoth Andie, dryly.

The day coming slowly brighter, I observed on the bilge, among the big stones with which fisherfolk ballast their boats, several kegs and baskets and a provision of fuel. All these were discharged upon the crag. Andie, myself, and my three Highlanders (I call them mine, although it was the other way about), landed along with them. The sun was not yet up when the boat moved away again; the noise of the oars on the tholepins echoed from the cliffs, and left us in our singular reclusion.

Andie Dale was the Prefect (as I would jocularly call him) of the Bass, being at once the shepherd and the gamekeeper of that small and rich estate. He had to mind the dozen or so of sheep that fed and fattened on the grass of the sloping part of it, like beasts grazing the roof of a cathedral. He had charge besides of the solan geese that roosted in the crags, and from these an extraordinary income is drived. The young are dainty eating, as much as two shillings apiece being a common price, and paid willingly by epicures; even the grown birds are valuable for their oil and feathers, and a part of the minister's stipend of North Berwick is paid to this day in solan geese, which makes it (in some folks' eyes) a parish to be coveted. To perform these several businesses, as well as to protect the geese from poachers, Andie had frequent occasion to sleep and pass days at Crosbie on the mainland; and found the man at home there like a farmer in his steading. Bidding us all shoulder some of the packages, a matter in which I made haste to bear a hand, he led us in by a locked gate, which was the only admission to the land, and through the ruins of the fortress to the Governor's house. There we saw, by the ashes in the chimney and a standing bed place in one corner, that he made his usual occupation.

The bed he now offered me to use, saying he supposed I would set up to be gentry.

"My gentrice has nothing to do with where I lie," said I. "I bless God I have lain hard ere now, and can do the same again with thankfulness. While I am here, Mr. Andie, if that be your name, I will do my part and take my place with you as your mate; and indeed, from the first I had set myself out to capture his good will. An odd circumstance (to be told presently) effected this beyond my expectation, but even in early days we made a friendly pair to be a prisoner and his jailer.

I should trifle with my conscience if I pretended my stay upon the Bass was wholly disagreeable. It seemed to me a safe place, as though I was escaped there out of my troubles. No harm was to be offered me; a material impossibility, rock and the deep sea, prevented me from fresh attempts; I felt I had my life safe and my honor safe, and there were times when I allowed myself to gloat on them like stolen waters. At other times my thoughts were very different. I recalled how strong I had expressed myself both to Ransome and to Stewart; I reflected that my captivity upon the Bass, in view of a great part of the coasts of Fife and Lothian, was a thing I should be thought more likely to have invented than endured; and in the eyes of these two gentlemen, at least, I must pass for a boaster and a coward. Now I would take this lightly enough; tell myself that so long as I stood well with Catriona Drummond, the opinion of the rest of man was but moonshine and spilled water; and thence pass off into those meditations of a lover which are so delightful to himself and must always appear so surprisingly idle to a reader. But soon the fear would take me otherwise; I would be shaken with a perfect panic of self-esteem, and these supposed hard judgments appear an injustice impossible to be supported. With that another train of thought would be presented, and I had scarce begun to be concerned about men's judgments of myself than I was haunted with the remembrance of James Stewart in his dung-on and the lamentations of his wife. Then, indeed, passion began to work in me; I could not forgive myself to sit there idle; it seemed (if I were a man at all) that I could fly or swim out of my place of safety, and it was in such humors and to amuse my self-reproaches that I would set the more particularly to win the good side of Andie Dale.

At last, when we two were alone on the summit of the rock on a bright morning, I put in some hint about a bribe. He looked at me, cast back his head, and laughed out loud.

"Ay, you're funny, Mr. Dale," said I, "but perhaps if you'll glance an eye upon that paper you may change your note."

The stupid Highlanders had taken from me at the time of my seizure nothing but hard money, and the paper I now showed Andie was an acknowledgment from the British Linen Company for a considerable sum.

He read it. "Troth, and ye're nano sae ill aff," said he.

"I thought that would may be vary your opinions," said I.

"Hout!" said he, "it shaws me ye can bribe, but I'm no to be bribit."

"We'll see about that yet a while," says I. "And first, I'll show you that I know what I am talking. You have orders to detain me here till after Thursday, 21st September."

"Ye're no altegether wrong either," says Andie. "I'm to let ye gang, bar orders, contrair, on Saturday, the 23rd."

