

By Peden's Cleuch

By H. Pease

Border hounds had gone right away up Redewater after an old dog fox they had picked on the rocks beside the Doure; twice had circled the Doure, then setting his mask west-ward had crossed the Rede, and, turning right-handed, made straight for Carter Fell.

My mare had gone splendidly for the first hour, but by the time we passed the cairn on the she had lost a shoe, and in addition had sustained a bad 'over-reach,' so I was fain to up and dismount, while I watched the Master and whip, and one other intrepid horse-man struggling gamely on towards Carlin's Tooth on the Scottish side of the Border after the tail of the vanished hounds.

I determined to descend to the grass-grown Hawick road which leads into the Jedburgh-Newcastle road half a mile from the ancient Border boundary line. The early morning that particular April day had been lovely; curlews newly returned had luted their love-song overhead; golden plovers had piped upon the bents; there was a scent of heather-burning in the snell air, but suddenly the weather had changed, and with an idle motion snowflakes now drifted down the wind. Cheviot was fast disappearing behind a white shroud; the triple Eildons showed like breaking billows; Ruberslaw alone was black against the sky.

I stayed a minute or two more to give my mare a mouthful of water at the springs of Jed, but whereas I had intended an inch she insisted upon an ell.

As I tried to drag her head out of the little pool of water, a stranger—evidently an old shepherd—accompanied by a frail old collie bitch came up beside me.

'Hae ye had guid huntin'?' he inquired. 'Hae ye killed the fox? They're mischievous beasts at the best, but worst o' a' at this season—aye seekin' for the puir lambs.'

I said I thought the fox had got right away, and would probably save his brush by taking refuge in some stronghold by Carlin's Tooth.

'Ay,' he replied absently, then added, 'D' ye ken the name o' this cleuch?

'No,' I replied; 'I come from the wrong side of the Border,' finally succeeding, as I spoke, in drawing my mare's head out of the water.

"'Tis Peden's Cleuch,"¹ he said with animation; "'tis the place where blessed Master Peden was peachin' when the bloody "Clavers" was huntin' him like a fox on the fells; ay, and would hae worried him wi' his hounds had na the Lord sent down His mist and wrapped him awa frae the hunters.'

He paused a moment, then continued slowly:

'They still hunt for him—"Clavers" and Grierson o' Lag; 'tis the weird they hae to dree till the Day o' Doom for their wickedness i' pursuin' the Saints o' God.'

'Have you ever seen them?' I asked lightly.

'Ay, I hae,' came the unexpected response, 'whiles i' the "oncome" oa" haar," or by the moonlight.

¹ Peden, the Covenanter, was undoubtedly on the Border in the 'killing times,' and is said to have escaped from the hunters when preaching on Peden Pike by intervention of a mist, but as in old maps this rounded hill west of Otterburn is spelt Paden, the derivation seems doubtful. Peden's Cleuch on the north side of Carter seems undoubtedly to have been his refuge.

‘D’ ye no ken the bit ballant?

*“Soondless they ride—for aye i’ sarch o’ their boon—
They ha’ died, but God’s feud is for aye unstaunched,
And aye they mun ride by the li~t o’ the moon.”*

‘No,’ I replied, astonished, ‘but how—supposing you have seen them—could you know them to be “Clavers” and Grierson o’ Lag?’

‘Not only hae I seen them, but I aince heard them talking,’ my companion replied quietly as before.

‘When was that?’ I asked, still more astonished, as I looked more keenly at the speaker.

He was a man of middle stature, dressed in rough shepherd’s costume, with a plaid about his shoulders; he had a gentle aspect, with tremulous mouth, and a far-away look in his eyes of speedwell blue.

‘I’ll tell ye,’ he replied simply. ‘Blessed Master Peden had been here i’ the “killing times,” ye ken, preachin’ till the puir hill folk, an’ baptizin’ their bairns—he baptized a forebear o’ my ain—and it would likely be the annivairsary o’ the day when he escaped frae the hans o’ the hunters through the “haar,” when I chanced to come by here an’ saw a bit tent pit up, an’ heard folk carousin’ within.

‘I creepit up, an’ I keeked within the openin’ o’ t, an’ there I saw twa hunters sittin’ at board—eatin’, and whiles drinkin’ the blood-red wine—ane o’ them was the bonniest man e’ er I saw i’ my life, but he had the sorrowfulest eyes e’ er set i’ a man’s face. There was ne’er a bit colour to his cheeks save where a trickle o’ claret had stained the corner o’ his lip.

‘His comrade was juist the opposite till him; foul he was, an’ discoloured wi’ lust an’ liquor—mair like a haggis nor a human face ava.

‘There was a wumman beside him—dootless his whure, that had ridden oot frae Jedburgh to be wi’ him—nestlin’ in at his side like a ewe till her ram i’ the autumn; not that he was takin’ muckle thocht o’ her, though—an’ then he cries oot loud:

‘ “’Tis a moonlicht nicht, my Lord Claverhouse,” he cries; “we’ll hunt oor quarry ower muir an fell, an’ aiblins hae mair luck than we i’ the day; we’ll run the auld brock to ground before dawn, I’ll hand ye a handfu’ o’ Jacobuses.”

‘“I’ll haud ye,” replied Claverhouse, wi’ a smile on his bonny, sad face,

*“Ye’ll tak the high road an’ I’ll tak the low road,
An’ I’ll be in North Tyne afore ye.*

So up an’ tak wing, my grey-lag goose,” he says, “an’ wing your way straight to the North Tyne water.”

‘“Then here’s a last toast,” cries Lag, holdin’ up his bicker fu’ o’ wine.

‘Noo, what think ye was his toast?’ my companion broke off to inquire of me with eye apleam.

I shook my head, and laid hold of my saddle to remount, for the eerie communication, the loneliness of the spot, and the isolation of the drifting snowflakes had all combined to give me a ‘scunner.’

‘It was their ain damnation,’ my companion whispered in my ear; ‘he was proposin’ the murder o’ the Saints o’ God—juist the “sin against the Holy Ghaist”—that was his fearsome health.’

I had climbed into my saddle, and at that moment an unseen plover wailed through the mist.

‘Hark!’ cried my companion, lifting a finger.

‘Hark to his soul i’ torment!

My mare took fright, and made a great spring forward; I let her go, for I was ‘gliffed’ myself, and right glad was I to reach the road made by human hands that led homeward, for I feared if I stayed on that I too might meet the wraiths of Claverhouse and Lag hunting the moorlands for blessed Master Peden.