

## J E A N G L O V E R .

1758—1801.

**A**YRSHIRE is a land of green pastures, level woods and fields, and bleak moors. Even its sea-border is rendered in many places unpicturesque by a stretch of barren sand. It needs the solan goose-haunted rock of Ailsa Craig, and the beetling mountains of the island of Arran opposite, to redeem its character. But Ayrshire is green as the Emerald Isle; and the houses of its little cottar farmers were wont to be whitewashed with a self-assertion and an independence, part dogged and part cheery. Its climate is that of the Devonshire of Scotland; and as Devonshire lanes have a rich flora, no wild flowers in Scotland bloom "by bank and brae," north, south, east, or west, like the lucken-gowan of Kyle, the pimperl and the variegated

thistle of Carrick. As for birds, one who dearly loved Ayrshire asserted that walking along by the "lush" greenness and budding whiteness of an Ayrshire hedgerow in the end of May, he could have caught the young linnets, which were tottering on the sprays and tumbling out of their nests, in hatfuls.

Ayrshire has other singers besides birds, and other distinctions than wild flowers. The natives are a strong, resolute race, with wild Irish blood in them here and there. They are conspicuous in whatever cause they adopt and make their own. Now they are stern, devoted Covenanters with the Fool of Fenwick—Guthrie; now on the losing side of high Toryism, with poor Lord Kilmarnock, who in his trial before the House of Lords, and in his execution on Tower Hill, made such havoc among the hearts of the fine ladies of London; and again, they are winning the people's hearts and braving obloquy for half a century with Thomas Cochran, Lord Dundonald.

The women of Ayrshire had a gift of being known for good or for evil before "Robbie

Burns" bestowed his immortality on the Ayrshire lasses who were his contemporaries. "May Collean," the Scottish sultana Schehezerade, who stopped the immolation of wives perpetrated by a "fause Sir John" of ballad renown, was an Ayrshire lass; so was Jean, Countess of Cassilis, who eloped with the gipsy Davie; an Ayrshire wife, though a Renfrew lass, was Christian Shaw, daughter of the Laird of Barragan, who had the horrible fate, when a girl of thirteen, to be reckoned bewitched by one of the Barragan maid-servants, and to cause the burning for witchcraft of five wretched men and women on the Gallows-green of Paisley. But Christian Shaw did other and better things for Renfrew and Paisley before she fell, with her foibles and infirmities, into the ghostly hands of the minister of Kilmaurs. With the aid of Lady Blantyre, she inaugurated fine spinning and bleaching, and the great thread manufacture of Paisley, towards the close of the seventeenth century.

Barbara Gilmour, of Dunlop, who acquired the art of cheese-making in Ireland, whither her

family had fled from persecution, and brought it back with her to her native village, was yet another Ayrshire woman ; and a fifth was Jean Glover of Kilmarnock, with a desperate strain of gipsy wildness and recklessness in her temperament. She was born in 1758, a year later than Robert Burns, and not long after that ride in the coach during which Miss Jean Elliot of Minto composed her "Flowers of the Forest."

"Auld Kilmarnock" was then a long street, made up of the houses and stances of weavers, who were chiefly employed in weaving the Kilmarnock cowl, the universal nightcap of Scotland. Though Jean was but a poor child in one of these weavers' families, she must have been reasonably well educated in the New Testament, the Proverbs of Solomon, the Shorter Catechism, and the multiplication table. She must have learnt, too, something of the art of writing ; for she would go to the parish school in her "daidly" and bare feet, and sit on the same "furm" with boys twice as big as herself, who could not help having a sneaking kindness for wild Jean.

Jean's nature could never have been a meek or saintly one in her splendid, handsome youth. But surely it was comparatively an innocent lass who ran about to the buzz and hum of wheels, and the rattle of treadles, with companions bold and heedless as herself, though the "wabster carles" might rise from their benches, lay aside their broadsheets, their sermons which had been thundered on the moss by the comrades of Cameron and Peden, and come out covered with blue and red worsted thrums, to shake their heads to carlines in linen jackets and mutches, and predict solemnly that no good would come of a set of light-heeled, light-headed loons and hempies, who were fast degenerating around them. No good came of them so far as Jean Glover was concerned. Yet there must have been still some good in Jean while she was a strapping young woman in her buff jacket, linsey-woolsey petticoat, and snooded or "screened" hair. She would draw water at the well near the cross where young Boyd had shot Lord Soulis with an arrow from his cross-bow, or stray up the Fenwick water by

which Boyd had lain in ambush, and beheld the retribution that in turn reached the Boyds' great castle of Dean.

It was a black day for Jean Glover when she began to attend the village fairs and races all round Kilmarnock. These fairs and races were in great part the result of a revolt against the high-minded stubborn despotism of the David Deanses of the West; and it might be the reaction of a curbed, galled nature which helped to work the mischief in Jean Glover's case too. Be that as it may, Jean played with fire, gaped and stared, laughed and fleeced. At last she became "madly enamoured" of Burns's "slight o' hand blackguard," ran away with him, and married him. Thenceforth she was launched on a career of wanton riot and disreputable adventure, which, like a troubled sea, could cast up nothing save mire and dirt.

