

THE
CAMERONIAN'S VISION.

BY
JAMES HYSLOP.



JOHN BROWN'S MONUMENT.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

JAMES HYSLOP, author of the following Poem, was born in the parish of Kirkconnel, Dumfriesshire. He was for some time a shepherd in the parish of Muirkirk, hence was known as "the Muirkirk Shepherd." He was the author of another highly popular poem, beginning, "In a dream of the night I was wafted away." This gifted peasant died many years ago, in sailing to a foreign land.

The present poem was written on the murder of John Brown of Priesthill, Muirkirk, Ayrshire, who on the first day of May, 1685, was shot to death at the door of his own cottage, as narrated in the poem. John Brown's small possession is situated in one of the most lonely moors in Scotland; not a house or field being in sight of it. But even there the blood-thirsty underlings of an infamous Government could not permit the inoffensive man of 58 years of age to live. To this hour many a pilgrim, with a swelling heart, visits the lonely grave and modest monument of "the Christian Carrier."

The engraving represents the monument erected in 1826. Inside the enclosure is the original flat grave stone, on which is the following inscription:—

"Here lies the body of John Brown, martyr, who was murdered in this place by Graham of Claverhouse for his testimony to the Covenanted work of Reformation, because he durst not own the authority of the then tyrant destroying the same, who died the first day of May A.D. 1685, and of his age 58."

I n death's cold bed the dusty part here lyes
O f one who did the earth as dust despise.
H ere in this place from earth he took departure :
N ow he has got the garland of the martyr.
Butchered by Claverse and his bloody hand,
R aging most ravenously over all the land,
O nly for owning Christ's supremacy,
W ickedly wronged by encroaching tyranny,
N othing how near soever he too good
Esteemed, nor dear for any truth his blood."

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FROM the climes and the seas of the fair sunny south,
I return'd to the gray hills and green glens of youth :
By mountain graves musing on days long gone past,
A dream-like illusion around me was cast.

In a vision, it seem'd that the chariot of time
Was roll'd back till I stood in the ages of crime,
When the king was a despot, who deem'd with his nod
He would cancel the bond, bound a nation to God.

The religion of Christ, like a lamb took its flight,
As the horns of the Mitre wax'd powerful in might,
And the prelates with priestcraft men's spirits enchain'd,
Till they fear'd to complain when their heart's blood was
drain'd.

Stern law made religion no longer a link
The soul to sustain on eternity's brink ;
But the gold of the gospel was changed to a chain,
The spirit of Scotland to curb and restrain :

A political bridle the people to check,
When the priest or the prince chose to ride on their neck ;
For churchmen a chariot in splendour who roll'd,
At the poor man's expense, whose salvation they sold.

From the court, over Scotland went forth a decree—
“ Let the Kirk of the north to the king bend the knee :
To the prince and his priesthood divine right is given,
A sceptre to sway both in earth and in heaven.

“ Let no one presume from the pulpit to read
The Scriptures, save eunuchs by courtiers decreed ;
At their peril, let parents give precepts to youth,
Till prelates and prayer-books put words in their mouth.

And none 'mong the hills of the heather shall dare
To meet in the moorlands for praises and prayer ;
Nor to Heaven in private prefer their request,
Except as the prince shall appoint by the priest.”

The nation of Knox held the mandate accurs'd :
(He the fetters of popery and priestcraft had burst—
With the stamp of his foot brought their towers to the ground,
Till royalty trembling shrunk back when he frown'd.

And Melville, the fiery, had fearlessly dar'd,
In a prince's own presence his priesthood to beard,
On the archbishop's head made his mitre to shake,
And the circle of courtiers around him to quake.)

So Scotland's Assemblies in council sat down,
God's word well to weigh with decrees of the crown :

And a Covenant seal'd, as they swore by the Lord,
Their Bibles and birnrights to guard with the sword.

These Priests from their kirks by the prelates were driven,
A shelter to seek with the fowls of the heaven;
The wet mist their covering, the heather their bed,
By the springs of the desert in peril they fed.

At the risk of their lives, with their flocks they would meet,
In the storm and in tempest, in rain and in sleet;
Where the mist on the moorglens lay darkest, 'twas there
In the thick cloud concealed, they assembled for prayer.

