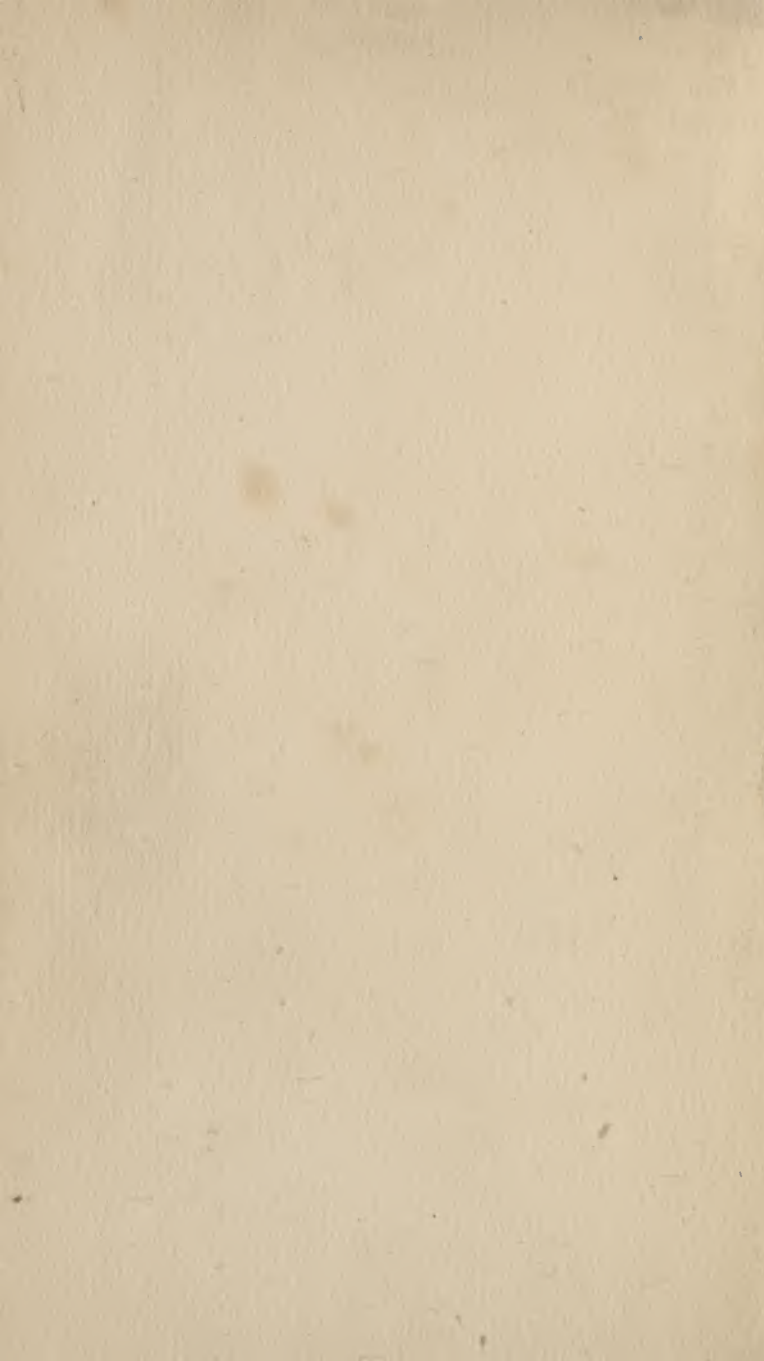


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Fair Helen

OF

KIRKCONNEL LEE:

A POEM,

BY

Stewart Lewis.

“ O Happiness ! Where art thou to be found ?
I see thou dwellest not with birth and beauty,
Though graced with grandeur, and in wealth arrayed ;
Nor dost thou, it would seem, with Virtue dwell,
Else had this gentle lady missed thee not.”—HOME.

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*FOURTH EDITION.*  
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DUMFRIES :

Printed at the Dumfries & Galloway Courier Office,
BY C. MUNRO AND CO.