But it had better be said here that Jean Glover is a proof of the truth of the proverb, "Give a dog an ill name and hang him." Poor Jean had hard lines dealt to her—not only in her hapless fortunes, but in the words spoken

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of her by a man who might have spared her.

Robert Burns was not wont to be hard on aught but what he held to be slavish meanness or base hypocrisy; but he was hard in his withering words on the poor strolling player and "randy gangrel" wife from whose lips he took down her sweet hill-flavoured song. A spade may be a spade, and yet a taste for strongly-spiced epithets may exist also. When a book was being written on Burns's contemporaries, and an investigation made among old Ayrshire men and women, it was found that Jean Glover was bad enough in all truth, but was not worse than a roughly-hardened tramp, a wilful, regardless woman. Although she "rugged and reived" at whatever came in her way, still she was not a thief in the ordinary meaning of the term, and she was faithful to her roving, ne'er-do-well husband, who had beguiled her to turn her back for ever on the dull Weavers' Row in Kilmarnock, and to wander the country with him—the best singer and actor in his troop.

Jean had wrung the hearts of what kindred owned her by going off and wedding the player Richard; yet he might not have been unkind to her beyond her deserts, reprobate though he was. Her daily round was not always among the filth and scum of towns. She had many a trudge with him through the peat-hags where white flowers hold up their spotless heads above the brown water; or she walked knee-deep in ling, startling the plover; or scrambled in a flutter of rags through thickets of trailing brambles or wilding sloes. The roads were then execrable. When little Hugh, Earl of Loudon, was conveyed as a child from Loudon Castle to Edinburgh, only fifty years before Jean Glover's epoch, it was in a pannier slung across the back of a horse, and accompanied by a servant on another horse; the journey occupying the better part of a week.

Jean must have shared with her husband and his allies many a meal taken from their wallets and spread out by a convenient spring, where she could fill her kettle when there was time to kindle a fire, and where the Meg-Merrilies stew



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—come by anyhow—could be eaten hot. Many a sleep Jean must have snatched when wrapped in her duffle cloak, and pillowed by the bracken. Would not the loneliness, the freedom, after which Jean had panted (though she had found it, poor wretch! to be only the worst kind of slavery), the scents and sounds of wild things around her, recall to her fitfully and dreamily some purer fancies of the settled, righteous homes, and the peaceful, virtuous hearths among which she had been bred, and which she had “madly” forsaken?

When Jean came back to Kilmarnock, she brazened out her disgrace in the eyes of her sedate townsmen by playing on her tambourine, as she did at the close mouth in Irvine, to attract newly-landed sailors, ploughmen, and apprentice weavers to the juggling tricks of her husband in the room down the close. There she flaunted in her player's finery of scarlet, tinsel, and glass beads, “the bravest woman that had ever been seen to step in leather shoon.” But she could not have been half so comely as when, in her simple jacket and modest snood, she first

“forgathered” with the players. Notwithstanding, did not the words of the Song of Kyle, which she sang as she tossed the tambourine above her head, bring back in an irresistible rush, alike to the singer and to her audience, wafts of the fragrance of the wild thyme and the heather, and echoes of the burnies which hold in their bickering the blithe babble of children and the soft “sough” of good women’s sighs?

Jean Glover dropped down in her endless march with her husband somewhere about Letterkenny, in Ireland, and died there in 1801, aged forty-two years, hardly past the prime of womanhood.

“Ower the moor among the heather” reads as if Jean had first lilted it out amid the wilds in the early days of her wanderings, before the spring had been taken out of her spirit by low companionship, bodily weariness, and taunting shame, which sits and grins even on the ill-clad backs of those who have as little to lose as Jean had.

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“ Coming through the craigs o’ Kyle,  
    Among the bonnie bloomin’ heather,  
There I met a bonnie lassie  
    Keeping a’ her ewes thegither  
        Ower the moor, among the heather,  
        Ower the moor, among the heather,  
        There I met a bonnie lassie  
        Keeping a’ her ewes thegither ”

There is an ineffable buoyance, an abounding blitheness in the words as well as in the tune. In keeping with it, there is a rich rejoicing in the wide world as the singer had known it in the wilds. There is little more in the song, unless it be that in the warmth of the closing vow we see a reflection of Jean’s own delirium of love for the player Richard, which had caused her to cast from her so much that a woman holds dear :—

“ Ower the moor among the heather,  
    Down among the blooming heather,  
By sea and sky ! she shall be mine,  
    The bonnie lass among the heather.”

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## O'ER THE MUIR AMANG THE HEATHER.

COMIN' through the craigs o' Kyle,  
Amang the bonnie bloomin' heather,  
There I met a bonnie lassie  
Keepin' a' her flocks thegither.  
Ower the muir amang the heather,  
Ower the muir amang the heather,  
There I met a bonnie lassie  
Keepin' a' her flocks thegither.

Says I, my dear, where is thy hame?  
In muir or dale, pray tell me whither?  
Says she, I tent the fleecy flocks  
That feed amang the bloomin' heather.  
Ower the muir, &c.

We laid us down upon a bank,  
Sae warm and sunnie was the weather;  
She left her flocks at large to rove  
Amang the bonnie bloomin' heather.  
Ower the muir, &c

She charmed my heart, and aye sinsyne  
I couldna think on ony ither;  
By sea and sky! she shall be mine,  
The bonnie lass amang the heather.  
Ower the muir, &c.