

THE KING'S OWN BORDERERS.

A Military Romance.

VOL. I.

BY
JAMES GRANT

"Memories fast are thronging o'er me,
Of the grand old fields of Spain;
How he faced the charge of Junot,
And the fight where Moore was slain.
Oh the years of weary waiting
For the glorious chance he sought,
For the slowly ripened harvest
That life's latest autumn brought."

PREFACE.

In the following volumes I have endeavoured to delineate the career of a soldier—and of a character that has not as yet, I think, figured in the pages of our military novelists—a Gentleman Volunteer, serving with a line regiment in time of war, according to a custom which survived even the memorable battles of the Peninsula.

As the scene of his adventures (some of which are not quite fictitious), I have chosen the expedition under the gallant and ill-fated Sir John Moore, as it has scarcely, if ever, been made the theme of a military romance.

No history of the 25th Foot is in existence; hence, as the brief outline of its early career in the first volume is substantially correct, it may prove of interest to some readers.

I may add that the 94th regiment mentioned occasionally, is the old 94th or "Scots Brigade," which came from the service of the States General, and was disbanded after Waterloo.

The corps at present bearing the same number in the Army List was also, however, raised in Scotland, but in December, 1823; and on that occasion the green standard of the old brigade of gallant memory was borne through the streets, from the castle of Edinburgh, by a soldier of the Black Watch.

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CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAP.

- I. LADY WINIFRED
- II. THE PARTAN CRAIG
- III. THE CASTLE OF ROHALLION
- IV. THE CHILD OF THE SEA
- V. THE PAST
- VI. LORD ROHALLION
- VII. OUR STORY PROGRESSES
- VIII. QUENTIN'S CHILDHOOD
- IX. THE QUARTERMASTER'S SNUGGERY
- X. FLORA WARRENDER
- XI. LOVE, AND MATTERS PERTAINING THERETO
- XII. A LAST KISS
- XIII. COSMO THE MASTER
- XIV. AN ABRUPT PROPOSAL
- XV. THE BLOW
- XVI. EXPOSTULATION
- XVII. FORTH INTO THE WORLD
- XVIII. UNAVAILING REGRET
- XIX. AN OLD SOLDIER'S STORY
- XX. THE WAYFARER
- XXI. THE VAULT OF KILHENZIE
- XXII. THE QUEEN ANNE'S HEAD

XXIII. NEW FRIENDS

XXIV. THE YOUNG VOLUNTEER

XXV. THE PRUSSIAN GRENADIER

XXVI. COLCHESTER BARRACKS

XXVII. THE LOST LETTER

THE KING'S OWN BORDERERS

CHAPTER I. LADY WINIFRED.

"Thick, thick—no sight remains the while,
From the farthest Orkney isle,
No sight to seahorse or to seer,
But of a little pallid sail,
That seems as if 'twould struggle near,
And then as if its pinion pale
Gave up the battle to the gale."
LEIGH HUNT.

On the afternoon of a lowering day in the November of 1798, a square-rigged vessel—a brig of some three hundred and fifty tons—was seen in the offing, about twelve miles distant from the bluff, rocky headland of Rohallion, on the western coast of Carrick, beating hard against a head-wind and sea, that were set dead in shore; and, as a long and treacherous reef, locally known as the Partan Craig (*Anglicè*, Crab-rock), lies off the headland, many fears were loudly expressed by on-lookers, that if she failed to gain even better sea room, ere night-fall, the gale, the waves, and the current might prove too much for her in the end, and the half-sunken reef would finish the catastrophe.

Over the craig the angry breakers of the Firth of Clyde were seen to boil and whiten, and the ridgy reef seemed to rise, at times, like a hungry row of shark's teeth, black, sharp, and shining.

With royal yards on deck, with topsails lowered upon the caps, her fore and maincourses close-hauled, with a double reef in each, the stranger was seen to lie alternately on the port and starboard

tack, braced so close to the wind's eye as a square-rigged craft dared be; but still she made but little way to seaward.

From Rohallion there were two persons who watched her struggles with deep interest.

"The turn of the tide will strengthen the current, my lady, and bring her close to the craig, after all," said one.

