The Curse of Moy
A Highland Tale
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The Castle of Moy is the ancient residence of Mackintosh, the chief of the Clan Chattan. It is situated among the mountains of Inverness-shire, not far from the military road that leads to Inverness. It stands in the hollow of a mountain, on the edge of a small gloomy lake, called Loch Moy, surrounded by a black wood of Scotch fir, which extends round the lake, and terminates in wild heaths, which are unbroken by any other object as far as the eye can reach. The tale is founded on an ancient Highland tradition, that originated in a feud between the clans of Chattan and Grant. A small rocky island in Loch Moy is still shown, where stood the dungeon in which prisoners were confined, by the former Chiefs of Moy.*

* It would be painful to trace farther the history, real or traditional, of the Curse of Moy, to which superstition has, even of late years, ascribed a certain degree of influence. - W.S. 1831.

THE CURSE OF MOY

Loud, in the gloomy towers of Moy,
The Chattan clan * their carol raise,
And far th' ascending flame of joy
Shoots o'er the loch its trembling blaze.

For long within her secret bower,
In child-bed lay the lady fair,
But now is come th' appointed hour,
And vassals shout, "An heir! an heir!"

And round the fire, with many a tale,
The well-spiced bowl the dames prolong,
Save when the chieftains' shouts prevail,
Or war's wild chorus swells the song.

Loud sound the pipes, the dancer's heel
Bounds nimbly from the floor of pine,
When in the light and mazy reel
Young maids and active soldiers join.

Late waned the night, the blazing brand
More feebly glimmer'd in the hall,
Less loudly shout the jovial band,
Less lively sounds the pibroch's call. - **

When, from the corner of the hearth,
A figure crept, of all the train
Most alien from a scene of mirth,
And muttering sigh'd, "'Tis vain, 'tis vain!"

Soon ceased the shout, a general thrill
Seized every heart: th' ill-omen'd voice
Seem'd e'en the warrior's breast to chill,
Nor dared the trembling sire rejoice.

He saw a pale and shiv'ring form,
By age and frenzy haggard made;
Her eyes, still wild with passion's storm,
Belied the snows that shroud her head.

Long had she wander'd on the heath,
Or begg'd the lonely trav'ler's aid,
And gossips swear that sudden death
Still follows where her footsteps tread.

Her hut, on Badenoch's wildest height,
Full well the mountain hunter knew,
Nor paused to take a narrower sight,
But cursed the witch, and quick withdrew.

Slowly she crawl'd before the throng,
Fix'd on the Chief her haggard eyes,
Check'd with a look the minstrel's song,
"No more," she cried, "No more rejoice!

"To you that o'er your midnight ale,
Have listen'd to the tales of glee,
I come to tell a gossip's tale;
Ill-omen'd Chieftain! list to me." -

THE WITCH'S TALE

Full sixty years have roll'd,
Since clamour shook these gloomy towers;
When Moy's black Chief, with Urquhart old,
Led Grant's and Chattan's mingled powers. ***

Like yours, their followers shouted brave,
Like yours, the minstrels answer'd loud,
Like yours, they 'gan the dance to weave,
And round and round the goblet flowed.

In solemn guise the Chieftains came,
To solemn league the Chieftains swore;
To quench the death-feud's fatal flame,
And dye the heath with blood no more.

Fair rose the morn, and Urquhart's pow'r
To Moray's hostile border flew, +
But ling'ring in the Chattan tow'rs,
The aged Chief the last withdrew;

Homewards he turn'd, some younger arm
Shall lead the war on the banks of Spey;
But sharp was the sleet, and cold the storm,
That whistled at eve in his locks so gray.
With him went Alva's heir, who stay'd
The Chieftain's weal or wo to share;
So Urquhart's trembling daughter pray'd,
So Alva vow'd who loved her dear. ++

But drear was Badenoch's wintry waste,
And mirk the night that round them fell,
As over their heads the night-raven pass'd,
And they enter'd Glen Iral's darkling dell. +++

The raven scream'd, and a slogan yell
Burst from Glen Iral's sable wood,
They heard in the gale a bugle swell,
They saw in the shade a man of blood.

