

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



LOVE IDYLLS

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First published in book form by John Murray, 1901.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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LOVE IDYLLS

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INTRODUCTION

There is true Scottish Gallvidian and terribly earnest coquetry in 'Love Among the Beech Leaves.' There is an abundance of Mr Crockett's vigour as a battle-painter in 'the Count and Little Gertrude'... The tragedy of 'Vernor the Traitor' presents a fresh aspect of the old 'hill-folk' life.

Love Idylls was published as a collection in 1901 by John Murray. While taking us to familiar places, they also read as a miscellany of the stories he's written that sell well. Six are mostly based in Galloway, one in Edinburgh and two in Europe. There are only nine stories in this collection and several of them are in multiple parts, suggesting they were serialised before publication. The longest is the first. 'Fitting of the Peats' is in thirteen chapters. It is an historical Gallovidian tale, taking us back to the 18th century in the familiar territory of Cairn Edward and Isle Rathan. Duchrae, previously described as Cairn Ronald or Black Dornal is also referred to here without being disguised. There is familiar but also unfamiliar territory within this collection.

In 'Fitting of the Peats,' the new characters of Bell McLurg and Adam Charteris Home rub shoulders with characters familiar from the 'Raiders' stories: Patrick Heron and Hector Faa both feature.

The other historical Galloway story in this collection is 'Vernor the Traitor.' This places us firmly back in the territory covered in *The Cherry*

Ribband, with Patrick Vernor being a darker, less likeable character than Raith Ellison. The story is told in the first person by Patrick for the most part, but eventually we realise it is his brother who is piecing together the story. This makes for an interesting narrative stance and works well to give the story its dark ending. In 'Vernor the Traitor,' we once more mingle with the historic figures of Richard Cameron and Clavers. It is a story in which those old favourites, Whigs and Jacobites, abound. The story also travels to Holland, a place we are familiar with from earlier Covenanting novels such as *Men of the Moss Hags* and *Lochinvar*.

In 'Love Among the Beach Leaves,' Crockett draws a loose portrayal of himself in the character of farm 'loon' Rab Christie. The 'cutting of the reeds' episode from 'Minister's Day' in *Bog Myrtle and Peat* is transformed. In Rab we see a more obviously adolescent version of Crockett than is perhaps common in his previous 'Wattie' incarnations. Marbles and Shakespeare also feature in this barely concealed vignette of Crockett's own boyhood.

In 'The Purple Mountains,' we revisit a Cameronian household and are once more exposed to the factionalisation that occurs from too strict adherence to this strict religious 'sect.' It falls to the children to teach the adults about love.

The author steps in as narrator in 'Golden Mountain.' Set in Whinnyliggate we encounter the dog 'Royal' and the child 'Sweetheart'. Crockett wrote two childrens' books, *Sweetheart Travellers*, and *Sweetheart at Home*, which were loosely autobiographical stories of his relationship with his own daughter Maisie. 'Golden Mountain' is a light,

humorous tale which serves as a taster for anyone interested in reading the 'Sweetheart' stories.

The setting for 'That Popish Parson' is less easy to place. Lochfinny might be in Galloway, Nithsdale or even Ayrshire. It is a mining story and as such recounts the mining disaster Crockett also writes about in *The Stickit Minister's Wooing* (1900) and *Vida* (1907). This short story shows religious intolerance within a mining community and draws a link to Manchester; both the English and the Catholics are subjects of debate by the quoit playing 'locals.'

The setting shifts to Edinburgh for 'Billiam.' This is the story of a rich young man who cares more for animals than his social status. He's like a latter day, more humorous Francis of Assisi and as such, somewhat out of place in Victorian Edinburgh. But the story makes the reader think about what is important in life and while Billiam is the cause of much humour, none of it is at his expense.

The two European stories; the seven chapter 'The Count and Little Gertrude,' and 'The Exercise Book of Field-Marshal Prince Ilantz,' serve to remind the reader that Crockett wrote nearly as many novels set in Europe as he did in Galloway. He was well travelled and as happy writing about European history as Scottish history. 'The Count and Little Gertrude' is set in the Austrian Alps during the Austro Prussian war of 1866, known as the Seven Weeks War. The Exercise Book is also set in Prussia. Like 'The Count,' it is the story of a soldier and a girl. Crockett offers interesting (though fictional) insight into Germany in the time leading up to the Unification - which was quite

contemporary to readers in his own day.

The collection *Love Idylls*, while offering the modern reader a range of Crockett's short fiction which would otherwise be impossible to find, also illustrates the role of literary agents and magazines in the cultural life of readers at the turn of the 20th century. The stories in *Love Idylls* would all have been published or serially published in magazines such as 'Pall Mall,' 'The People's Friend,' 'The Young Man' and 'The Young Woman,' 'Leisure Hour,' 'The Graphic,' 'Woman at Home,' 'The Windsor,' and 'The Idler,' all of which Crockett contributed to. His literary agent A.P.Watt, who 'invented' the profession, made sure that Crockett's work was published and re-published as broadly as possible and while this provided a constant income it also took a considerable amount of time away from writing full length novels. Crockett recognised this and found writing serial fiction increasingly irksome, but knew better than to bite the hand that fed. He kept up a furious writing pace in order to satisfy the demands of agents, publishers and public; despite prolonged periods of ill health. I for one, am glad he did so. His stories have given me so much joy over the years.

Cally Phillips

2021

LOVE IDYLLS

1. THE FITTING OF THE PEATS

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE THE BONNET LAIRD

Ninian MacLurg, Laird of Millwharchar, in the hill country of Galloway, took off his broad blue bonnet and wiped his brow. It was customary for lairds at that time to wear broad-brimmed hats which came from Edinburgh, or even as far as London, according to the standing of their territorial sasine upon the rolls of the county sheriff.

But there are lairds and lairds, bonnets and bonnets. So Ninian MacLurg wore a blue broad-piece almost as heavy as a steel cap, with a checked band of red and white Rob Roy tartan and a round button the brightest scarlet on the top, which to the initiate meant that the headgear had been manufactured no farther away than Kilmarnock in the neighbouring shire of Ayr. The Laird of Millwharchar's bonnet was no mere common bonnet, new coft from the shop of Rob Rorrison on the Plainstones of Dumfries. It did not dazzle the beholder with the brilliance of its checked pattern. No flaunting feather cocked restlessly at an angle upon its right side, as was too much the fashion among the unhallowed young callants who roamed the country side after the lasses.

No—many times no, indeed. Ninian MacLurg's bonnet was a sober, serious, responsible piece of headgear, well befitting its stern wearer. Generally it was drawn firmly down on either side till the band touched the tips of the wearer's ears. It was worn doggedly, belligerently, almost insolently. For that was the way in which Ninian MacLurg wore all his garments, till even when lying upon a chair by his box-bed at nights they seemed able and willing at any moment to expound the catechism, contradict an opinion upon any subject by whomsoever advanced, or to deal either any unlicensed night-raker or Episcopalian dissenter a most discomposing buffet on the side of his head for the good of his soul.

Ninian MacLurg was looking for his daughter Bell. He had three other younger daughters and two sons, out somehow Bell took more looking after than all the others.

'The de'il's in the lassie,' was his unpaternal way of explaining and denouncing this fact. 'I declare I canna gang to the house o' God on the Lord's great day but it's 'Where's Mistress Bell?' 'What for brocht ye no Miss Isobel wi' ye, Laird?'—as if the feckless helicat lassie had been the minister himself!'

But after all there is no accounting for taste, and so the matter stood. Then not only was this strange popularity of his daughter a trouble to the laird at kirk or market; it was equally troublesome when he abode on his own acres.

Two stout sons he had, Alec and John by name, who laboured all day at plough and flail to satisfy their father, but at the gloaming went off on

their own visitations at other farm towns, where the gloom was less pronounced than within the sphere of influence dominated by the severe Laird of Millwharchar.

'The man that shall tak' daughter o' mine frae about the hoose,' he was wont to proclaim loud enough to be heard between kirk-door and market-cross, 'maun hae three hunder pound o' coined siller and three hunder acres o' good plow land besides. He shall satisfy me upon three points o' doctrine according to the Presbyterian standards of our faith, and lastly he shall stand up to me, Ninian MacLurg, with a stieve cudgel of oak in his fist, and therewith he shall break my head. Then after that I will speak with him in the gate concerning my daughter.'

All the same Bell MacLurg took a good deal of trouble inseparable from the task of finding such a paragon out of the laird's hands; and used her fine eyes so resolutely and to such purpose among the faithful on Sabbath mornings at kirk, that young bloods from distant parishes, who for years had systematically neglected the stated assembling of themselves together, became constant and devout attenders upon ordinances at the Kirk of Dullarg. Moreover, some curious and recondite motive induced them to congregate along the west wall—a spot not much in favour with the general body of the faithful, inasmuch as not only was it hot in summer and cold and draughty in winter, but what was worse—from the seats along the west wall one could not watch the minister's movements during time of sermon, nor yet make certain that on the top of the shut pulpit Bible there was not room for the most microscopic of written 'notes.' All the same these

highly undesirable benches were now generally better filled than the rest of the kirk. And it has really nothing to do with the matter to add that the square black-lettered pew of the MacLurgs was placed at the lower angle of the west wall, and that Bell MacLurg never passed a sprig of thyme or sleep-dispelling southernwood to her sisters without having a whole battery of admiring eyes directed upon her movements.

One famous Lord's Day as Ninian MacLurg opened the small pew door to marshal his family in before him, he stopped suddenly aghast. All four seats were piled high with branches of sweet-scented 'siddewood,' and as the laird said afterwards, 'What with flowering thyme and other playactin' trash, the decent Millwharchar pew was steaming like a haystack that had heated.'

Ninian MacLurg was not, however, a man without common sense. He had been, as the country side expressed it, a 'gye boy' in his youth—which, being interpreted, meant that he had had some repute of wildness before the arrival of that inward grace which in the Bonnet Laird had now so entirely gained the mastery over original sin and actual transgression.

The Laird of Millwharchar, casting back into his own unhallowed youth, instantly divined whence the 'rubbish' had come, and correctly estimated its meaning and purport. With a haughty gesture of his left hand he kept his family, as it were, at bay, while he entered the square 'seat.' Then, with an action exactly like a binder on the harvest-field, he took up the southernwood, the thyme, and yet rarer growths in his arms, pressed them into small compass, and

strode with them to the bench along the west wall, which was already filled with the bachelordom, eligible or otherwise, of three parishes. Then, like to a sower on a windy day, he swept his mighty arm along the astonished row—and lo, their offerings to Venus, as one might say, the frankincense and mixed spices and myrrh were scattered in the very faces of those who had brought them to the temple. Thereafter Ninian MacLurg passed slowly down the west wall with his oaken staff in his hand ('thick as a bullock's hind leg,' said Rob Gregory of the Boreland), and held it a moment under every young man's nose, giving him ample time to inhale the perfume of its polished knobs and sinewy compacted strength.

After that the western wall was more thickly populous than ever with daring and worshipful swains, but the Millwharchar 'box-seat' remained for ever empty and swept—but wholly ungarnished.

'Bell—Bell MacLurg—oh, ye besom, wait till I lay hands on ye! The kye are yet on the hill. 'Tis not an hour to milking time! The lads are waiting their suppers, and gin ye dinna come, ye'll miss the worship o' God—and I'll daud the head at ye, my lass!'

This comprehensive denunciation Ninian addressed to the waving broom and nodding gowans of the 'park' pastures which lay like a bright green fringe outside the gardens and orchards of Millwharchar. But only the girdling woods of Larbrax and his own white barn wall gave back the echo.

Thwarted outside, Ninian MacLurg went into the house, and relieved his feelings by subjecting his younger daughters to wholesome spiritual discipline.

Then, being sore by reason of Bell's impudent evasion, he yet further regained his self-respect by going to the hay-field in order to tell Alec and John that they were lazy good-for-nothings, who would not sleep that night with whole bones unless they worked twice as hard as they had been doing.

But these projects, agreeable and delightful as they appeared, were instantly banished by a sight which fairly dumb-founded the Laird of Millwharchar.

On the face of a brae some three hundred yards from the farmhouse his daughter Bell appeared, in the broad light of day, unblasted by the lightnings of heaven, calmly walking towards him with a young man on either side of her.

CHAPTER TWO THE FIRST FITTING OF THE PEATS

This is how it happened. As usual in such cases it was in no sense the lady's fault. Bell MacLurg had gone out to the moor avowedly to 'fit' such peats as had been drying on the heather, after being carried out of the 'face,' or wet bank of fibrous fuel, from which her father's strong arms had cut and 'cast' them. It was a hot day, so Bell took with her a white summer bonnet of linen framed on wire, the materials for which she had bought out of her butter-money last Rood Fair—without, however, thinking it necessary to consult her father on the transaction. It was a becoming article of attire, but nevertheless the lady wore it mostly in her hand, or drooping over her shoulders by the strings.

Isobel MacLurg arrived at the peat-moss in due time, and sat down to recover herself upon a convenient tussock of dry heather, when she saw an apparition strange to be discerned in that wild place—that is, save and except when Mistress Bell by chance wandered thither. A tall young man was coming over the moss towards her.

Bell MacLurg shaded her brow with her bonnet. She did not need to lift it very high in order to do this, for the sun was already quickening his pace for the final plunge beneath the horizon.

'It cannot be Will Begbie,' she mused. 'Will is not so slender, and he always comes through the wood at any rate. It cannot be Allan of the Hill. He walks too fast for Allan. It must be someone new, someone I do not know. How interesting that will be! But ought I to have ventured so far away from

home? My father says that there are some of my Lord Dalmarnock's rebels lurking in the moss-hags yet! Shall I run home?’

She rose to her feet and kilted her coats with a pretty action of her hands at either side her already attenuated kirtle.

‘No, I will not,’ she said; ‘upon second thought he does not look like a rebel—from a distance, that is!’ Then she fell on her knees and began to ‘fit’ the peats with the most intense and abstracted concentration, added to many turnings of her head to this side and that, besides divers pauses, finger on lip, to consider abstruse problems of architecture, drying and ventilation.

‘It seems a difficult job, this which engrosses you so entirely, madam,’ said a voice close behind her. ‘Pardon me for enquiring if I can be of any assistance to you?’

Bell rose instantly to her feet with a little cry and—yes, explain it who will—the blushful colour of an infinite surprise mustered most becomingly upon her neck and cheeks. She could not have looked more astonished if the speaker had suddenly dropped from the new moon, which, like a blown leaf of autumn, floated already high above the horizon.

‘I have startled you,’ said the new-comer, regretfully; ‘pray pardon me. I should be more sorry than I can say to discompose so fair a maiden.’

In the first burst of surprise, Bell had placed one hand on her breast below her throat, as if to recover herself—Eve's attitude when Adam caught her that first time looking at the apple. Then she put her other hand up beside it with charming unconsciousness of her pose, and looked at him

through her mantling eyelashes.

He was tall—taller even than she had thought when she diagnosed him from Will Begbie. He was, as it seemed at a first glance, somewhat shabbily dressed, yet he wore every article with such distinction that, as Bell put it to herself, ‘after a little you came quite to think him better put on than my Lord Queensberry himself.’ He was a young man, but yet not so very young either, a little on the shady side of thirty perhaps. But his face was so pale and thin that he looked older than his years, and when he took the military hat with its binding of tarnished gold lace off his head, Bell could see a frosting of early grey at his temples. His surcoat, unbuttoned all the way down the front, and dotted irregularly with gold buttons or the threads which had once attached them to it, was also white—or rather had once been white. The undercoat, belted easily at the waist, had likewise, doubtless, at the same time been red. It was still faced with gold lace, and had large silk pockets, from one of which the ear of a dead hare projected with a curious suggestion of listening to what was going on.

But by this time Bell had quite recovered herself. A brief, comprehensive glance at once reproachful, playful, tragic, and coquettish, had told her all that the pen has been able to pack into a longish paragraph. She decided that she would not be frightened any more—for the present, that is.

‘And please, sir, who are you?’ she asked, looking up again at the man in the white coat with the straggling gold buttons,

The young man laughed, and before answering glanced about him uneasily as if looking for

someone.

‘Glenmorrison would never forgive me if he knew I had told you, but I am called Adam Home!’

‘How strange I never had one—I mean I never knew any one of that name,’ said Bell instantly. ‘It must be very awkward.’

‘And why awkward?’ queried Adam Home, smiling down at this pretty rustic who yet spoke so like a lady.

‘Because,’ said Bell slowly, ‘if there were any one you liked very much—anyone who liked you, that is, there is no nice ‘little name’ for them to call you by.’

She seemed to turn the whole subject of this second transgression of Adam over in her mind. Then she shook that small dark head of hers, with the scarlet snood bound low about it, so vigorously that one or two crisp brown ringlets escaped from that slender band as gladly as children getting loose from school.

‘No,’ she repeated emphatically, ‘it would not be nice at all!’

Adam Home stood smiling before her, his hat still in his hand.

‘And may I ask what names fulfil these severe conditions sufficiently to be eligible for your favour?’

‘Why,’ said Bell to herself, ‘I declare he talks like Fontinbras, in that book I hide from father, writ by Mistress Aphra Something or other.’

But aloud she said, ‘Well, I like William, though it is common, but Charles and Francis are best of all. Willie, Charlie, and Frank are so sweet to say!’

And she looked as if she had experience of them all.

The young man bowed.

‘I am fortunate enough to be able to oblige you with two of these. My full name happens to be Adam Charles Francis Charteris Home!’

‘You are not deceiving me!’ she said, looking up at him with an innocence which added without words, ‘for I could not possibly deceive you!’

‘On my honour, no!’ he cried, with a quick rebound from the somewhat formal gravity of demeanour he had hitherto observed. ‘I would not attempt to deceive one on whose countenance Nature has marked both sweetness of disposition and trustful innocence, in addition to a delicate beauty all its own.’

‘Lord, Lord,’ cried the girl, clapping her hands, ‘it is wonderful! How well you know me, and without ever setting eye on me before!’

But if Mr. Home of the many prænomens had been at all an observant man, he would have noticed a very roguish smile lurking about the corners of Mistress Bell's mouth, which might have caused him to modify at least one clause of his somewhat flowery eulogium.

But at that moment his eyes were ranging the heather and trying to pierce into the dark woods which edged the Millwharchar Moss to the eastward.

CHAPTER THREE PRETTY MISTRESS BELL

'You do not ask me my name—it must be because you know it already,' said Bell, who did not approve of young men looking over her head at fine scenery, still less as if they were looking out for someone else. It was a trait of male character to which she had been little accustomed. So to the spoilt little beauty this grave young man with his stately periods, his tantalising errant eyes, his tarnished clothes, and his noble bearing, was like a spur in the flank of a mettlesome steed.

Adam Home's eyes returned slowly to his pretty companion's, lingering by the way on hillock and hollow with a sedulous and anxious regard.

'Nay,' he said, 'but indeed I know not your name! Will you tell me to whom I have the honour of speaking?'

'Is it not usual for gentlemen to ascertain that first, before speaking at all?' said Bell tartly enough.

At this Master Adam Home started as if a wasp had stung him.

'By Heaven, you are right, madam,' he said, lifting his hat ceremoniously; 'still I think the circumstances may plead for me. This is, if I mistake not, Millwharchar Moor, and these brown shaggy hillocks at the back are denominated Lamachan and the Black Craig of Dee.'

Bell inclined her head, hoping that if he went on in such language as that she might be preserved from smiling too obviously. But she replied gravely enough: 'Indeed they are, and the effort to denom—I cannot mind that most excellent word—proves you a

Scot and a countryman. It is as good as an introduction at the Assembly Rooms of the town of Edinburgh. If it please your Highness' (she made him a low curtsey), 'I am nominate—thank you, denominate—Bell, or otherwise Isobel MacLurg, eldest surviving daughter of Ninian, Laird of Millwharchar.'

The young man bowed again, with yet more humble and respectful observance.

'Mistress Isobel,' he said, 'I come to you with something more than the commonplaces of introduction. Your kindness or cruelty may mean my life or death. So fair a lady must needs in this amorous country of ours have had such a sentence addressed to her before—but never by a man in such a case as I.'

The mirth gradually died out of Bell's eyes as he spoke.

'The fact is,' he went on, 'that I and a companion have had a small difficulty with the Hanoverian Government, in which we have come off somewhat at the worse. There is a price upon our humble heads which would make you safe of new bonnets to the end of your life, and which if he chose, it would greatly enrich your father to obtain. For our sins we have been compelled to take refuge with certain wild outlaws of these inmost hills, headed by one Hector Faa, who calls himself of the Honest Party, but who in fact is ready to be honest or dishonest just as may suit him best!

Now there is pressing need for my friend and myself to get to France, both on account of the cause which we have at heart, and because the search for us grows daily more hot and close. Also

for my own part I am greatly weary of a damp and dreary cave in the rocks, and of the society of Hector Faa, the hill gipsy, and his ignorant tatterdemalions.'

'You are not a murderer?' cried Bell, standing a little farther off defensively; 'you have never taken human life?'

The grave young man, Adam Home, laughed a little self-contemptuous ironic laugh. 'Indeed, I cannot flatter me that I have. I was never in but one affair, and that was a ravelled, unsatisfactory piece of business. It took me all my time to keep the swords of King George's Hessians off my own crown.'

'Then you are a rebel,' she said, panting a little—'how lovely!'

'I am very glad you think so,' he said. 'I am in hopes that in that capacity I may make a similarly favourable impression upon your father, and mayhap induce him to accommodate us with horses, and conduct us privately to some cove on the southern shore of Galloway, whence we may obtain boat for France.'

As he had been speaking, Bell's countenance had gradually been falling. As soon as he had finished she came a step nearer him, and held up her clasped hands with a sweet penitential innocence which was not on this occasion all assumed.

'Oh, do not!' she cried, 'do not! For God's dear sake—yes, and your own, never dream of going to my father. If you are of the Pretender's party, or favourable to my Lord Kenmure, he will have no pity upon you—not though your case were ten times as needful.'

‘Mistress Isobel,’ said Adam gravely, ‘I will not conceal from you that we have heard some such reports of the laird of this bleak heritage as discouraged us from approaching him directly. But that was before we knew that he owned a jewel so rare that to possess it, nay even to gaze upon it—were worth—were worth...’

‘Who may you be calling it?’ inquired Bell pointedly, as he stammered and paused for a fitting price with which to round his phrase.

The unexpected interrogatory knocked the bottom out of his compliment. Adam Home laughed, coloured, and finally said: ‘Faith, Mistress Bell, you have not your wit to seek. We will be having you at Versailles yet, clattering up the great gallery upon the prettiest of red heels, and parrying and reposting with each courtier as you go.’

‘Indeed I were better employed fitting the peats,’ said Bell; ‘but to your needs. I am concerned, sir, for your necessities and those of your friend. But I do urgently dissuade you from approaching my father. He would of a surety hand you over to the Government, without question or pity, being a strong friend of their party.’

‘But he is a gentleman, a laird on his own property. He would surely have some compassion on misfortunate men whose heads are already forfeit to the executioner’s axe!’

Bell shook her own pretty head, and felt her neck with a little shudder as if to make sure that it was rightly attached at top and bottom.

‘Ah,’ she cried, again interrupting him, ‘you do not know my father when you speak so. He is a strong, fierce man, a Covenant man of the sternest

sort, and he hath sworn that if ever he catch any of the Pretender's folk, he will slay them like so many rats in a trap!

'That he might not find so easy,' said the youth. 'We are at least men of our hands, we rebels of the moss and cave!'

'I see, sir, that you know not my father,' she answered, not without a certain satisfaction; 'he could break a dozen' (she was about to say 'of you,' but refrained), 'a dozen men in his fingers at once. There is none in all the countryside can stand against him for a moment—no, not even Sir Alexander Gordon himself.'

