

rose in front, from a cleft of which grew a wild holly-tree, whose dark green branches rustled over the spring which arose beneath. The banks on either hand rose so high, and approached each other so closely, that it was only when the sun was at its meridian height, and during the summer solstice, that its rays could reach the bottom of the chasm in which he stood. But it was now summer, and the hour was noon, so that the unwonted reflection of the sun was dancing in the pellucid fountain.

"It is the season and the hour," said Halbert to himself; "and now I—I might soon become wiser than Edward with all his pains! Mary should see whether he alone is fit to be consulted, and to sit by her side, and hang over her as she reads, and point out every word and every letter. And she loves me better than him—I am sure she does—for she comes of noble blood, and scorns sloth and cowardice.—And do I myself not stand here slothful and cowardly as any priest of them all?—Why should I fear to call upon this form—this shape? Already have I endured the vision, and why not again?—What can it do to me who am a man of lith and limb, and have by my side my father's sword? Does my heart beat—do my hairs bristle, at the thought of calling up a painted shadow, and how should I face a band of Southrons in flesh and blood? By the soul of the first Glendinning I will make proof of the charm!"

He cast the leathern brogue or buskin from his right foot, planted himself in a firm posture, unsheathed his sword, and first looking around to collect his resolution, he bowed three times deliberately towards the holly-tree, and as often to the little fountain, repeating at the same time, with a determined voice, the following rhyme:

"Thrice to the holly brake—  
Thrice to the well :—  
I bid thee awake,  
White Maid of Avenel !

"Noon gleams on the Lake—  
Noon glows on the Fell—

Wake thee, O wake,  
White Maid of Avenel !"

These lines were hardly uttered, when there stood the figure of a female clothed in white, within three steps of Halbert Glendinning.

"I guess 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly."\*

## CHAPTER XII.

There's something in that ancient superstition,  
Which, erring as it is, our fancy loves.  
The spring that, with its thousand crystal bubbles,  
Bursts from the bosom of some desert rock  
In secret solitude, may well be deem'd  
The haunt of something purer, more refin'd,  
And mightier than ourselves.

*Old Play.*

YOUNG Halbert Glendinning had scarcely pronounced the mystical rhymes, when, as we have mentioned in the conclusion of the last chapter, an appearance, as of a beautiful female, dressed in white, stood within two yards of him. His terror for the moment overcame his natural courage, as well as the strong resolution which he had formed, that the figure which he had now twice seen should not a third time daunt him. But it would seem there is something thrilling and abhorrent to flesh and blood, in the consciousness that we stand in presence of a being in form like to ourselves, but so different in faculties and nature, that we can neither understand its purposes, nor calculate its means of pursuing them.

\* Coleridge's *Christabelle*.



Halbert stood silent and gasped for breath, his hairs erecting themselves on his head—his mouth open—his eyes fixed—and, as the sole remaining sign of his late determined purpose, his sword pointed towards the apparition. At length, with a voice of ineffable sweetness, the White Lady, for by that name we shall distinguish this being, sung, or rather chanted, the following lines:—

“ Youth of the dark eye, wherefore didst thou call me ?  
Wherefore art thou here, if terrors can appal thee ?  
He that seeks to deal with us must know nor fear nor failing !  
To coward and churl our speech is dark, our gifts are unavailing.  
The breeze that brought me hither now, must sweep Egyptian ground,  
The fleecy cloud on which I ride for Araby is bound ;  
The fleecy cloud is drifting by, the breeze sighs for my stay,  
For I must sail a thousand miles before the close of day.”

The astonishment of Halbert began once more to give way to his resolution, and he gained voice enough to say, though with a faltering accent, “ In the name of God, what art thou ?” The answer was in melody of a different tone and measure:—

“ What I am I must not show—  
What I am thou couldst not know—  
Something betwixt heaven and hell—  
Something that neither stood nor fell—  
Something that through thy wit or will  
May work thee good—may work thee ill.  
Neither substance quite, nor shadow,  
Haunting lonely moor and meadow,  
Dancing by the haunted spring,  
Riding on the whirlwind's wing ;  
Aping in fantastic fashion  
Every change of human passion,  
While o'er our frozen minds they pass,  
Like shadows from the mirror'd glass.  
Wayward, fickle is our mood,  
Hovering betwixt bad and good,  
Happier than brief-dated man,  
Living twenty times his span ;  
Far less happy, for we have  
Help nor hope beyond the grave !