1817.

C. A. B.

THE HISTORY OF THE

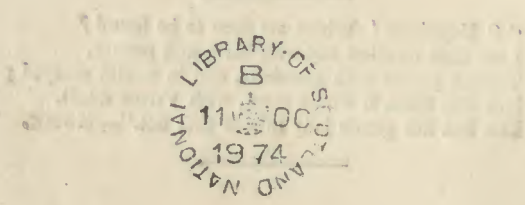
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PREFACE.

THE following ballad was first published about twenty-two years ago, and excited, at that time, a very general and lively interest among the inhabitants of Annandale, to whom the traditionary story, and the local scenery where the catastrophe happened, are well known. As few copies of the former publication are now extant, and as the scene it describes has become of late the frequent resort of the fashionable and the curious, the Author has been induced, in compliance with the solicitations of a great many friends, to give a fourth edition, in order to perpetuate the remembrance of a very interesting and tragical event. The scene lies in the vicinity of Springkell (formerly called Kirkconnel) the paternal seat of the present Sir JOHN HERON MAXWELL, Bart.; and the story on which the ballad is founded, is taken from the statistical account of the parish of Kirkpatrick-Fleeming, Dumfries-shire.

It appears that fair HELEN was a daughter of the family of Kirkconnel, who formerly possessed the most extensive estates in the south of Scotland, and of which the Springkell property forms at present only a small portion. The young lady was courted by two young gentlemen, whose names were FLEEMING and BELL; the former heir to an estate in her neighbourhood, most probably the same which is now called Mossknow; the latter, proprietor of the lands of Blackwood-house, which were also situated in the neighbourhood. BELL, who appears to have been of a gloomy and furious character, finding his addresses slighted by the lady, and observing her marked partiality for FLEEMING, vowed to revenge himself upon his rival, when he discovered him again in her company. Unfortunately, an opportunity for executing his purpose soon occurred. For, while the two lovers were one evening pursuing their favourite walk along the romantic banks of the Kirtle, they were discovered from the opposite banks by the assassin, who had planted himself among the bushes to watch their motions. HELEN was the first who perceived him, and suspecting his bloody purpose, rushed to her lover's bosom, to rescue him from the danger; and thus, receiving the wound intended for another, sunk, and expired in her favourite's arms. FLEEMING instantly revenged her death, and slew her murderer; but, inconsolable for the loss of all that was dear to him on earth, he went abroad. The image of her he loved, however, attended him thither, and finding, that neither time nor absence were able to efface from his mind the remembrance of the melancholy scene that was past, he returned

to his native country, and stretching himself on the tomb of his beloved HELEN, expired and was buried by her side. Upon the tomb-stone, in the burial-ground of Kirkeonnel, are engraven a sword and cross, with “*Hic jacet ADAM FLEEMING.*” Several circumstances, which cannot, with propriety, be detailed at present, led us to refer the period of this tragical event to the latter years of Queen MARY, or to the beginning of the reign of her son JAMES VI. There is still extant an old ballad, supposed to have been written by ADAM FLEEMING, while abroad, which gives a lively picture of his own feelings, but is extremely short. With the exception of this, and a few beautiful Elegiac Stanzas on the same subject, by the late celebrated Dr John Leyden, the author has reason to believe, that he is the first who has ventured to turn the whole tragical story into rhyme. How far he has succeeded in the attempt, he leaves to the judgment of others to determine. His friends, who know his limited means of improvement, will judge with candour. And as the *dira necessitas* is the principal motive which forces him at this moment to obtrude his effusions on the public, he trusts the benevolent and the good will not refuse him their support.

Fair Helen

OF

KIRKCONNEL LEE.

'MONGST all the maids in ANNANDALE,
That bloomed in beauty's pride,
The matchless HELEN far excelled ;
Sweet flower of Kirtle side !

Her cheeks were ruddy as the dye
That paints the orient morn ;
Her eye outshone the glittering dew
That decks the blossomed thorn.