Then a quaintly wilful look stole over her face as she looked at the young man in the frayed coat.

'But there may be a way,' she said; 'my father goeth to Wigton tomorrow. I know where there are horses on the moors which you can catch with a feed of corn at any time. Saddles there are in the stable, and that shall be unlocked. I will put plenty of providing for man and beast behind the park dyke in a hollow of the rock which I shall show you. I myself will set you on your way, and, it may be, provide a safe escort who will hold his tongue—a neighbour lad who will do the thing I tell him, and who will guide you to the shore at a place where a boat may be obtained.'

It was now the young man's turn to shake his head, which he did slowly and sadly enough.

'Nay, my fairest lady,' he said sententiously, 'I thank you from my heart, but it cannot be. It shall never be said that Adam Home took another man's horse and provend without asking his leave.'

'Is not this somewhat nice in a man who by his

own account came over to take a king's crown?’

‘You little Whig!’ he cried admiringly. ‘I knew not that you had been so well trained in your father's opinions.’

‘Nay,’ she answered, ‘tis all the same to me— one way or the other. But I acknowledge your side hath the prettiest fashions in dress, and also the most glosing tongues. So for the safety of other poor innocent maids I ought to help you all out of the country as fast as needs be.’

CHAPTER FOUR

A LESSON IN ARCHITECTURE

Bell told herself that she liked to flout this sobersides of a cavalier, because he took every saucy saying with a little quick uplift of the head which showed him unaccustomed to be so treated by any woman. And ever as soon as she had got in her shot, she knelt down and fell to fitting peats with much becoming earnestness and innocence. Adam Home was longer this time in finding anything to say in reply.

At last he broke silence, as if he had finished reviewing the whole field.

‘Nay, Mistress Bell,’ he said, ‘I sincerely thank you for your kind and courteous offer. It is well intended. But I am sure that Glenmorrison would never agree to it. It would not consort well with the spirit of a gentleman.’

Bell looked up sharply.

‘Doth it consort with the spirit of a gentleman to stand with his thumbs in his pocket-holes while a girl fits peats on her knees?’

Again there came over the grave face the startled look which the minx had so quickly learned to try for as a sufficient reward.

‘My dear lady,’ he cried, with a quick change of mood, ‘I crave a thousand pardons. To my undying shame I had not observed your occupation, so intent was I on yourself and my wretched affairs. Permit me.’

He knelt down beside her, and at the first attempt succeeded in knocking over no less than five of the ‘fittings’ which Bell had been engaged so

busily in constructing before his arrival, and which she had persevered with in spite of so many interruptions.

The girl gave a little cry of horror on thus beholding her work undone.

'Hold—hold!' she cried, 'you mistake. These are not ninepins. This is Millwharchar peat moor, not a skittle alley. That is not the way to fit peats, but thus—and thus.'

And seizing his wrists she showed him how to take the first peat, set it angle-wise on its stronger base, face and balance it with a second, buttress it with a third, and finally, having built a fort after the manner of stooked sheaves in a harvest-field, how to put the all-important 'crown' upon the work—to turn the rain,' as Bell explained technically.

'Now,' she said, 'take care that you do it. exactly right after this, and when you turn round see that you knock no more of my 'fittings' down, or else they will say—'What blundering bullock has been among the peats?''

"Tis the first time that ever I was called a blundering bullock,' said the young man, starting half round as on a pivot at her speech.

'It will not be the last if you do not keep more watch over your feet,' said the girl with a vicious click of her pretty teeth; 'pray endeavour to finish one fair job without whirling round every moment like a teetotum.'

The young man worked a while in silence, feeling a little sullen at being thus thwarted and tantalised by one whom he had thought to be no more than an ignorant pretty maiden of the country. But Bell's saucily unconscious air of command

piqued him, and he resolved to excel in the occupation to which he had been set.

It was not long before she looked again.

'Ah, that is better—much better,' she cried, sitting upon her own knees and letting the wide summer bonnet fall back from her head, so that the latter stood out against the sky with a certain comely and shapely determination. Adam Home thought he had never seen the like anywhere before.

He did not feel the necessity of leaving the country to be so pressing or immediate as it had been.

But he was to be quickly and somewhat unpleasantly reminded of the duty on which he had come. For at the very moment when Bell had again taken his wrist to help him with a 'fitting' of peats whose moist slipperiness prevented them from being easily 'set,' a shadow fell between them, and there, within three yards, stood the figure of a man, silently and, as it appeared, somewhat contemptuously regarding their occupation. Bell's first instinct was to start up to her feet and apologise for having been the means of causing her companion to be discovered at so trivial a task. But after one glance at the regardant intruder, the young man on his knees went calmly on with his peat-fitting, turning his head to the side and studying the architecture after the manner of his mistress, and 'hefting' the peats in his hand as if his whole soul were in the work before him.

The new-comer was a smallish man with a thin moustache, which he kept twisting assiduously, black eyebrows, which, thick in the middle, turned sharp at the outer corners and flashed defiantly

upwards like feathers in a Highland bonnet, with an air at once conceited and insolent.

But the amateur in peat-fitting was not intimidated by his attitude.

'Ah, Hector!' was all that he said, and went on calmly with his work—so different is the effect of a supercilious regard in man and in woman. Adam Home had responded like a tuned instrument of strings to Bell's disdainful eyes and petulant words, but now he laboured, apparently unconscious as any hind, at his menial occupation under the contemptuous stare of another man.

The figure addressed as 'Hector' retained its first attitude of disapproving reserve for some minutes, but as neither of the objects of contempt appeared at all affected, he was at last forced to break the silence.

'My lord,' he said, 'you seem to have forgotten in congenial employment the purpose for which you came hither!'

Adam Home glanced sharply up at him.

'Keep the 'my-lording' for the next campaign in Flanders!' he said; 'I am no lord of yours!'

Bell MacLurg rose to her feet. What had she been doing? A lord—and she tried to think over all she had said to him. The tally did not turn out a very suitable or a very respectful one.

The olive-skinned, dark-moustached man made a little impatient movement with his foot.

'No man is the lord of Hector Faa—that is well enough known in Galloway. And indeed, if I may venture to remark, it ill becomes you—I mean it is ill befitting one in your situation to bandy compliments or waste precious time when the

scaffold is as near you and your friend as that heather buss is near me.'

And he stamped on a tussock of heather-bells with an angry gesture.

Adam Home now rose to his feet and deliberately dusted his hands.

'You are right,' he said; 'I did wrong to forget Glenmorrison in the time of trouble which he shares with me. I crave your pardon, Hector Faa—now let us go down to the house of Millwharchar and speak with the laird.'

The man addressed as Hector Faa started back.

'Nay,' he cried, 'not I. There is still some sense left under my bonnet. Hector Faa is not going to venture his life, unattended, near such an old heathenish Cromwell as Ninian MacLurg of Millwharchar!'

'Then,' said Adam Home tranquilly, 'I will go alone—or at least with this lady, if she will deign to accompany me.'

The little dark man hesitated a moment. Then with great deliberation he pulled out a pistol, half-cocked it, looked to the priming, and anon restored it to his side pocket. Next he set his hand upon his thigh and half drew a dagger therefrom, as if to ascertain that it worked easily in its sheath.

'Lead on,' he said, 'you shall not cast it up that Hector Faa was afraid of any man that breathes. But mind you, if there be a 'tulzie,' each of us will look only to the safety of his own life. This is no quarrel or occasion of mine!'

And this is the reason that Bell MacLurg came into the presence of her father Ninian, Laird of

Millwharchar, with a young man walking doucely on either side of her.

CHAPTER FIVE
'GOD SAVE KING GEORGE!'

The trio arrived at the little loaning shaded with irregular alders and birches which led between the two 'parks' pertaining to the house of Millwharchar. The two first acquainted were maintaining a brisk conversation on the merits of various wild flowers, Bell preferring the wild white rose, and Adam Home holding out for the modest gowan, while a step behind them, Hector Faa, with his hand in the flap of his right pistol-pocket, listened with a smile as incredulous as it was contemptuous.

Suddenly a turn of the loaning brought them face to face with a startling apparition.

'Halt there where ye stand, or prepare forthwith to meet your Maker!' exclaimed a voice stern as the law and all the prophets.

The young people looked up from their pleasant converse of word with word and glance with glance. Close to them, and elevated a little on the broad stone steps of the farmhouse, stood a striking and almost tremendous figure. Coat of blue, ancient steeple-crowned Puritan hat towering above, steel breastplate winking beneath, buff knee-breeches covering limbs sturdy as an average man's body, shoon buckled with huge clasps of hammered iron—thus before them, instant and minatory, stood Ninian MacLurg. His long-stocked brown 'Queen Anne' musket was levelled directly at Adam Home, a second piece stood contiguous to his hand, and the bare blade of an Andre Ferrara glittered against the wall of rough harled masonry whereon it leaned hilt upwards.

Six foot six in height stood Ninian MacLurg, tough as an ancient oak, keen-eyed as an eagle, irascible and indomitable as in all Scotland only he could be.

'Oh, father,' cried Bell, 'for God's sake put down your gun. These gentlemen are in trouble and have come to beg your assistance!'

'Out of my gate, lassie,' cried her father, glancing down the barrel of his piece. 'Gentlemen, forsooth. They are rebels, cave-lurkers, sheep-stealers. Make your peace with God, gentlemen. It was an ill day that you thought to cozen Ninian MacLurg with your traitorous speeches.'

Then Bell, white with terror, threw herself in front of Adam Home, and cried to her father: 'Do not shoot—it was my fault. I brought him here.'

He hath a sick companion who needs your help. You would not refuse it, for your heart is kind. Oh, father, be forbearing with him!'

The eye of Ninian MacLurg never wavered along the levelled tube.

'Take your hand out of your pocket-hole, little, ugly, gipsy man—one, two, three—out with it! I thank you. Now, long man with the tashed coat, say after me, with your hands held up to heaven, 'God save King George and confound Jamie the Pretender! You have till I count thirty to save your life!'

Hector Faa's hand, which, obedient to the first invitation, had been reluctantly withdrawn from the vicinity of his pistol, now began to return even more stealthily. But he reckoned without his host.

'Your hands above your head, little man—so!—as you hope for a moment's longer life keep them

there. Now, sir to your catechism. Say after me, 'God save King George.'

Up to this moment Adam Home's fingers had been busy with the gowan which he had pulled to illustrate his argument with Bell. But he turned to that maiden now, as her father began to count slowly, 'One—two—three,' in an audible voice, he said: 'Mistress Bell, you were right; will you give me that rose from your neck in exchange for my gowan? I think after all it is the finer and fairer flower. At least, I love the better to wear it.'

'Fourteen—fifteen—sixteen,' came the steady count, and the shining barrel never wavered.

'Oh, take it,' cried Bell, 'take it and say what he tells you—for my sake say it. My father is a man of his word. I will never be saucy again; I will do anything you wish if only this once you will say 'God save King George.'

The young man smiled patiently and a little wistfully.

'For your sake I would if I could at all, sweetest maid,' he said, 'but the true King is more to me than life—more even than love!'

'Twenty-three—twenty-four—twenty-five.'

Adam Home instinctively put his petitioner at arm's length from him, and with a quiet and assured mein fitted the white rose to his button-hole, first reverently kissing the emblem of the Stewart race, which was now also a lady's favour.

He was adjusting it to his satisfaction, and giving a little pat to the lapel of his coat, when the inexorable voice from the doorstep counted on level and monotonous, 'Twenty-eight—twenty-nine.'

'Crash!' went the Queen Anne musket, the

sound echoing loudly against the barn and byres of Millwharchar, and presently, after an appreciable interval, being tossed back from the dark recesses of the wood.

The young man Adam Home stood for a moment after the report in his ordinary attitude of careless ease. Then all suddenly he swayed, clapped his hand on his right side, gripped himself, as it were, and turning to Bell with his other hand he raised his hat.

‘I fear that I need not trouble you any longer,’ he said courteously, ‘but I am infinitely indebted to you—indebted to you—indebted.’

And the hand that had held the hat aloft sinking heavily down, its owner slowly pitched forward rather than fell, and lay motionless on his face among the straw which cumbered the yard.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SECRET OF THE PLASTERED DOOR

At the first pull of Ninian MacLurg's finger on the trigger Hector Faa had dodged like a weasel behind a red-bodied mountain cart, and now his pistol barrel glanced over the back bar with the sharp eye of the hill gipsy twinkling small and bright behind it like the eye of a bird.

The Laird of Millwharchar had not, however, expended his whole magazine at one shot. He seized the gun which stood against the wall by the barrel, and cocking it, he advanced resolutely towards the fugitive entrenched behind the trail-cart.

Hector Faa's teeth gradually uncovered, and he waited till his assailant was within a dozen paces and then fired; the bullet, being well aimed, struck the second musket upon the side of the lock, glancing off, however, and flattening itself against the wall without doing any damage.

'The God of battles hath delivered the wicked into my hands!' cried Ninian MacLurg, as he caught the trail-cart suddenly by the pole and turned it over, almost but not quite upon the top of Hector Faa. For that active man of the hills, seeing his position, and acknowledging defeat as readily as victory, instantly fled, leaving his discharged pistol on the ground, so anxious was he to avoid underlying the tender mercies of the Laird of Millwharchar. He sped across the courtyard, almost bowed to the ground, and ran with all his power for the heather.

Ninian turned about for his Ferrara blade. He had a score of steps to go back to recover it, which

gave the nimble fugitive a considerable start. But in a moment it was in his hand, and, with his great body thrown forward and every nerve strained, the laird took up the chase as eagerly and determinedly as if twenty-six instead of sixty-two had been the number of his years.

But Hector Faa had a long start, and strain as he would, Ninian could not overtake him nor reduce by an appreciable inch the distance between them. Nevertheless, he held staunchly on in this fashion, and, separated by an interval of no more than a hundred yards, pursuer and pursued plunged into the dark shades of the wood of Larbrax.

Bell, overwhelmed with shame and pity, was left alone with the wounded man. With a great effort of strength she turned him over, till his head rested on her shoulder. She was surprised to feel how light and supple he was. She thought that she could almost carry him in her arms.

But at this moment her two brothers, Alec and John, came into the courtyard, and stood astonished to find their eldest sister with the head of a wounded man on her shoulder.

'Bell,' the two lads cried simultaneously, 'what in the world are you doing with the man?'

'Come and help this instant, great gomerils,' replied that acrid maiden; 'think you that I am playing 'Jook my Joe' about the stacks on Halloween?'

Alec and John approached gingerly, looking around for their father as they did so, with a glance which told much of the Spartan nature of their upbringing.

'Who is he? And what are you going to do with

him?’

‘He is a young lord who came to ask a favour of my father,’ said Bell, ‘and he has shotten him. And, oh, if he dies, our father will hang. Come— help me with him to the old stable-laft of Larbrax. Will Begbie will hide him there, or I shall know the reason why.’

The lads demurred. It was a good half mile to the deserted steading of Larbrax. Their father might return. What would they say to him when he came back and found the wounded man gone?

‘Leave all that to me,’ cried Bell; ‘say not a word to the other lasses. They would only throw up their hands and fall over in dwawms —every way at once, like heavy corn on a wet day. Take hold of him, I say.’

And so with their imperious sister at the head, Alec in the midst, and John at the feet, they laid Adam Home on a dismounted door which stood at the back of the byre, and prepared to carry him to the stable loft of Larbrax.

As the lads paced slowly with their burden down the loaning and across the green pastures, there came back to them no sight or sound of the chase. Not a tree-top waved nor a smooth swell of hazel copse parted before the rush of pursuer and pursued.

Alec and John soon tired of their burden, and Bell had to threaten and cajole them time about, to make them keep to their work. At last to shame them she took a turn at the foot of the door, relieving John, who sulked along after them. Her arms were almost dragged from their sockets, and there was a tearing stitch in her side which threatened to deprive her of breath altogether.

As she looked at the young man, he appeared to wear the self-same smile with which he had thanked her for the white rose, and her heart prayed that he might not be dead, and the dishonour for ever laid upon her fathers head that he had shot down an unarmed and unresisting man upon his own doorstep.

Even as she stumbled along, biting her lips with the effort not to cry out and drop the board on which Adam Home lay stretched out, the eyes of the wounded man were slowly opened. Consciousness struggled back into them. Seeing Bell at his feet, he strove to raise himself, but with a determined shake of the head she motioned him to lie still where he was.

Then John, who had been gradually growing ashamed of himself, craved that she should let him back to his place, but Bell, with a new strength in her veins from the knowledge that he was alive, would not surrender her post, and permitted him only to help in Alec's place at the side.

In this wise came the procession into the silent courtyard of the old farm town of Larbrax. Now the 'stable-laft' into which Bell proposed to convey Adam Home was of peculiar construction, and had obviously been built to suit the needs of difficult and dangerous times.

It was, in fact, not upon the top of the stable at all, but over the barn. That storehouse of fodder and sheaves had been originally built with a double roof, the inner being of less steep slant than the outer, leaving a space of some five feet high all along the length of the barn. This was entered from the real stable-loft by a wall-press, of which the back was

composed of wood roughly plastered over to imitate stone.

This had been for many years the hiding-place to which resorted a former goodman of Larbrax, one Gideon Begbie, the grandfather of young Will, present tenant of the farm, during the days of Charles's persecution.

It was with some pain and no small difficulty that Adam Home was carried up the narrow ladder which led to the outer loft. From thence the road was easier, but the wounded man had to endure many a pang before he found himself deposited on a bed of clean straw, with the little green skylight carefully extracted and placed among the thatch in order to let in the air and a glimpse of the blue sky.

Then at last, sending off the lads Alec and John, lest her father should have arrived home before them, Bell kneeled beside Adam Home, and cut away the waistcoat and fine shirt from the wound, the locality of which was all too easily discoverable by the oozing red which dyed with a fresher scarlet the faded red of his military undercoat.

Bell found it necessary to descend from the loft, to find a basin, to fill it at the spring, tear a piece of soft material from her kirtle, before again returning to find her patient propped higher on his bolster of straw.

'This is kind of you,' he said, but she could only answer him with her tears, as she bent tenderly to bathe the wound. The bullet, she found, had made a long, tearing cut, glancing along the rib, but turning off through the coat before reaching the backbone.

‘Will you tell me exactly what it looks like?’ said Adam Home. ‘I am enough of a surgeon to know whether or not it is dangerous.’

Bell checked her sobs in order to obey him.

‘That is well,’ he said cheerfully, ‘yet I fear much I shall be a trouble to you for some time. But where am I at this moment?’

The girl told him that he was at the old and deserted farm-steading of Larbrax and in perfect safety—that no one but the owner, Will Begbie, ever came there. ‘And,’ added Bell, ‘I can readily make Will see matters as he ought.’

The wounded man took a swift glance at her as she attentively bound up the wound with strips of her kirtle, till she had extemporised as good a dressing as was possible in the circumstances.

Then, leaving the last strip of cloth she could spare wet upon his brow, and promising soon to return, Bell tripped down the ladder and carefully closed the door behind her which separated the two lofts above the stable and barn of the deserted homestead.

CHAPTER SEVEN
WILL BEGBIE HAS A SORE HEART

Arrived at the outer air, Bell went in search of Will Begbie. She would find him, she was sure, at the new farm town, where he resided with an old housekeeper, by name Tibby Lee, and a shepherd or two, whose duties kept them all day on the hill. But upon her arrival there she found silence in the wide spaces of the yard, broken only by the 'chunnering' of the hens in their dust baths under the bank. Silence dominated the house when Bell stood on the steps and called 'Will!' Then, when at last she mustered courage to open the door by lifting the iron latch with its new-fangled, broad thumb-piece, her call of 'Will, I want you!' was answered only by the pushing back of a wooden chair as Yarrow, his half-blind old collie, rose from beneath the kitchen table and came enquiringly to the door.

But Yarrow could not inform Bell where his master was, though he thrust a moist nose of sympathy into her hand, so she had to seek further. On a bench in the new barn was a tankard from which the ale had been so recently drained that the yellow froth bubbles had not yet had time to reach the bottom. The girl's voice rang through the wide dusky spaces from threshing-floor to rafters.

'Will—Will—O Will—I want you!'

But through the open door which looked out among the late blossoming trees of the orchard, the echo answered mockingly 'Want you!'

Bell next skirted the office houses to a little rocky knoll from which she could discern both the old and the new farm towns of Larbrax, and also the

house of Millwharchar lying higher up the valley.

But Will Begbie was not to be seen. The sound of a gun or pistol, dull and far away, alarmed her, and she set her hand to her heart. Was the guilt of shedding innocent blood to fall twice in one day upon her father? Or had the violent man perished in his own violence, as Bell had often heard it prophesied in the kirk.

The girl was heartsick and distressed. She thought with a sharp self-reproach, mingled with a wild pleasure of how the young man in the tarnished officer's dress had helped her with the peat-fitting. She recounted to herself (after the manner of women) how often their hands had touched each other, and especially she recalled again that quick, backward fling of the head as often she broke the crust of his formality with her daring pleasantries.

'It is all Will Begbie's fault—he ought to be here when I want him—Lord knows he is often enough in the way when I don't!'

'Will Begbie is here, Mistress Isobel!' said a tall, fresh-complexioned youth attired in the sober costume of a well-doing yeoman. 'In what can I serve you?'

'Indeed, Will Begbie, there is much that you can do,' said Bell, dashing into her explanation before she lost courage. 'My father shot a young rebel, and I have had him carried to the old barn over by there. He lies in the secret laft. You do not mind, do you?'

Bell lifted up beseeching eyes wet with recent tears to the youth who stood before her. He in his turn set his fingers underneath his bonnet sideways, and tilting it a little, scratched his head with a

quaint perplexity.

‘A dead man—a murdered man in my barn, and your father did it?’ he said with an appreciable interval between each statement.

‘Neither a dead man nor yet, even if he had been dead, a man murdered by my father. He is a rebel officer, and came to ask succour and safe conduct.

It was my fault. I brought him. But my father, being an angry, hot man, would not listen to a word, and gave him only half a minute to cry ‘God save King George.’ Then when he would not thus be hurried into loyalty, my father shot him down. So I have brought him to you, that you may look after him and then help him to escape from the country.’

Will Begbie shifted from one foot to the other uneasily. ‘Bell,’ he said doubtfully, ‘you know not what you ask. It is rank treason to conceal a rebel, and it might go against my neck were it known. Besides I am a good King George’s man, and so was my father before me.’

Bell flashed a small key from her pocket, and leaping to her feet and thrusting it under his nose, she cried out indignantly, ‘Here, take it—there is the key of the secret laft. Go and betray the man that trusted you, betray me that thought better of you than of any of her own folk. Go and bring the red soldiers up from Creebridge. But never from this day forth look the road Bell MacLurg is on, till the day you die the death of a traitor and a spy!’

The colour faded gradually from the fresh rustic face with its honesty of purpose and plainness of intent.

‘Nay, Bell,’ he stammered, ‘I meant nothing of

the kind. I was just a little taken aback at the first go off. I will never betray any that trusted me. I will go and see the man now. Will you accompany me?’

‘Thank you, Will. I knew you would see reason. You always can be convinced. But before you go, can you think of any kindly silent man with the skill of a surgeon? There is none that I can remember but Dominie Duncan Robison over at the clachan. He has the name of great skill. Can you advise me if with his official position we could count on his holding his tongue in the matter of the rebel?’

The slower wits of Will Begbie revolved the problem a while and looked at it from all points. ‘I think it would do,’ he said. ‘They whisper cannily that Duncan, being a Highlandman himself, hath a warm side to the King ower the water. At least I am sure he would deal kindly with the old man.’