At their wild mountain worship no warning bell rung
But the sentries were fix'd ere the psalm could be sung.
When the preacher his Bible brought forth from his plaid,
On the damp rock beside him his drawn sword he laid.

The sleepless assemblies around him who met,
Were houseless and hungry, and weary and wet;
The wilderness wandering, through peril and strife,
To be fill'd with the word and the waters of life.

For in cities the wells of salvation were seal'd,
More brightly to burst in the moor and the field;
And the Spirit, which fled from the dwellings of men,
Like a manna-cloud rain'd round the camp of the glen.

I beheld in my vision a prince on his throne;
Around him in glory the mitred heads shone;
And the sovereign assembly said, "Who shall go forth
In the moorlands to murder the priests of the north!"

"Our horsemen have hunted the moor and the wood,
But often they shrink from the shedding of blood;
And some we sent forth with commission to slay,
Have with Renwick remain'd in the mountains to pray.

"Is there no one among us whose soul and whose sword
Will hew down in the desert that priesthood abhorr'd;
With their blood, on the people's minds print our decree?
The warrior's reward shall be 'Viscount Dundee.'"

'Twas a title of darkness, dishonour, and shame;
No warrior would wear it, save Claver'se the Graham.
With a warrant of death like a demon he flew,
In the blood of his brethren his hands to imbrue.

That mission of murder full well fitted him,
 For his black heart with malice boil'd up to the brim;
 Remorse had his soul made like angels who fell,
 And his breast was imbued with the spirit of hell.

A gleam of its flame in his bosom had glow'd,
 Till his devilish delight was in cursing of God:
 He felt Him a foe, and his soul took a pride
 Bridle-deep through the blood of his sufferers to ride!

His heart hard as flint, was in cruelty mail'd;
 No tear of the orphan with him ere prevail'd,
 In the blood of its sire, while his sword was defil'd,
 The red blade he wav'd o'er the widow, and smil'd.

My vision was changed, and I stood in a glen
 Of the moorlands, remote from the dwellings of men,
 'Mong Priesthill's black scenery, a pastoral abode,
 Where the shepherds assembled to worship their God.

A light hearted maiden met there with her love,
 Who had won her affections, and fix'd them above:
 Concealed 'mong the mist on the dark mountain side,
 Stood Peden the prophet, with Brown and his bride.

A silent assembly encircled the seer,
 A breathless expectance bent forward to hear;
 For the glance of his grey eye wax'd bright and sublime,
 As it fix'd on the far flood of fast coming time.

"Oh Scotland! the Angel of darkness and death
 One hour the Almighty hath staid on his path:
 I see on yon bright cloud his chariot stand still;
 But his red sword is naked and ready to kill.

"In mosses, in mountain, in moor and in wood,
 That sword must be bath'd yet in slaughter and blood,
 Till the number of saints who shall suffer be seal'd,
 And the breaches of backsliding Scotland be heal'd.

"Then a prince of the south shall come over the main,
 Who in righteousness over the nation shall reign;
 The race of the godless shall fade from the throne.
 And the kingdom of Christ shall have kings of its own.

"But think not, ye righteous, your sufferings are past;
 In the midst of the furnace ye yet must be cast;

But the seed we have sown in affliction and tears,
Shall be gathered in gladness in far distant years.

"On the scroll of the Covenant blood must be spilt,
Till its red hues shall cancel the backslider's guilt.
Remember my warning, Around me are some
Who may watch, for they know not the hour He shall come.

"And thou, pretty maiden, rejoice in the truth
Of the lover I link for thy husband of youth.
Be kind while he lives; clasp him close to thy heart;
For the time is not far when the fondest must part.

"The seal of the Saviour is printed too deep
On the brow of thy bridegroom for thee long to keep.
The wolf round the sheepfold will prowl for his prey,
And the lamb be led forth for the lion to slay.

"His winding-sheet linen keep woven by thee;
It will soon be requir'd, and it bloody will be.
A morning of terror and tears is at hand,
But the Lord will give strength in thy trial to stand."

My vision was changed: happy summer had fled
O'er the heath-circled home where the lovers were wed;
Affection's springs bursting from hearts in their prime,
The stream of endearment grew deeper with time.