Man awakes to joy or sorrow ;  
Our's the sleep that knows no morrow.  
This is all that I can show—  
This is all that thou may'st know.”

The White Lady paused, and appeared to await an answer ; but, as Halbert hesitated how to frame his speech, the vision seemed gradually to fade, and become more and more incorporeal. Justly guessing this to be a symptom of her disappearance, Halbert compelled himself to say,—“ Lady, when I saw you in the glen, and when you brought back the black book of Mary of Avenel, thou didst say I should one day learn to read it.”

The White Lady replied,

“ Ay ! and I taught thee the word and the spell,  
To waken me here by the Fairies' Well.  
But thou hast loved the heron and hawk,  
More than to seek my haunted walk ;  
And thou hast loved the lance and the sword,  
More than good text and holy word ;  
And thou hast loved the deer to track,  
More than the lines and the letters black ;  
And thou art a ranger of moss and of wood,  
And scornest the nurture of gentle blood !”

“ I will do so no longer, fair maiden,” said Halbert ; “ I desire to learn ; and thou didst promise me, that when I did so desire, thou wouldst be my helper ; I am no longer afraid of thy presence, and I am no longer regardless of instruction.” As he uttered these words, the figure of the White Maiden grew gradually as distinct as it had been at first ; and what had well nigh faded into an ill-defined and colourless shadow, again assumed an appearance at least of corporeal consistency, although the hues were less vivid, and the outline of the figure less distinct and defined,—so at least it seemed to Halbert,—than those of an ordinary inhabitant of the earth. “ Wilt thou grant my request,” he said, “ fair Lady, and give to my keeping the holy book which Mary of Avenel has so often wept for ?”



The White Lady replied :

" Thy craven fear my truth accused,  
Thine idleness my trust abused ;  
He that draws to harbour late,  
Must sleep without, or burst the gate.  
There is a star for thee which burned,  
Its influence wanes, its course is turned ;  
Valour and constancy alone  
Can bring thee back the chance that's flown."

" If I have been a loiterer, Lady," answered young Glendinning, " thou shalt now find me willing to press forward with double speed. Other thoughts have filled my mind, other thoughts have engaged my heart within a brief period—and by heaven, other occupations shall henceforward fill up my time. I have lived in this day the space of years—I came hither a boy—I will return a man—a man, such as may converse not only with his own kind, but with whatever God permits to be visible to him. I will learn the contents of that mysterious volume—I will learn why the Lady of Avenel loved it—why the priests feared, and would have stolen it—why thou didst twice recover it from their hands.—What mystery is wrapt in it?—Speak, I conjure thee!" The Lady assumed an air peculiarly sad and solemn, as, drooping her head, and folding her arms on her bosom, she replied :

" Within that awful volume lies  
The mystery of mysteries !  
Happiest they of human race,  
To whom God has granted grace  
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
To lift the latch, and force the way ;  
And better had they ne'er been born,  
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn."

" Give me the volume, Lady," said young Glendinning. " They call me idle—they call me dull—in

this pursuit my industry shall not fail ; nor with God's blessing, shall my understanding. Give me the volume."

The apparition again replied :

" Many a fathom dark and deep,  
I have laid the book to sleep ;  
Ethereal fires around it glowing—  
Ethereal music ever flowing—  
The sacred pledge of Heaven  
All things revere,  
Each in his sphere,  
Save man for whom 'twas given :  
Lend thy hand, and thou shalt spy  
Things ne'er seen by mortal eye."

Halbert Glendinning boldly reached his hand to the White Lady.

" Fearest thou to go with me ?" she said, as his hand trembled at the soft and cold touch of her own—

" Fearest thou to go with me ?  
Still it is free to thee  
A peasant to dwell ;  
Thou may'st drive the dull steer,  
And chase the king's deer,  
But never more come near  
This haunted well."

" If what thou sayest be true," said the undaunted boy, " my destinies are higher than thine own. There shall be neither well nor wood which I dare not visit. No fear of aught, natural or supernatural, shall bar my path through my native valley."

He had scarce uttered the words when they both descended through the earth, with a rapidity which took away Halbert's breath and every other sensation, saving that of being hurried on with the utmost velocity. At length they stopped with a shock so sudden, that the mortal journeyer through this unknown space must have been thrown down with violence, had he not been upheld by his supernatural companion.



