

Samuel Ferguson (1810-86)

4 *Willy Gilliland*

An Ulster Ballad.

Up in the mountain solitudes, and in a rebel ring,
He has worshipp'd God upon the hill, in spite of church and king;
And seal'd his treason with his blood on Bothwell bridge he hath;
So he must fly his father's land, or he must die the death;
For comely Claverhouse has come along with grim Dalzell, 5
And his smoking rooftree testifies they've done their errand well.

In vain to fly his enemies he fled his native land;
Hot persecution waited him upon the Carrick strand;
His name was on the Carrick cross, a price was on his head,
A fortune to the man that brings him in alive or dead! 10
And so on moor and mountain, from the Lagan to the Bann,
From house to house, and hill to hill, he lurk'd an outlaw'd man.

At last, when in false company he might no longer bide
He stay'd his houseless wanderings upon the Collon side,
There in a cave all underground he lair'd his heathy den, 15
Ah, many a gentleman was fain to earth like hill fox then!
With hound and fishing-rod he lived on hill and stream by day;
At night, betwixt his fleet greyhound and his bonny mare he lay.

It was a summer evening, and, mellowing and still,
Glenwhirry to the setting sun lay bare from hill to hill; 20
For all that valley pastoral held neither house nor tree,
But spread abroad and open all, a full fair sight to see,
From Slemish foot to Collon top lay one unbroken green,
Save where in many a silver coil the river glanced between.

And on the river's grassy bank, even from the morning grey, 25
He at the angler's pleasant sport had spent the summer day:
Ah! many a time and oft I've spent the summer day from dawn,
And wonder'd, when the sunset came, where time and care had gone,
Along the reaches curling fresh, the wimpling pools and streams,
Where he that day his cares forgot in those delightful dreams. 30

His blithe work done, upon a bank the outlaw rested now,
And laid the basket from his back, the bonnet from his brow;
And there, his hand upon the Book, his knee upon the sod,
He fill'd the lonely valley with the gladsome word of God;
And for a persecuted kirk, and for her martyrs dear, 35
And against a godless church and king he spoke up loud and clear.

And now, upon his homeward way, he cross'd the Collon high,
And over bush and bank and brae he sent abroad his eye;
But all was darkening peacefully in grey and purple haze,
The thrush was silent in the banks, the lark upon the braes — 40
When suddenly shot up a blaze, from the cave's mouth it came;
And trooper's steeds and trooper's caps are glancing in the same!

He couch'd among the heather, and he saw them, as he lay,
With three long yells at parting, ride lightly east away:
Then down with heavy heart he came, to sorry cheer came he, 45
For ashes black were crackling where the green whins used to be,
And stretch'd among the prickly coomb, his heart's blood smoking round,
From slender nose to breast-bone cleft, lay dead his good greyhound!

"They've slain my dog, the Philistines! they've ta'en my bonny mare!" —
He plung'd into the smoky hole; no bonny beast was there — 50
He groped beneath his burning bed, (it burn'd him to the bone,)
Where his good weapon used to be, but broadsword there was none;
He reel'd out of the stifling den, and sat down on a stone,
And in the shadows of the night 'twas thus he made his moan —

"I am a houseless outcast; I have neither bed nor board, 55
Nor living thing to look upon, nor comfort save the Lord:
Yet many a time were better men in worse extremity;
Who succour'd them in their distress, He now will succour me, —
He now will succour me, I know; and, by His holy Name,
I'll make the doers of this deed right dearly rue the same! 60

"My bonny mare! I've ridden you when Claver'se rode behind,
And from the thumbscrew and the boot you bore me like the wind;
And, while I have the life you saved, on your sleek flank, I swear,
Episcopalian rowel shall never ruffle hair!
Though sword to wield they've left me none — yet Wallace wight, I wis, 65

Good battle did on Irvine side wi' waur weapon than this."

His fishing-rod with both hands he gripped it as he spoke,
And, where the butt and top were spliced, in pieces twain he broke;
The limber top he cast away, with all its gear abroad,
But, grasping the tough hickory butt, with spike of iron shod, 70
He ground the sharp spear to a point; then pull'd his bonnet down,
And, meditating black revenge, set forth for Carrick town.

The sun shines bright on Carrick wall and Carrick Castle grey,
And up thine aisle, St. Nicholas, has ta'en his morning way,
And to the North-Gate sentinel displayeth far and near 75
Sea, hill, and tower, and all thereon, in dewy freshness clear,
Save where, behind a ruin'd wall, himself alone to view,
Is peering from the ivy green a bonnet of the blue.

The sun shines red on Carrick wall and Carrick Castle old,
And all the western buttresses have changed their grey for gold; 80
And from thy shrine, St. Nicholas, the pilgrim of the sky
Has gone in rich farewell, as fits such royal votary;
But, as his last red glance he takes down past black Slieve-a-true,
He leaveth where he found it first, the bonnet of the blue[.]

Again he makes the turrets grey stand out before the hill; 85
Constant as their foundation rock, there is the bonnet still!
And now the gates are open'd, and forth in gallant show
Prick jeering grooms and burghers blythe, and troopers in a row;
But one has little care for jest, so hard bested is he,
To ride the outlaw's bonny mare, for this at last is she! 90

Down comes her master with a roar, her rider with a groan,
The iron and the hickory are through and through him gone!
He lies a corpse; and where he sat, the outlaw sits again,
And once more to his bonny mare he gives the spur and rein;
Then some with sword, and some with gun, they ride and run amain; 95
But sword and gun, and whip and spur, that day they plied in vain!

Ah! little thought Willy Gilliland, when he on Skerry side
Drew bridle first, and wiped his brow after that weary ride,
That where he lay like hunted brute, a cavern'd outlaw lone,
Broad lands and yeoman tenantry should yet be there his own: 100

Yet so it was; and still from him descendants not a few
Draw birth and lands and, let me trust, draw love of Freedom too.

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