Her breath was like the scented breeze
Blown from Arabia's grove ;
Her every gesture grace bespoke,
And dignity and love.

Her neck surpassed the sculptor's art,
Like Parian Marble fair ;
As raven's pinions glossy black,
In ringlets flowed her hair.

In vain did Envy, fiend of hell,
 Essay a fault to find ;
 For virtue, sense, and truth sincere,
 Illumed the maiden's mind.

The trump of Fame had spread her praise,
 And numbers flocked to see
 The beauteous, budding, blushing rose,
 Of fair Kirkconnel Lee.

Each wealthy swain on Annan's banks,
 And Kirtle's verdant vale,
 Had tried to win fair HELEN's heart,
 With many a *love-sick tale*.

But all their efforts fruitless proved ;
 Their *love-sick tales* were vain ;
 For yet her bosom ne'er had throbb'd
 With love's heart-thrilling pain.

Stern BELL, the chief of Blackwood-house,
 Whose castle stood hard by,
 Had long beheld this lovely maid,
 With wistful am'rous eye.

His lands were large, his wealth was great,
 His name for valour famed ;
 But yet his deeds betrayed a soul,
 Where pride and fury flamed.

This cruel, tyrannizing chief,
 Was hated far and near ;
 His actions oft, from HELEN'S eye
 Had forced the pitying tear.

One day he found her in her bower,
 And told his well-feigned tale ;
 But cold contempt chilled all his hopes,
 Nor could his arts prevail.

Nor was it strange that cold contempt,
 Should meet his proffered love ;
 For hearts so different ne'er possessed
 The hawk, and harmless dove.

The haughty chief stalked off in rage,
 And muttering swore, ere morn
 His injured love should be revenged,
 Nor treated thus with scorn.

With fiend-like care, himself he hid
 Amidst a neighbouring grove,
 Where, well he knew, each summer eve,
 Fair HELEN used to rove.

He saw her at the wonted hour
 Trip o'er the flowery field—
 Swift from the thicket sprung the chief,
 His heart with vengeance steeled.

“ Yield, scornful maid! yield to my love!
 For lonely is the hour;
 Nor mortal man, nor heaven, nor hell,
 Shall free thee from my power!”

With savage hand he seized the fair,
 On lawless deed designed:
 But let the virtuous ne'er despair,
 For Heaven's to Virtue kind.

Young FLEEMING, heir of Fleeming-Hall,
 Had hunting been that day,
 And, as kind Fate had so ordained,
 He homeward passed that way.

A braver youth with brighter parts,
 Had Scotia never seen;
 His face was like *Adonis* fair,
 Like *Mars* his martial mien.

Endowed with each exterior grace
 That beauty can impart,
 While honour bright, and truth unstained,
 Possessed his manly heart.

Oft with the Southern border bands
 His courage had been tried;
 And oft his glittering sword with blood
 Of Scotia's foes been dyed.

Long had he loved this charming fair—
 But love he ne'er confessed ;
 To all unknown, the latent flame
 Lay burning in his breast.

By nameless arts he oft had tried
 Fair HELEN'S heart to move ;
 He sighed and looked, and faltering spoke,
 But never spoke of love.

Each well-known scene he now surveys,
 Round sweet Kirkeonnel Lee,
 In hopes the charmer of his soul,
 Fair HELEN, he might see.

When lo ! a voice assails his ear—
 The voice of female grief :
 His keen-edged sword young FLEEMING drew,
 And flew to her relief.

“ Haste ! turn thee villain ! ” cried the youth
 “ Thy worthless life defend ;
 No more with angel innocence,
 In coward strife contend.”

Roused at the sound, the furious chief
 His sword that instant drew,
 And reared its point, designed to pierce
 Young FLEEMING'S body through.



With skilful hand the daring youth
 The weapon turned aside,
 And quickly with his rival's blood
 His gleaming steel was dyed.

“Cursed be thy hand!” cried frantic BELL,
 “And cursed this ill-timed wound;”
 He said—and staggering backward, fell,
 Extended on the ground.