It was more than a minute, ere, looking around him, he beheld a grotto, or natural cavern, composed of the most splendid spars and crystals, which returned in a thousand prismatic hues the light of a brilliant flame that glowed on an altar of alabaster. This altar, with its fire, formed the central point of the grotto, which was of a round form, and very high in the roof, resembling in some respects the dome of a cathedral. Corresponding to the four points of the compass, there went off four long galleries or arcades, constructed of the same brilliant materials with the dome itself, and the termination of which was lost in darkness.

No human imagination can conceive, or words suffice to describe, the glorious radiance, which, shot fiercely forth by the flame, was returned from so many hundred thousand points of reflection, afforded by the sparry pillars and their numerous angular crystals. The fire itself did not remain steady and unmoved, but rose and fell, sometimes ascending in a brilliant pyramid of condensed flame half way up the lofty expanse, and again fading into a softer and more rosy hue, and hovering as it were on the surface of the altar to collect its strength for another powerful exertion. There was no visible fuel by which it was fed, nor did it emit either smoke or vapour of any kind.

What was of all the most remarkable, the black volume so often mentioned lay not only unconsumed, but untouched in the slightest degree amid this intensity of fire, which, while it seemed to be of force sufficient to melt adamant, had no effect whatever on the sacred book, thus subjected to its utmost influence.

The White Lady, having paused long enough to let young Glendinning take a complete survey of what was around him, now said, in her usual chant,

“Here lies the volume thou boldly hast sought;  
Touch it, and take it,—’twill dearly be bought.”

Familiarized in some degree with marvels, and desperately desirous of showing the courage he had boasted, Halbert plunged his hand, without hesitation, into the flame, trusting to the rapidity of the motion to snatch out the volume before the fire could greatly affect him. But he was much disappointed. The flame instantly caught upon his sleeve, and though he withdrew his hand immediately, yet his arm was so dreadfully scorched, that he had well nigh screamed with pain. He suppressed the natural expression of anguish, however, and only intimated the agony which he felt by a contortion and a muttered groan. The White Lady passed her cold hand over his arm, and, ere she had finished the following metrical chant, his pain had entirely gone, and no mark of the scorching was visible :

“Rash thy deed,  
Mortal weed  
To immortal flames applying;  
Rasher trust  
Has thing of dust,  
On his own weak worth relying:  
Strip thee of such fences vain,  
Strip, and prove thy luck again.”

Obedient to what he understood to be the meaning of his conductress, Halbert bared his arm to the shoulder, throwing down the remains of his sleeve, which no sooner touched the floor on which he stood than it collected itself together, shrivelled itself up, and was without any visible fire reduced to light tinder, which a sudden breath of wind dispersed into empty space. The White Lady, observing the surprise of the youth, immediately repeated—

“Mortal warp and mortal woof,  
Cannot brook this charned roof;  
All that mortal art hath wrought,  
In our cell returns to nought.  
The molten gold returns to clay,



The polish'd diamond melts away ;  
 All is altered, all is flown,  
 Nought stands fast but truth alone,  
 Not for that thy quest give o'er:  
 Courage ! prove thy chance once more."

Emboldened by her words, Halbert Glendinning made a second effort, and plunging his bare arm into the flame, took out the sacred volume without feeling either heat or inconvenience of any kind. Astonished, and almost terrified at his own success, he beheld the flame collect itself, and shoot up into one long and final stream, which seemed as if it would ascend to the very roof of the cavern, and then sinking as suddenly, became totally extinguished. The deepest darkness ensued ; but Halbert had no time to consider his situation, for the White Lady had already caught his hand, and they ascended to upper air with the same velocity with which they had sunk into the earth.

They stood by the fountain in the Corrinan-shian when they emerged from the bowels of the earth, but on casting a bewildered glance around him, the youth was surprised to observe, that the shadows had fallen far to the east, and that the day was well nigh spent. He gazed on his conductress for explanation, but her figure began to fade before his eyes—her cheeks grew paler, her features less distinct, her form became shadowy, and blended itself with the mist which was ascending the hollow ravine. What had late the symmetry of form, and the delicate, yet clear hues of feminine beauty, now resembled the flitting and pale ghost of some maiden who had died for love, as it is seen indistinctly and by moon-light, by her perjured lover.