Grimly he points, and a hundred hands
Their horses seize; in that fatal hour,
Unarm'd, defenceless, Urquhart stands,
But Alva has drawn his broad claymore.

"Stand fast, Craig Ellachie," he cried, *+
As his stalwart stroke the foremost slew;
Alas! no friendly voice replied,
But the broad claymore in fragments flew.

And sad was the heart of Alva's heir,
And he thought of Urquhart's scenes of joy,
When, instead of her smile that he loved so dear,
He met the haughty scowl of Moy.

And far across the wintry waste,
And far from Marg'ret's bow'r of joy,
In silent haste, and in chains, they pass'd,
To groan and despair in the towers of Moy.

On yonder rock their prison stood, **+
Deep in the dungeon's vault beneath,
The pavement still wet with the rising flood,
And heavy, and dank, is the fog they breathe.

Three days were past - with streaming eye,
With bursting heart, and fail't ring breath,
What maiden sues at the feet of Moy,
To save their life, or to share their death?

"Tis Marg'ret; in whose heart the tale
Had waken'd the first sad sigh of grief,
And wan and pale from Urquhart's vale,
She flew to the tow'r of the gloomy Chieft.

Beneath his darken'd brow, the smile
Of pleased revenge with hatred strove,
And he thought of the hours, perchance, the while,
When she slighted his threats, and scorn'd his love.

And thus he spoke, with trait'rous voice,
"Oh! not in vain can Margaret plead;
One life I spare - be hers the choice,
And one for my clan and my kin shall bleed.

"Oh will she not a lover save,
But dash his hopes of mutual joy,
And doom the brave to the silent grave,
To ransom a sire from the sword of Moy?

"Or will she not a father spare,
But here his last spark of life destroy,
And will she abandon his silvery hair,
And wed her love in the halls of Moy?"

Oh have you seen the shepherd swain,
While heav'n is calm on the hills around,
And swelling in old Comri's plain, ****+
Earth shakes, and thunders burst the ground.

Like him aghast did Marg'ret stand,
While start her eyes from her burning head,
Nor stirs her foot, nor lifts her hand;
The chastisement of Heav'n is sped.

Long mute she stands when before her eyes
From the dungeon's cave, from the gloomy lake,
In the mournful wood two forms arise,
And she of the two her choice must make.

And wildly she sought her lover's breast,
And madly she kiss'd his clanking chain;
"Home, home," she cried, "be my sire releas'd,
While Alva and I in the grave remain.

"And my father will rest, and our name be blest,
When Moy's vile limbs shall be strew'd on the shores
The pine-tree shall wave o'er our peaceful grave,
Till together we wake to weep no more."

The tear from Urquhart's eye that stole,
As rung in his ear his daughter's cry,
Ceased on his furrow'd cheek to roll,
When he mark'd the scorn of the gloomy Moy.

And stately rose his stiffened form,
And seem'd to throw off the load of age,
As gather'd in his eye the storm
Of feudal hate, and a chieftain's rage.

"False traitor! though thy greedy ear
Hath drunk the groan of an enemy,
Yet inly rankle shame and fear,
While rapture and triumph smile on me. -

And thou, my best, my sorrowing child,
Whate'er my fate, thy choice recall!
These towers, with human blood defiled,
Shall bide my corse, and atone my fall.

"Why should I live the scorn of slaves?
From me no avenger shall I see,
Where fair Lochness my castle laves,
To lead my clan to victory.

"White are my hairs, my course is run,
To-morrow lays thy father low;
But, Alva safe, with yonder sun
He shall rise in blood on the hills of snow.

"If Alva falls, and falls for me,
A father's curse is o'er thy grave;
But safe and free, let him wend with thee,
And my dying blessing thou shalt have."

The maid stood aghast, and her tears fell fast,
As to the wild heath she turned to flee;
"Be Alva safe," she sigh'd as he pass'd,
"To Badenoch's height let him follow me."