"Under God's favour, John Girvan, I hope not!" was the fervent response.

"There is an eddy between the craig and the coves of Rohallion as strong as the whirlpool of Corryvreckan itself."

"Yes, John; I have seen more than one poor boat, with its crew, perish there, in the herring season."

"Look, look, my lady! There is another vessel—a brig, I take her to be—running right into the Firth before the wind."

The speakers were Winifred Lady Rohallion and her husband's bailie or factor, who stood together at a window of the castle of Rohallion, which crowns the summit of the headland before mentioned, and from whence, as it is a hundred and fifty feet in height, and rises almost sheer from the water, a spacious view can be obtained of the noble Firth of Clyde, there expanding into a vast ocean, though apparently almost landlocked by the grassy hills and dales of Cunninghame, the princely Isle of Bute (the cradle of the House of Stuart), the blue and rocky peaks of Arran, the grey ridges of Kintyre; and far away, like a blue stripe that bounds the Scottish sea, the dim and distant shores of Ireland.

A few heavy rain-drops, precursors of a torrent, plashed on the window-panes, and with a swiftness almost tropical, great masses of cloud came rolling across the darkening sky. Under their lower edges, lurid streaks between the hill-tops marked the approach of sunset, and thunder began to grumble overhead, as it came from the splintered peaks of Arran, to die away among the woody highlands of Carrick.

Aware that when the tide turned there would be a tremendous swell, with a sea that would roll far inshore, the fishermen in the little bay near the castled rock were all busily at work, drawing their brown-tarred and sharp-prowed boats far up on the beach, for there was a moaning in the sea and rising wind that foretold a tempestuous night: thus, they as well as the inhabitants of Rohallion Castle were at a loss to understand why the strange brig, instead of running right up the firth in search of safe anchorage under some of the high land, strove to beat to windward.

The conclusion therefore come to was, that she was French, or that her crew were ignorant of the river navigation; there were no pilots then, so far down the firth, and when the fishermen spoke among themselves of running down to her assistance or guidance, they muttered of French gun-brigs, of letters of marque, and privateers—shrugged their shoulders, and stood pipe in mouth under the lee of the little rocky pier to watch the event.

At the drawing-room windows of the more modern portion of the old stronghold of Rohallion, the lady of that name, and her bailie, stood watching the ship, by the dim light of the darkening afternoon.

Lady Winifred was a woman of a style, or rather of a school, that has passed away for ever out of Scotland.

Tall and stately, but gentle, homely, and motherly withal, her quaint formality was tempered by an old-fashioned politeness, that put all at their ease.

Now though verging on her fiftieth year, she was still very handsome, albeit where dimples once laughed, the wrinkles were appearing now. She had been an Edinburgh belle in those days when the tone of society there was very stately and aristocratic; when the city was the winter resort of the solid rank and real talent of the land; when it was a small and spirited capital instead of a huge "deserted village," abandoned to the soothing influences of the church, the law, Sabbatarianism, and the east wind.

Her lofty carriage and old-fashioned courtesy reminded one of what is described of the ladies of Queen Anne's time; she possessed a singular sweetness in her smile, and every motion, even of her smooth, white hands, though perfectly natural, seemed studies of artistic grace. Her eyes were dark and keen; her features straight and noble; her complexion brilliantly fair. Though powder had been wisely discarded by Her Majesty, the Queen Consort, and the six Princesses, their doing so was no rule for Lady Rohallion, who was somewhat of a potentate in Carrick, and still wore her hair in that singular half-dishevelled fashion, full and flowing, as we may see it depicted in Sir Joshua's famous portrait of her, which is to be hung on the walls of the Scottish National Gallery, when cleared of some of their local rubbish.

Thus, the white powder which she retained in profusion, formed a singular but not displeasing contrast to her black

eyebrows, black eyes, and long dark lashes—silky fringes, from which, some five-and-twenty years before, she had shot more than one perriwigged sub, who had come unscathed from the dangers of Bunker's-hill and Brandywine.

