

La Dame Blanche

[Opéra comique, in three acts; text by Scribe. First produced at the Opéra Comique, Paris, December 10, 1825; first time in English under the title of "The White Maid" at Covent Garden, London, January 2, 1827.]

PERSONAGES.

George Brown, or Julius of Avenel. Gaveston, late steward of the Avenel estate. MacIrton, an auctioneer. Dikson, an honest farmer. Anna, adopted child of the Lady of Avenel. Jenny, wife of Dikson. Margaret, servant of the late Lady of Avenel.

[Mountaineers, peasants, etc.]

The scene is laid in Scotland; time of the Stuarts.

The story of this favorite opera, adapted from Walter Scott's novels "The Monastery" and "Guy Mannering," runs as follows. The Laird of Avenel, a Stuart partisan, upon the eve of going into exile after the battle of Culloden, entrusts his estate and a considerable treasure concealed in a statue, called "the White Lady," to Gaveston, his steward. The traditions affirmed that the White Lady was the protectress of the Avenels, and the villagers declared they had seen her in the neighborhood. Gaveston, however, who puts no faith in the legend, announces the sale of the castle, hoping that the superstition may keep others from bidding and that he may get it for a low price. The steward decides to sell, because he has heard the Laird is dead and knows there is no heir.

Anna, an orphan, who had been befriended by the Laird, determines to frustrate the designs of Gaveston, and appears in the village disguised as the White Lady. She writes to Dikson, a farmer who is indebted to her, to meet her at midnight in the castle of Avenel. His superstitious

fears lead him to decline the invitation, but George Brown, a young British soldier on furlough, who is sharing the farmer's hospitality, volunteers in his stead. He encounters the White Lady at the castle, and is informed by her that he will speedily meet a young lady who has saved his life by her careful nursing, Anna recognizing him as her recent patient. When the day of sale comes, George and Anna are present, and the former buys the castle in obedience to Anna's instructions, though he has not a shilling to his name. When the time for payment comes, Anna produces the treasure which had been concealed in the statue, and still in the disguise of the White Lady reveals to him the secret of his birth during the exile of his parents, and informs him he is Julius of Avenel. Gaveston approaches the spectre, and tears off her veil, revealing Anna. Moved by the zeal and fidelity of his father's ward, George offers her his hand, which after some maidenly scruples she accepts.

In the first act the principal numbers are the opening song of George, "Ah! what Pleasure a Soldier to be"; the characteristic ballad of the White Lady with choral responses, "Where yon Trees your Eye discovers"; and the graceful trio in the finale, "Heavens! what do I hear." The second act opens with a plaintive romanza, "Poor Margaret, spin away," sung by Margaret, Anna's old nurse, at her spinning-wheel, as she thinks of the absent Laird, followed in the fifth scene by a beautiful cavatina for tenor, "Come, O Gentle Lady." In the seventh scene there is a charming duet, "From these Halls," and the act closes with an ensemble for seven voices and chorus which is extremely effective. The third act opens with a sentimental air for Anna, "With what Delight I behold," followed in the third scene by a stirring chorus of mountaineers, "Hail to our Gallant, our New-made Lord," and leading up to "The Lay ever sung by the Clan of Avenel"--set to the familiar melody of "Robin Adair." Though somewhat old-fashioned, the opera still retains its freshness, and its refined sentiment finds charming musical expression.