‘I said not that the rebel was an old man, Will,’ said Bell quickly; ‘he is not so very old.’

‘I will go and see him,’ said the farmer of Larbrax with less exuberance of spirits than he had hitherto shown. And this time he did not invite Bell to accompany him.

They walked together, however, to the old farm town, and then Will Begbie went up alone. When he came down ten minutes after his face was altered. It was sterner, older, as if he himself had been wounded to the death.

‘I will do it, Bell,’ he said, ‘but mind it is for your sake I will help this man to escape out of the country.’

‘And partly for my own!’ he added to himself.

CHAPTER EIGHT
A SEED FOR NEXT YEAR'S GARDEN

Bell's father did not return to Millwharchar till late at night, and when he came in none dared ask a question of him as he set himself down by the fire, now gloomily staring at the sullen glow of the peat ashes and now rubbing briskly at the blade of his Andrea.

Suddenly he flung a question at Bell, and the lads, who sat by the slender illumination of a candle pretending to read, trembled till their chap books shook like willow leaves in a westerly wind.

'What came of the young rebel that I shot?'

Bell had been expecting the question ever since she had heard her father's step on the threshold, and she had been prepared for it long before that.

'Some ill-looking gangrel lads came down from the hills and carried him off, we know not where,' she answered, looking at Alec and John, daring them to say a word.

'Some of Hector Faa's crew of rascals, I doubt not,' grumbled her father. 'Hark ye, Mistress Bell, never let me hear of you passing word of mouth with any belonging to that gang, or I will banish you from my fireside, never to return.'

'Yes, father,' said Bell meekly, thinking that in certain circumstances she could imagine worse fates than such perpetual exile.

Under the skilful leechdom of the dominie, who proved as silent and willing as Will Begbie had foretold, and the bright occasional visits of Bell to his lonely garret, the wounded man recovered quickly. But Will Begbie never went from home to

kirk or market all the time that Adam Home lay in the secret loft above the old barn. And only on one occasion did Bell see her invalid alone. So anxious was Will to preserve him from intrusion, and guard him from all excitement, that he frequented the old farm town more than he had done in twenty years, and his appetite became so insatiable and abnormal that his ancient housekeeper Betty was heard to declare that 'she kenned na what had ta'en Maister Willie—for that it wasna ae meal o' meat that he could eat, but three a' at a doonsittin'—and never a crumb left to show for it!'

The solitary exception to Will Begbie's unsleeping watchfulness chanced on the afternoon of the day before Adam Home and his friend Glenmorrison were to sail as castaway foreign sailors of no particular nationality in a lugger which was putting out from the Ferry Port of Cree. Will had been called away suddenly by a message that one of his horses had fallen into a moss-hole on the march between Larbrax and Millwharchar Moor. The message was brought by John MacLurg, and its genuineness was somewhat suspect, owing to the fact that John was seen to spend one silver crown on a new thistle buckle for his bonnet, and another on parti-coloured ribands for the lasses over at the clachan that night, where, as it happened, a travelling chapman was displaying his wares, and driving a brisk trade.

At any rate, the horse was definitely and indubitably in the bog, and had to be extricated with ropes. Nevertheless, so strange is chance, that before Will was over the hill, Bell MacLurg had set John to guard the approaches of the old farm-

steading, and had gone up to say farewell to Adam.

She found him wearing a coat of Will Begbie's, while his own, carefully mended and brushed, hung on a nail behind him. He was pale, but was able to rise so far as the low rafters would allow him to greet her entrance.

'You are going to leave us tomorrow,' said Bell, after the pause that follows most salutations; 'how glad you must be!'

'I shall indeed be glad that I am again to see the sky and breathe the unconditioned air,' he said, dropping into his old ornate diction; 'but I grieve that I can receive no more such angel visits as this. I can never repay that which you have done for me. But neither will I ever forget. In happier times I shall return. There are even now good friends in high place who urge me to make my peace with the Government. Also I think that they themselves will soon have had enough of the axe to satisfy even Hanoverian tastes.'

Bell and Adam Home sat on two stools looking at each other, awkward as a couple of school-children left alone when the master is out and they know not when he will return.

A light quizzical smile came over Adam's face.

'If I come back next year in time for the peat-fitting, will you give me the rest of my lesson?'

Bell was silent, but a deep flush slowly covered her face.

'Do not' she said; 'be a little generous. You are a great man. I heard Hector Faa call you 'my lord.' And though after a fashion you explained his words, yet I have not seen you so much without knowing that you belong to a different world from that in

which we simple folk of Galloway dwell. Leave us alone to our dull lives. We have done our best to help you to life again, as one Christian should help another. But do not come back, I pray you do not come back!

There were tears in her eyes now, and Adam Home thought he had never seen them so large and beautiful, deep as the cloudless zenith before the sun-rising. He came forward and took both her hands.

There came a whistle up the stairs.

'Haste ye—haste ye, Bell,' cried her brother from the ladder foot; 'they have shifted the horse beast out of the mire!'

Adam Home stood by the plastered door. He held Bell's hands a moment in his. 'I have not the right now!' he said, looking down at her lips and blushful face, 'but when the roses bloom and the peats are fitted, I will come again, and ask for what I dare not take!'

'Ah, do not!' she began, but could get no further. For, with a courtesy such as she had only dreamed of, he lifted the fingers of the Bonnet Laird's daughter to his lips and respectfully kissed them. Then with a resolute hand he shut the door after her.

Next day at the fair at Cree Bridge, as Bell stood by the little jetty which protruded into the brown tidal water, a tanned foreign sailor with a red knitted cap on his head came limping past.

'Will you buy a purse, pretty lady?' he said in broken English.

Bell knew the voice at once. It was that of Adam Home. But she could not find a word with

which to answer him.

'I thank you,' he said aloud, as if he had received a price, and, touching his cap, he moved away. She saw him get on board the lugger, which looked so slight and frail a craft in which to cross the wide seas to France, yet had proved herself capable by many a successful voyage to Fecamp and Le Havre.

The tide being full, the rope was immediately cast off, and with a favourable wind the boat moved off, while the wake whitened and followed like a furrow after a plough.

Bell stood on the quay and watched. The foreign sailor took off his red cap and swung it about his head. Bell's hand wavered piteously up in reply, but dropped again in a moment, as if ashamed of its own daring. Then, as she turned away, she eagerly opened the purse. It contained nothing but a withered white rose.

'What have you got there in that old purse, Bell?' said Will Begbie cheerily in her ear.

He had rid himself of the rebel officer, and, since he knew nothing of John MacLurg's vigil, his heart pulsed light and secure within his bosom.

'Tell me—what have you stowed away so secretly and anxiously in that old purse?' he cried again.

'Nothing but a seed for next year's garden!' answered Mistress Isobel MacLurg.

PART TWO

CHAPTER NINE THE BRIDGE OF AVIGNON

Adam stretched himself wearily as he rose and looked about him. He had been sitting beneath the arid and insufficient shade of a grey olive, whose dustily silver leaves shivered and rustled and rubbed their edges together even in the windless noon of May with a certain curious suggestion of life not wholly vegetable.

'I wonder what keeps Glenmorrison,' he said to himself; 'he is always late nowadays!'

Adam Home heaved a long sigh.

'After all,' he continued, 'he has nothing else to do, so he may just as well take up procrastination as a business. There is no other advantage in being in this horrible place!'

And yet there were few scenes more beautiful within the bounds of the world than that upon which Adam Home looked down, as he shrugged his shoulders and blinked with eyes half closed in order to shut out the heat and the dust of that high glorious day in early summer.

He saw a red-roofed sunny city, full of Oriental suggestion, with wide balconies of scrolled ironwork and closed sun-blinds. He looked upon a rippling river, spanned by an ancient bridge, somewhat ruinous indeed, upon whose broken arches the children joined hands and sang a quaint and moving ditty. And as the burgher folk went past upon the river bank and heard them, husbands and wives clasped hands instinctively and smiled at each

other, always saying the same words and always moved with memories of the days when they too sang— *Upon the Bridge of Avignon, We're dancing round, Dancing round!*

Beyond, lifting its yellow-white masses of building against a sky which was just beginning to take on its summer look of brass towards the zenith, extended the castle and palace of the Popes of Avignon.

But Adam Home was tired of the brilliant little southern city. He had grown to hate Rome en poche. He was tired even of the loyalty that kept him there, tired of drawing money drop by drop from a poor tenantry to lend it to a Prince, who, though far from ungrateful, immediately forgot that he had received it, and went off to expose his distresses to some other adherent suspected of having received a more recent remittance from home.

'At last!' cried Adam, without moving from the sparse edgewise shade of the dry-rustling olive leaves, and making a trumpet of his hands. 'Glenmorrison, what news of him today?'

A tall, ruddy-faced, elderly man was stepping leisurely up the rocky path towards him, leaning somewhat heavily upon a stick, and occasionally stopping to wipe his brow with a great brown kerchief of the pattern of a Paisley shawl.

So soon as he came within the radius of retort, 'Him,' he panted indignantly, 'him—as you call your Prince, sir, is for a wonder in the best of health and the worst of tempers.'

'What,' said Adam Home, smiling, and making room for his friend under the olive, 'has he been fretted by the Government order to remove himself

from Avignon, or has he not been able to borrow the money to pay his last week's market bill?'

'Neither and both, sir,' said Glenmorrison grandly, and then, quite suddenly becoming familiar and dialectal, he added, 'sit farther over, Aidam— ye are takkin' up every bit o' the caller shade—no that this God-forsaken whin buss gies us onything that can be rightly named a shadow. I wish to peace

I was sittin' aneath a decent Scots fir in the forest o' Glenmorrison, watchin' the reel deer comin' troopin' bonny ower the Balloch! Aidam, Aidam, what garred ns no stick to that douce solid man, King George, and so sit siccar on our lands and heritages a' our days?'

'Glenmorrison,' said Adam Home, clapping his hand on his friend's knee, as they sat close together in their doubtful patch of coolness, and watched the yellow sunlight in which the landscape simmered with the Palace of the Popes rising stern and dignified in the midst, 'Who was it that persuaded me first to join? Who brought me hither? Who pinches and screws that 'him' down yonder may have three pennies and a bawbee out of every good Scot's groat that comes his way—who but Glenmorrison? Aye, and who would give up that last bawbee for a clap on the shoulder and a careless kindly word from Ye-Ken-Wha?'

'I ken—I ken,' said the ruddy-faced man, shaking his head; 'it's true, Aidam. But it's fair heart-breakin' to see him this day sittin' cheek by jow wi' the Dowager's waitin'-maid, and cryin' every quarter hour for 'A bottle o' wine and fresh glasses! Wi' never a thocht o' his faithfu' servants that have weared their a' on him, but only colloquin' wi' Irish

rapparees and penniless French rogues. It's a' that woman! We maun kidnap her, I'm tellin' ye, and send her aff to King Louis. He has sae money sic-like already about him that an odd yin or twa mair wad never be kenned! But she plays the mischief wi' oor laddie.'

'And think ye,' said Adam Home, 'that if the Walkinshaw were away that we wad get back the lad that fought at Gaeta like ten men and stood like a tall pine beneath the gathering banner at Glenfinnan? No, no, let the lass be, lest a worse thing befall!'

The elder man looked up with some surprise at his companion.

'Aidam!' he said, 'what's gotten ye, Aidam? Has she been at ye hersel'? I thought that ye were wi' us in separatin' the Prince frae that woman?'

Then Adam Home spake more sharply than before—nay, even sternly. 'The lass has paid her price for him, and a bonny bargain she has of it! Glenmorrison, I am sick of all this. I am going home to Scotland—aye, though I put my neck in the hemp for it. Even Tower Hill were better than this miserable life of feckless plots abroad and universal cat-and-dog at home!'

'Tut, tut, Aidam,' said Glenmorrison, 'this will never do! Ye need to be lanced, Aidam. MacWheem maun see to ye. Nocht like blood-lettin' for curin' the megrims! Preserve us—you to speak o' gaun hame to the gallows wi' a score o' ill-set cousins at Henry Pelham's elbow, and that good uncle him-sel' about to be inducted into your estates and kindly heritages!'

'Glenmorrison,' said Adam Home, 'my life here

is not worth a docken leaf. I am sick of it—sick also, God forgive me, of the Prince!’

Glenmorrison rose in a fume.

‘I see—I see,’ he said; ‘you would play ‘booty.’ You would make your private peace. You have been in communication with the butchers of Drummoissie. That is the secret of your defence of the Walkinshaw. Perhaps you have gotten the Dowager's waiting-maid to speak a word to her mistress for you. But, sir, you shall not go to England without feeling the point of a true man's sword. Heavens, sir, I will fight you here and now for the words you have spoken!’

And the red-faced man strode to and fro, snorting and nodding his great head, and with his hand clapped threateningly on his sword. The young man sat still, leaning his back indolently against the gnarled trunk of the olive, and for answer he cast one shapely leg over the other and stared at his silver shoe-buckle.

‘Sit down, Glen,’ he said; ‘you and I cannot quarrel. We lay over long together in the cave on Millwharchar Muir. The stead of your elbow is in my ribs yet. Man, ye just could not find it in your heart to pink Adam Home with the selfsame hand that used to be laid about my neck in the night time!’

The ruddy man, who had been fanning himself haughtily, flung down his hat in the dust and held out both his hands.

‘Aidam,’ he cried, ‘ye hae seen baith a mad dog this day and a silly one too! Give me your hand, if ye can forgive me for my temper. It's a' my mither's faut for marryin' a d d reid-headed Heelant-man!’

Then the young man, suddenly losing his

nonchalance, rose to his feet with a bright smile on his face. He took his friend's hand, pressed it with a quick enthusiasm very unlike his previous unconcern, and drew him down again upon the roots of the olive.

'Sit down, Glen,' he said; 'this day is somewhat overhot for the emotions. If you are a fool, I am a whole company of them—and a merry-andrew to boot. For I know as well as you that I risk my neck by going back to Scotland. I have nothing to gain but the gallows. Yet, O man, I can hear in my sleep the grouse craw in the heather as he fills his crappan, and the lang-nebbit whaup willy-whaain' doon to his nest in the gloamin'! Man, I'm away back to the cave on the Black Craig o' Dee. My heart is fair sick to see a trout loup in a pool, and to sit where the birks are bonniest and sweetest scented, and when the larches are hanging out their green tassels like ladies' favours.'

Adam Home uttered the last words with a kind of rapture, and Glenmorrison gazed at him in dumb astonishment, which, however, slowly merged into an eye-twinkling kind of humour. But he did not speak.

'Good-day, Glen,' cried the young man, waving his hand; 'I'm off to pack my hat-box. Make my adieus and obeisances to the Prince, will you, if ever he asks for me; I will not interrupt him now!'

Glenmorrison watched him go, with a careless grace of carriage that had something almost dainty and womanish about it. Then the smile broadened on his face.

'Oho! Aidam, lad!' he murmured, 'ye are sick to hear the whaup birlin' at his wild sang doon the

wind, are ye? And every grouse cock that chunners in a heather buss is happier than you! An' it's the springtime on Millwharchar Muir, is it? And the Walkinshaw, doon there' (he pointed with his hand), 'is a puir lass that has paid her price, and your heart is sore vexed for her. Aye, aye! Aidam! Ow aye, Aidam!'

And Glenmorrison, sitting with his elbows on his knees, leaned forward till his broad, smooth-shaven chin rested on the ebony handle of his cane, and watched the young man till he lost sight of the tall slender figure in the press of the country folk on mules and donkeys, all coming out of the city laden with their purchases or rattling the empty baskets of their ingoing merchandise.

'Aye, aye,' he communed with himself, well-pleased at his own penetration, 'I ken. I thocht it would come. And it will tak' him the sairer noo when it has. There never was a Kilpatrick that could stand against a petticoat. And this yin has been lang in catchin' the fever. It will gang the harder wi' him for that! And a bit slip o' a country lass too—after haein' escapit a' the braw dames o' King Louis' Court!'

He rose after a while, stretched himself carefully, and with a stiff halt in his gait began to descend.

'Aweel,' he mused as he went, 'it's nae mainer o' use speakin' to the lad. He doesna ken what is the trouble wi' him. And faith, Guid forgie ye, Glenmorrison, ye are ower fond o' a bonny bit craitur yoursel' to hae the richt to flyte him! Aye,' he added, chuckling, 'and fond too o' the whaup willy-whaain' doon to his nest in the gloamin!'

CHAPTER TEN

THE SECOND FITTING OF THE PEATS

It was a June morning. Mistress Bell MacLurg was out fitting the peats on the Millwharchar Muir. This is how she did it.

It was yet early. The dew was pearly on the grass, and Bell walked slowly from the little heather-girt farm-stead, and down the birch-tree glade. Then still more slowly she passed along the side of the burn that gurgled half-hid in the bent grass till she reached the black hags on the edge of the muir.

At this place, having looked at the peats her father had cast, and shaken her head over the delicate problem of where she was to begin, Bell sat down on a knoll of dry heather and gave herself up to the consideration of that and of other problems more or less remotely connected therewith.

'Here,' she said, 'was the very spot where I had been kneeling, when!'

'No,' she added, correcting herself, finger on lip, 'it was there!' But it was neither. For more of the peat-face had been cast, and the spot where the sacred and unutterable event thus vaguely alluded to had happened, was lying all about her in narrow black oblongs, of the shape and size of two bricks fastened together by their ends.

He had promised—but—it simply could not be! The laws against straggling rebels were more strictly administered than ever, the red soldiers more frequent visitors in the glen. She was glad, therefore, that there was no chance of her being interrupted at her work—so glad that as she looked downwards towards the Black Craig of Dee, along the line by

which he had come last year (was it only a year ago?) the landscape appeared curiously enough to dissolve, running edgewise in both directions, and a dry lump which had been hardening in her throat broke with a sound like a sob.

This was that same Bell MacLurg who had made a jest and a mocking of the rows of young men along the west wall of the kirk on Sabbaths, and even turned on her heel when the young Laird of Duchrae told her that he had seen no girl so pretty in the Assembly Rooms of Edinburgh, asking him if by any chance he thought that was any news to her.

Yet it was this very girl who thus saw the landscape waver and melt into a grey blur, like a sum on a boy's slate at close of school.

What—it was raining! Thunder-rain too, for the drops splashing down flat and large were more than lukewarm. Bell glanced up at the sky. The sunlit blue ran every way, though still a little blurred and dim. The drops must come from somewhere else. It did not occur to her that she had been crying till a shadow fell across the yellow bent and dulled the ruby-hearted heather. She started to her feet, her heart drummed in her ears, and the tears were raining down undisguisedly now. A figure, tall and darkly masculine, was striding swiftly over the peat hags within a score of feet of her. She could not see his face. So silly it was! She darted up her apron, a pretty one with flowers speckled on it which she had put on (one never knows!), and dashed the water out of her eyes.

Someone had hold of her hands. Someone was whispering words in her ear. Will Begbie! No— not Will Begbie—by no manner of means Will Begbie!

'Love—little love,' he was saying (Will Begbie forsooth!) 'I have come back to you—a thousand miles back for my lesson. Have you forgot that you promised to teach me how to fit the peats?'

But in spite of his cheering words Bell could only sob and sob and hold down her face. She had not really wanted him to come. She had hoped that he would stay away. She was very angry with him for coming. She would tell him so and send him away.

Besides it was very wrong. What would her father say! And at any rate he could never mean it, but only to make sport of her. He was a great man. She would tell him now to go away and leave her. So she set her hands against his breast, for he was drawing her dangerously near to him and saying—well, things that her ears ached to hear and her heart bounded to listen to.

Then with a tremendous effort Bell lifted her face to speak. She was just opening her mouth to tell him that he must not—when—when something cataclysmic happened. The sky went round and round, the world span like a top. The earth heaved under her feet. All the wide spaces seemed to grow full of honeysuckle and balm and sweet spices. Odours of the divine and human floated dizzying about her. She trod on the viewless air. Rosy clouds upbore her, and she found herself held very close to a blue silk vest, underneath which a man's heart was beating very loud. Her hands, which she could have sworn that she had raised for the purpose of keeping him at a proper distance, were clasped about his neck. It was no use to pretend any more. Also it was much nicer.

CHAPTER ELEVEN THE PROPOSAL

‘But you should not have come at all. You know you should not. I did not mean you to come. And you are in danger. You must go away at once, or else I shall not love you!’

The young man, whose face now wore a very different expression to that which we had seen upon it under the olive tree over against the Bridge of Avignon, felt himself held tighter as the tender voice murmured reproachfully, ‘You must go away again!’

Once on a time, and not so long ago either, Adam Home had thought that his life was over. With a kind of relief he had felt (as he believed) his pulses beat slower and steadier. He had looked cold and unmoved upon the fascinations of the easy beauties of two Courts. So he was sure that his youth had indeed passed away. But now, held in the light of Bell MacLurg’s eyes, exultation took hold of him to find that his heart had never played so rare a tune for any woman, and that this Bonnet Laird’s daughter had taught him that there was a sweeter cup to set to his lips than he had ever dreamed of draining on his life’s journey.

‘You knew you were in danger—yet you have come back to me!’

To Bell there was something acutely, even painfully, exquisite in the thought. Fire as well as blood ran in the girl’s veins.

‘Oh, but you should not—you ought not!’ she cried; ‘you must go back at once—if anyone should see you, what should I do? Go! Go!’

But, nevertheless, Adam Home felt himself held

tighter, for the face that looked up at him was at once radiant with a maid's love and fierce with a mother's anxiety.

Smiles ran rippling across the girl's lips as often as they were disengaged—while each time she held him at a distance in order to search his face (to see if he really meant it), tears welled in her eyes till they grew large and deep and suffused, being filled with a kind of glorified mist.

And then Adam Home told his tale at length. To do it he bade her sit down beside him on a tussock of 'ling' in the lea of a great face of peat. Before she did so Bell cast her eye around the horizon and her mind over the possibilities. Her father was at Cairn Edward. He would likely go on to Dumfries. It was market day there and he might be long detained—might indeed not return that night.

Will Begbie—well, it did not much matter where Will was. She held Will in the hollow of her hand. So she thought as she settled herself down on the great tussock of dry purple heather. There were no King's soldiers in the neighbourhood ever since Ligonier's Horse had been called abroad, and with them had marched that young ensign who had come 'once-errand,' as the country folk say, from Dumfries, just to see whether Bell's eyes were as gloriously blue as had been reported of them. He went back, declaring that the half had not been told him—but adding that her heart was as flinty as her eyes were blue.

And there and thus Adam Home told his tale and settled the aching of his heart, feasting his eyes on their desire till the sun rose to the zenith and began to sink again, and still on the wide

Millwharchar Muir not a peat was fitted.

Moreover Bell began to grow hungry. As for Adam, he did not care whether or not he ever tasted food again. Indeed, the very thought jarred upon him. But not so Bell. For, rising at last after many attempts out of the encircling fortress, she extracted from under the lip of a moss-hag a white-wrapped bundle and a brown jug. With these she spread before him her frugal midday meal—scones of flour and farles of cake, in quantity scanty enough for one and a laughing-stock for two—yet very bread of the gods when administered in finger-lengths with spices and condiments thus:—

‘Open your mouth, sir—no, you don’t! There! Now eat that! Did you ever get anything so nice in France? You know you never did. You know it in your heart, sir. I suppose you have been drinking such rare and expensive wines that you turn up your nose at honest buttermilk. But I will teach you, sir, to play your whimsies off on me! Another bite? Ah, would you! One thing at a time, if you please, Master Adam Francis Charles Home! Oho, sir, I have not forgotten your name, you see! Not that I believe a syllable of the Charles Francis, any more than I do of all the other nonsense you have been talking this morning!’