On the present occasion, her visitor, who bore the somewhat unaristocratic name of Mr. John Girvan, or, at times, Girvanmains, was a short, thickset, weatherbeaten man about sixty years of age, and in whom any one could have discerned at a glance the old soldier, by the erect way in which he carried his head. He wore an old military wig that had once been white, but was quite unpowdered now and was bleached yellow; and he had a jolly good-humoured face, rendered so red by exposure to the weather and by imbibing whisky-toddy, that, as he once said himself, "it might blow up a gunpowder magazine, if he came within a mile of it."

He had been the Quartermaster of Lord Rohallion's regiment, the 25th Foot, and after long service with it in America and elsewhere, had settled down on his colonel's estates in the capacity of land-steward, ground-baillie, and general factotum, and in this capacity had snug apartments assigned to him in a part of the old castle.

"While looking at yonder ship, my lady, you forget the letters I have brought you from Maybole," said he, producing a leathern pouch having the Rohallion arms stamped in brass on the outside; "the riding-postman, with the mailbags, arrived just as I was leaving the Kirkwynd Tavern. Waes me! what a changed place that is now. Many a crown bowl of punch have poor Robbie Burns and I birlled there!"

"True, John, the letters; unlock the bag, and let me see what the news is from Maybole."

This ancient burgh-of-barony was the little capital of the old bailiwick of Carrick.

Opening the pouch, Girvan tumbled on the table a number of letters and newspapers, such as the Edinburgh "Courant" and "Chronicle," which then were about a quarter of the size of the journals of the present day, and were printed on very grey paper, in such very brown ink, that they had quite a mediæval aspect.

The first letter Lady Winifred opened was from her chief friend and gossip, the Countess of Eglinton, with whom she had been at school, when she was simply Winifred Maxwell, and when the Countess was Eleanora Hamilton, of Bourtreehill. Her letter was somewhat sorrowful in its tenor:—

"I wish you would visit me, my dear friend," it ran; "Eglinton Castle is so dull now, so very *triste*! My good lord the earl (whom God preserve!) has been appointed Colonel of the Argyle Fencibles, one of the many kilted regiments now being raised, lest we are invaded by the French and their vile Corsican usurper; so he hath left me. My second boy, Roger, too, hath sailed lieutenant of a man-o'-war, and sorely do I opine that never mair shall my old hand stroke his golden curls again—my own brave bairn! (Her forebodings were sadly verified when, soon after, this favourite son died of fever at Jamaica.) I send you Mrs. Anne Radcliffe's novel, 'The Mysteries of Udolpho,' in five volumes, which I am sure will enchant you. I send you also the last book of the fashions, which I received by the London mail three weeks ago. Carriage robes are to have long sleeves, and the jockey bonnets are trimmed

with green feathers; white satin mantles, trimmed with swansdown, of the *exile style*, are considered the most elegant wraps for the opera. You will see by the papers that our brave Lord Nelson hath been created Duke of Bronte, but returns from Naples with the odious woman Lady Hamilton. Tell Bailie Girvan ('Quartermaster,' I think he prefers,) that I thank him for the hawslock-wool* he sent to Eglinton; my girls and I are spinning it with our own hands. Also I thank your sweet self for the lace mittens you knitted for me on Hallow-e'en. Your little friend—it may soon be ward—Miss Flora Warrender, is now with us, and seems to grow lovelier and livelier every day. I have Madame Rossignal, an *emigré*, the fashionable mistress of dancing, from Fyfe's Close, Edinburgh, with me just now, teaching my girls; but for a child of eight years, the little Warrender excels them both. Her father goes abroad in command of his regiment, and her poor mother is almost brokenhearted."

* The finest wool, being the locks that grow on the throat.

"If she is lonely at Eglinton, with her daughters the Ladies Jane and Lillas, how much more must I be, whose husband is absent, and whose only son is with the army!" exclaimed Lady Winifred.

"A letter from Rohallion himself!" said the old Quartermaster in an excited tone, handing to the lady a missive which bore her husband's seal and coronet.

"From him, and I read it *last!*" said she reproachfully, as she opened it.