And next, the frightened fainting maid,
 Demanded FLEEMING'S care;
 He seized her arm, and homeward led
 The lovely trembling fair.

A messenger to Blackwood house
 He sent, without delay,
 To tell what had befallen their chief,
 And where he bleeding lay.

Soon as the tumult did subside
 In HELEN'S grateful breast,
 In accents mild as vernal breeze
 She thanked her generous guest.

“No thanks I ask, dear maid,” he cried
 “No thanks are due to me;—
 Forever sacred be the hour
 I came to succour thee.

“ For, O ! fair HELEN, deign to hear
 A secret yet unknown :
 From that blest hour I saw thy face
 I’ve loved but thee alone.

“ My heart a willing victim fell
 Before Love’s sacred shrine :
 For who could see, and not adore
 Those matchless charms of thine ?

“ Then, dearest maid, if in thy breast
 One spark of pity be,
 O ! give it to a hapless youth,
 Who dies for love of thee !”

A virgin blush of crimson hue,
 Suffused fair HELEN’S cheek ;
 Her heart, her eye, confessed a flame
 Her tongue refused to speak.

His modest worth, and high desert,
 Well knew the conscious maid,—
 She gave him hopes that future days
 Would see his love repaid.

Low in a vale by Kirtle’s stream,
 An ancient church-yard stands,
 Where solemn silence sits enthroned,
 And sacred awe commands.

Oft in this lone sequestered vale
 These tender lovers strayed,
 To breathe their tender tales of love
 Beneath the verdant shade.

Meanwhile, the chief of Blackwood-house,
 Recovering from his smart,
 To Kirtle hies, with rancorous spite,
 And vengeance in his heart.

By spies, he learnt the time and place
 Where met the faithful pair ;
 And hell-born malice prompts the fiend,
 To lurk in ambush there.

Nor long beneath the embowering shade
 The bloody miscreant lay :
 For Phoebus, from the western main,
 Shot forth his piercing ray ;

Now evening's cooling breeze succeeds
 The day's fierce scorching beam,
 When HELEN and her lover meet,
 By Kirtle's winding stream.

O ! had that eve less lovely been,
 Or Fate that meeting spared ;
 A hapless pair, to sorrow doomed,
 A different lot had shared.

Unconscious of impending fate,
 They held their wonted way,
 While BELL his murderous *tube* prepared,
 And marked his destined prey.

“To hell begone!” the demon cried—
 His voice fair HELEN heard;
 She saw him take his deadly aim,
 And sprung her love to guard.

The ball designed for FLEMING’S heart,
 Pierced deep her snowy breast:—
 “A long adieu, dear youth!” she said,
 And sunk in endless rest.

So have I seen a blooming flower,
 Scorched by the solar ray,
 Contract its leaves, and droop its head,
 And, withering, die away.

The noise that base retreating BELL
 Amongst the bushes made,
 Aroused the youth,—who on the grass
 The lifeless body laid.

He crossed the stream, o’ertook the foe,
 And drew his gleaming *brand*,
 The villain fell a lifeless corse,
 Beneath his vengeful hand,

Soon as the murdered, much loved fair,
 In silent grave was laid,
 And every funeral honour given
 The dear, lamented maid.

The woe-worn FLEEMING bade adieu
 To friends, and Scotia's shore,
 Since her dear presence, whom he loved,
 He could enjoy no more.

Through foreign lands and climes remote,
 Long roamed the hapless swain ;
 Who home returned, that peace to seek,
 Abroad, he sought in vain.

He hied him to the sacred spot,
 Where lay his HELEN dear ;
 And long bedewed the grass-green turf
 With many a briny tear.

" I come, dear sainted shade !" he cried,
 " I come to meet with thee ;
 With joy I yield my parting breath
 For *her* who died for me.

" Soon shall we meet, no more to part,
 In climes of bliss !" he cried,
 Then on his much-loved HELEN'S tomb,
 He laid him down and died.

FINIS.