All at once she clasped her hands with a pathetic little gesture of dramatic despair.

‘Adam,’ she cried, ‘we have forgotten to fit a single peat! What will my father say to me when he comes home? (Thank heaven, he is at Dumfries by now!)’

Adam Home indicated that he cared not even an infinitesimal coin of the realm what her father

said, and that he had not come a thousand mile and a thousand to the back of that only to fit peats all day.

At this Bell's mouth dropped, and she glanced up at him with shocked reproach.

'But you told me when you first arrived that you had come for your lesson, and if that is not true, how can I believe anything else you have told me since?'

Adam Home hastened to supply her with an additional and confirmatory evidence.

'Well, if that be true,' said Bell, daintying herself after eating, 'you must help me with my peats. I must have something to show, you know, or John and Alec will wonder!'

'Let them wonder!' said Adam Home. 'Bell, will you come away with me? I want you to leave all this. Can you take a landless and moneyless man, one without country or kin? Would you leave your people to wander the earth with him?'

Bell put out her hand.

Her eyes were downcast and smiling, yet she did not answer for a while. Then she glanced up quickly at him.

'What do you think yourself?' she said, daring him with her eyes.

He did not heed her light mood, but went on more earnestly and boldly. 'Will you, Bell? Take time before you answer, for it means all to me.'

'Aye, truly,' said Bell, suddenly growing as pale as himself, 'I will go with you the world over! You know well that you have made me love you!'

'And I,' said Adam Home, taking her hand, 'will faithfully serve you, will give my life to keep you

safe, my love, my wife! I will joy to do your bidding.'

Bell glanced up with a sudden light in her demure eye and a rush of red back to her pale cheek. 'I would far rather that you made me do your bidding!'

'I may have to do that, too, madam!' said Adam Home, with an answering spark of fire in his eye. 'And faith, Mistress Bell, I had better begin now. I have found a safe way out of the country. A French ship sails a week hence from Loch Ryan. She calls at Isle Rathan, whence a boat may be put out to her under cloud of night. My friend, Patrick Heron, though a great King George's man, has there a good Jacobite clergyman in hiding with him—a man, like myself, somewhat tainted in the recent troubles. He will marry us—that is, if between times you do not change your mind. Patrick's wife will welcome you for my sake, for she, too, wears the white rose in her heart. And as for Pat, he will welcome you for your own. For, having wedded one of them himself, he naturally loves all pretty, scornful lasses. Bell, what say you to my plan? Will you come?'

'I cannot even if I would. I shall not have any wedding-dress!' she objected, feeling that he was taking things rather too much for granted. Her pretty lips pouted and her foot kicked at a tuft of grass. 'And I had thought it all out during the winter. It was to be white silk with gold broidering—long in the waist, short in the skirt—so pretty over a quilted petticoat of blue, with black stockings and buckled shoes. Bess Kerr told me of one she saw in Edinburgh at the Assembly Rooms, but I knew I could better it. And now I cannot. I won't be married in my old taffeta. It is a shame. But men do not care.

I suppose you would be glad if I had only my apron.'

'I would indeed be well content,' said Adam gravely; 'I want only you, you see. I did not come from France to marry a 'grande costume!'

'But I shall not look at all pretty! You will be ashamed of me. In France you will go out with your great ladies and leave me. Are you sure you never will? Tell me—tell me at once!'

Adam told her several times, being held tightly by the lapels of his coat while he did so.

'No, do not bend your head; hold it up. So! I want to see by your eyes if you are speaking the truth. You really love me in this old gown better than all the fine ladies of the Court? And will you always love me just as much, and never, never, never grow tired of me?'

CHAPTER TWELVE THE OTHER PLAN

While Adam was engrossed in the long-continued business of satisfying these and other reasonable inquiries and doubts of his sweetheart, it was natural enough that both of them should be wholly absorbed in their own affairs.

Had either of them turned their heads, all the rest of this story might have run differently. But neither moved, so they did not notice that behind them a man was crouched on the top of the peat bank looking directly down upon them. He could hear the low murmur of their voices. He could see Bell's face turned tenderly and smilingly up, with that look upon it which means happiness to but one man—for it is the unmistakable look of a woman's glad surrender and resignation. He could see—and after that he turned away—Adam Home's face bowed down to silence with a long kiss a pair of appealing and petitionary lips.

Will Begbie went down Millwharchar Muir like a man stricken with a deadly wound, who yet can just stagger home to die. He had come up to the hill with purpose to see Bell MacLurg, and, it might be, help her with her peat-fitting. He had watched her that day as he had done every day since the man whose life he had saved had gone to France. And though, for a little while after the lugger sailed from the Water of Fleet with the red-capped sailor on board, Bell had seemed pensive, of late all had changed, and her voice was once more heard gay-carrolling in the morn, like the mavis in little bursts of song, as she swung her milking-pail or tripped up

the loaning to summon home the pasturing kine with the old melodious call— 'Hurley, Hurley, hie away hame!'

Will Begbie had loved Bell a long time—indeed, ever since he could remember her, a little dainty dotting thing of two or three whom he used to carry afield to gather gowans on the knowes while he mowed the rushy hollows, or to lose herself in the cornfield where the tall poppies waved scarlet like a thousand soldiers' coats.

For years he had counted her as surely, his watching her as she grew up, rejoicing in her beauty, glad when the suitors came flocking, and chuckling to himself with a quiet smile as he saw them betake themselves out of the glen, riding sullenly on their steeds, yet nevertheless turning in their saddles to take a last look at Bell, as she stood in the doorway waving them off into the great world again.

He had never spoken of love to Bell. But he had depended upon her knowing. And he had liked her to count upon him in all things. It was, 'Will, do this!' and Will had done it already. 'Will, come here!' and Will came like a dog. At kirk and market, if there happened to be nobody newer or better, Will was at hand to escort Bell home, never intrusive or in the way, ready to recognise the interests of sport and keep discreetly in the background so long as he was not wanted, but all the same—there— ready and happy to be whistled up on occasion like his own faithful Bawty.

In short, the relation into which Bell and Will had dropped was precisely that most unlikely to be favourable to the intentions of either.

For Will never doubted but that Bell, when she had tired of novelty and the exercise of her power, would turn to him. Bell, on her part, when she thought of the matter at all, had an idea of making good old Will, faithful Will, happy—by loving him as a sister. This appeared to her an ambition so new, so untried, so laudable, and moreover one so likely to meet Will's own views (when properly explained to him), that she never doubted but that all was for the best between them. So she took Will Begbie's arm with a sister's freedom, and patted him on the head, as he sat by the fire watching her with adoring eyes, like a big dog. Once at Halloween she had even let him kiss her when the nuts were cracking merrily on the hearth, and kissing was in the very air.

Will thought of that every night. He was too proud of it ever to try for another. But to marry Will Begbie! Why, Bell never thought of such a thing.

But Will did, and now as he stumbled blindly down the hill, his heart clay-cold and dead within his breast, the whole bright summer landscape, running in glorious red and green and purple from verge to horizon verge, gay with flowers underfoot, white-winged with clouds above—all suddenly went ashen grey and lifeless about him.

He looked angrily up at the muir fowl, the clamorous peesweeps, the whinnying snipe, the wailing curlew. They vexed him. He wished he could twist their necks and silence them forever. Bell had been taken from him. Now she never could be his. He had seen it. He had never before surprised that look on a woman's face. Now he never would see it for himself. But he knew its meaning on Bell's all too well.

So he stumbled dully into the stable. It seemed the safest refuge. He would escape from the clamour and the brightness there.

Blossom, Pet Blossom, the little grey mare he had been keeping as a surprise for Bell, turned and whinnied to him. He was used to bring her a piece of sugar in his pocket, concealing it from his housekeeper, who did not approve of luxuries. Now Pet Blossom vexed him, and as she nuzzled against his coat, he thrust her fiercely from him, as if she had been responsible for the faithless, cruel girl who should have been her mistress. Then, his heart relenting, he bent his head on Blossom's mane, and did what many a man has done before and since, though that which none will ever own to.

Slowly he came to himself, an angry and desperate bitterness rising in his heart. This man, he knew, was a great lord—an exile truly, but still in spite of that a great lord. He could mean no good to Bell. He was deceiving her. It might soon be too late. This man had used his hospitality to win away his sweetheart from him. But at this point, with a quick revulsion his heart refused to give up all hope. Even now it might be possible. All was not yet lost. He might still save Bell.

Even as he thought these things in his heart he was saddling Blossom. That mettlesome little lady threw up her head and moved her feet rejoicingly and expectantly on the hard earthen floor of the stable.

He had suddenly remembered that Ninian MacLurg would be at market that day. He would warn him of the traitor within his gates. But in the background of Will Begbie's heart there was another

and less worthy thought. He told himself that he was a good King's man with a duty to his country—even if there was an extra loft above the barn at the old farm-steading.

He had heard that there was to be a troop of horse that day in Cairn Edward, under young Ensign Pelham. His herd Jock had seen them riding two by two yestere'en along the military road from the Shire. They could not yet have gone. He could make up his mind on the way what he would do if he found them.

So Will Begbie mounted at the stable-door, and the next moment, with a glad clatter of hoofs and a ring of bridle-iron, Blossom was flying down the glen towards Cairn Edward.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN THE CAPTURE

It was late afternoon upon Millwharchar Muir. The sun began to cast long, slaty shadows thwart-wise across the ruddy purple and golden brown. The moss-hags acquired threatening eyebrows as their overhanging summits shut off the sunshine from their gloomy deeps.

Seven times had Bell remarked that it was time to be going homewards, lest one of her brothers—or perhaps Will Begbie—might take it into his head to come that way looking for her.

Besides, the peats were fitted—as many as two rows of stooks—work for half an hour at least. But then Bell had had to wait till the casting was dry enough. Other things also had interfered. At last, however, after an eighth declaration, she rose determinedly to her feet. This time there must be no dallying. She must be going. No, she would not sit down again and think it over. It was time, and high time, too. And he ought to know better than to ask her, considering the danger to them both; and what would she do if anything happened to him?

Well, just a minute then. There! Was he satisfied now?

So in the quiet, peaceful-seeming evening these two walked slowly towards the little copse which erected its crest of birch and fir over the edge of the moor. They went hand in hand, and discussed the flight to Isle Rathan. Adam was to arrange through a faithful retainer that Gideon Lamb, outed clergyman and

good Jacobite, was to be in readiness. Mistress Patrick Heron (erstwhile May Maxwell) was to be warned. Bell's heart throbbed at the thought of meeting her, reassured, however, by the news that she had once been a farmer's daughter. Bell's father was a laird.

'Now, little love,' said Adam, 'we must say good-night. Good angels keep you—till tomorrow, fove, till tomorrow! And then, on the third day—why then, there will begin to be no more tomorrows for ever and ever!'

'Good-night, Adam!'

'Why do you not say Charles Francis?' he said, smiling.

'I like Adam best now. You are my Adam!'

'Good-night, little Eve!'

'In the King's name, stand!'

The voice rang out like a trumpet, imperious and commanding, yet with a certain amount of the weakness of self-conscious youth in it.

Adam Home lifted his head and confronted a score of dismounted King's troopers. An officer was at their head with his sword drawn in his hand. Their carbines were at the ready, and the black muzzles approached within a dozen yards of his breast.

Very haughtily Adam Home—another Adam Home from him who had spoken these last words to his love—looked at his captors, his head high and his eyes straight and unabashed. He did not take his arm from about his sweetheart's waist under the gaze of so many men, but rather, as it seemed, kept

it there with a kind of prideful ostentation.

So they stood, the red tunics of the dragoons almost black against the sunset, the last rays glinting on sword blade and gun barrel and looking fair into the dark and angry face of Adam Home and the wild eyes of Bell, the plighted wife of the man whose life was forfeit.

Behind the troop stood Will Begbie, despair and remorse already tugging at his heartstrings. But it was too late.

'Kilpatrick—you!' cried the young officer of dragoons in sheer and unfeigned astonishment.

'Ah, Harry!' was all that Adam Home replied.

There was a pause. The young ensign sheathed his sword with a sharp click, but his men remained fixed with their muskets pointed at the rebel.

'Cousin Adam,' said the lad, his face colouring, 'this is a deucedly awkward business for me. I declare I must take you prisoner!'

Adam Home smiled, and removing his arm from his sweetheart's waist he took her hand instead. He could feel that her bosom was heaving tumultuously, the storm not far off. He resolved it should not break if he could help it.

'Certainly, Harry lad,' he cried cheerfully, 'I am your prisoner. But I am this lady's prisoner first. I present you to my wife!'

'Your wife!' repeated the officer, obviously mystified.

'Yes, my wife, or almost,' said Adam Home. 'His Highness the Elector of Hanover permitting, we are to be married the day after tomorrow at the house of Mr. Patrick Heron of Isle Rathan, Justice of the Peace in this Stewartry of Kirkcudbright.'

'That's worse still, Adam,' said the lad, 'for there's a warrant out for your arrest on a charge of high treason. And Uncle Harry is in Cairn Edward to meet with my Lord Galloway!'

'Content, my boy,' said Adam Home calmly, 'it will be quite a family gathering! All I ask is that you march your men round by the house of Millwharchar which your guide (he looked at Will Begbie with a dry smile) doubtless pointed out to you in the valley as you came up. I would desire your leave to place in safety this lady who is so dear to me.'

'Of course I will,' cried the boy brightening. 'It is a shift most damnable that I am in. Pity me, Adam, and tell me what you would do if you were in my shoes!'

'Why,' said Adam Home, 'do what you must do—your duty. Besides, you are my uncle's favourite and next heir, and when they stick my head on Tower Hill, it will all be for the best.'

The poor boy's distress was evident, but in another direction Adam Home had gone too far. At the image which his light words called up but too easily in her heart, Bell clasped him about the neck.

'Oh, Adam,' she cried, 'I have brought you to this! Wicked girl that I am—I am the cause of your death! You will hate me. You will curse the day you saw me. You must. I will not love you if you do not!'

She turned upon the young officer.

'Oh, good sir, I know you are kind. Do, I pray you, release him. I beg you from my heart to let him go. Indeed, he was not plotting nor doing any harm to the King. He only came to see me. All the way from France he came. And I love him. And I hate

you, Will Begbie. Yes, I hate you; I could kill you, crush you like a serpent under my foot! I know why he has done this, gentlemen; it is because I would not marry him. Ugh! the wretch. I always knew what he was. It always made me feel as if a toad hopped into my hand every time he shook it. And now he has wickedly betrayed my love—my life. But you will let him go, good gentleman. Sir Captain, I will do anything you ask. I will be indebted to you all my life. Do take me to prison in his place. I alone am the guilty one if there is any harm. He came all the way only to see me. Would not you have done the same?’

‘Indeed that I would!’ cried the boy eagerly.

‘If you had been my sweetheart, I mean!’

‘Whether or no!’ cried the boy, with enthusiasm. He had never seen so pretty a girl, he thought.

‘Then you will let him go!’

The lad clasped his hands in despair as she smiled hopefully into his face. But Adam answered for him, tenderly caressing Bell’s hand with his right, all the while keeping it firm in his left.

‘He cannot, dearest heart!’ he said; ‘he has his duty to perform. He is an officer of King George. I would do the same in his place. Indeed, he cannot let me go! My uncle could, but he will not!’ He added the last sentence in an undertone.

‘But they will kill you. I am sure I shall never see you again. And—the day after tomorrow was so near!’

At the sound of her sobs the lad bowed his head in a burst of boyish sorrow.

‘This is hard, Adam,’ he moaned. ‘Heavens and earth, I declare if you say the word you can run for it

when my troop is at the farmhouse. I will not let them fire. They can only break me. They won't shoot me. My uncle Henry would not let them to do that, much as he hates you. And I haven't got any sweetheart!

'My boy,' said Adam Home gently, 'I would not think of it for a moment. They will not hang me. At least, I do not think so. They are all for conciliation now. They say that the Prince has been in London, and that the Government knew of it.'

'Do not be too sure! My uncle is very angry with you for rebelling. He never had any favour for you. And now he swears that you nearly loaded him with the King.'

'And then, after all, he would have my estates if I were to hang, while the King would get them if they were only confiscated,' said Adam in a whisper. 'But cheer up, boy, and let us keep up this lady's spirits!'

They were come by this time to the little green loaning which leads through an orchard of crab-apple and gooseberries to the house of Millwharchar.

Bell had walked quietly the last part of the way, holding her lover's hand while he talked with his cousin. She dried her eyes and listened. There seemed to be some hope. His uncle, they said, was a great man in whose hand were the powers of life and death.

Surely he would not order to the scaffold his own nephew—just for coming home to see one who loved him.

'Say 'good-bye' to me here, little one,' said Adam at the gate, gently, 'I will soon be back to you. And though the day after tomorrow cannot bring me

all the happiness I had hoped, yet tonight I shall sleep happier than ever before, knowing that you love me. Be not afraid. We must put the other off a little—but, please God, only for a little. God bless you, Bell. Be mindful of me—a worthless fellow enough, but one that truly loves you!’

‘Good-night then—and not ‘goodbye,’ Adam!’ said Bell, brightly holding up her face to be kissed unashamed before them all.

And so, with a wave of his hand and a look out of his eyes for her alone, Bell’s lover marched off to prison, smiling and debonnaire as ever—though the road he went might be even to the scaffold.

Bell stood on the doorstep and watched them go. Then, in a moment, her mood changed from resignation to alertness.

‘John,’ she cried, ‘saddle me Brown Bess! And be quick! Don’t ask why. You will know in good time. I will answer to my father when he comes home. Do as I bid you!’

And as John obediently departed stablewards, his imperious sister ran upstairs to her own little room to array herself in her daintiest dress, her whitest and fleeciast lace, her smartest shoes, and to don the pretty low-sitting hat over her sunny curls, which, when duly settled in its place, made her the most ravishing vision man could look upon. After that she stole into her brother’s room, and securing a rowel spur, fixed it carefully upon the heel of her shoe.

By the time she was finished and had dabbed her eyes free of all traces of tears, Brown Bess was at the door. And once more as Bell mounted, John besought her to tell him whither she was going.

'To Cairn Edward,' she cried, as she sent the rowels home with absolute disregard for Brown Bess's feelings, and started at a tearing gallop down the brae.

At the loaning foot, where she had looked her last upon the man she loved, the man who only loved her stood full in her path.

'Bell, listen to me, Bell!' he cried. 'Do not go till I have had speech with you! I could not help it! He but played with you, while I had loved you all my life.'

He spoke piteously, wildly, with a hoarse bark of despair in his voice. But he spoke in vain. Bell was of that nature which can forgive all things that do not touch the beloved. But there, the wolf guards not her young with fiercier tooth. She had found her love. Now she would fight for him. Rich or poor, peer of the realm or condemned traitor, Bell MacLurg cared no jot. He was hers. He was her all. What mattered a lifetime's devotion in any other?

'Out of my way, treacherous hound!' she cried, and, as he tried in desperation to seize her bridle rein, she pulled Brown Bess sharply round and sent in the spur a second time. Even then Will Begbie stood his ground, but the pretty vixen on horseback cut him sharply across the cheek with her whip.

'That is all I have for traitors!' she cried as she passed him. She meant one who was a traitor to her love—King George or King James she cared nothing for. Why should she? She had but one king, and even now they were taking him to his death.

Will Begbie fell back with a red line across his face and his heart broken, while Bell swept down the Cairn Edward road in a tumult of angry exultation.

'This for a lifetime's devotion!' he said, with his hand touching his stinging cheek.

'That for betraying my love to his enemies!' she said, and inconsistently bestowed a little of the same upon Brown Bess, who at least was wholly innocent.

For love is a fire that eats up all, and there is no fuel that it burns faster than bygone kindnesses which are awkward to remember.

A grave-faced man of middle age sat writing in the best parlour of Mistress Douglas's change-house in the town of Cairn Edward. He had laid aside his wig for greater ease, and now sat occasionally rubbing his cropped poll of badger grey with one hand, while he made the other to travel rapidly over the blue official sheets of foolscap which a secretary had placed on the table before him.

Occasionally he took snuff from a golden box with the royal arms on the lid, and then again he would look out of the low window before which a crowd of loafers was assembled. They were trying to get a glimpse of the man of quality within, who had come with so great a retinue to meet my Lord Galloway. It was even reported that he was one of the Royal Princes travelling in disguise.

Suddenly there was a noise in the passage. The clear determined demand of a feminine voice predominated. Then came the lower tones of a man refusing some request. Both of these were iterated and reiterated, growing every moment more insistent, till with a gesture of annoyance, the man at the table went to the door and flung it wide open.

'What is this unseemly brawl?' he cried in the tone of one accustomed to be obeyed.

At sight of him his secretary and the valet who

had been barring the way fell back, and between them their master found himself gazing at one of the loveliest maidens it had ever been his lot to behold. She was dressed in a short-pleated kirtle, over which was a silken overskirt prettily draped to show a tiny foot and the turn of a handsome ankle.

The girl's colour was vivid, her eyes at once brimful of tears and brilliant with indignation.

'A girl of spirit,' thought Mr. Henry Pelham, First Lord of the Treasury of King George II, and at present in that august monarch's absence abroad Lord Justice of the three kingdoms as well.

As soon as Bell saw her way plain before her, she ran to Pelham and clasped his arms as if for protection.

'I knew I would see him. I knew he would listen to me!' she cried triumphantly. 'My lord, will you protect me from these—domestics? They would not let me see you! You will not permit them to drag me away. They would not dare, when you are by!'

'No, no,' said my Lord Justice; 'come in, madam, and tell me what it is you wish with me!'

Mr. Henry Pelham was embarrassed at being taken without his wig, in which, like the locks of Sampson, abode much of the formal dignity of his age.

'Place a chair for the young lady, Benson,' he commanded, and as the valet obsequiously did so and Bell followed him, with her eyes on the floor, my Lord Justice endued himself swiftly with his wig, and then, standing in a dignified attitude by the mantel-piece, looked at the vision of loveliness which had so suddenly burst in upon his seclusion.

'You need not wait,' said Mr. Pelham gravely to

his servant Benson. The door closed instantly, and he turned towards his visitor. She had risen also to her feet, and after regarding him a moment with a troubled countenance, all suddenly she took two or three swift steps and fell on her knees before him. At the same time her hat slipped over backward and hung upon her shoulders by its ribband.

The First Lord of His Majesty's Treasury stood aghast. His very wig trembled with amazement in every hair.

'Oh, will you forgive your nephew,' she cried; 'he has been a rebel, I know, and he should not have come from France. But I made him. I am a wicked, wicked girl (though you might not think it to look at me). But he loved me, and he had not seen me for so long. And so would you have returned if you had loved me as he did. You know you would. For you are just like him; your eyes are the same. So you won't hang him. I rode at a gallop all the way to tell you first before anyone else—and oh, you won't let them put him in prison, or kill him. Indeed, he only came to see me.'

Tears were running fast down her face by this time, and every sentence was punctuated with her sobs. She had taken possession of Mr. Pelham's hand, and now held it fast in both of hers.

'What—what,' quoth my Lord Justice, stammering in sheer amazement, 'what is this? I do not understand. What nephew of mine? My nephew Harry is an officer in the King's army, and at this moment has gone out to capture a lurking rebel of Lord Dalmarnock's forces who has returned at the peril of his life to this countryside!'

'That is he—that is he!' cried Bell, loosening

her grasp and holding up her hands clasped before him in the attitude of the sweetest and most pathetic supplication; 'the rebel he went to take was your nephew Adam Home. And he found him on the moor—with me. I was teaching him to fit peats. And he never plotted any against King George or anybody. He never so much as mentioned his name.'

