

The Story of Lady Glammiss

By E. Lynn Linton

One of the earliest, as she was one of the noblest, victims of this delusion, politics and jealousy had as much to do with her death as had superstition. Because she was “one of the Douglasses,” and not because she was convicted as a sorceress, did William Lyon find her so easy a victim to his hate. For it was he—the near relative of her first husband, “Cleanse the Causey” John Lyon, Lord Glammiss,—who ruined her, and brought her young days to so shameful an end. And had he not cause? Did she not reject him when left a widow, young and beautiful as but few were to be found in all the Scottish land? and, rejecting him, did she not favour Archibald Campbell of Kessneath instead, and make over to him the hands and the beauties he had coveted for himself, even during the life of that puling relative of his, “Cleanse the Causey”? Matter enough for revenge in this, thought William Lyon: and the revenge he took came easy to his hand, and in fullest measure. For Lady Glammiss, daughter of George, Master of Angus, and grand-daughter of that brave old savage, Archibald Bell-the-Cat, was in no great favour with a court which had disgraced her grandfather, and banished her brother; and consequently she found no protection there from the man who was seeking her ruin. Perhaps, too, she had mixed herself up with the court feuds and parties then so common, and thus had given some positive cause of offence to a government which must crush if it would not be crushed, and extirpate if it would not be destroyed. Be that as it may, William Lyon soon gathered material for an accusation, and Lady Glammiss found that if she would not have his love he would have her life. She was accused on various counts; for having procured the death of her first husband by “intoxication,” or unholy drugging, for a design to poison the king, and for witchcraft generally, as a matter of daily life and open notoriety; and for these crimes she was burnt, notwithstanding her beauty and wealth and innocence and high-hearted bravery, notwithstanding her popularity—for she was beloved by all who knew her—and the honour of her stainless name. And once more, as so often, hatred conquered love, and the innocent died that the guilty might be at rest.

I must omit any lengthened notice of the trial of Janet Bowman in 1572, as also of that of a notable witch Nicneven, which name, “generally given to the Queen of the Fairies, was probably bestowed upon her on account of her crimes, and who, when ‘her collore craig with stringis whairon wes mony knottis’ was taken from her, gave way to despair, exclaiming, ‘Now I have no hoip of myself,’ saying, too, that ‘she cared not whether she went to heaven or to hell.’” The Record has preserved nothing beyond the mere fact of the first, while the foregoing extract is all that I can find of the second; so that I am obliged to pass on to the pitiful tale of—

Bessie Dunlop and Thom Reid

By E. Lynn Linton

Poor douce honest Bessie Dunlop, spouse to Andro Jak in Lyne, deposed, after torture, on the 8th day of November, 1576, that one day, as she was going quietly enough between her own house and Monkcastle yard, “makeand hevye sair dule with hirsself,” weeping bitterly for her cow that was dead, and her husband and child who were lying “sick in the land-ill,” she herself still weak after gissane, or child-birth, she met “ane honest, wele, elderlie man, gray bairdit, and had ane gray coitt with Lumbart slevis of the auld fassoun; ane pair of gray brekis and qithyte schankis gartanit abone the kne; ane blak bonet on his heid, cloise behind and plane befoir, with silkin laissis drawi throw the lippis thairof; and ane quhyte wand in his hand.’ This was Thom Reid, who had been killed at the battle of Pinkye (1547), but was now a dweller in Elfame, or Fairy Land. Thom stopped her, saying, “Gude day, Bessie.” “God speid yow, gude man,” says she. “Sancta Made,” says he, “Bessie, quhy makis thow sa grit dule and sair greting for ony wardlie thing?” Bessie told him her troubles, poor woman, and the little old gray-bearded man consoled her by assuring her that though her cow and her child should die, yet her husband would recover; and Bessie, after being “sumthing fleit” at seeing him pass though a hole in the dyke too narrow for any honest mortal to pass through, yet returned home, comforted to think that the gude man would mend. After this, she and Thorn foregathered several times. At the third interview he wanted her to deny her baptism, but honest Bessie said that she would rather be “revin at horis taillis” (riven at horses’ tails); and on the fourth he came to her own house, and took her clean away from the presence of her husband and three tailors—they seeing nothing—to where an assemblage of eight women and four men were waiting for her. “The men wer cled in gentilmennes clething, and the wemens had all plaidis round about them, and wer verrie semelie lyke to se.” They were the “gude wychtis that wynnit (dwelt) in the court of Elfarme,” and they had come to persuade her to go back to fairy-land with them, where she should have meat and clothing, and be richly dowered in all things. But Bessie refused. Poor crazed Bessie had a loyal heart if but a silly head, and preferred her husband and children to all the substantial pleasures of Elfame, though Thorn was angry with her for refusing, and told her “it would be worse for her.”

