

Ringan Gilhaize; Or, The Covenanters, Volume 2

A novel by John Galt; 1823

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was in the cool of the evening, on Saturday the last day of May, when my brother came over to my house, where, with Michael, I had prepared myself to go with him to Loudon-hili. Our intent was to walk that night to Kilmarnock, and abide till the morning with our brother Jacob's widow, not having seen her for a long time.

We had in the course of that day heard something of the publication of "The Declaration and Testimony," which, through the vehemence of the preachers before spoken of, had been rashly counselled at Ruglen, the 29th of the month; but there was no particulars, and what we did hear was like, as all such things are, greatly magnified beyond the truth. We, however, were grieved by the tidings; for we feared some cause of tribulation would be thereby engendered detrimental to the religious purposes of our journey.

This sentiment pressing heavily on our hearts, we parted from my family with many misgivings, and the bodements of further sorrows. But the outward expression of what we all felt was the less remarkable, on account of what so lately had before happened in my brother's house. Nor indeed did I think at the time, that the foretaste of what was ordained so speedily to come to a head was at all so lively in his spirit, or that of my son, as it was in mine, till, in passing over the top of the Gowan-brae, he looked round on the lands of Quhanst, and said—

"I care nae, Ringan, if I ne'er come back; for though we hae lang dwelt in affection together yon'er, thae that were most precious to me are now both aneath the sod,"—alluding to his wife who had been several years dead,—and poor Bell, that lovely rose which the ruthless spoiler had so trampled into the earth.

"I feel," said Michael, "as if I were going to a foreign land, there is sic a farewell sadness upon me."

But we strove to overcome this, and walked leisurely on the high-road towards Kilmarnock, trying to discourse of indifferent things; and as the gloaming faded, and the Night began to look forth, from her watchtower in the heavens, with all her eyes of beautiful light, we communed of the friends that we trusted were in glory, and marvelled if it could be that they

saw us after death, or ever revisited the persons and the scenes that they loved in life. Rebellion or treason, or any sense of thoughts and things that were not holy, had no portion in our conversation: we were going to celebrate the redemption of fallen man; and we were mourning for friends no more; our discourse was of eternal things, and the mysteries of the stars and the lights of that world which is above the firmament.

When we reached Kilmarnock we found that Jacob's widow had, with several other godly women, set out towards the place of meeting, to sojourn with a relation that night, in order that they might be the abler to gather the manna of the word in the morning. We therefore resolved not to halt there, but to go forward to the appointed place, and rest upon the spot. This accordingly doing, we came to the eastern side of Loudon-hill, the trysted place, shortly after the first scud of the dawn.

Many were there before us, both men and women and little children, and horses intermingled, some slumbering, and some communing with one another;

And as the morning brightened, it was a hallowed sight to behold from that rising ground the blameless persecuted coming with sedate steps to worship their Maker on the mountain.

The Reverend Mr. Thomas Douglas, who was to open the action, arrived about the rising of the sun, ^ with several other ministers, and behind them four

aged men belonging to Strathaven bearing the elements.

A pious lady, whose name I never heard, owing to what ensued, spread with her own hands a damask tablecloth on the ground, and the bread and wine were placed upon it with more reverence than ever was in kirk.

Mr. Douglas having mounted upon a rock nigh to where this was done, was about to give out the psalm, when we observed several country lads, that were stationed as watchers afar off, coming with great haste in; and they brought word, that Claverhouse and his dragoons were coming to disperse us, bringing with them the Reverend Mr. King, a preacher of the gospel at Humilton, and others that they had made prisoners, tied with cords two and two.

The tidings for a moment caused panic and consternation; but as the men were armed, and resolved to resist, it was thought, in consideration of the women and children, that we ought to go forward, and prevent the adversaries from advancing. Accordingly, to the number of

forty horsemen, and maybe near to two hundred foot, we drew ourselves apart from the congregation, and marched to meet Claverhouse, thinking, perhaps, on seeing us so numerous, that he would not come on,—while Mr. Douglas proceeded with the worship, the piety of none with him being abated by this grievous visitation.

Mr. William Clelland, with Mr. Hamilton, who had come with Mr. Douglas, were our leaders, and we met Claverhouse on the moor of Drumclog.

The dragoons were the first to halt, and Claverhouse, having ordered his prisoners to be drawn aside, was the first who gave the word to fire. This was without any parley or request to know whether we came with hostile intent or no. Clelland, on seeing the dragoons make ready, cried to us all to den ourselves among the heather; by which forethought the shot flew harmless. Then we started up, and every one, with the best aim he could, fired at the dragoons as they "were loading their carabines. Several men and horses were killed, and many wounded. Claverhouse seeing this, commanded his men to charge upon us; but the ground was rough, the heather deep, and the moss broken where peats had been dug, and the horses floundered, and several threw their riders, and fell themselves.

We had now loaded again, and the second fire was more deadly than the first. Our horsemen also, seeing how the dragoons were scattered, fell in the confusion as it were man for man upon them. Claverhouse raged and commanded, but no one now could or would obey. In that extremity his horse was killed, and, being thrown down, I ran forward to seize him, if I could, prisoner; but he still held his sword in his hand, and rising as I came up, used it manfully, and with one stroke almost hewed my right arm from my shoulder. As he fled I attempted for a moment to follow, but staggered and fell. He looked back as he' escaped, and I cried—" Blood for blood;" and it has been so, as I shall hereafter in the sequel relate.

When the day was won, we found we numbered among the slain on the side of the vanquished nearly twenty of the dragoons: on our side we lost but one man, John Morton—a ripe saint; but several were wounded; and John Weir and William Daniel died of their wounds. Such was the day of Drumclog.

Being wounded, I was carried to a neighbouring farm, attended by my brother and son, and there put upon a cart and sent home to Quharist, as it was thought I would be best attended there. They then returned to the rest of the host, who, seeing themselves thus brought into open war, resolved forthwith to proceed to Glasgow, and to raise again the banner of the Covenant.

But Claverhouse had fled thither, burning with the thought of being so shorn in his military pride by raw and undisciplined countrymen, whom, if we had been bred soldiers, maybe he would have honoured, for it being what we were, though our honour was the Vol. II. 10 greater, he hated us with the deadly aversion that is begotten of vanity chastised; for that it was which incited him to ravage the West country with such remorselessness, and which, when our men were next day repulsed at Glasgow with the loss of lives, made him hinder the removal of the bodies from the streets, till it was said the butchers' dogs began to prey upon them.

But not to insist on matters of hearsay, nor to dwell at any greater length on those afflicting events, I must refer the courteous reader to the history of the times for what followed, it being enough for me to state here, that as soon as the news spread of the battle and the victory, the persecuted ran flocking in from all quarters, by which the rope of sand, that the Lord permitted Monmouth to break at Bothwell-brigg, was soon formed. My brother and my son were both there, and there my gallant Michael lies. My brother, then verging on threescore, being among the prisoners, was, after sore sufferings in the Grayfriars churchyard of Edinburgh, sent on board a vessel as a bondsman to the plantations in America. His wrongs, however, were happily soon over; for the ship in which he was embarked perished among the Orkney islands, and he, with two hundred other sufferers, received the crown of martyrdom from the waves.

O Charles Stuart, king of Scotland! and thou,

James Sharp!—false and cruel men But ye are

called to your account; and what avails it now to the childless father to rail upon your memory?