'Adam Home—my nephew? You mean Lord Kilpatrick. That is the only rebel nephew I have,' said Mr. Pelham. 'He is in France—in, let me see, Avignon, with the Young Pretender; that was the last news we had of him!'

Bell passed this absolute declaration of her lover's quality without a heart-beat. She was hard on the track of something else—his life.

'But it is the same,' she said, repossessing herself of the great man's hand. 'He came straight from Avignon to see me. And we were to be married on Thursday, and then go away again. Oh, do let us go, and we will never trouble you or the King again.'

'Ha—ahem!' said my Lord Justice, 'this is grave indeed. My nephew Adam, a proscribed rebel and companion of the Young Pretender, in Scotland, and being brought here in custody!'

'Yes, but in your custody and your kind nephew's! Nobody else will be the wiser. And he is so sorry for rebelling, and he will never do it any more. I will see to it myself that he does not!'

'Rise, my good girl!' said Mr. Henry Pelham, thinking how awkward it would be if my Lord Galloway should happen to come in at that moment. 'Allow me to assist.'

'No! I will not rise from my knees till you have promised me his life. You will not let them hang

him. Send him away anywhere—only let me go with him. He will get into no more mischief then, I warrant you!’

‘There! There!—We will see what can be done!’ said Mr. Pelham, touching Bell’s curls in a fatherly way, and finding pleasure in the task.

‘But promise! I will kiss your foot if you will only promise!’ Bell spoke vehemently now.

‘That is not necessary. Indeed, not my foot on any account when you are about it. Your hand! No, they shall not hang Adam for a traitor. I promise you they shall not. Gad, I did not think that the dog had the spirit in him to make a girl like this so much in love with him!’

Bell was now on her feet and stood before my Lord Pelham, looking down and twisting her slender fingers.

‘I wish any one so pretty loved me half as much!’ said my Lord Justice, taking snuff. He was rather pleased with himself now that he had passed his word.

‘You are very like your nephew. The same figure of a man—only a little more mature!’ said the sly minx, looking with a certain admiration at the portly figure of the First Lord.

‘Ahem!’ ejaculated Mr. Pelham, brushing down his lace ruffles daintily, ‘Gad, it is true. That young rascal’s mother, my poor sister, always said so. Well, well, you shall have your lover, though I am not at all sure that he deserves you!’

Then he looked again at her under his shaggy brows.

‘But pray who may you be, young lady, who have thus captured and tamed so shy a bird as

Adam Home?’

‘I am called Bell MacLurg. My father is a laird in this county of Galloway. But I have no money of my own. So we shall be very poor unless’—she went close up to him and laid her hand on the sleeve of his coat, caressing it softly as if she had been accustomed to do it all her life— ‘unless you think there is any chance of Adam getting back some of his property. Do you think there is, Uncle?’

The stern features of the First Lord relaxed into something approaching geniality. ‘You would make a fool of me between you. I warrant Adam put you up to all this.’

‘Oh no, he did not,’ asserted Bell hurriedly; ‘he does not know I am here. He will be very angry. But I can soon make it up with him. Now, can he have his estates back—or some of them?’

She faltered a little, and showed symptoms of relapsing again into tears. My lord, alarmed and thinking of my Lord Galloway, approached her side.

‘Do not cry, like a good girl. And we shall see — we shall see. But,’ he hesitated, ‘the King had as good as promised them in reversion to me. And indeed I do not see what I am to get out of all this if I give back the estates.’

He took his fair petitioner by the soft, rounded chin and turned up her face. He saw two blue eyes looking into his through a mist of unshed tears.

‘I am an old fool, I know,’ he growled, ‘to let myself be cozened by a brat like you out of something like ten thousand a year.’

Bell clapped her hands joyously.

‘Can he have them then? Will you promise? If you do—I—I will give you a kiss. I never gave a man

a kiss before.'

'What, not Adam?'

'No, not Adam!'

She forgot to say that he had taken one or two.

'By Gad, it is tempting—I will! It makes a man young again! But it must be with all the forms. No dab on the nose for Harry Pelham!'

'Besides,' said Bell, casting down her eyes and hesitating.

'Besides what, you baggage?' cried my lord, looking admiringly at her.

Bell hesitated a moment, and then, warned by a noise on the street, said quickly, with a dangerous upward glance at the First Lord of the Treasury, 'besides, you will like having me for a niece. Even at Court it is permitted to kiss one's uncle!'

The door of Mistress Douglas's best parlour was suddenly opened. Without were my Lord Galloway, Lord-Lieutenant of the County, with Ensign Henry Pelham, of his Majesty's Fifth Dragoons, and between them, a prisoner, stood Adam Francis Charles Home, eighth Lord Kilpatrick.

This is what these three saw.

Henry Pelham, Lord Justice and Prime Minister of the Realm, was bending from the heights of an austere dignity to lay on the smiling lips of beauty a chaste salute—nay, as it seemed, to repeat one that had already been offered upon the same altar.

'Ha!' cried my Lord of Galloway; 'ha, Pelham, fairly landed this time, Pelham, my boy!'

'Uncle!' said Ensign Harry Pelham, aghast.

'Bell!' cried Adam Home, yet more aghast.

'Gad, Pelham, I must have a Garter at least for holding my tongue about this. It is too good to keep

from the coffee-houses! Horace will crack fifty jests on this!' laughed jovial Galloway.

'I did not know that the old fellow went in for this!' murmured his nephew who had been lectured about his behaviour at the last Assembly Ball.

Adam Home said nothing more, but kept his eyes on Bell, who stood with her hands clasped demurely about his uncle's arm, looking down and blushing becomingly, yet with a pretty air of proprietorship very clearly marked indeed.

'Ahem!' said Mr. Pelham, at last recovering himself, 'you mistake. You do not know this very remarkable young lady. Not even you, Adam, you rascal, can lay claim to knowing her. This is —what is your first name again, my dear?—This is my niece, the Lady Bell, eighth Viscountess Kilpatrick. And if any man of you has a word to say to it, or any quarrel with the innocent kinsmanly privilege of which you have been witness, damme, let him step out into Mistress Douglas's inn-yard, where Harry Pelham's sword is very much at his service!'

And the old gentleman stood patting the little hand of his companion, all the while frowning and browbeating his three interrupters, throwing out his chest and nodding with his head till his bushy eyebrows became as threatening as those of Majesty itself.

'And now, Adam, you dog, come here!' he cried; 'this is the young lady who saved not only your life but your lands. One was forfeit to the King's laws, the other to my breeches' pocket. I have given both into this young lady's hand. You must beg them from her. You do not deserve either. You have behaved abominably to the best of uncles, sir, and

to the most paternal of sovereigns. But we will say nothing more about that, if—ahem—if you gentlemen will give me your word of honour to say nothing about the—ah— little ceremony it was your good fortune to witness. Galloway will not, I warrant. I know a thing or two too many about him. Harry, by the Lord I'll break you if you peach. And as for you, Adam Home, you will have job enough on your hands to keep this young lady out of mischief!

'Mischief!' said Bell, innocently, lifting her eyes for the first time from the floor.

'Yes, madam, mischief!' frowned Mr. Pelham; 'I repeat it—mischief. Making a fool of men who ought to know better, men more than thrice your age! Adam, your rebelling days are over, my lad. Willy-nilly, you must join the Government. I hear that you are to be married on Thursday! Well all I can say is— God help you!'

'Adam!' said Bell, three days after, when all was over, 'What a blessing it was not your aunt I had to deal with in the inn-parlour at Cairn Edward! In that case you would have been hanged instead of wed!'

2. THE COUNT AND LITTLE GERTRUD:

A STORY OF THE SEVEN WEEKS' WAR

CHAPTER ONE THE DAISY-CHAIN

The Count St. Polten-Vassima was walking slowly along one of his forest paths. He was not in the least thinking where he was going. He had quite recently and unexpectedly come into both the title and the property, and he was, for the time being, staying in one of the smaller rooms of the great unfinished castle which his father had begun and his brother had continued. The new Count St. Polten was tall, dark, meditative—a soldier, yet nevertheless constitutionally inclined to a certain graceful melancholy. Even his recent dignities had not very obviously cheered him. It was now that still hour of the afternoon when Nature takes her summer siesta, and St. Polten walked along the woodland glade, sober as a funeral to look upon, but nevertheless happily and conscientiously sad within. It pleased him to observe the absence of elation in himself. As he sauntered, his mind far away, he did not observe that he had approached close to one of the cottages of his people—that of Alt Karl, his ancient Jagdmeister, whom many years ago his father had ordained to teach him all the mysteries of the hunt and the secrets of the wood, while yet he was but a wild younger son of the great house of the Counts of St. Polten.

‘Cuckoo! cuckoo!’ called suddenly a bird-voice

above his head. Something whirled lightly through the air and settled about his neck. The Count looked up quickly and caught just one glimpse of a girl's laughing face vanishing at the window above him. Then he looked down and found a daisy-chain caught round his neck and hanging about his shoulders.

The Count St. Polten-Vassima stood awhile in wonder, not ill pleased, only fingering the ring of flowers, and smiling quietly to himself. Presently there came along the forest path towards him a stern-faced erect old man, who carried himself with a curious mixture of forest freedom and soldierly precision.

It was Alt Karl, the tenant of the house under which the Count stood. He looked curiously at the daisy-chain, but said nothing. The Count noticed the question in the old man's eyes.

'No, Karl, I do not wear one of these chaplets as a rule,' he said; 'but the fact is, either an angel from heaven crowned me with flowers, or else.'

And he paused and looked up.

'It was my minx of a Trudchen!' cried Alt Karl, finishing his master's sentence; 'I saw her busy at the making of it. I cannot control her since her mother died. She will do nothing but play pranks or scour the hills with a gun, and boasts that she is as good a jager as there is in all the forest (which is a thing most true)—besides being as good a mountaineer as there is on the mountains, as if these were worthy ambitions for a young girl. But it is a good thing that she goes tomorrow to her aunt's school in Breslau; there of a surety she will learn something more befitting a modest maiden.'

‘I trust,’ said the Count pleasantly, ‘that you will convey to the young lady my sense of the great honour she has done me by bestowing upon me this flowery token of her favour.’

‘On the contrary,’ cried Alt Karl, ‘I shall bestow upon her a great scolding whenever I catch her, minx that she is!’

And so with a mutual salute of military exactness the Count and his old and privileged Jagdmeister parted, the nobleman to return to his vast and lonely barracks, Alt Karl to enter angrily the cottage with the roses crowding about the porch.

‘Gertrud!’ Alt Karl called sternly, stamping his foot a little. He had stopped to listen, standing just within the door of the quiet, dusky sitting-room.

No one answered to his call. He could hear the two clocks ticking loudly, one on the wall of the salon and the other over the mantel-piece in the kitchen.

‘Cuckoo!’ all suddenly cried a voice behind him.

Alt Karl could not restrain a violent start. The bird seemed so near him—at his very ear, in fact. He looked up just as the Count had done, and instantly he found himself bepelting from head to foot with a shower of roses, which a tall, bright-faced girl of thirteen or fourteen poured out of her apron upon his upturned face. She had been standing on tiptoe all the time upon a chair set behind the sitting-room door.

The tricky maid clapped her hands and laughed merrily.

‘A forfeit! a forfeit!’ she cried. ‘It is the fete day of the flowers. And the new Count owes me a forfeit also!’

'I would have you understand that it is not the custom—' began her father sternly.

'A forfeit or a kiss, father!' she cried; 'and if you scold me a single word I declare I shall ask the Count for a kiss too!'

And launching a random salute at her father, which alighted on the top of his nose, she danced out among the sunlit summer flowers as lightly and irresponsibly as a gossamer blown by the winds.

CHAPTER TWO THE CONVICT GANG

'Halt!'

It was Under-Officer Richter who spoke. And in war time this same stiff Alt Karl did not speak without reason. Never had the discipline of the Imperial White Coats showed better than now, when, defeated and decimated, the weary remnants of the great army of the double empire stood at bay just long enough to allow Feldzeugmeister von Benedek to rally and reorganise his scattered forces under the guns of Olmutz and Vienna.

'Halt! The enemy!' muttered Under-Officer Alt Karl.

'The brushwood is good enough for me,' said his colonel, the Count of St. Polten-Vassima. And with the alertness of a mountaineer he betook himself to cover till the enemy should develop his strength. It was the Count's duty to protect the hill-road which crosses the Austrian Alps to Verona, to mask the weakness of the fortresses of Moelk and Neustadt, to forward supplies from the Tyrol, and generally to retrieve an irretrievable misfortune with which he and his men had had nothing whatever to do. He had now but twenty-seven men to do all these things with. Also these twenty-seven were hungry men, for in the sullen retreat from the stricken field of Koniggratz there had been no time for more than a mouthful of 'wurst' out of the knapsack, and the hasty draught of water as they passed over a brook. The Count had commanded well nigh five hundred men when the big guns first spoke across the valley on the morning of the 3d of

July. Five hundred gallant fellows had lain among the wet corn, all night and arisen with hope in their hearts out of the crushed and muddy rye. Then first of all St. Polten's command had been flung out across the Prussian skirmish line, and the deadly fire of the needle-guns had wrought him sore havoc. After that the grape-shot from the orchards of Sadowa had left many of his brave Tyrolers dead among the silent water-mills of the village. His five hundred were barely three when Chlum was taken, and when with the Field-marshal at their head the Imperial White Coats dashed at the intrenched Prussian Guards of the army of the Crown Prince. There St. Polten left two out of his three hundred, on the bare slopes which were swept by the needle-gun of the North, even as the broad Danube is swept by the slantwise western rain.

And when the pursuit quickened, and the retreat bade fair to become a rout, was it not the Count St. Polten-Vassima who pushed his war-worn hundred across and across the line of advance, and with the scanty ammunition at his command dulled with desperate valour the edge of the victory-hunger of the 3d Prussian Army Corps? For though their guns were but few, the aim of the Tyrolers was deadly. So now, with belts tightened and grey set faces, St. Polten's men kept, as was their duty, the lonely hill-road to Verona with but twenty-five bayonets—and Under-Officer Alt Karl.

Already this remnant of the Imperial White Coats had been forty-eight hours without food or sleep, and even the hardest old chamois-poacher of the Inn valley owned himself done up.

From the dense covert of the brushwood the

Count, with Alt Karl at his elbow, watched the road beneath. Certainly a large party of some kind was marching southward. A jabber of hoarse voices rose through the still air. The Prussians must have risen betimes, thought the Count, to be here ere the dew was off the grass this morning in mid-July. Then a gun cracked. The sound came with a little jar upon the party in the brushwood. They were discovered, so each man of them thought, and automatically he counted the precious rounds of ammunition which remained to him. Then for a moment his heart went pitifully out to the lass away in the Tyrol village whose cheek, like so many others during the terrible seven weeks, would pale at the sight of the next list posted at the village Rathhaus.

But Under-Officer Alt Karl rose erect. 'Dumm-Kopf! Convicts! Assassins!' he exclaimed, with the contempt of a soldier for the bands of criminals from the southern penal settlements, whom the policy of weakening and withdrawing the military guards had encouraged to escape, and who now constituted at once a difficulty to the authorities and a danger to the inhabitants of the provinces.

A loose-marching rabblement of men, carrying guns and slung wallets of various patterns, hurried southward along the road beneath the Tyrolers. Leaders there were manifestly none, for the quarrelling and noise were past telling. The nostril of Under-Officer Richter curled.

'Shall we stop these swine-cattle?' he said; 'they are here for no good. Murderers, likely; thieves, certainly.'

The Count nodded.

'March!' said Alt Karl, hardly above his breath.

And the command strung stealthily down the hill, taking advantage of every scrap of cover, in order to reach the narrows of the pass before the head of the convict column should come up. Rollicking songs rose joyously from the rascals beneath, lilting along the hillside with an abandon which spoke not of war but of wine. The nose of Alt Karl mounted ever higher and higher.

‘Calf-heads! Stupid kerls! Worse than scoundrels!’ he muttered. ‘Would that I had them in the barrack-yard for three months.’

At last the twenty-seven were in position. Of this Alt Karl informed the Count with an upward movement of his head, somewhat like a duck giving thanks to a kind Providence. Then up rose St. Polten.

‘Stop!’ he cried loudly to the men beneath. ‘To what penal establishment do you belong; and where is the officer in charge?’

The convicts, in Austrian prison uniform, stood still with open mouths on the road beneath; but so astonished were they that no one answered. Only from far back in their straggling ranks a rifle cracked, and a twig spat close by the Count's ear.

‘Pigs of the city slums!’ muttered the Under-Officer under his breath. And he kept his eyes alert to catch the Count's every movement.

‘Shoot me that man who fired!’ cried the Count; ‘and those two at the head of the column—no more. We cannot afford to waste ammunition on rascals!’

Crack! Crack! Crack! rang out the three shots. The man with the smoking gun fell prone upon it. The leader of the advance leaped into the air and collapsed in a heap on the ground, while a third

man suddenly reeled and grasped his leg as though a wasp had stung him.

The twenty-seven White Coats rose from the brushwood.

‘Ready!’ cried Under-Officer Alt Karl.

The convicts from the settlements started to run, but the commanding voice of Under-Officer Karl suddenly brought them up all standing.

‘Halt! pigs, and eaters of pigs’ meat! Put down the guns, which are the property of the Kaiser-like Apostolic Majesty! Ground arms! Pile arms!’

The rascals beneath, held by the threatening muzzles of the guns of the twenty-seven veteran marksmen, reluctantly piled their arms in obedience to the threatening accents of the voice which spoke as having authority.

‘I was not ten years a guard of such scoundrels for nothing,’ said Alt Karl as he saluted stiffly.

The Count smiled. He had hunted and campaigned too long with Alt Karl to take any offence at his abrupt speeches and dictatorial ways.

‘And now,’ said Alt Karl, ‘what does your Excellency wish done with these escaped thieves? Shall we shoot them and be done?’

‘God forbid!’ cried the Count, who was more tender of heart, and had seen enough killing of late; ‘they may have those that love them. Even as you, Alt Karl, have the little Gertrud in the cottage by the pine-wood.’

‘Wolves and swine have not Trudas,’ muttered Alt Karl rebelliously. ‘They had been safer shot, for they are the very spawn of death and full of the treachery of the devil!’

‘Speak to them,’ said the Count wearily, ‘and

tell them that they are free to return to their homes. We have not force to hold them and do our duty also. The play is played. Let the supers go home.'

So Alt Karl erected himself once more to bid the ex-prisoners dismiss to their homes and settlements, and be grateful for the clemency of the commander. And right gladly the cowed rascals, who had doubtless had their fears of Karl's solution of the matter, bent their heads to the ground and scoured away to the south.

CHAPTER THREE THE BIRD OF HOPE

So day by day the Count of St. Polten-Vassima kept the road which leads to Verona, and day nor night none came near him. For all the peasant folk were fled, the barns were exhausted or plundered, and all the fields were desolate. It was not long before there came a day when the men wanted food. So the Count bade Under-Officer Richter, who was also Alt Karl and his own Jagdmeister, to serve five rounds of ammunition to each of the best five shots and let them go out to kill wood-pigeons, where a few corn-patches were not quite trampled down and the wheat began to be ruddy.

It happened as the five soldiers set out to leave the camp that the note of the cuckoo came through the trees, rough and stammering now with the lateness of the season. Then first one, then another, and at last half-a-dozen of the long, grey, ashen-breasted birds swooped noiselessly down, flying their short flights from tree to tree, and occasionally uttering the call which, though rough and raucous now, still carried the eternal freshness of spring along with it.

'Let us try if the 'kuckuck' is good eating,' cried Alt Karl. And one of the White Coats lifted his gun to fire at the bird as it flashed past. But the Count of St. Polten-Vassima sprang to his feet. His face had suddenly grown pale.

'Down with your guns!' he cried, in a voice that had more of the war rasp in it than even that of Alt Karl. 'If one of you so much as fires a shot at a cuckoo, I will give him the contents of my revolver!'

The men stopped, open-mouthed with wonderment. Alt Karl was so astonished that he forgot to put down the boot which he had been tying, and so held it for a long moment suspended in the air.

But the Colonel did not choose to give any explanation of his strange manifestation of temper, and the five White Coats saluted and betook themselves wonderingly to their several quests. Alt Karl also went about his business of gathering together a small cairn of stones for the camp kettle, and the cooking of the provision with which he expected the marksmen to return. But he collected first the stones and then the fuel mechanically, for in his heart he was busily conning reasons for the strange behaviour of his officer and master the Count.

For an hour St. Polten sat on the trunk of a fallen pine, deep in thought. Then raising his head he summoned Alt Karl to him.

'Karl,' he said, 'do you remember the illness that brought you to a shadow and the gates of the dead?'

'Remember!' said Alt Karl; 'do I forget it for a day, or your most noble kindness?'

'And do you remember how, one morning in the spring when the leaves were greening, I came to you in the little chalet under the hill?'

'Ah,' you said, 'it is over, Count Rudolph, all over; I shall never hear the 'kuckuck' again.' Then at that moment the little Trudchen came running in. 'Father,' she said, with a voice like sleigh-bells ringing over the snow, heard from the other side of a lake, 'father, I hear the 'kuckuck' calling.' So we two

that were men listened like little children for the voice of the bird—ay, as it had been for the sentence of the Angel of Life and Death. But we could not hear the sound. So in my arms I took you up and carried you out till I set you, all rolled in the blankets of the great bed-chair I had given you, blinking like a great white owl there in the sunshine of the morning. Then there came two cuckoos, courting the same mate to grant them her favours, and the gladsome cry of 'kuckuck' went round the forest.

'Now you know, father,' said your little Truda, 'that you will certainly get better. For today you have heard the 'kucktick,' and the spring is here.' And that is the reason why I would not permit the shooting of a cuckoo. No, Karl, nor ever shall while I am Rudolph, Graf St. Polten-Vassima and colonel even of a broken regiment.'

Alt Karl went and stood before his master. He bent his stiff grey head uncovered and took the Count's hand. He raised it to his lips and, as the manner of the Austrian Tyrolers is, he kissed devoutly the signet-ring upon it.

'Master,' he said, and the tears were not far from his eyes, 'master, God has given me a good pupil, in other things than the learning of the Jagd. Saving your great honour and high nobleness, I that am but a poor huntsman love you as a son for the gracious words spoken to Alt Karl this day.'

CHAPTER FOUR

A ROSEBUD OF TWENTY-ONE

The war of the Seven Weeks was over, and the twenty-seven Tyrolers disbanded till the regiment should be reorganised. The sudden quarrel of South and North had been as suddenly made up. The Count went back to his corner of the great house of St. Polten. His heart was yet more heavy within him, for the pride of his nation had been trampled upon by the strong rude feet of the invaders from the north—iron-cast Prussians, as he called them, bullocks from grey Pomerania.

But when the Count had taken one look at the gaunt unfinished mass of his chateau he turned away with genuine sadness, dragging at his moustache—for the third army corps of the enemy had come that way on its swoop for Vienna. Horses had been stalled in the billiard-room and field-guns stored in the chapel. In the dining-hall the surgeons had done their abhorred divine work. The garden was a mere waste, and a wild pig was rooting there among the untended flowers even as he looked. The panelled front door had been used as a target for the revolver bullets of the Northern officers.

So the Count of St. Polten turned away, he hardly knew whither. He was a lonely man, with no one in the world genuinely to love him, and it was much the same to him where he went. So at least he told himself. He would see his lawyers, his land-agent, his Jagdmeister, and then set out for Paris. This was his resolve as he strode away from St. Polten with a sense of solitude and desolation settling like lead about his heart.

