

Robert W. Buchanan (1841-1901)

6 *The Battle of Drumliemoor*

(North Coast. Covenant Period.)

Bar the door! put out the light, for it gleams across the night,  
And guides the bloody motion of their feet;  
Hush the bairn upon thy breast, lest it guide them in their quest,  
And with water quench the blazing of the peat.

Now, wife, sit still and hark! hold my hand amid the dark; 5

O Jeanie, we are scattered e'en as sleet!

It was down on Drumliemoor, where it slopes upon the shore,  
And looks upon the white surf of the bay,  
In the kirkyard of the dead, where the heather is turned red  
By the bloody clan that sleep beneath the clay; 10  
And the Howiesons were there, and the people of Glen Ayr,  
And we gathered in the dark o' night to pray.

How! Sit at home in fear, when GOD's voice was in mine ear,  
When the priests of Baal were slaughtering His sheep?  
Nay, there I took my stand, with my reap-hook in my hand, 15  
For bloody was the sheaf that I might reap;  
And the LORD was in His skies, with a thousand dreadful eyes,  
And His breathing made a trouble on the deep.

Each mortal of the band brought his weapon in his hand,  
Though the chopper or the spit was all he bare; 20  
And not a man but knew the work he had to do,  
If the Fiend should fall upon us unaware.  
And our looks were ghastly white, but it was not with affright,  
For we knew the LORD was hearking to our prayer.

Oh, solemn, sad, and slow, rose the stern voice of Monroe,     25  
    And he cursed the curse of Babylon the Whore;  
And we could not see his face, but a gleam was in its place,  
    Like the phosphor of the foam upon the shore;  
And the eyes of all were dim as they fixed themselves on him,  
    And the Sea filled up the pauses with its roar.             30

And when, with accents calm, Kilmahoe gave out the psalm,  
    And the sweetness of GOD's voice was on his tongue,  
With one voice we praised the LORD of the Fire and of the Sword,  
    And louder than the winter wind it rung;  
And across the stars on high went the reek of vapour by,     35  
    And a white mist drifted round us as we sung.

It was terrible to hear our cry rise deep and clear,  
    Though we could not see the criers of the cry,  
But we sang and gripped our brands, and touched each other's  
    hands,  
    While a thin sleet smote our faces from the sky;             40  
And, sudden, strange, and low, hissed the accents of Monroe,  
    'Grip your weapons! Yea, be silent! They are nigh!'

And heark'ning, with clenched teeth, we could hear across the  
    heath,  
    The tramping of the horses as they flew,  
And no man breathed a breath, but all were still as death,     45  
    And close together shivering we drew;  
And deeper round us fell all the eyeless gloom of Hell,  
    And the Fiend was in among us ere we knew.

Then a shriek of men arose, and the cursing of our foes -

    No face of friend or foeman could we mark;             50  
But I struck and kept my stand, trusting GOD to guide my hand,  
    And struck, and struck, and heard the hell-hounds bark;  
And I fell beneath a horse, but I reached with all my force,  
    And ripped him with my reap-hook through the dark.

As we struggled, knowing not whose hand was at our throat, 55  
Whose blood was spouting warm into our eyes,  
We felt the thick snow-drift swoop upon us from the rift,  
And murmur in the pauses of our cries;  
But, lo! before we wist, rose the black reek and the mist,  
And the pale Moon made a glamour from the skies. 60

O GOD! it was a sight that made the hair turn white,  
That withered up the heart's blood into woe,  
To see the faces loom in the dimly lighted gloom,  
And the dead men lying bloodily below;  
While melting, with no sound, fell with gentleness  
around 65  
The white peace and the wonder of the Snow!

Ay, and thicker, thicker, poured the pale silence of the LORD,  
From the hollow of His hand we saw it shed,  
And it thickened round us there, till we choked and gasped for air,  
And beneath was ankle-deep and stained red; 70  
And soon, whatever wight was smitten down in fight  
Was buried in the drift ere he was dead.

Then we beheld at length the troopers in their strength,  
For faster, faster, faster, up they streamed,  
And their pistols flashing bright showed their faces ashen  
white, 75  
And their blue steel caught the driving moon and gleamed.  
And a dying voice cried, 'Fly!' And behold, e'en at the cry,  
A panic fell upon us, and we screamed!

Oh, shrill and awful rose, 'mid the splashing blood and blows,  
Our scream unto the LORD that let us die; 80  
And the Fiend amid us roared his defiance at the LORD,  
And his servants slew the strong man 'mid his cry;  
And the LORD kept still in heaven, and the only answer given  
Was the white Snow falling, falling, from the sky.

Then we fled! the darkness grew! 'mid the driving cold we  
flew, 85

Each alone, yea, each for those whom he held dear;  
And I heard upon the wind the thud of hoofs behind,  
And the scream of those who perished in their fear,  
But I knew by heart each path through the darkness of the strath,  
And I hid myself at dawn, and I am here. 90

Ah! gathered in one fold be the holy men and old,  
And beside them lie the curséd and the proud;  
The Howiesons are there, and the people of Glen Ayr,  
Kirkpatrick, and Macdonald, and Macleod.  
And while the widow groans, lo! GOD's hand around their  
bones 95  
His thin ice windeth softly as a shroud.

Ay, on mountain and in vale our women will look pale,  
And palest where the ocean surges boom;  
Buried 'neath snow-drift white, with no holy prayer or rite,  
Lie the lovéd ones they look for in the gloom; 100  
And deeper, deeper still, drops the Snow on vale and hill,  
And deeper and yet deeper is their Tomb!

*1868*

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