Once, too, the queen of the fairies, a stout, comely woman, came to her, as she was “lying in gissane,” and asked for a drink, which Bessie gave her. Sitting on her bed, she said that the child would die, but that the husband would recover; for Andro Jak seems to have been but an ailing body, often like to find out the Great Mysteries for himself, and Bessie was never quite easy about him. Then Thom began to teach her the art of healing. He gave her roots to make into salves and powders for kow or yow (cow or sheep), or for “ane bairne that was tane away with ane evill blast of wind or elfgrippit:” and she cured many people by the old man’s fairy teaching. She healed Lady Johnstone’s daughter, married to the young Laird of Stanelie, by giving her a drink brewed under Thorn’s auspices, namely, strong ale boiled with cloves, ginger, aniseed, liquorice, and white sugar, which warmed the “cauld blude that gaed about hr hart, that causit hir to dwam and vigous away,” or, as we would say, to swoon. And she cured John Jake’s bairn, and

Wilson's of the town, and her gudeman's sister's cow; but old Lady Kilbowye's leg was beyond them both. It had been crooked all her life, and now Thorn said it would never mend, because "the march of the bane was consumit, and the blude dosinit" (the marrow was consumed, and the blood benumbed). It was hopeless, and it would be worse for her if she asked for fairy help again. Bessie got fame too as a "monthly" of Lyne. A green silk lace, received from Thorn's own hand, tacked to their "wylie coitts" and knit about their left arms, helped much in the delivery of women. She lost the lace, insinuating that Thorn took it away again, but kept her fatal character for more medical skill than belonged to an ordinary canny old wife. In the recovery of stolen goods, too, she was effective, and what she could not find she could at least indicate. Thus, she told the seekers that Hugh Scott's cloak could not be returned, because it had been made into a kirtle, and that James Baird and Henry Jameson would not recover their plough irons, because James Douglas, the sheriff's officer, had accepted a bribe of three pounds not to find them. Lady Blair having "dang and wrackit" her servants on account of certain linen which had been stolen from her, learnt from Bessie, prompted by Thorn, that the thief was no other than Margaret Symple, her own friend and relation, and that she had dang and wrackit innocent persons to no avail. Bessie never allowed that Thorn's intercourse with her was other than honest and well conducted. Once only he took hold of her apron to drag her away to Elfame with him; but this was more in the way of persuasion than love making, and she indignantly denied the home questions put to her by the judges with but scant delicacy or feeling for an honest woman's shame. Interrogated, she said that she often saw Thorn going about like other men. He would be in the streets of Edinburgh, on market days and other, handling goods like any living body, but she never spoke to him unless he spoke first to her: he had forbidden her to do so. The last time she met him before her arrest he told her of the evil that was to come, but buoyed her up with false hopes, assuring her that she would be well treated, and eventually cleared. Poor Bessie Dunlop! After being cruelly tortured, her not very strong brain was utterly disorganized, and she confessed whatever they chose to tax her with, rambling through her wild dreamy narrative with strange facility of imagination, and with more coherence and likelihood, than are to be found in those who came after her. Adjudged as "confessit and fyhit," she was "convict and brynt" on the Castle Hill of Edinburgh—a mournful commentary on her elfin friend's brave words and promises.