I could not but feel there was something extremely insidious in this arrangement. That I was to reappear precisely in time to be too late would cast the more discredit on my tale, if I were minded to tell one; and this screwed me to fighting point.

"Now then, Andie, you that kens the world, listen to me, and think while ye listen," said I. "I know there are great folks in the business, and I make no doubt you have their names to go upon. I have seen some of them myself since this affair began, and said my say into their faces, too. But what kind of a crime would this be that I had committed? or what kind of a process is this that I am fallen under? To be apprehended by some ragged John-Highwaymen on Aug. 30, carried to a rickle of old stones that is now neither fort nor gaol (whatever it once was), but just the gamekeeper's lodge of the Bass Rock, and set free again, Sept. 23, as secretly as I was first arrested—does that sound like law to you? or does it sound like justice? or does it not sound honestly like a piece of some low, dirty intrigue, of which the very folk that meddle with it are ashamed?"

"I canna gainsay ye, Shaws. It looks unco underhand," says Andie. "And werenae the folk guid sound Whigs and true blue Presbyterians I would hae seen them mayont Jordan and Jerooglem or I would have set hand to it."

"The Master of Lovat'll be a braw Whig," says I, "and a grand Presbyterian."

"I ken naething by him," said he. "I hae nae trokings wi' Lovats."

"No, it'll be Prestongrange that you'll be dealing with," said I.

"Ah, but I'll no tell ye that," said Andie.

"Little need when I ken," was my retort.

"There's just the sae thing ye can be fairly sure of, Shaws," says Andie. "And that is that (try as ye please), I'm no dealin wi' yoursel'; nor yet I amnae goin' to," he added.

"Well, Andie, I see I'll have to be speak out plain with you." I replied. And I told him so much as I thought needful of the facts.

He heard me out with serious interest, and when I had done seemed to consider a little with himself.

"Shaws," said he at last, "I'll deal with the naked hand. It's a queer tale, and no very creditable the way you tell it; and I'm fur frae minting that is other than the way that ye believe it. As for yoursel', ye seem to me rather a dacent-like young man. But mo, that's aulder and mair judeecious, see perhaps a wee bit forrit in the job than what ye can dae. And here is the matter clear and plain to ye. There'll be nae skaith to yoursel if I keep ye here: for frae that, I think ye'll be a hantle better by it. There'll be nae skaith to the kintry—just ae mair Hielantman hangit—Gude kens, a guid riddance. On the ither hand, it would be considerable skaith to me if I would let you free. Sae, speakin' as a guid Whig, an honest freen' to you, and an anxious freen' to my ainsel', the plain fact is that I think ye'll just have to bide here wi' Andie an' the solans."

"Andie," said I, laying my hand upon his knee, "this Hielantman's innocent."

"Ay, it's a pesty about that," said he. "But, ye see, in this warld, the way God made it, we cannae just get a'thing that we want."

CHAPTER XV.—BLACK ANDIE'S TALE OF TOD LAPRAIK.

I have yet said little of the Highlanders. They were all three of the followers of James More, which bound the accusation very tight about their master's neck. All understood a word or two of English; but Neil was the only one who judged he had enough of it for general converse, in which (when once he got embarked) his company was often tempted to the least of it. And that's a queer tale, too," he added, smiling. "And if ye would like I'll tell it ye."

To be sure, we were all of the one mind, and even the Highlander that had the least English of the three set himself to listen with all his might.

THE TALE OF TOD LAPRAIK.

