



The Scottish Chiefs (Classic Reprint)

Jane Porter

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Excerpt from The Scottish Chiefs

The copy of "Scottish Chiefs" which was the companion of my early days had a cover of dark red cloth and when I first caught sight of the last American edition bound in gay tartan I felt a certain bereavement, as if I had lost a friend. The volume of my childhood had been literally "read to death," the common occurrence being that while I was finishing my allotted chapter a younger sister was dancing disturbingly on one foot, awaiting her turn to know what might be happening to Sir William Wallace.

When, however, the beloved book lay before me for this present re-reading, the magic was still there and my eyes flew to lines that had thrilled me long ago:

"It was the iron head of an arrow which the moon had silvered; and Ker, catching it up exclaimed: 'Wallace is safe! This calls us to Glenfinlass!'"

(Oh, so many years since the arrow had first called me to Glenfinlass; how eagerly I followed, and how ready I was to follow again!)

Then I turned another leaf, haphazard and met the passage:

"And by the ghost of that same Fergus, I swear," exclaimed Murray, "that my honest claymore shall never shroud its head while an invader be left alive in Scotland!"

I might have been a child again, hearing my mother's voice calling me to supper from my nook in the window-seat, while I pleaded: "Oh! only five more minutes, please! Wallace has just rescued Lady Helen and hes bearing her in his arms over the rushing torrent on a bridge of a single tree!"

There was a particular passage that incited us to dangerous acrobatics in those young days. It was one of the miraculous feats of strength and skill daily performed by the gallant Wallace, that acted as a direct inspiration to similar exploits, - exploits most difficult to achieve in the upper chamber of a Maine cottage with beds, chairs and stools to serve for Highland scenery:

"Looking up I beheld a young chieftain with a bow in his hand leaping from cliff to cliff, till, springing from a high projection on the right he alighted at once at the head of a wounded deer."

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