"Stay, spirit!" said the youth, emboldened by his success in the subterranean dome, "thy kindness must not leave me, as one encumbered with a weapon he knows not how to wield. Thou must teach me the art to read, and to understand this volume; else what avails it me that I possess it?"

But the figure of the White Lady still waned before his eye, until it became an outline as pale and indistinct as that of the moon, when the winter morning is far advanced ; and ere she had ended the following chant, she was entirely invisible :—

"Alas ! alas !  
 Not ours the grace  
 These holy characters to trace :  
 Idle forms of painted air,  
 Not to us is given to share  
 The boon bestow'd on Adam's race !  
 With patience bide,  
 Heaven will provide,  
 The fitting time, the fitting guide.

The form was already gone, and now the voice itself had melted away in melancholy cadence, softening, as if the being who spoke had been slowly wafted from the spot where she had commenced her melody. It was at this moment that Halbert felt the extremity of the terror which he had hitherto so manfully suppressed. The very necessity of exertion had given him spirit to make it, and the presence of the mysterious being, while it was a subject of fear in itself, had nevertheless given him the sense of protection being near to him. It was when he could reflect with composure on what had passed, that a cold tremor shot across his limbs, his hair bristled, and he was afraid to look around lest he should find at his elbow something more frightful than the first vision. A breeze arising suddenly realized the beautiful and wild idea of the most imaginative of our modern bards\*—

It fann'd his cheek, it raised his hair  
 Like a meadow gale in spring ;  
 It mingled strangely with his fears,  
 Yet it felt like a welcoming.

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\* Coleridge.



The youth stood silent and astonished for a few minutes. It seemed to him that the extraordinary being he had seen, half his terror, half his protectress, was still hovering on the gale which swept past him, and that she might again make herself sensible to his organs of sight. "Speak!" he said, wildly tossing his arms, "speak yet again—be once more present, lovely vision!—thrice have I now seen thee, yet the idea of thy invisible presence around or beside me, makes my heart beat faster than if the earth yawned and gave up a demon." But neither sound nor appearance indicated the presence of the White Lady, and nothing preternatural beyond what he had already witnessed, was again audible or visible. Halbert, in the meanwhile, by the very exertion of again inviting the presence of this mysterious being, had recovered his natural audacity. He looked around once more, and resumed his solitary path down the valley into whose recesses he had penetrated.

Nothing could be more strongly contrasted than the storm of passion with which he had bounded over stock and crag, in order to plunge himself into the Corrinan-shian, and the sobered mood in which he now returned homeward, industriously seeking out the most practicable path, not from a wish to avoid danger, but that he might not by personal toil distract his attention, deeply fixed on the extraordinary scene which he had witnessed. In the former case, he had sought by hazard and bodily exertion to indulge at once the fiery excitation of passion, and to banish the cause of the excitement from his recollection; while now he studiously avoided all interruption to his contemplative walk, lest the difficulty of the way should interfere with, or disturb his own deep reflections. Thus slowly pacing forth his course, with the air of a pilgrim rather than of a deer-hunter, Halbert about the close of the evening regained his paternal tower.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The Miller was of manly make,  
To meet him was na mows;  
There durst na ten come him to take,  
Sae noited he their pows.

*Christ's Kirk on the Green.*

It was after sunset, as we have already stated, when Halbert Glendinning returned to the abode of his father. The hour of dinner was at noon, and that of supper about an hour after sunset at this period of the year. The former had passed without Halbert's appearing; but this was no uncommon circumstance, for the chase or any other pastime which occurred, made Halbert a frequent neglecter of hours; and his mother, though angry and disappointed when she saw him not at table, was so much accustomed to his occasional absence, and knew so little how to teach him more regularity, that a testy observation was almost all the censure with which such omissions were visited.

On the present occasion, however, the wrath of good dame Elspeth soared higher than usual. It was not merely on account of the special tup's-head and trotters, the haggis and the side of mutton, with which her table was set forth, but also because of the arrival of no less a person than Hob Miller, as he was universally termed, though the man's name was Happer.

The object of the Miller's visit to the tower of Glendearg was like the purpose of those embassies which potentates send to each other's courts, partly ostensible, partly politic. In outward show, Hob came to visit his friends of the Halidome, and share the festivity common among country folk, after the barn-yard has been filled, and to renew old intimacies by new conviviality. But in very truth he also came to have an eye upon the contents