It was dated from White's Coffee-house, in London, whither he had gone as a representative peer, and it contained only some news of the period, such as comments on Lord Castlereagh's or Mr. Pitt's

speeches about the Irish Union; ("which is to be carried by English gold and guile, like our own," said the Quartermaster, parenthetically;) the hopes he had of getting command of a brigade in Sir Ralph Abercrombie's proposed Egyptian expedition; he related that their son Cosmo, the master of Rohallion, then serving with the Guards, was well, and stood high in favour with the Prince of Wales.

"A doubtful compliment, if all tales be true," commented Lady Winifred.

"If Rohallion goes on service, I'll never stay at home behind him," exclaimed old Girvan; "it would ill become me."

"*All* the Highland regiments in Great Britain, second battalions as well as first, are under orders for immediate foreign service," continued his lordship's letter; "this looks like work, Winny dear, does it not?"

He added that Parliament was to be prorogued in a day or two, and that he would return by sea in one of the Leith smacks, which were then large and heavy passenger cutters, of some two hundred tons or so; they were all armed with carronades, and as their crews were secured from the pressgangs, they manfully fought their own way, without convoy, with the old Scots flag at their mast-head.

"He comes home by sea," said Lady Rohallion aloud, glancing nervously at the offing, where the coast of Ireland had disappeared, and where the clouds were gathering black and rapidly.

"By sea!" repeated Girvan.

"Now, the Lord forfend, at this season of the year!"

"And when so many French and Spanish privateers infest the seas, led by fellows who, in daring, surpass even Commodore Fall or Paul Jones," exclaimed Girvan.

As if to echo or confirm their fears, a booming sound pealed from a distance over the sea.

"What noise is that?" asked Lady Rohallion, starting up, while her pale cheek grew paler still.

"A gun—a cannon shot to seaward!" exclaimed the old soldier, pricking up his ears, while his eyes sparkled on recognising the once too familiar sound.

"'Tis that vessel in distress," said Lady Rohallion, as they hurried once more to the windows which overlooked the sea. "Away to the clachan, John; get all our people together, and have the boats launched."

"That will be impossible with such a heavy sea coming rolling in, my lady—clean impossible!" replied the other, as he threw up a window and levelled a telescope at the vessel, while the wild blast against which she was struggling made the damask curtains stream like banners, and frizzed up, like a mop, the Quartermaster's old yellow wig.

"What do you see, John? Speak, Girvanmains!"

"There go her colours; but I can't make them out."

"Twenty guineas a man to all who will aid her!" exclaimed Lady Rohallion, taking a key from her gold chatelaine, and hurrying to a buhl escritoire, while gun after gun pealed from a

distance over the stormy sea; but they came from two vessels, one of which was hidden in a bank of dusky vapour.

The lady grasped the old Quartermaster's arm, and her white hands trembled nervously as she exclaimed in a whisper—

"Oh, my God, John Girvan! what if Rohallion should be on board of her, with a foe on one hand and a lee shore on the other?"

CHAPTER II. THE PARTAN CRAIG.

"Prone on the midnight surge with panting breath,
They cry for aid, and long contend with death;
High o'er their heads the rolling billows sweep,
And down they sink in everlasting sleep.
Bereft of power to help, their comrades see
The wretched victims die beneath the lee!"
FALCONER'S *Shipwreck*.

Inspired by fears, perhaps, similar to those of his lady, the Quartermaster made no immediate reply, but continued to watch with deep interest, and somewhat of a professional eye, the red flashes which broke from the bosom of that gloomy bank of cloud, which seemed to rest upon the surface of the water, about six miles distant.

The wind was still blowing a gale from the seaward. Through the fast-flying masses of black and torn vapour, the setting sun, for a few minutes, shed a lurid glare—it almost seemed a baleful glow along the crested waves, reddening their frothy tops, and lighting up, as if with crimson flames, the wet canvas of the brig; but lo! at the same instant, there shot out of the vapour, and into the ruddy sheen of the stormy sunset, another square-rigged craft, a brig of larger size, whose guns were fired with man-o'-war-like precision and rapidity.

The first vessel, the same which for so many hours had been working close-hauled in long tacks to beat off the lee shore, now relinquished the attempt, and, squaring her yards, hoisting her topsails from the cap, stood straight towards Rohallion, her crew

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