

**UNIQUE TRADITIONS
CHIEFLY OF
THE WEST AND
SOUTH OF SCOTLAND**

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Unique traditions chiefly of the west and south of Scotland by John Gordon Barbour

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SCOTLAND

By

JOHN GORDON BARBOUR

Author of "Tributes to Scottish Genius," etc.

..... Such the bent
Of legends ling'ring long in Scotia's vales.

GRENE.



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1886.



PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

NOTWITHSTANDING of the many olden Tales and Traditions which Sir Walter Scott hath interwoven or episodized with the mass of his Scottish novels; and notwithstanding all that the Ettrick Shepherd hath done; and notwithstanding all that Allan Cunningham hath done—there still remains some traditions, and legends, among the Lowland or half Highland Scots, which deserve to be reduced to writing. With regard to the North Highlands, I say nothing; there be lingering there at the present period a thousand and one romantic tales and traditions, which have been handed down for five hundred years, and which will likely be dear to the grandson descendants of the present generation. But among the mountains of Athole, among the lakes of Breadalbane, by the banks of the Teith, the Clyde, the Nith, the Cree, the Dee, the Clouden, and the Ken, yet linger some legends and traditions most meriting of being preserved. To collect and to record only a part of these forms the purpose of the present volume.

The Tales of Demonology, Elfinism, and Witchcraft, shall not seem throng in this collection. Indeed, since Sir Walter Scott hath published his letters on these subjects, all the demons, witches, and fairies in Albion

must lie dead for ever! They are entirely exorcised now; and that magical wand, which about twenty-five or thirty years ago, could call forth, and did call forth, sprites, spaewives, Orkney witches, and eidolons at pleasure, has now disenchanted them all. Should ever the White Lady of Avenel herself appear among the woods and walks of Abbotsford, there can be little doubt but that the philosophic Baronet would scowl at her, and fly from her as indignantly as he would ever have done from a white horned heifer of the olden Caledonian breed. O! *sic* changes! *Euge et Vale!*

Farewell to Fairyism, then, but not so to the heroes, hermits, kings, cowpers, carlins, and Covenanters of Caledonia. Burns hath said, and we ourselves have said, that we have no dearer aim than to make leisurely journeys through Caledonia, to wander by the romantic banks of her streams, and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the abodes of her heroes. We have even sung, but rather to deaf ears, concerning these romantic streams and stately towers; and now in humble prose we essay to recite and record some Unique Legends and Traditions more or less connected with our native streams, towers, and heroes, but all redolent with the very scent and soul of Caledonia. Our bonny buxom heiress, that loved and chose a Macadam in his *hoshens*, was no White Lady of Avenel. Our Carsefairn Carlin, that heaved the Cairn on the Kells Rhynds, to the memory of King Robert Bruce, was no vendor of winds; and our maltreated Witch, who was rolled into

the Clouden, was no Shetland Norna. Neither was Heron of Bargauly a daft Davie Gellatley. Neither was Foster of Knocksheen a less flesh-and-blood being than the more celebrated Tam O'Shanter.

As we have sometimes wandered, under a midsummer midnight, by the Doon, the Dee, and the Truil; or by the autumnal moonlight, on the more celebrated banks of the Tay, the Tummel, or the Urchay, we have fondly fancied that some benignant fay-folk might be our travelling companions. We never really saw the fairies, though we certainly once imagined that we heard their music nigh the falls of Moness, and by the hermitage of Acharn. But when we recollected that, by the braes and banks of all these streams the Bruce had hidden, had wandered, or had bled, the gossamer dreams of fairyland flitted away, and we really and fondly imagined that the shades of the royal Bruce, and of his "Barbour" biographer, ever musing in the moon-beam beside us, and blessing us while we gloated with a patriotic eye over the lakes, the woods, and the mountains, that once were hallowed by the sacred foot of Scotland's saviour-king.

Whenever, then, we shall light upon a fountain, and of which it hath been proven that the Bruce even drank; or whenever we shall stumble on the foundation of a wall, in which tradition records that King Robert ever resided, we shall be proud to sip from that spring, and to repose on that vestige.

And who shall forbid us to recite some hitherto unrecorded traditions regarding the ancient Covenanters? We happen to be doubly descended from, or connected

with the persecuted, who made the manly stand under the tyrant and truant Stuarts. We are proud of the genealogy. We regard, and long have regarded Charles II. as a royal ingrate and blackguard; and we have as constantly regarded the body of the Covenanters as making a most manly, magnanimous, and decisive stand for national freedom—religious and civil. We hail at this very hour the noble and unquenched feeling which hath gone abroad among the middle and lower ranks of Scotland regarding the memories of their persecuted forefathers. The sepulchres of the worthies are visited, and their mouldering tombstones are reviewed; and the flowers and evergreens of deep veneration are planted and watered around the gravesods of the Caledonian martyrs. This is quite as it ought to be; and although in some of the late annuals the Ettrick Shepherd has recalled from oblivion or obscurity several interesting traditions concerning the Covenanters, still one or two, not less interesting, may be added. "The Night before Killiecrankie" embodies more truth in it than several laudators of "Bonnie Dundee" may be willing to allow; and the "Lag-ridge" recites an act of wanton barbarity exercised by Grierson of Lag over the family and chattels of a most respectable yeoman, or freeholder, whose ancestors held their rights from the immediate hand of the renowned royal Bruce—aye, and one of whose dauntless ancestors fell fighting almost by the Bruce's side, while planting the standard of Scotland in the Bearstone at Bannockburn.

While we must seem thus to inherit a name from

our consanguinity to the eldest poet and historian of Scotland, still, in the estimation of many, we have no name to live in literature. We write no Anacreon songs, no Don Juans, no "Letters on Demonology;" and, moreover, we are accused of certain hankerings after the Covenanters and Reform. What wonder, then, if no *Ebony Magazine*, no *Tory Review*, ever usher us into notice, either with a black rod or a white one?

But stand in no amaze, gentle reader, although none of these traditions should ever be laudated, or quoted by even any of the Nithside journals. One of them was so wedded to sketches of geese, turkeys, otters, gennets, and tom-fish, that he could take no notice of Lammer-geyers, Cenis Chamois, Jungfrau peaks, Leman lakes, Staubach waterfalls, and Simplon avalanches. The other was nibbling so unremittingly at the Colossus of Reform, like a mouse *cheeping* at the paw of a lion, that when neutral persons sent him a review of any part of modern Hebrew melodies, he could only quiet his conscience by garbling or curtailing the communication. Read on, courteous Gallovidian! We are neither the Ettrick Shepherd nor Allan Cunningham, but we are the accredited descendant of him who sung "The Bruce" from the shepherd's shealing at the head of Loch Truil, till he reposed in the royal palace of Dunfermline, independent and unrivalled.

Many traditions are omitted, because Sir Walter Scott, John Galt, or the Ettrick Shepherd, have used them so pertinently. The story of "Muir of Auchen-