She sat her down on the blasted heath,
And hollowly sounded the glen below;
She heard in the gale the groan of death,
She answered the groan with a shriek of wo.

And slowly tow'rds the mountain's head,
With a sable bier four ruffians hied;
"And here," they said, "is thy father dead,
And thy lover's corse is cold at his side."

They laid the bodies on the bent,
Each in his bloody tartan roll'd;
"Now sing Craig-Ellachie's lament,
For her Chiefs are dead and her hopes are cold."

She sigh'd not as she turn'd away,
No tear-drop fell from her frozen eye;
But a night and day, by their side did stay,
In stupid speechless agony.

And another she staid, and a cairn *++ she made,
And piled it high with many a groan;
As it rises white, on Badenoch's height,
She mutters a prayer over every stone.

She pray'd that, childless and forlorn,
The Chief of Moy might pine away;
That the sleepless night and the careful morn,
Might wither his limbs in slow decay;

That never the son of a Chief of Moy
Might live to protect his father's age,
Or close in peace his dying eye,
Or gather his gloomy hermitage.

But still as they fall, some distant breed,
With sordid hopes, and with marble heart,
By turns to the fatal towers succeed,
Extinct by turns to the grave depart.

Then loud did she laugh, for her burning brain
The soothing showers of grief denied;
And still, when the moon is on the wane,
She seeks her hut on the mountain's side.

There sits she oft to curse the beam
That vexes her brain with keener wo;
Full well the shepherd knows her scream,
When he sinks on the moor in the drifted snow.

Seven times has she left her wretched cell
To cheer her sad heart with gloomy joy,
When the fury of heaven, or the blasts of hell,
Have wither'd the hopes of the house of Moy.

And - now! at your feast, an unbidden guest,
She bids you the present hour enjoy!
For the blast of death is on the heath,
And the grave yawns wide for the child of Moy!

Here ceased the tale, and with it ceased
The revels of the shuddering clan;
Despair had seized on every breast,
In every vein chill terrors ran,

To the mountain hut is Marg'ret sped,
Yet her voice still rings in the ear of Moy;
- Scarce shone the morn on the mountain's head,
When the lady wept o'er her dying boy.

And long in Moy's devoted tower
Shall Marg'ret's gloomy curse prevail;
And mothers, in the child-bed hour,
Shall shudder to think on the Witch's tale.

* The Chattan clan is a federal clan, consisting of the families of Mackintosh, Macpherson, and some others of less consequence. The Chief is the Laird of Mackintosh; the Chattan country is in the inland part of Inverness-shire.
** The pibroch is a wild music, played by the piper at the assembling of a clan, in marches, &c. Every clan had its own particular tune, which was played most scrupulously and indefatigably on all great and signal occasions.
*** Grant, the Laird of Urquhart, was the chief of the clan of Grant; his castle of Urquhart, now in ruins, covers one of the most beautiful of the craggy promontories that adorn Loch Ness. The delightful vale of Glen Urquhart is embosomed in the mountains behind it. The possessions of the clans in the southern part of Inverness-shire, border on those of the clan Chattan, with whom, of course, they were continually at variance.
+ The Lowland district of Moray, or Elginshire, along the banks of the Spey, being comparatively fertile and civilized, and in the immediate vicinity of the Grampians, was long exposed to the ravages and inroads of the Highland clans, who possessed the mountains on the border, and the upper part of
Strathspey.
++ Alva is an ancient possession of a chieftain of the family of Grant.
+++ The Iral is a small stream that rises in the Chattan country, and falls into the river of Nairn, between Moy and Loch Ness.
*+ Craig Ellachie, where was the place of assembling of the clan Grant, was also the slogan, or war-cry, of the clan.
**+ See introduction to this ballad.
***+ The vale of Comri, in Perthshire, where earthquakes are still frequently felt, is in the higher part of Strathearn, near Crieff.
*++ A cairn is a heap of loose stones, the usual memorial of an ancient burying-place.