His feet rather than his will carried him to a sunny south-looking glade, with a cottage that stood banked against the sheltering pine-wood. It was the chalet of Alt Karl, but how unlike the other chalets of the forest people! Roses over-clambered it, creepers dominated the walls and roof, a vine cast its snaky tendrils round the chimney, the gravel walk was of hard-packed sand, and carefully swept.

‘Cuckoo! cuckoo!’

It was the same bird's voice he had heard there years ago, but with a new elan, a fresh brightness in it. The Count paused a while in the leafy shadow of the porch, for it was pleasant there out of the heat. Suddenly there came a soft rustle as of wings or summer draperies, a patter down the stairs, a rush out of a door, and a clear voice exclaiming, ‘Why don't you answer, old curmudgeon of a father? Do you really think I cannot see you hiding there in the porch?’

Two arms were thrown impulsively about the Count's neck, and then turning he found himself closely face to face with the dismayed, terrified eyes of the fairest maid it had ever been his lot to see. The girl stood before him crimsoning from brow to bosom. Her hands had fallen from his shoulders to her sides, and had again been half-way lifted to her eyes as if to cover her face from the shame. She took her breath short, panting like a captured bird that fears mishandling. The Count St. Polten was equally surprised. His heart certainly jolted within him in a manner strange and unwonted. And when he awoke to himself he had his dirty campaigner's cap in his hand, and was bowing over the girl's hand as though she had been the Empress-Queen herself.

But suddenly, with a startled recognition of her tardy dutifulness, the girl knelt before him and set his hand to her lips, kissing the signet of the Count's ring as her father had done.

'The Count!' she murmured. 'I have been rude to the Count, my father's gracious lord!'

Rudolf St. Polten raised the maid, and for the first time in his life he resented the homage which was his unquestioned right as grand seigneur. 'And you?' he said, as if he had answered a previous question of hers as to his own identity.

'I am only little Gertrud Richter, daughter of your Jagdmeister Karl.'

'Not the little Truda whom I used to set on my knee and feed with sweetmeats and brown spiced biscuits! Not little Truda who called 'kuckuck,' and threw the flowers about my neck!' The Count looked at the bright young girl from head to foot as if his mind could not compass the greatness of the change.

'Even so,' she said, blushing yet again, for the sense of his greatness was fresh upon her. 'I have been for five years in Breslau at school, and have just come home to take care of my father.'

A swift sense of the happiness of Alt Karl broke in upon the lonely Count. His Jagdmeister had this to come home to when his day's work was done. For himself he had only the mildewed walls of the great barracks over yonder, defiled by the Prussians and wasted by the wild boar out of the wood.

Suddenly the maid clapped her hands together with a pretty gesture of despair.

'What have I done?' she cried. 'I am dumb and stupid with your so unexpected coming. I had well-

nigh forgotten to bring you in and offer you refreshment.'

And she led the way into a cool room, with green blinds set at an angle to keep out the sun's heat. In the corner of the room there was a bower of greenery—ferns and flowers, and a little jetted spray of water that tinkled and laughed in the midst. Behind were bright love-birds and Japanese sparrows, in a cage which nearly filled one entire end of the little salon. A piano was set thwartwise in the angle. Music was strewn here and there. A paper-covered book lay face down on the window seat, and a mighty wolfhound aroused himself from the fireplace to sniff the new-comer all over. Then with silent, reluctant approval the beast went back, and lay down with a sigh of regret that the intrusion needed no hostile intervention on his part. Pervading everything about the chalet there was the charming sense of feminine occupancy, that delicate refinement alien to man, which, is yet the more delightful to him on that account.

The Count sat down in wonder. Alt Karl's house as he remembered it in his boyhood, had been a bare, clean place in which a strong-handed, plain-favoured old peasant woman perpetually washed and baked and scolded. He could hear the ring of her voice still as she called a certain ragged, coltish, long-limbed lass away from the sweet sawdusty smells of the sawmill down by the St. Polten water, or sent her voice up the hill to bring the same unlicensed wanderer down out of the resinous silences of the pine-wood, where she had been all too happily playing bo-peep with the squirrels.

While he thus dreamed Truda stood by the window, her instinctive reverence for the Count of St. Polten—her father's master, whom she had watched and worshipped many a day as he strode past to the hunting—struggling with her training in the free scholastic commonwealth of the far-off Silesian city.

With quick intuition the girl caught the wonder in the face of the Count as he looked about him.

'It is my aunt,' she said timidly. 'She had been very kind—too kind. She wished to keep me with her in Breslau, but I could not leave my father for a longer time. So she gave me the piano and these other things to remind me of the school in Breslau which had been my home for five years.'

The Count felt a sudden and infinitely curious jealousy of the city. This maid was a flower of his own gloomy forest, a plant of the free pine-woods and the dashing highland brooks. What had she to do with pianos and school-mistresses and scholastic cities?

'Not that I am likely to forget sweet Silesia,' she said and sighed.

The Count felt his gloom return yet more fully upon him. He looked out of the window at the squirrels cracking the juicy young cones of the larches and biting the tops of the young trees. The plain-faced, strong-armed woman he used to see in the house of Alt Karl moved across the glade towards the door with a basket in her hand. It seemed not a day since he had seen her last. Her hair might be a little greyer, that was all. 'If you will not sit down,' said the Count at last, 'I must stand up also and then I must go.'

Obediently Gertrud sat down by the window and leaned against the sill the heavy coil of fair hair she had wound carelessly round her head, instead of allowing it, as was the local custom, to hang down her back. A spray of scarlet creeper fell over it as the wind blew softly in, and a tangle of swaying vine leaves cast flickering shadows upon its flat, dull, golden mass.

The Count thought of his journey to Paris with a sudden dismay and a sense that he was leaving something infinitely more desirable behind him. The Count was thirty-five, and to-day he felt twenty years older. The brief seven weeks' campaign had touched the dark hair above his temples with grey. His life also seemed all grey and wearisome, ever since the eagles of Austria had gone down at Konig-gratz before the carrion vultures of the North. The Count awoke from a kind of day-dream, to find himself calculating how old this girl might be who sat so innocently with him in the house of Alt Karl.

'Twenty-one and a rosebud?' ' he quoted, thinking aloud.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE SIEGE OF THE CHALET

But Gertrud did not seem to hear. She was looking at something across the open grassy space, with parted lips and eager wide-open eyes.

‘Look!’ she cried, manifestly troubled; ‘look! there are two or three men hiding yonder in the shadow. They are not folk of St. Polten nor of the neighbourhood.’

The Count rose quickly from his chair and came to her side. She pointed with her finger to the edge of the pine-wood. For a minute his less accustomed eyes could discern nothing—only the shadowed spaces of the glade interspersed with the staring sunlight and the blue wash of cool shadows.

‘Quick!’ she cried breathlessly. ‘I see another and another. They have guns and curiously marked dresses. They are crouching in the dusk behind the trees. Do you not see them just there behind the oleander?’

And now the Count St. Polten saw a man with a convict's jacket and a peaked forage cap set crosswise on his head, lying in the dark of the bushes, and behind him two or three others. Instinctively he felt for his revolver. He knew the rascals now. It was a section of the band of escaped criminals whose leaders he had killed, and from whom he had taken the guns on the way to Verona. He knew in a moment that they were seeking his life. But very calmly he picked up his own cap which he had let fall by his side.

‘I must bid you adieu, Mademoiselle,’ he said; ‘it is time that I went away.’ For as he said to

himself, it was no use bringing this young girl into a matter which concerned himself alone.

'I will go and find your father,' said the Count.

But the maiden never moved, watching eagerly from the open window. She put out one hand a little behind her as if to command his silence. Then very calmly she walked to the window, set her elbows on the sill, looked listlessly and carelessly up and down the green glade, and finally broke into a gay folksong, the notes of which rang jauntily across the silent spaces of the wood. She stretched her arms slightly and yawned, as if she were weary of the sleepiness of the heavy day and listless with the stirless air of noon.

Then quite slowly she drew herself back into the room, pulling the green sparrred wooden shutters after her and bolting them within.

'Run quickly,' she said to the Count; 'close the back door, bolt it, and also the little wicket window in the angle. I will attend to the front door.'

Whereupon she vanished, and the Count, smiling a little at taking his orders from little Gertrud Richter, hastened to do her bidding. He passed through the kitchen, where old Elizabeth stood speechless at the unwonted apparition of the noble Count St. Polten marching through her kitchen and banging and double-locking her back door. Then going quickly to the angle behind the staircase, St. Polten almost thrust his hand into the face of a dark-browed man who was staring keenly in through the wicket. But at the sight of the Count's revolver, then a comparatively rare weapon, and much feared in Austria and the Quadrilateral, the spy turned and fled.

'Now they are warned of our preparations,' said the Count, 'we shall have the storm presently.'

He went back through the kitchen into the little salon and there he found Gertrud. She had a dozen guns out of her father's presses ranged on the table, and several boxes of cartridges stood open beside them. The ancient Elizabeth, with a somewhat bewildered look, but with ready capable obedience, was charging the older muzzle-loaders which had been used for years at the chamois shooting—guns whose every trick and kick were known to the Count, who had cuddled them to his shoulder many a perilous ridge and remote deer-pass among the mountains.

'Count,' said little Truda as soon as he entered, 'if you will take the wicket in the angle, you will have under observation both the sides which are nearest the wood. I shall go to the gable window above, whence I shall be able to see anyone who may attack us across the grass.'

'But why trouble yourself at all?' the Count St. Polten began, a little proudly. 'I can account for any dozen of these dogs of the prisons.'

'Ah! But,' said little Truda wisely, 'they are too many for you. I have counted ten already, and such rascals as they would never fight fair but would shoot you in the back.'

And she almost pushed him to his position in the angle at which he had seen the face of the spy.

Then there occurred a strange, still pause before anything happened. The sunshine slept white-hot in the open spaces, not a twig moved in the wood. In the grass the cicadas shrilled like the sharpening of scythes in a far-off meadow. The

Count St. Polten- Vassima had all the high-born Austrian's contempt for the rascal sweepings of the gaols, but nevertheless he recognised his peril. Doubtless the band of desperate men would do their best to revenge the death of their leaders and the loss of their weapons.

While the Count was still meditating, 'crack' went little Truda's first shot in the room above. It was answered by the cry of a man in angry pain, and then came the soft trample of many rushing feet over greensward.

Crack! crack! The swift double report rang out again from the room where the schoolgirl of Breslau kept her vigil.

The Count was on the point of rushing up to succour his ally when she called down imperatively, 'Keep your place, Count! They will attack you next. I can keep them back on this side.'

And she spoke no more than the truth, for half a dozen muskets spoke from the woods, and then with a rush as many men sprang out of the covert of leaves and ran hard for the back porch of Alt Karl's chalet. If once they got safely within its shelter, it might have been difficult to reach them with bullets. Four of the men carried a long straight section of tree trunk, to be used as a battering-ram to force the door.

The Count's rifle cracked, and the nearer end of the tree dropped promptly to the ground. The man who had been carrying one side of the log gripped his hand to his thigh and roared aloud. The Count laid down one smoking weapon and lifted another. With this he took aim at the nearer of the two dark-faced men who, with muskets in their hands, were

by this time much closer to the porch than those who had to bear the burden of the tree. Again the Count's rifle was heard, and the men broke for the wood without waiting for more. The leaves closed about them, and there was a great and instant stillness.

As Count St. Polten-Vassima stood at his wicket he could hear Gertrud Richter in the room above, loading her artillery and laying each gun as it was ready in order on her little dressing-table. He himself hastened to do likewise. Then all suddenly a new turn was given to the situation, for Alt Karl strode out of the wood and across the wide green towards the front door. His daughter saw him first, for that was her chosen side of the house.

'Run,' she cried, 'run for the door, father! I will open it.' But Alt Karl was an Under-Officer of the Apostolic Kaiser, and it was not his habit to run till he saw cause. So he faced about and looked calmly all about him. A gun went off to the right and a waft of white smoke arose. Alt Karl took the fowling-piece from his shoulder and laid it to his ear ready for action. Then steadily, as if he had given himself the order to charge, he went at the double straight for the place from whence the bullet had come. But before he had gone a dozen yards a second shot was fired from the left. Alt Karl wavered, stumbled, and went over on his face with a swirl, his gun exploding as he fell.

By this time Truda had the front door open, and was on the point of rushing forth to succour her father. But Count St. Polten took her by the shoulder roughly and thrust her behind him.

'Stay where you are,' he commanded; 'he is too

heavy for you to carry.'

And he laid down his gun on the sparred rustic seat in the porch, and rushed across the lawn bareheaded. Bullets whistled about him as he ran. But in a moment he had reached the side of the fallen man. He stooped and raised Alt Karl in his arms. A crowd of men broke from the coverts on right and left, and with fierce howls of rage rushed towards the Count, who stumbled under his heavy burden.

Nevertheless he carried his Jagdmeister swiftly enough in his arms towards the open door. As he came he saw Gertrud kneeling upon one knee behind the trellis of the porch. Swiftly she fired one gun and then another till she had exhausted her battery. Then she stood up with her father's revolver in her hand, and as he approached the door with his unconscious burden on his shoulder, he could hear the sharp crack of the report, and simultaneously the spit and whistle of the bullets as they passed on either side of him, first over one shoulder and then over the other. So accurate was the young girl's aim that the charge of the convicts was retarded, though not wholly prevented. As Gertrud clanged the door and shot the bolts, two men flung themselves against it, and one fired his gun into the keyhole. But the solid oak and the good iron bolts stood the stress.

'To your wicket!' cried Truda; 'I shall go back to my window.'

She only reached her station in time to see the disappointed assailants running back to cover. But the lawn was fairly sprinkled with the wounded, some limping, some crawling, and a few more lying

deadly still. All was safe for a little, so having again loaded her rifles, Gertrud ran swiftly down to look after her father.

Alt Karl lay with his head supported on the Count's arm. His daughter cut away his coat deftly. The bullet had gone clean through his shoulder, between the joint of the right arm and the spring of the neck, but very near the surface—too near to have touched any vital part. It was the shock more than the wound which had felled Alt Karl. Presently he looked up.

'Trudchen,' he said, 'have they killed your father at last?'

But his daughter smilingly answered him, ' 'Tis but a little blood-letting and will do thee good, Father Karl. It is not for gallows thieves to make an end of such a soldier as thou art.'

So when they were somewhat reassured, and the bleeding stanchd, Alt Karl bade them to lay him along a couch by an open window and give him a gun or two, for it was natural that he also should desire to have his chance at the scoundrels.

But for a long time there came no sign of further attack. The peace of an utter quiet settled on the little chalet and its encompassing ring of sombre woodlands. In the long glades where the confederation of the flowers strove with the green pigmy armies of the grass which should be the greater, not a blade waved, not a petal nodded, so wonderful a silence brooded over all. The sun smote overbearingly down upon them, so that the humming of the bees and the shrill whistle of the cicadas almost ceased as the performers retired to take their siestas till the sun should creep a little

lower in the white-hot sky.

CHAPTER SIX WHO SHALL SAVE

'I like this not,' said Alt Karl; 'it goes not soundly right. I would rather see the scoundrels storming up to the doors of the house, yelling for our blood, than abide this uncanny quiet.'

The Count St. Polten had relapsed into his customary lassitude, save that his eyes sometimes rested with a peculiar expression of astonishment on the returned schoolgirl from Breslau. Gertrud, on the other hand, seemed wholly unconscious that she had done anything remarkable. The repulse of an organised band of convicts might have formed part of the ordinary curriculum of ladies' schools in Silesia, so calm and well accustomed, so demure and unconscious sat the little Truda at her window. But she listened eagerly enough to the talk of her elders.

'Doubtless they are waiting for the night, to steal upon us with the firebrand and the drench of petroleum,' said Alt Karl; 'that is the way we burn the villages from which the sharpshooters fire upon our line of march.'

'There is part of a cavalry regiment, Hussars of the Black Eagle, lying in St. Polten,' said the Count. 'If by any means we could get the news taken down there we might have succour within an hour. It is but three miles, and if there were a man of courage in the neighbourhood, he might run with the news.'

Alt Karl shook his head.

'It needs more than courage, and our men of sense are mostly lying between here and Koniggratz,' he said. 'Besides, the woodchoppers and peasants

will doubtless think that we of the chateau amuse ourselves with firing at the mark.'

Alt Karl held those low views of the intelligence of the countryfolk about St. Polten, which are the birthright of the true hillman of the Tyrol.

The Count lay back in his chair, deep in meditation. He drew out of his breast pocket a silver cigarette case. He was on the point of lighting one, when his eyes fell on Gertrud Richter.

'With your permission, Mademoiselle,' he said, bowing courteously.

The words brought a grim smile to the face of Alt Karl, a smile which ended in a little twitch of pain as his wounded shoulder nipped him.

'Tis just my little Truda home from school in Breslau, and no Mademoiselle at all,' he explained. For often in the Austrian Tyrol, with regard to the meaning of words, things are not what they seem.

The Count looked more than a little annoyed and glanced at Truda, but she had taken to her knitting, with the muskets ready on the table beside her all the time.

'Your permission, Fraulein Gertrud?' he said politely.

Gertrud smilingly nodded and said that indeed, with her father's habits, she was well enough accustomed to tobacco.

'To the grand pipe, not to the whiffing of straws,' said Alt Karl contemptuously, pointing to the array of noble bowls and six-foot stems on the wall.

So with the Count smoking and Gertrud making occasional reconnaissances to the upper windows, the still, breathless afternoon wore on into

the cooler stillness of the evening sunshine.

All the while little Gertrud was busily thinking. It was the Count and her father whose death the convicts aimed at. For herself, not knowing the hearts of the human wild beast, she had no fear. Indeed, had she known all, the worst would not have affrighted her so long as within the chambers of her father's revolver there slumbered an alternative.

From childhood Gertrud had dwelt in this place. For fifteen years she had tried every path, tested every hiding-place and descended into every hollow in all the jagged tangle of honeycombed limestone country about St. Polten. She remembered especially the long ravine cleft of St. Martin, which began so mysteriously just beyond the grassy slope of the glade. The little Trudchen thought deeply, and her thoughts were of what she and she alone could do.

Would it not be possible for her to run across the lawn, drop into the ravine and there lie hid while the convicts were searching for her? From thence she might be able to make her way down the bed of the stream to Martin's Loch, where, in rainy weather, the streamlet spouted through an archway of stone down the cliff side. She had clambered there many a time in search of frost-gentian and saffron dandelion, and had indeed descended half-way to St. Polten along the side of the cliff. It was true the foothold was exceedingly precarious, even in daylight, consisting of the merest projections of the limestone rock. But no one had ever attempted it in the twilight, still less at night, at which time alone she could now hope for success.

All this kept passing and re-passing in the

busy little brain while Gertrud proceeded with her knitting, or went her rounds above and below stairs.

'I wonder if they have really gone,' she said to herself, 'or if they are only lying in hiding. I shall try. I shall give the real 'Mademoiselle' a chance to distinguish herself.'

And she set the hunter's Tyrolese hat, in which she had been accustomed to roam the woods, upon the head of the dressmaker's wooden model, which, like a thrifty landward damsel, she used in the making of her attire. She set 'Mademoiselle' upon a chair with a cloak about her and pushed her to the window. There she swayed idiotically forward and leaned against the sill as if looking out. A jet of white smoke sprang promptly out of an oleander bush on the far side of the lawn. There followed the sharp report of a stolen needle-gun, and a bullet pitted itself in the thick beam above the window.

'Well done, Mademoiselle,' said Truda smiling.

And she withdrew the decoy back again into her bedchamber.

Thereupon Gertrud went down and explained her scheme for bringing relief, telling them what she had done with Mademoiselle. But the men, knowing what they knew, would not hear of her plan for a moment. If any one was to go for help it must be himself, that was St. Polten's solution. 'If we are to die, why die we must,' was that of Alt Karl.

But in her heart the girl refused to accept either. The Count certainly could not go, because he did not know the only practicable way to St. Polten, that through Martin's Loch. Her father might be ready and willing to die—but not so she, nor, if she judged aright, the Count either. So Truda looked

carefully to her revolver, which had been her father's during the war, and slipped it loosely into the pocket of her hunter's coat, ready to her hand. Then she put on the short mountaineer's kilt in which she had so often gone to the hunt with her father, and setting the man's Tyrolese hat firmly on her head she stood ready. After all it was only fifty steps or so across the grass, and fifty through the wood to the beginning of the cleft, and in the quick-coming dusk she would be there in a moment.

The dark comes swiftly enough among the wooded foothills of St. Polten. The sun was already set and the brown shades were cooling into blue with the rising of the night mist out of the hollow places.

Truda laid her plans rapidly. She arranged her half-dozen guns in a row and then discharged them one after the other, lifting them in turn to her shoulder and firing them into the belt of woodland through which she meant to run. The Count came anxiously upstairs to see if she had precipitated a general engagement. But all was still and quiet, not even the shaking of a branch betrayed the presence of the lurking foe.

The girl asked the Count to accompany her downstairs for a moment. There was something to be done with which he alone could help her. So they went below, and Gertrud very swiftly undid the fastenings of the back door of the chalet. Then standing on the doorstep she said, 'Now I mean to go down to St. Polten by Martin's Loch to bring up the cavalry. Shut the door swiftly after me!' And with that she was gone out of his sight before he could lay a hand on her, melting into the dusk like a

shadow.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CLEFT OF ST. MARTIN

The Count stood a moment where she had left him in speechless amazement. Then he took a hurried step or two in the direction of the wood, as though to follow and bring the madcap back, but the folly of this proceeding immediately forced itself on him. He could not hope to catch her. He knew nothing of the way by which she had gone. He would be leaving the chalet open and undefended, with no one but a wounded man within.

He bolted the door therefore and ran up to the higher window which had been Gertrud's embrasure. Cautiously he looked out and listened. The night was very still. Not a breath of air whispered among the pine trees.

'Cuckoo! cuckoo!'

The voice of the bird came clearly and cheerfully from the direction in which the girl had vanished. The Count took it for a good omen, and the prayer of his heart became a thanksgiving.

'That was little Trudchen's voice,' said Alt Karl, when the Count St. Polten re-entered the room where, in the darkness, the old man still kept his keen vigil, peering out of the open window across the narrow space which divided them from the woods.

Then the Count told Alt Karl all that his Gertrud had done. But the old soldier showed no sign of emotion.

'It is in the hands of God,' he said. 'Did she take the revolver?'

'It is at least gone from its place,' replied the Count.

'Then she may indeed die, as may we all,' said her father; 'but otherwise I am not greatly afraid for little Truda.'

Rarely had Gertrud's heart beat so wildly as when she dashed across the lawn into the thick blackness of the woods. Her hand was on her pistol, for she knew that she risked infinitely more than her own life upon the issue of her quest. She might, for instance, for all she knew, have run straight into the arms of the cruel and lurking foe. She might chance upon the very spot at which a score of them lay hidden. Nevertheless she sped swift-foot towards the wall of leaves, and in a moment she was stooping low to take the plunge.

Suddenly out of the darkness, a little way to the right, two men emerged and looked towards the chalet. Their eyes caught the flash of her figure darting past. Without a word they closed in upon her, compelling her to enter the woods a little more to the right than she had intended. So that instead of having thick woods all the way to the cleft's mouth, she had to cross an open space of twenty yards of flower-sprinkled grass.

When Gertrud emerged upon this little woodland cirque, where a thousand times as a child she had spread her cups and baked her mudpies in her girlish housewifery, she almost tripped over half a dozen men all lying on the grass. She swerved to the right in order to avoid them. One or two sprang after her with growls like wild beasts, and to avoid these new assailants Truda had to dodge between her first pursuers. She could hear them crashing after her in the wrong direction. So she bent her head till she was running almost double. Truda kept

along the side of Martin's cleft for a hundred yards before plunging into it, letting herself down by the branches of trees and bushes into its depths, and clinging perilously with her knees to every jutting crag and point of limestone rock.