My father, Tam Dale, peace to his hanes, was a wild, sploringlad in his young days, wi' little wisdom and less grace. He was fond of a lass and fond of a glass, and fond of a randan, but I could never hear tell that he was muckle use for honest employment. Frae ae thing to anither, he listed at last for a sodger and was in the garrison of this fort, which was the first way that ony of the Dales cam to set foot upon the Bass. Sorrow upon that service! The governor brewed his ain ale; it seems it was the warst conceivable. The rock was processioned frae the shore with vivers, the thing was ill-guided, and there were whiles when they had but to fish and shoot solans for their diet. To crown a' this was the Days of the Persecution. The persishin' cauld chalmers were ait occupeed wi' sants and martyrs, the saut of the yearth, of which it wasnae worthy. And though Tam Dale carried a firelock there, a single sodger, and liked a lass and a glass, as I was sayin', the mind of the man was nair just than set with his position. He had glints of the glory of the kirk; there were whiles when his slander rase to see the Lord's sants misguided, and shame covered him that he should be baulding a cen'le for carrying a flockock in so black a business. There were nights of it when he was here on sentry, the place a' wheesht, the frosts o' winter maybe riving in the wa's, and he would hear ane o' the prisoners strike up a psalm, and the rest join in, and the blessed sounds rising from the different chalmers—or dungeons, I would raither say—so that this auld craig in the sea was like a pairt of heev'n. Black shame was on his saul; his sins hove up before him muckle as the Bass, and above a', that chief sin, that he should have a hand in hagging and hashing at Christ's Kirk. But the truth is that he resisted the spirit. Day cam, there were the rousing companions, and his guid resolves departitit.

In thir days, dwalled upon the Bass a man of God, Peden the Prophet was his name. Ye'll have heard tell of Prophet Peden. There was never the wale of him sinsyne, and it's a question wi' mony if there ever was nis like afore. He was wild 's a peat-hag, fearsome to look at, fearsome to hear, his face like the day of judgment. The voice o' him was like a solan's, and dinnie'd in folks' lugs, and the words of him like coals of fire.

Now there was a lass on the rock, and I think she had little to do, for it was nae place far dacent weemen, but it seems she was bonny, and her and Tam Dale were very well agreed. It befell that Peden was in the guirden his lane at the traying when Tam and the lass cam by; and what should the lassie do but mock with laughter at the sant's devotion. He rose and leukit at the two o' them, and Tam's knees knoitered thegither at the look of him. But whan he spak it was mair in sorrow than in anger. "Poor thing, poor thing!" says he, and it was the lass he lookit at. "I hear you skirl and laugh," he says, "but the Lord has a deid shot prepared for you, and at that surprising judgment ye shall skirl but the ae time!" Shortly thereafter she was daundering on the craigs wi' twa-three sodgers, and it was a blawy day. There cam a gowst of wind, claught her by the coats, and awa' wi' her bag and baggage. And it was remarked by the sodgers that she gled but the ae skirl.

Nae doubt this judgment had some weicht upon Tam Dale; but it passed again and him none the better. Ae day he was flyting wi' anither sodger-lad. "Deil hae me!" quo' Tam, for he was a profane swearer; and there was Peden glowering at him gash an' waefu'; Peden, wi' his lang chafts an' huntin' een, the maud harped about his kist, and the hand of him held out wi' the black nails upon the finger nebs—for he had nae care of the body—"Fy, fy, poor man!" cries he, "the poor fool man! *Deil hae ae*, quo' he, an' I see the deil at his oxter." The conviction of guilt and grace cam in on Tam like the deep sea; he flung down the pike 'at was in his hands—"I will nae mair lift arms against the cause o' Christ!" says he, and was as gude's word. There was a sair fyke in the beginning, but the governor, seeing him resolved, gied him his discharge, and he went and dwalt and merried in North Berwick, and had aye a gude name with honest folk frae that day on.

It was in the year seeventeen hunner and sax that the Bass cam in the hands o' the Da'rymples, and there was twa men sought the chairge of it. Baith were weel qualified, for they had baith been sodgers in the garrison, and kent the gate to handle solans, and the seasons and values of them. Forby that they were baith—or they baith seemed—earnest professors and men of comely conversation. The first of them was just Tam Dale, my father. The second was ane Lapraik, whom the folk ca'd Tod Lapraik maistly, but whether for his name or his nature I could never hear tell. Weel, Tam gaed to see Lapraik upon this business, and took me, that was a toddlin' laddie, by the hand. Tod had his dwallin' in the lang loan benorth the kirkyaird. It's a dark, uncanny loan, forby that the kirk has aye had an ill name since the days o' James the Saxt and the deevil's cantrips played therein when the Queen was on the seas; and as for Tod's house, it was in the mirkest end, and was little liked by some that kenned the best. The door was on the sneck that day, and me and my father gaed straucht in. Tod was a wabster to his trade; his loom stood in the but. There he sat, a muckle fat, white hash of a man like creish, in a kind of a holy smile that gart me scunner. The hand of him aye cawed the shuttle, but his een was steeked. We cried to him by his name, we skirled in the deid lug of him, we shook him by the shoulther. Nae mainner o' service! There he sat on his dowp, an' cawed the shuttle and smiled like creish.