At the door of his home, in a glad summer's night,
With his children to play was the father's delight;
One dear little daughter he fondly caress'd,
For she look'd like the young bride who slept on his breast.

Of her sweet smiling offspring the mother was fain,
Each added a new link to love's wedded chain;
One clung to her bosom, one play'd round her knee,
And one 'mong the heather ran chasing the bee.

In union of warm hearts, of wishes, of thought,
The prophet's prediction was almost forgot;
With wedded affection their hearts overflow'd,
And their lives passed in rearing their offspring to God.

The mist of May morning lay dark on the mountains;
The lambs cropt the flowers springing fresh by the fountains;
The waters, the woods, and the green holms of hay, lay
In sunshine asleep down in Wellwood's wild valley.

In Priesthill at dawning the psalm had ascended,
The chapter been read, and the humble knee bended ;
Now in moors thick with mist, at his pastoral employment,
The meek soul of Brown with his God found enjoyment.

At home, Isabella was busy preparing
The meal, with a husband so sweet aye in sharing ;
In the cradle beside her the infant lay smiling,
The mother with sweet songs its fancy beguiling.

His daughter went forth in the dews of the morning
To meet on the footpath her father returning ;
Alone 'mong the mist she expected to find him,
But horsemen in armour came riding behind him.

The mother, in trembling, in tears, and dismay,
Clasped her babe to her bosom, and hasted away ;
She clung to her husband, distracted and dumb,
For she felt that the hour of her trial was come.

But vain her distraction, her tears and her prayer,
Her sufferings by Claver'se were held light as air ;
With his little ones weeping around him, he brought
The fond father forth, in their sight to be shot.

" Bid farewell thy family, and welcome thy death,
Since thou choosest so fondly to cherish thy faith ;
Some minutes my mercy permits thee for prayer.
Let six of my horsemen their pistols prepare."

" My widow, my orphan, O God, I resign
To thy care ; and the babe yet unborn, too, is thine ;
Let thy blessing be round them, to guard and to keep,
When over my green grave forsaken they weep."

At the door of his home, on the heather he knelt ;
His prayer for his family the pitiless felt ;
The rough soldiers listened with tears and with sighs,
Till Claverhouse cursed him, and caused him to rise.

For the last time the lips of his young ones he kiss'd,
His dear little daughter he clasped to his breast :
" To thy mother be kind, read thy Bible, and pray ;
The Lord will protect thee when I am away.

" Isabella, farewell ! Thou shalt shortly behold
Thy love on the heather stretch'd bloody and cold.

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The hour I've long looked for hath come at the last—
Art thou willing to part?—all its anguish is past."

"Yes willing," she said, and she sought his embrace,
While the tears trickled down on her little one's face,
"'Tis the last time I ever shall cling to thy heart,
Yet with thee I am willing, yes, willing to part."

'Twas a scene would have softened the savage's ire;
But Claver'se commanded his horsemen to fire;
As they cursed his command, turning round to retreat,
The demon himself shot him dead at his feet.

His temples, all shatter'd and bleeding she bound,
While Claver'se with insult his cruelty crown'd;
"Well, what thinkest thou of thy heart's cherished pride!
It were justice to lay thee in blood by his side."

"I doubt not, if God gave permission to thee,
That thou gladly wouldst murder my offspring and me:
But thy mouth he hath muzzled, and doom'd thee, in vain,
Like a bloodhound, to bay at the end of thy chain.

"Thou friendless, forsaken, hast left me and mine,
But my lot is a bless'd one when balanceed with thine,
With the viper remorse on thy vitals to prey,
And the blood on thy hands that will ne'er wash away.

"Thy fame shall be wafted to all future time,
A proverb for cruelty, cursing, and crime;
Thy dark picture, painted in blood, shall remain
While the heather waves green o'er the graves of the slain.

"Thy glory shall wither; its wreaths have been gain'd
By the slaughter of shepherds, thy sword which disdain'd:
That sword thou hast drawn on thy country for hire,
And the title it brings shall in blackness expire.

"Thy name shall be Claver'se, the bloodthirsty Scot,
The godly, the guiltless, the grayhair'd, who shot.
Round my Brown's bloody brow glory's garlands shall wave,
When the muse marketh 'murderer' over thy grave!"

BANKS OF THE CRAWICK.