Her pursuers came blundering after. She could hear them calling in prison slang the one to the other. But they searched in vain, for not one of them was a true mountain man or trained in the ways of the woods.

When Gertrud Richter reached the gravelly bottom of the cleft of St. Martin she found the rivulet wholly dried up by the long heats of summer. Here in a secure recess she waited full five minutes to let the heat of pursuit pass by overhead, and then in the stillness which ensued she cried twice 'Cuckoo!' It was the note of hope which had cheered the heart of the Count, hearing- it from the window of the beleaguered chalet.

Very swiftly the girl made her way along the cleft, which, as in the manner of such places in limestone districts, now opened out into a ravine with precipitous sides, now contracted into a passage little wider than a tunnel, and anon debouched quite unexpectedly upon the bare side of a precipitous cliff.

But not unexpectedly to Gertrud Richter. Many a time had she clambered down to the steep breakneck path, which led almost to the roofs of St. Polten. There it was at last. Through the narrow, half overgrown opening of St. Martin's Loch Truda could see the lights of St. Polten glimmering beneath her. She even heard the band playing—that of the regiment which she was risking her life to summon.

It seemed as if she could almost cry down to them, they were so near. She could see the bright lights of the cafe, and the officers sitting in front of it at the little round tables, smoking with crossed legs and no doubt talking infinite scandal.

But there was a hard climb yet to come—and what made it much more difficult, she had to climb down, not upwards.

But little Gertrud grasped the edge of the rocky sill of St. Martin's Loch and let herself drop with confidence over the bare scarp of the cleft. Her feet did not quite reach the next ledge, so she let go, with a catch in her throat lest in the years since last she had been there, the foothold beneath her might have been knocked away either by the weather or by some random mountaineer.

No, it was still there. Her feet gripped the broad firm edge, and she tiptoed out upon it to feel for the rowan tree which used to grow from a cleft to the right. It was gone, and Truda's heart for the first time fluttered wildly. It would be terrible should she be fixed all night on this bare limestone ledge, like a beetle pinned to a wall, while the fiends above were making an end of the one most dear to her on earth—that is, of her father.

But Truda did not hesitate more than a moment. She remembered that the ledge immediately beneath her was very broad, and that the rock sloped a little towards it. So without a moment's hesitation she swung herself over, and stretching to the full extent of her arms, she let go. She slid downward bodily, snatching at every smallest prominence which would break her fall, and in doing so bruising herself most cruelly upon

the rocks. But what of that, thought Truda, when once she stood safely upon the ledge, and the worst was over? She called to mind that a goat's track led down a tail of debris to the back of the Rathhaus of St. Polten. So in a moment she was digging her heels into the sliding banks of shale, and descending recklessly towards the lights of the town.

In five minutes more Gertrud Richter, dishevelled and bleeding from a dozen scratches on her hands and arms, was telling her tale to the Colonel of the Hussars of the Black Eagle.

'The Count of St. Polten besieged by formats—impossible!' said he, looking at the wares of a seller of matches and automatically selecting the one with the prettiest picture.

Nevertheless, in spite of the impossibility, the bugles sounded, the saddles filled, and the hoofs clattered merrily up the road towards the chateau of St. Polten.

The path led uphill all the way, but the men set themselves light-heartedly to their task. And first of them all, with the Colonel a little way behind her, rode the Breslau schoolgirl upon a cavalry saddle.

And as they went they came in sight of that which made them spur yet faster and more fiercely—the flames of a burning house mounting redly to the skies. The heart of the maid throbbed violently. Was the deed which she had done to be all in vain? Were the rescuers after all to arrive too late?

Not till the white coats of the cavalry had surmounted the last rise could the men see the source of the flames. But they heard the rattling of small arms, the crackling of timbers, and the hoarse shouting of many men.

The tall columns of soaring fire made an awful flickering twilight among the gloomy forest glades. Presently, with anxious hearts, the Hussars of the Black Eagle topped the brae, and there before them was the great house of St. Polten, which so long had stood unfinished, flaming to the skies, and the convicts running every way with torches and blazing pine-faggots, like ants in a disturbed hillock of dry fir needles.

But the chalet of Alt Karl was still dark and untouched.

A pile of faggots had indeed been laid down in the porch under Truda's roses, and was just beginning to flame up. The rattle of musketry rang about the house in a circle of fiery flashes. For it was evident that the convicts had found more arms and ammunition in the burning chateau.

A solitary gun replied fitfully from the windows of the chalet.

So busy were the besiegers that the cavalry were actually among them with the sword before they were aware. And then with what wild yells of terror the wretched men fled for the shelter of the woods, the horsemen riding them down mercilessly, so that but few escaped. For the marvellous light of the burning palace shone every way, even into the densest thickets. And all that night the pursuers rode hither and thither, striking and killing along the woodland ways as far as the spring of St. Martin's cliff.

Thus ended the leaguer of St. Polten. For several days the soldiers hunted high and low, until the whole band of the escaped convicts had in divers fashions been accounted for.

Within the chalet there had been desperate work. Late in the engagement the Count had been wounded on the brow by a chance bullet; it was a flesh wound and he made little of it for his own sake. But fierce anger at the indignity came upon him, and not for all the entreaties of Alt Karl would he for a moment resign his place at the windows. So that at last the Jagdmeister, tied to his couch, had to content himself with preparing the guns for his master to fire.

This he did with an ever darker and more silent fury as the night went on, and the light of the burning chateau made his enemies plain in its fierce glare.

The Count as he fired winged every bullet with a silent curse.

'This for her who gave herself for our sakes,' he said below his breath.

And at each discharge an enemy dropped, out there in the green flamelit fairway of the glade.

Presently there came to the ears, through the rattle of the musketry and the shouts of the incendiaries, the unmistakable cavalry cheer of the Austrian horse, and the clatter of disciplined steeds, then last of all the heady elation of the charge. But one there was that rode straight up to the door of the chalet and dismounted swiftly, minding neither friend nor foe.

The Count St. Polten-Vassima ran to open the door.

It was only the little Truda who stood there, clear and fair in the great light which shone from his burning castle. She looked down at her short kirtle, and the girl who had ridden the cavalry charger at

the head of the detachment stood blushing and ashamed before him whom she had risked life and honour to save.

'I brought them as soon as I could,' she said weakly, and then began to cry as if her heart were broken.

But the Count of St. Polten-Vassima clasped the daughter of his Jagdmeister in his arms without a word.

It was a fortnight later, and the Count had returned from Vienna. Ostensibly he had gone to have the plans prepared for the new house, which he was to build by the heights near Martin's Loch, upon the plateau whence one can look down upon the red roofs of St. Polten.

Yet as fast as his feet would carry him he hastened to the cottage, which had resumed its perennial quiet after the terrors of the siege to which it had been exposed. As the Count came near he heard the ripple of a piano in the little salon. Little Gertrud was singing a love song, quaint and old, and the sound of her voice brought back again the lonely feeling into the heart of the Count.

Gertrud came sedately to the door and asked him to enter, and would have gone forthwith to find her father. But he took her hand and kept it, as he looked away over to the crest of the hill, where his new chateau was to stand.

'Truda,' he said, 'I have come all the way from Vienna to ask if a girl, beautiful and young, can love a glum useless fellow like me.'

Gertrud's eyes were on the ground, and for a moment she did not answer, but her hand shook in his.

'You must marry a great lady,' she began at last, her voice quavering.

'A Count St. Polten-Vassima can wed where he chooses. The Emperor himself has said it.'

'But,' faltered Truda, compelling her rebellious heart to be still, 'there are ladies, beautiful and clever, in Vienna, in Paris, in all the cities where you will go.'

The Count laughed a little, and pointed up to the frees which nodded over the defile, at the bottom of which lay the perilous pass through which she had passed so lately.

'Beautiful ladies—clever ladies—without doubt many, little one. But which of these beautiful ladies would have risked Martin's Loch at blackest night for me? And which would have thrown herself down, bruising her fair hands on the white cliffs of St. Polten, all to save my worthless life?'

'But it was for my father,' whispered Truda, glancing at him just once, with a spark of the ancient mischief quick in her eye.

3. LOVE AMONG THE BEECH LEAVES

'Elizabeth Macandrew! Saw ye ever the make o' that lassie? I declare, there she is at the barn-end wi' the laddies again! I'll fetch her in by oot o' that.' Thus hopefully from the kitchen door, to whomsoever it might concern, Mistress Robin MacAndrew, the goodwife of Pitlarg.

A fine sunny afternoon in the heart of summer it was at Pitlarg. The hens were scraping in the hot roadway and scattering dustbaths over their backs, clucking low to themselves for very content in the holes in the hedges. Pitlarg dreamed a dream, and, as it were, turned over in its deep sleep. Nothing stirred about it anywhere—except Donald, that ancient black pet lamb, now grown into a great sheep; and even he only moved restlessly about the farmyard, and thrust his nose into every pail and bucket in quest of something to eat. It was never too hot or too cold for Donald to want to eat. He had been out with the cows, it was true; but there are limits to the society of cows, for one so enterprising as Donald.

'Elizabeth MacAndrew!' cried the goodwife again from the kitchen door. Now, Elizabeth is not an easy name to cry aloud, which is a reason why dogs and horses are not called Elizabeth. So that the herald at the kitchen door had to do her best with MacAndrew.

But name and surname thus cried aloud in the farmyard both returned, void as an echo to the herald in the white baking apron. Only a sleepy hen

rooped lazily in a hole under the hedge, and a bantam cock exerted himself just enough to crow derisively.

'Betsy MacAndrew—my certie, gin I come to ye, ye hempie!'

The words lengthened themselves out, still without effect. Donald, the pet sheep, came lumbering awkwardly to his mistress, and stuck his cold moist nose into her hand. It was certainly a strange time for her to feed him, he thought; but Donald was not the sheep to miss a chance. One never knows. On this occasion, however, he had assuredly drawn a blank.

'Gae 'way, beast!' said Mistress MacAndrew, shaking her baking apron at him with one hand, whilst she shaded her eyes with the other from the sun and looked along the road. There was a changing group at the end of the barn, on that smooth open space called the Playing Green, before every Galloway farmhouse, on which many generations of children have played and maidens danced,

'It's thae Beattie lads an' Rab Christie, the new loon, playin' at the bools—an' that daft lassie, Elizabeth, encouragin' them an' playin' wi' them, nae less.'

Mistress MacAndrew ran in suddenly, struck with a wild fear that her last girdleful of crumpy farles of cake had overbalanced and fallen into the grate.

Being satisfied on this point (by finding that it was only a hen which had passed her outer guard, and was stalking about the kitchen making a high-pitched and wearisome plaint in a minor key), she

shooed the fowl out. It hastened away in a foolish fluster, and continued to make remarks on the subject all across the yard with hurrying footsteps and drooping rufflings of wing.

Then, with an access of determination in her eye, Mistress MacAndrew took a hasty survey of her kitchen and of the cake drying in the fireplace. It seemed to her that no accident could happen for five minutes. So she went to the door.

She would try once more.

'Bess!' she cried. But neither is Bess a good name to carry, specially to those who do not want to hear, on a slumberous afternoon when the sun and the sleepy air drown the voice.

The monosyllabic adjunction only sounded like a goose trying to bark. Mistress MacAndrew took the life of her precious cake in her hands and walked towards the scattering and changing group at the loaning head.

'I'll fetch that lassie in a hurry, I'll wager ye!' she said.

She was a woman of some firmness of character, but her husband's brother's daughter was almost too much for her. Niece is a vain word in Galloway.

'James MacAndrew's lassie,' was what, in hours of ease, Elizabeth was called—with an accent on her parent's name which intimated that James had not been a success in life. At other times, and they were the more numerous, she was addressed with simplicity, as 'Bess, ye hempie!'

Mistress MacAndrew had the dramatic sense. She drew near to the absorbed group along the covered way of the orchard wall, that she might take

them red-handed in the midst of their iniquity. Presently she stood in the shade looking upon their play almost from striking distance. There was a supple willow wand in her hand. Nemesis hovered imminent—in a baking apron.

They were four who were playing that game of marbles which is known in the simple dialect of the place as Ringie. Four marbles or 'bools' lay in the ring, at the four cardinal points of the circle. The 'playing bools' or taws of three urchins lay at varying distances from the ring, each watched over by its owner; while a slim, long-limbed girl of fifteen knelt on one knee and shot, with swift and accurate jerk of the thumb and forefinger, her tau towards the ring. She knocked one off, pocketed it and tried again. The second time she missed, and it was Wull Beattie's turn. His marble did not reach the ring, but lay immediately outside.

The next boy, Jock Beattie the name of him, played with equal lack of success. The girl regarded him with an air of contempt, and scratched the dust with her bare toe—an unseemly thing in a great lass of fifteen. There was now but one other to play, and he seemed uncertain. He was the tallest of the three, but he seemed to walk in a maze. The sight of him awakened the worst passions in the breast of the white-aproned watcher by the barn-end. He was the 'new loon' of the farm, hired for summer work, and set to cut thistles at a penny an hour. Yet here he was playing at 'the bools' with the Beatties and Elizabeth MacAndrew! The willow wand twitched and turned in the hand—not, as in the case of the spring finder, to indicate the proximity of water, but rather that of fire. The fire was glowing in the breast

of the mistress of the 'new loon,' and was soon to be transferred to various convenient outliers of his person.

But the 'new loon,' whose turn it was to play, did unexpectedly well. The Beatties, indeed, laughed at him for his way of holding his 'bool,' and Bess gave him a little shove behind with her foot at the moment of playing. Nevertheless, his marble performed the notable feat of 'skinning the ring.' It knocked off all the three marbles that lay round. The two Beatties yelled with disgust.

But Bess MacAndrew was more practical. Also she was an entirely shameless young woman. She bent down suddenly, scooped up the three marbles that had been on the ring, the new loon's playing taw, and that which of rights belonged to the elder of the Beatties, and fled fleetfoot for the kitchen door with flutter of high-kilted skirt.

The Beatties gave instant chase, though they might quite as well have hunted the summer wind. Only the new loon stood still, wondering in his slow way what had happened. He had no satisfaction on that point, but he found out very soon what was going to happen. For it was just then that his mistress made her appearance. She had missed the psychological moment, owing to the crisis which the unexpected act of Bess MacAndrew had precipitated; but at the instant when the kitchen door clashed to and the lock clicked in the inside, the willow wand fell on the dusty jacket of the new loon, and his mistress began to explain his duties to him.

It was a somewhat distracting lecture for the loon; for in the background the Beatties were flinging themselves on the kitchen door with baffled

howlings, and in the intervals of carpet-beating upon his jacket the mistress of Pitlarg was telling him where he would go to. The new loon said he did not care: anything for a change; and, indeed, a worse time for a lecture on moral philosophy could hardly be conceived.

When it was over the new loon went back in a dazed condition to the pasture field, where, with a hook freshly sharpened at the grindstone, he had been set at dinner-time to cut thistles. He had only come to Pitlarg that day; and when Bess MacAndrew summoned him to come and play marbles with the Beatties he had been of opinion that this was part of his daily duties. The willow wand induced him to think otherwise.

Then, justice being so far satisfied, Mistress MacAndrew turned her attention to the Beatties, who were still trying to get in at the kitchen door. They had not seen what happened to the new loon; so that when the wrathful voice of the mistress of the farm arose suddenly behind them, and the first sharp touches of the willow wand fell upon their appointed place, it is little wonder that they turned and fled, leaving their bags in the hands of the enemy. Miss Elizabeth MacAndrew stood at the kitchen window and made faces at them as they ran. She held up the captured marbles in her hand, threw them in the air and caught them as they fell. The thoughts of the Beatties were prayers—taken from the Psalms.

But the new loon only rubbed himself and thought what a strange place Pitlarg was. He had come from the heathery hillside above the laird's plantations, where his father had been a

gamekeeper, and Pitlarg was his first place. His mother was now a widow, and he had come away from home in order to help to keep her. He was seventeen, though he did not look so much.

Bess MacAndrew listened with due deference to her aunt's hortatory lecture. She put on her shoes and stockings. Then she went and set all the marbles in a row under the glass case of the clock in the 'room,' where the new loon could see them, but where, owing to his subordinate position, he would have no right to go. Bess meant to make it interesting for the new loon.

His name was Robert Christie, and he had grown six inches during the year, but his clothes had not accompanied him. His joints looked like knots on beech branches, and his long neck gave him the look of a jack heron that has just alighted. He had a Globe Shakespeare in his pocket, Macaulay's History in his box upstairs, a Milton, and three volumes of the cheap edition of Carlyle (blessed treasure of Providence for boys in their teens during the sixties and seventies!) and, besides these, a Bible which his mother had given him. He had also a change of everything. So he promised his mother to read his Bible. And Rab Christie was a boy of his word, even when he only passed it to himself: much more when he passed it to his mother.

But the terms of his engagement were unfortunate. In the meantime he was just at Pitlarg on trial, and the master was from home for the day. He was to cut thistles at a penny an hour, and after a week's experience at his work William MacAndrew would tell the new loon whether he wished him to

remain. He had thus come in between terms, owing to Pate Tamson, the late Pitlarg boy, running away to join the play-actors, with whom he learned to swing naphtha lamps and sleep on a sack, instead of playing Hamlet as he had expected. So Robert Christie had his comfortable bed in the stable loft and reigned in his stead.

But for all that it was not yet decided whether the new loon was to stop about the place.

William Mac Andrew, decent man, came home from the town over in the afternoon, and took a walk round the fields (he called it 'a dawner') to see how things were going. He looked over the croft dyke to observe how the new loon was conquering the thistles at a penny an hour—and good money. The new loon was reading Measure for Measure at a penny an hour, prone on his face, with his ragged straw hat over his eyes and his feet from the knees flailing in the air to warn off the flies.

In a moment the scene changed to 'The Tempest,' and that without warning. William MacAndrew was a decent man and quiet, but this was too much for him.

'Aye, my man,' he said, 'an' what's this o't ye are at? Is this cuttin' my thistles, ye lazy whalp? D'ye ken what comes o' cheatry? D'ye ken whaur cheats gang to?'

'My mither says they gang to be drovers an' packmen, an' mak' sillar like slate stanes!' said the new loon. 'But if ye please, Pitlarg, I'm no a cheat, though I was readin' my buik for a meenit. See, I hae my faither's watch, an' I was readin' juist five meenits by it. Then I wad gang screevin' ower the field and cut doon the thistles like mawin' meadow

hay. Yince roond and come back for five meenits mair. Ye see, sir, I mak' up for't, an' it's juist like takkin' a drink!'

Pitlarg smiled grimly.

'An' what micht it be that ye are readin', my man?' he asked.

'It's Shakespeare, sir,' said the new loon with shamefacedness. Pitlarg was an elder, and there was no saying what he might think of Shakespeare.

'Ay,' said Pitlarg, 'I was jaloosin' that it wadna be your Bible. But ye micht read waur. Let us see.

The new loon handed him the book.

'It's ower sma' prent for me!' said Pitlarg, 'but I think you and me will fettle fine yet. Only till we 'gree about a price, I am thinking that we'll work by the piece an' no by the hour. I'll pay ye a penny a rig for the thistles, and then ye can read Shakespeare in your ain time.'

It was a bad, backward year, and Pitlarg was a little anxious about his rent; but he was a hardworking and honest man, and trusted in Providence.

For many years he had been harassed by the game of the neighbouring landlords 'eating off' him; especially the rabbits and hares from the carefully preserved coverts on two sides of his farm, in which a brace of landlords bred game by the hundred to feed upon his crofts.

It so happened that Pitlarg's farm lay by itself, apart from the estate of his own laird, and was surrounded by the lands of gentlemen sportsmen, whose grouse fed freely on his stooks, and whose rabbits and hares wasted his turnips.

But it was the year of the 'ground game,' and

there was a better prospect for the future. Only the two next rent days were hard fences for the farmers of Pitfour to take.

'The Lord will provide a deliverer,' said Pitlarg, with genuine piety.

And He did—the new loon.

When Rab Christie came in that night he had done a good day's work on the new terms of working by the piece. He was satisfied with himself, and some sonorous lines from Shakespeare were sounding in his head.

He took his porridge quietly at the kitchen table and looked about him. The mistress was bustling about, clattering dishes. Pitlarg was lying with his boots off on the sofa in the 'room,' reading the 'wee paper'—lamb sales were his first subjects, then the synopsis of the Rabbits and Hares Bill.

Miss Elizabeth MacAndrew sat demurely at her uncle's side near the window. She was working a sampler. The new loon looked at her. She had shoes on now, also stockings, and her long legs were crooked up under her chair out of sight. She caught him looking, and put out her tongue at him. Then she pointed out the marbles under the clock-case to him, counting upon her fingers—one, two, three, four, and her thumb for his own stolen 'taw,' which was a fine sphere of alabaster.

But the new loon did not even look annoyed. He rose calmly and walked into the sacred 'room,' where no farm loon had ever been before, except at worship. Bess watched him with stupefaction. Mistress MacAndrew stopped as suddenly as if a hen had flown in her face, and even Pitlarg himself put down his paper and his jaw dropped with

wonder.

Rab Christie calmly lifted the glass shade off the clock, took out the marbles, counted them leisurely, and put them in his pocket. Then he walked back to the kitchen table, and set about finishing his porridge. It was some time before the three in the room recovered themselves. The mistress came first to her senses. She had followed the audacious loon to the room door.

'Hoo daur ye,' she said, 'to meddle wi' my clock, an' to come ben to my room without biddin'?'

'They were my bools,' said Rab calmly, taking bite and sup time about.

Bess thought she had never admired any one so much—not even the man at the fair that rode three horses at a time, whose shining example had drawn off Rab's predecessor.

'Your bools!' said Mistress MacAndrew, gasping; 'an' hoo cam' your bools under my crystal clock case, that hasna been lifted or dusted for twenty year?'

'That,' answered the new loon indifferently, 'I dinna ken, but they war my bools.'

'Losh preserve us! that fair coves Co'en!' said Mistress MacAndrew, holding up her hands.

But Pitlarg only laughed, and took up his paper. 'It's Shakespeare that does it. He's gotten it on him, guidwife! Ye canna help it!'

'Eh—what? what has he gotten—whatna a trouble did ye say the laddie had on him? Is't smittable, think ye. He'll no bide about Pitlarg gin it be. Let me see, laddie.'

And the cautious goodwife of Pitlarg, who feared not the face of man, but stood in deadly

terror of 'onything smittable,' examined Rab Christie's brow and the back of his ears for spots, and his hair for possibilities.

'Na,' she said, 'he's clean and weel-keepit, at ony rate. I see nae sign o' trouble about the boy. What said ye he had gotten, guidman?'

'Hoot, nocht ava, mistress; I juist said that he had gotten a Shakespeare,' said Pitlarg over his paper.

'A what, William—I wush ye wad speak plain Scots, an' nane o' yer langnebbit yins. What's Shakespeare?—Is't a swallin' or a 'luppen shinnin'?' I've heard o' folks haein' an income in their knee, an' a brither o' my auntie's had a white swell-in', but never in a' my days did I hear o' ony body haein' a Shakespeare—guidelife, no!'

'Hoot na, woman: d'ye no ken?' said Pitlarg—who had kept perfectly serious, for he loved to hear the wife talk: 'Shakespeare's juist a book.'

'A book!—guidman, ye are no richt in the mind! What harm could a book do him to gar him come clamperin' in howking bools oot o' my clock case? Guidman, ye are gettin' to hae less an' less sense in yer auld age.'