"God be guid to us," says Tam Dale, "this is no canny!"

He had jimp said the word, when Tod Lapraik came to himsel'.

"Is this you, Tam?" says he. "Haith, man! I'm blythe to see ye. I whiles fa' into a bit dwam like this," he says; "it's frae the stamack."

Weel, they began to crack about the Bass and which of them twa was to get the warding o't, and by little and little cam to very ill words, and twined in anger. I mind weel, that as my father and me gaed hame again, he cam ower and ower the same expression, how little he likit Tod Lapraik and his dwams.

"Dwam!" says he. "I think folk hae brunt far dwams like yon."

Aweel, my father got the Bass and Tod had to go wantin'. It was remembered sinsyne what way he had ta'en the thing. "Tam," says he, "ye hae gotten the better o' me ance and I hope," says he, "ye'll find at least a' that ye exneckit at the Bass." Which have since been thought remarkable expressions. At last the time came for Tam Dale to take young solans. This was a business he was weel used wi'; he had been a craigsman frae a laddie, and trustit name but himsel. So there was he hingin' by a line an' speidering on the craig faces, whaur it's bleest and steighest. Fower tenty lads were on the tap, hauldin' the line and mindin' for his signals. But whaur Tam hung there was naething but the craig and the sea below, and the solans skirling and flying. It was a braw spring morn, and Tam whustled as he claught in the young geese. Mony's the time I heard him tell of this experience, and aye the swat ran upon the man.

It chanced, ye see, that I am keeked up, and he was awaur of a muckle solan, and the solan pyking at the line. He thocht this by-ordinar and outside the creature's habits. He minded that ropes was unco saft things, and the solan's neb and the Bass Rock unco hard, and that twa hunner feet were raither mair than he would care to fa.

"Shoo!" says Tam. "Awa', bird! Shoo, awa' wi' ye!" says he.

The solan keekit down into Tam's face, and there was something unco in the creature's ee. Just the ae keek it gied, and back to the rope. But now it wrought and warstlet like a thing demonit. There never was the solan made that wrought as that solan wrought; and it seemed to understand it's employ bravely, birzing the saft rope between the neb of it and a crunkled jag o' rock.

There gaed a cauld stond o' fear into Tam's heart. "This thing is nae bird," thinks he. His een turnit backward in his heid and the grey steel cam out, and he cried, "I gets a dream here," he thought. "It's by wi' Tam Dale." And he signalled fur the lads to pa' him up.

And it seemed the solan understood about signals. For nae sooner was the signal made than he let be the rope, spried his wings, squaked out loud, took a turn flying, and dashed straught at Tam Dale's een. Tam had a knife, he gart the cault steel glitter. And it seemed the solan understood about knives, for nae sooner did the steel glint in the sun than he gied the ae squawk, but laigher, like a mony disappointed, flegged off about the roundness of the craig, and Tam saw nim nae mair. And as sune as that thing was gone, Tam's heid drapped upon his showther, and they pu'd him up like a deid corp, dadding on the craig.

A dram of brandy (which he went never without) brought him to his mind, or what was left of it. Up he sat.

"Hin, Geordie, rin to the boat, mak' sure of the boat, man, rin!" he cries. "or yon solan 'll have it awa'," says he.

"The fower lads stared at ither, an' tried to whillywha him to be quiet. But neathing would satisfy Tam Dale, till ane o' them had startit on ahead to stand sentry on the boat. The ithers askit if he was for down again."

"Na," says he, "and nether you nor me," says he, "and as sune as I can win to stand on my twa feet we'll be aff frae this craig o' Sawtan."

Sure eneuch, nae time was lost, and that was ower muckle; for before they won to North Berwick Tam was in a crying fever. He lay a' the simmer; and wha came nae mair to some speiring for him but Tod Lapraik! Folk thocht afterwards that ency time Tod cam near the house the fever had worsened. I kenna for that; but what I ken the best, that was the end of it.

It was about this time o' the year my grandfaither was out at the white fishing, and like a bairn, I but to gang wi' him. We had a grand take. I mind, and the way that the fish lay brought us near in by the Bass, whaur we forgathered wi' anither boat that belanged to anither man, Sandie Fletcher, o' Castleton. He's no lang deid nether, or ye could sp'ier at himsel'. Weel, Sandie hailed.

