

# THE GOLDEN BOOK MAGAZINE\*

for January, 1931

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# Lives of Highwaymen, Pirates and Robbers



## 1. Sawney Beane

**T**HE FOLLOWING NARRATIVE presents such a picture of human barbarity, that, were it not attested by the most unquestionable historical evidence, it would be rejected as altogether fabulous and incredible.

Sawney Beane was born in the county of East Lothian, about eight miles east of Edinburgh, in the reign of James I. of Scotland. His father was a hedger and ditcher, and brought up his son to the same laborious employment. Naturally idle and vicious, he abandoned that place in company with a young woman equally idle and profligate, and retired to the deserts of Galloway where they took up their habitation by the sea-side. The place which Sawney and his wife selected for their dwelling was a cave about a mile in length, of considerable breadth, and so near the sea, that the tide often penetrated into the cave about two hundred yards. The entry had many intricate windings and turnings, leading to the extremity of the subterraneous dwelling, which was literally "the habitation of horrid cruelty."

Sawney and his wife took shelter in this cave, and commenced their depredations. To prevent the possibility of detection, they murdered every person they robbed. Destitute also of the means of obtaining any other food, they resolved to live upon human flesh. Accordingly, when they had murdered any man, woman, or child, they carried him to their den, quartered him, salted the limbs, and dried them for food. In this manner they lived, carrying on their depredations and murder, until they had eight sons and six daughters, eighteen grandsons and fourteen granddaughters, all the offspring of incest.

But though they soon became numerous, yet such was the multitude which fell into their hands, that they had often superabundance of provisions, and would, at a distance from their own habitation, throw legs and arms of dried human bodies into the sea by night. These were often cast out by the tide, and taken up by the country people, to the great consternation and dismay of all the surrounding inhabitants. Nor could any one discover what had befallen the many friends, relations, and neighbors who had unfortunately fallen into the hands of these cannibals.

In proportion as Sawney's family increased, every one that was able acted his part in these horrid assassinations. To prevent the possibility of escape, they would lie in ambush in every direction, that if any escaped those who first attacked, they might be

assailed with renewed fury by another party, and inevitably murdered. By this means they always secured their prey, and prevented detection.

At length Providence interposed in the following manner to terminate the horrible scene. One evening a man and his wife were riding home upon the same horse from a fair which had been held in the neighborhood, and, being attacked, the husband made a most vigorous resistance: his wife, however, was dragged from behind him, carried to a little distance, and her entrails instantly taken out. Fortunately for him, and for the inhabitants of that part of the country, twenty or thirty in a company came riding home from the fair. Upon their approach, Sawney and his bloody crew fled into a thick wood. This man who was the first that had ever escaped out of their hands, related to his neighbors what had happened, and showed them the mangled body of his wife.

In a few days, his majesty in person, accompanied by four hundred men, went in quest of the perpetrators of these horrible cruelties. The man, whose wife had been murdered before his eyes, went as their guide, with a great number of bloodhounds, that no possible means might be left unattempted to discover the haunt of such execrable villains.

They searched the woods, and traversed and examined the seashore; but, though they passed by the entrance into their cave, they had no suspicion that any creature resided in that dark and dismal abode. Fortunately, however, some of the bloodhounds entered the cave, raising an uncommon barking and noise, an indication that they were about to seize their prey. Accordingly, a sufficient number of torches were provided; a great number of men penetrated through all the intricacies of the path, and at length arrived at the private residence of the horrible cannibals.

They were followed by all the band, who were shocked to behold a sight unequalled in Scotland, if not in any part of the universe. Legs, arms, thighs, hands, and feet, of men, women, and children, were suspended in rows like dried beef. Some limbs and other members were soaked in pickle: while a great mass of money, watches, rings, pistols, and clothes were thrown together in heaps.

The whole cruel, brutal family, to the number formerly mentioned were seized and were next day conducted to the common place of execution in Leith Walk, and executed.

—*Lives of Noted Highwaymen*, first published 1711; revised by C. Whitehead in 1834.