"What's yon on the Bass?" says he.

"On the Bass?" says grandfaither.

"Aye," says Sandie, "on the green side o't."

"Whatten kind of a thing?" says grandfather. "There cannae be naething on the Bass but just the sheep."

"It looks unco like a body," quo' Sandie, who was nearer in.

"A body!" says we, and we nane of us likit that. For there was nae boat that could have brought a man, and the key o' the prison yett hung over my father's heid at hame, in the press bed.

We keept the twa boats close for company, and cram in nearer hand. Grandfather had a glass, for he had been a sailor and the Captain of a smack, and had lost her on the sands of Tay. And when we took the glass to it, sure eneuch there was a man. He was in a crunkles o' green brae, a wee below the chaipel, a' by his lee lane, and lowped and flang and danced like a daft quean at a waddin'.

"It's Tod," says grandfaither, and passed the glass to Sandie.

"Ay, it's him," says Sandie.

"Or ane in the likeness o' him," says grandfather.

"Sma' is the differ," quo' Sandie. "De'll or warlock, I'll try the gun at him," quo' he, and brought up a fowling-piece that he aye carried, for Sandie was a notable famous shot in all that country.

"Haud your hand, Sandie," says grandfather; "we maun see clearer first," says he, "or this may be dear day's work to the baith of us."

"Hout!" says Sandie, "this is the Lord's judgments surely, and be damned to it!" says he.

"Maybe ay, and maybe no," says my grandfather, worthy man. "But have you a mind of the Procurator Fiscal, that I think ye'll have forgathered wi' before," says he.

This was ower true, and Sandie was a wee thing set ajee. "Aweel, Edie," says he, "and what would be your way of it?"

"Ou, just this," says grandfather. "Let me that has the fastest boat gang back to North Berwick, and you bide here and keep an eye on yon. If I cannae find Lapraik, I'll join ye and the twa of us'll have a crack wi' him. But if Lapraik's at hame, I'll rin up the flag at the harbor, and ye can try Thon Thing wi' the gun."

Aweel, so it was agreed between them twa. I was just a bairn, an' clum in Sandie's boat, whaur I thoucht I would see the best of the employ. My grandsire gied Sandie a siller teaster to pit in his gun wi' the leid draps, bein' mair deidly again bogles. And then the ae boat set aff for North Berwick, an' the ither lay whaur it was and watched the wanchancy thing on the braeside.

A' the time we lay there it lowped and flang and capered and span like a teetotum, and whiles we could hear it skelloch as it span. I ha seen lassies, the daft queans, that wuld lowp and dance a winter's night, and still be lowping and dancing when the winter's day cam in. But there would be folk there to hauld them company, and the lads to egg them on, and this thing was by lee lane. And they would be a fiddler diddling his elbock in the chimney side; and this thing had nae music but the skirling of the solans. And the lassies were bits o' young things wi' the reid life dinnling and stending in their members; and this was a muckle, fat, creishy man, and him fa'n in the vale o' years. Say what ye like, I maun say what I believe. It was joy was in the creature's heart; the joy o' hell, I daursay; joy whatever. Mony a time I have askit mysel', why witches and warlocks should sell their souls (while are their maist clear possessions) and be auld, duddy, drunkit wives or auld, feckless, doddered men; and then I mind upon Tod Lapraik dancing a' they hours by his lane in the black glary of his heart. Nae doubt they burn for it in muckle hell, but they have a grand time here of it, whatever—and the Lord forgie us!

Weel, at the hinder end, we saw the wee flag yirk up to the mastheid upon the harbor rocks. That was a' Sandie waited fur. He up wi' the gun, took a deleeberate aim, an' pu'ed the trigger. There cam a bang and then ae waefu' skirl frae the Bass. And there were we rubbin' our een and lookin' at ither like daft folk. Far wi' the bang and the skirl the thing had clean disappeared. The sun glintit, the wund blew, and there was the bare yaird wham the Wonder had been lowping and flinging but ae second sine.

The hale way hame I roared and grat wi' the terror of that dispensation. The grawn folk were nane sae muckle better; there was little said in Sandie's boat but just the name of God; and when we won by the pier the harbor rocks were fair black w