'Aweel, aweel!' said Pitlarg good-naturedly,

'it's no lost what a freend gets. Ye're gettin' a' the sense that is about Pitlarg, and to them that hae shall be given, ye ken.'

'Lord save us, guidman! did ye ever see sic a boy?' said the mistress of Pitlarg that night, when the new loon had gone off to the stable loft, and Elizabeth MacAndrew was in bed but not asleep in her own room; 'd'ye think that we'll be able to keep him?'

The goodman, who was sitting having his last smoke before bedding, lifted a glowing peat from the hearth, and fitted the end of it into his pipe, holding that grimy cutty sideways, so that he might be able to survey the operation with a wary eye. Not till his pipe was drawing well did he answer his wife. He was a cautious man, Pitlarg. The operation when thus performed gives time for consideration. Several promising reputations for wisdom have been built up on it.

'He may do no that ill, gin there's somebody to owerlook his wark.'

'Deed, then, guidman, Pitlarg is the very bit for him. Ye were a graund ower-looker a' the days o' ye. There's few in this countryside can keep steeks wi' you at a day's gafferin!'

Which was Mrs. MacAndrew's way of saying that her husband did not love hard work. Perhaps that might be the reason that there was an anxiety about the rent.

William MacAndrew did not enter into the subject. Instead he put a new coal in his pipe.

'He's a guid boy to his mither, an' the herd says that he sees him at his prayers nicht an' mornin',' he said at last.

Pitlarg wanted the boy to stay, so that he touched his wife's preferences on their weak side, as he well knew how.

Next morning when the goodwife of Pitlarg came into the kitchen, the new loon came in, and threw a pair of fat rabbits down on a chair.

'Whar gat ye thae?' said Mrs. MacAndrew.

'In the kailyaird,' said Rab Christie.

'Deed, aye, they hae been sair on the plants,

the vermin; and they'll mak' a graund denner; but how did ye get them?'

'I made a gin o' a steeker,' said the youth, simply enough, but using highly technical language.

He meant that he had constructed a snare of an old bootlace, and that he had so fixed it with a little fall beneath that the rabbits had committed *felo de se*.

'I canna bear skinnin' rabbits,' said Mistress MacAndrew. 'I wonder wha'll do it for me.'

'Skin the rabbits—that nocht ava,' returned the loon, to whom the matter was as simple as peeling a potato. In ten minutes the rabbits were clean and ready for the pot.

When Bess reached home from school, next day she came into the yard swinging her green bag of books. There were three great beeches standing in the old courtyard, making a dream of rustling leaves, and sprinkling a pleasant shade over the great iron bar to which the horses were yoked when the mill was to be set agoing. As she passed under the trees something fell at her feet, narrowly missing her head. Bess MacAndrew sprang her own length aside, with a shrill cry. There was something moving among the leaves, and that which had fallen at her feet was a book.

From overhead came the voice of the new loon.

'Lassie fetch me up that book. It'll save me comin' doom'

'I daresay,' said Bess. 'Come doon and get the book. It'll save me comin' up.'

'Verra weel,' said crafty Rab, 'I can do without it; but it's juist graund up here!'

'What are ye doin' there?' continued Bess,

standing on tiptoe and peering up. She could see nothing, however, except a pair of legs waving in the air. It was certainly very mysterious and attractive.

'I can see Criffel an' the three Cairnsmores, an' the dominie at the schule, an' a' the boys playin' 'Steal the Bonnets!' Oh, it's grund!'

'I wish I could see!' said Bess MacAndrew wistfully.

'There's made a bonny seat up here where ye can sit and swing, and the wind rocks ye, an' the leaves birl about ye and tell ye stories, an' ye can sit an' read—splendid stories—ghosts and murders and fairies an'...'

'I'm comin' up,' said Bess.

'Wi, than!' said the invisible in the tree; 'fetch the book wi ye!'

Soon Rab and Bess were seated side by side far up in the great beech tree. Rab had fixed a slate in a curious but perfectly safe position between two thick branches; and, with her back to the main trunk and her feet on a bough, Bess MacAndrew stated it as a fact that she would not call the Queen her grandmother.

The loon swung beside her in a manner apparently far more perilous, but so accustomed was he to arboreal life that he often went to sleep hooked on to three branches like a great grey homespun squirrel. Perhaps it was heredity that did it. Or more likely adaptation to the habits of Mistress MacAndrew.

'Now read me about the murders and the ghosts!' commanded Bess.

The new loon had never heard of Mr. Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare,' but Bess considered that

nothing could beat Rab Christie's. Indeed, the manner in which he illustrated his points with quotations and dramatic utterances sometimes threatened his equilibrium. For instance, on the occasion when as Lady Macbeth he endeavoured at once to wash his hands, to balance himself on the top of a tree, and to keep the leaf of the Globe Shakespeare from flapping over in the wind, it became necessary for Bess to catch him by the hair and bring him to his poise again with a tug of great dexterity. Indeed, after this she considered it her duty to keep a hand twisted permanently in the crisp curls at the back of his head.

Rab did not mind at all, except when he wanted to emphasise a striking point in a dramatic way. This somewhat shortened his dramatic tether. Think of Mr. Irving being so controlled! But Bess would not let go, however interested she might be. She looked upon it as a duty.

William MacAndrew, on his evening tour of inspection, turned into the yard a little while after this. He most certainly heard voices in the earth or in the air, but he had not the least idea where to look for Ariel.

Now, it was the wide-awake Miss Elizabeth who first saw her uncle, and put her hand over the reader's mouth, causing an abrupt hiatus in the drama at the thrilling announcement, 'Thrice the brindled cat hath mewed!'

'Davert!' said William MacAndrew, 'but I could hae sworn I heard that boy.'

Two pairs of eyes watched him from aloft. The 'hempie' put aside the branches to have a better view. This was as good as hide-and-seek and going

to church all in one. But a tell-tale green bag lay on the path. When Elizabeth started to climb the great beech she had not taken her schoolbag with her. Her uncle now found it, and took it in his hand.

'That careless lassie!' he said, 'she never thinks that a' her books cost siller. Let us see!'

And with that William MacAndrew sat him down on the iron bar of the mill and proceeded to open out Bess's schoolbag of green frieze.

Up among the tree branches there was an agitation. The owner shook with anger and indignation. 'The horrid wretch—to open my bag!' she said.

Uncle William adjusted his glasses and opened the first book. It was a Bible.

'Steal not this book for fear of shame.' Dear me! that's what I wrote on my ain, forty year synel!' said the searcher, not ill pleased.

He opened another. Various hieroglyphics were drawn over it—ladies of the hourglass-and-parasol persuasion, houses with curly smoke proceeding from all the chimneys, and fronted with gravel walks of alarming precision.

All was as it had been forty years ago. Children are the true Conservatives:

'Elizabeth MacAndrew is my name, Scotland is my nashun, Pitlarg is my dwelling-place— A pleasant habitation.'

Uncle William slapped his leg as he sat on the mill bar. He thought this very excellent poetry indeed. And truly the sentiment was unexceptionable. It beat Shakespeare for real contentment.

But the author was exceedingly indignant,

though, owing to temporary circumstances, she was unable to state her grievances. The trees rustled and shook irregularly above Uncle William's head, and a leaf or two fell; but the goodman of Pitlarg was content to think that the wind must be rising, and so read stolidly on.

He took out next a grimy twist of greyish-brown paper. The trees shook more than ever.

Up in the top branches, Bess took the new loon by the collar and said, 'Do something to make him stop! Oh, the wretch, the horrid wretch!'

The new loon at that moment could not think of anything.

Uncle William looked within the twist of paper. Six bull's-eyes were there, aromatic and exceedingly adherent. A paper lay on the top of them.

Uncle William read aloud, with great apparent enjoyment:

'Lisbeth MacAndrew, I luv you— The rose is red, the vilet's blew, Sugar's sweet, And so are you! Wulliam Baittie, wrote with a new pen.'

Up in the tree, Miss Elizabeth MacAndrew was blushing the red of the rose aforesaid.

'It's that great softie Wull Beattie,' she whispered. 'He's aye slippin' things in my bag when I am no lookin'.'

But the new loon sat a little farther off, in spite of the explanation.

'I didna ken it was there,' said Elizabeth, whose shame was great and real.

But something else came to light—a brass curtain ring, that Uncle William put upon his little finger.

Leaning back, he chuckled to himself. He

foresaw that in a year or two Pitlarg would be a lively place.

Up in the tree Elizabeth dug her hands into the side of her companion. 'Do something, can ye no, or I'll throw doon your Shakespeare at him!'

Then the new loon began to call softly with his hand to his mouth.

Sitting beneath, on the iron bar of the mill, William MacAndrew, who was a little deaf, cocked his ear to listen. Surely he heard the bleating of sheep in distress—the deeper cry of the ewes, the shrill, sweet treble of the lambs. It was not for nothing that Rab Christie had been a gamekeeper's son. There was no sound in nature that with his hands and mouth he could not imitate, and that well enough to deceive the wild things themselves. It was, therefore, easy for him to take in an old farmer rather hard of hearing.

The impression which Pitlarg got as he sat and listened was that the lambs recently weaned had again got in among their mothers. So he set down the bag where he had found it; and, taking his staff and whistling on his dogs, he set off briskly up the hill road. Before he was round the corner, Elizabeth was at the foot of the tree, and had reclaimed her violated treasure.

She shook her clenched fist at her uncle's back as he hastened up the road.

'Horrid, mean old wretch!' she cried.

'Eh! what was that ye said?' queried her aunt, at the door. 'Ye surely warn a' speaking that gate to your uncle, Elizabeth?'

'It was that new loon,' said the ungrateful young lady.

'Oh!' said the mistress of Pitlarg, satisfied.

Rab Christie had a fine plan for catching the hares and rabbits which infested Pitlarg from the neighbouring preserves. He first invested a considerable sum in the common material for wires and snares. Then he interested his master in the venture. Finally, he excited Miss MacAndrew to such an extent that she petitioned that she might be permitted to assist him. Rab was nothing loath.

So the next night, after her aunt had looked in upon her sleeping-room and seen her wrapped safely up in the bed-clothes for the night, who but the 'hempie' stole out fully dressed, raised the sill of her bedroom window, and met Rab at the corner of the byre? There was a sharp chill in the air, and Elizabeth shuddered. The loon of Pitlarg observed this, and threw his coat about the girl's neck, tying it about her throat by the arms.

'Hae, carry that!' he said, handing her a rabbit net. 'Ye'll hae mair to carry or ye come hame.' So they went out into the grey twilight of the night.

Soon they were at the march dyke. At every hare run and rabbit track Rab placed a snare, as they went round the irregular marches of Pitlarg. In many cases, so constant was the traffic, that Rab and Bess could hear them being filled up only a few hundred yards from where they were working. Rab made Bess put on a pair of mittens, so that her hands would not touch the snares. It took them two hours to go round.

Then Rab saw Elizabeth back to her window. She was safe within in a moment. But he never thought of thanking her for coming. The shoe was altogether on the other foot, and Elizabeth felt it to

be so.

'May I come an' help ye to bring them hame?' she said meekly.

'Weel, if ye are wakkin' at five, ye may,' said the youth coolly, as he walked away.

Elizabeth was again at the corner of the barn at five by the clock, and in an hour Rab and she had every snare lifted and nearly a hundred rabbits and hares lying at the barn door. Then Bess slipped quickly to her room, watching her aunt as she went into the byre to milk the cows.

'An' what wull we do wi' a' thae?' said the farmer of Pitlarg, in amazement. He had never seen so much fur together in all his life.

The new loon was practical.

'Lend me the powny an' the cairt,' he said, 'an' I'll tak' them to Cairnochan, the game-dealer in the toon.'

He had been at that job before.

But before he went he made a practical proposal to the master of Pitlarg for a penny for each rabbit that he should catch and get to market.

So Rab drove off to the town with his loaded cart of ground game. At the gate he passed the gamekeeper of the Dullarg estate, who looked curiously at the heap under the sacking. But Rab passed without giving him any information. At the town he made a most favourable arrangement with the game-dealer to take all the rabbits and hares from Pitlarg. Cairnochan wanted them to send to Newcastle. They were not poached, but sold altogether 'on the square,' so Rab got the best price for them. They were to be driven down every morning, that they might be entirely fresh. They

were to be exclusively in the hands of Cairnochan, and nothing was to be said to the surrounding gamekeepers. The loon returned triumphant.

So night after night it went on, and day after day the light cart drove to the town. In three months the rent was paid and Rab was a capitalist. He offered the half of the pennies to his trained assistant, but Bess rejected the offer with scorn. To take money for her help would be to spoil all the romance of the ploy.

But the neighbouring gamekeepers waxed suspicious. They lay in watch, and finally found Rab setting his traps one night. There was a storm of language, but the action was perfectly legal; and, as Rab put it, it would be years before Pitlarg could trap from the Dullarg and Craigley a tenth of what the game of the Dullarg had eaten off Pitlarg.

In a day or two there was a wire netting round the better part of the Pitlarg march dyke, and the gamekeepers rubbed their hands. They had done that atrocious new loon at Pitlarg to rights this time. But they did not know that, with a broomstick for a lever, that boy and his capable trained assistant had been at the trouble to raise the netting at all the runs, and engineer passages through the blocking furze. And on the morrow the pile at the barn door was not much less than usual. When Rab is away, Bess can do it herself, for she is not a bit afraid of the brown moor, the colourless night, the dewy fields, or the cries of the wild things on the hills before the dawning comes.

Pitlarg thought, and with good reason, that there never was such a boy, and at last the goodwife agreed with him. Rab had been promoted to taking

his meals in the room along with his master and mistress, which never boy was allowed to do before.

By the following autumn Rab had so much money between his wages and his percentage (much increased now by the grateful Pitlarg) that he thought of taking a year at college, for the loon who reads Shakespeare has ambitions, and the world does not end for him with rabbit-catching.

So he went away, and Bess MacAndrew accompanied him to the gate upon his departure. There was a sense of emptiness somewhere, and her heart was welling rebelliously within her at the desertion.

'You are glad to go away,' she said, scraping the ground with her foot, as they stood before parting at the black gate of the loaning.

'Yes,' said Rab, his heart full of his future, and with the sublime selfishness of youth and excellent intentions; 'yes, ye see I want to get on, Bess.'

'You are a nasty, horrid, deceitful thing, and I'll never speak to you again as long as I live!' said Elizabeth; and, lest she should ignominiously burst into tears she turned and fled, leaving Rab standing dumbfounded at the gate, looking after her.

She ran straight into the byre, and putting her arms round the neck of her favourite red-and-white cow, she sobbed her girl's heart out, sore and hurt with the cruel desertion of her comrade and companion.

'Love!' she said to herself— 'not such a thing. That is all nonsense; but it is a horrid shame of him, all the same.'

The loon meant to come back next year, but the year lengthened into two, and Rab had taken a

college bursary and been through three sessions at college before he came back to Pitlarg. He was now twenty, and Elizabeth MacAndrew was nearly eighteen. But nothing was changed when he came up the loaning. He was to bide with the MacAndrews all the summer, and help with the hay and harvest; but he had arranged to have time also for his studying.

The gate was hanging on one hinge when he tried to open it. He resolved that he would come out and mend it at once. The stable was grimy and dull: he would begin to give the whole place a coat of whitewash tomorrow. But the kitchen doorstep was scoured, and the windows winked like jewels. The neglect was only apparent in what had been his own department. He would soon set that to rights. The new loon had come to his own again. But here was someone approaching.

A tall and sedate young lady moved towards him, book in hand. She was dressed in black. Rab Christie took off his hat, for amongst other things he had learnt manners in Edinburgh town. The quietly graceful young woman bowed.

‘A visitor!’ thought the new loon.

He came nearer.

‘Mercy me, Bess—I mean Miss MacAndrew!’ stammered Rab.

The young lady extended her hand calmly.

‘How do you do, Mr. Christie?’ she said, with great self-possession.

The loon, now come to his regality, only to find all things new, walked through the yard by her side, more dazed than when, in the slumberous summer afternoon of long ago, Mistress MacAndrew had

laced his jacket for playing 'bools' in working hours, and Bess had run off with the stakes to put them in the clock-case. There, too, was the window out of which she had got to help him with the rabbits. It was all a dream. This tall young lady never swung her feet over a tree branch, sitting on a slate stool.

'It is a fine day,' she said at last, keeping her eyes demurely on the ground.

'It is that!' said the new loon, becoming conscious of the size of his feet and the fact that his hands hung by his side like hams.

They passed under the tree of climbing. Its leaves rustled invitingly. Rab sighed as he looked up. Then just for a moment he caught the glint of ancient mischief in the eye of Bess MacAndrew.

'Will ye try it, Bess?' he said audaciously.

For one quivering moment it seemed as if Bess would, but her eye drooped again upon the ground.

'You will want to see my aunt,' she said meekly.

'Aye!' said Mr. Robert Christie, who had, of course, come so far solely for that purpose.

They were passing the corner of the hedge in which the hawthorn tree, carefully trained, stooped across and made about them a fragrant dusk of shade. They were going calmly underneath, when the new loon paused to pick a spray. No, he did not stop—he only ceased advancing. With a little sigh Elizabeth MacAndrew ceased also, and reached up to pick another spray.

'Let me do it,' said the loon.

So Bess let him; but the audacious loon, wicked thoughts working in him, suddenly, and of course unexpectedly, stooped and kissed her.

For a long moment she stood, four great roaring oceans swirling in her ears. Then the old Bess asserted herself. She gave the loon as sound a cuff on the ear as she would have done before he went away.

'Now let us go in and see my aunt,' she said, with great content.

So they went in together, but took hands as they went.

And the rest is an old story.

4. THE PURPLE MOUNTAINS

Roger Marchbanks dwelt on a hilltop. She who had once been Ailie his daughter abode with her three children in the valley at the hill's foot. And there was bitter anger between them twain. For once Ailie Marchbanks had been as the apple of her father's eye, and as he went about his scanty properties he had drawn his coat of grey homespun more closely about him in order that his Ailie might be arrayed in garments of the newest and the best, cut after a fashion all undreamed of in the valley of the Dee.

‘And at the first call of the stranger she left me, at the first whistle of his pipe, left me for the son of the man that robbed me of my fair acres, that took from me the dainty Long Croft, the Sandyknowes, bonny with the braided corn whenever the spring nights lengthen, sweet Nunholm, and the Lady-land, where the white-thorn bushes are dotted like posies about the braes.’

As he spoke thus to himself, Roger Marchbanks thrust with his staff's point more deeply into the earth, so that the shod of it delved a series of little wells, into which the spring showers fell and filled them full.

Roger Marchbanks had been all his life a stern, unworldly man of the simplest nature. As a middle-aged man, he had spent all his affection upon the young wife who had not long outlived the birth of her first child. And more recently, as he grew old, he had watched his daughter shoot up like a tender plant by his muirland fireside.

He was a Cameronian, and high in the esteem of the faithful—a man wholly without guile, and slow to suspect it in others—even in members of the Establishment. Still less was it likely that Roger Marchbanks would watch suspiciously a fellow-elder of the elect folk. It was in this way that sleek Doctor James Tod, the orthodox physician of Cairn Edward, desiring to set up a carriage and build a house (as well as to obtain money for other purposes less patent to the public), urged it upon Roger Marchbanks, of Lochryan, to set his name to certain documents written upon stamped paper. It was a form—nothing more, he told him. And between the diets of worship one Monday, after communion, Roger wrote his name twice, and immediately forgot all about it.

‘Honour the physician,’ he said, as he laid down the pen gravely, ‘with that honour which is due unto him because of necessity: for the Lord hath created him.’

‘Amen!’ said James Tod sanctimoniously, for he thought that the words came from Holy Writ— as indeed they did, though not from the portion of that Writ included between the boards of his Bible.

But if the Lord had created James Tod, the devil had certainly taken him in hand shortly after, and never again removed his power far from him.

For, suddenly, with the flaming exposure of an evil life, double as a serpent's tongue, James Tod disappeared, and with him most of Roger Marchbanks' fair patrimony. The old ‘bonnet laird’ saw the fields pass from him, concerning which his father had spoken words solemn as a National League to him. ‘Six hundred years have they been in

the hold of the Marchbanks. Keep them for your children like a covenant of the Lord.'

So into the breast of the old man there entered such a hatred of James Tod and all his works that his black prayer for the destruction of the accursed stock came between him and his God, and his vengeance breathed from him like a psalm of David.

When the destruction delayed, he felt justified in asking, Could there be a God of doing justly and a God of withholding punishment? If God were the jealous God, concerning whom Roger Marchbanks had been taught, would He not ere now have cut down the wicked, as Roger had himself uprooted the stubborn whin roots out of the fair acres of the Ladyland?

It was this time that Roger Marchbanks' only daughter, Ailie, chose for running away to marry Allan, the son of Doctor James Tod. True, they had loved one another ever since they had been young lad and lass, linking together lightfoot on the sunny leas which the ill-doing of the father of one of them had reft from the father of the other. Allan Tod had, to the knowledge of all, had no part in his father's iniquity. But Roger Marchbanks, as might have been foretold of him, cursed the young pair with the Cameronian equivalent for bell, book, and candle.

But Allan and Ailie had expected nothing better. Allan Tod had nothing for it but to set up as a solicitor in a small town, where already there were lawyers to spare. And for seven years he kept his head well up in the unequal struggle. For his father's ill-name and his wife's ill-health both weighed upon him.

'He comes o' a bad stock,' said the curious folk

of the Ferrytown.

Nothwithstanding all this, when Allan Tod died in the eighth year of their marriage, he left Ailie Marchbanks and her three bairns none so ill provided for. There was an insurance on his own life, which oftentimes it had gone hard with him to pay. There was the house that he had built in the Ferrytown, and (a last remnant of his father's holdings) there was the little cottage of Craiglee, on the verge of the property of Lochryan, underneath the hill, at the top of which Roger Marchbanks dwelt.

It was to the latter that Ailie retired. She could easily dispose of the red free-stone house near the railway station of the Ferrytown, for luckily houses of that size happened to be scarce that year. So to Craiglee, the whitewashed cottage under the shaggy brow of Cairn Ryan, Ailie went and nestled down with her brood of three.

The first night, after Miriam and Gregor and little Rob had all been long laid down to sleep, the young widow went herself quietly to a window that gave upon the hill. It was at the corner of the children's sleeping-room, and she listened intently for their breathings, as only a mother does, before she entered. But as she came half-way across the floor, she saw something at the window which made her heart spring within her. A small, white-robed figure was kneeling on a chair. Ailie Marchbanks laid her hand on her side, and stopped with a short, gasping indraw of her breath.

'Mother!' said the figure at the window. And in a moment Ailie the widow was herself again. She had thought for a moment that the white-sheeted

figure might portend some ill to her treasures.

'Miriam,' she said, 'what are you doing there? Why are you not in bed?'

'Mother,' said the little lass, 'there is a star up there; I have been watching it. It burns so steadily, brighter than all the rest. See, mother, just by the edge of the wood.'

Ailie, the widow of Allan Tod, looked forth. And lo, in a moment she became again the daughter of Roger Marchbanks the Cameronian. For that was the light in her father's sitting-room window. And even as she looked, the shining light went down to a pin-point. It was her father 'taking the book' up at Lochryan. When he had done with the reading of Scripture, and ere he kneeled to begin the prayer of intercession, very reverently it was his custom to turn the lamp low. Those who knew not the spirit of the man and of the people might have supposed that the thing was done from motives of economy. But the wiser knew that it was a part of the Cameronian worship, and betokened the chastened light which shone upon the spirit, and the shutting out of earthly things ere the soul of man ventured into the immediate Presence.

So even as Ailie looked, the light went down. And she read the meaning of it as well as if she had been up there. Her father's silver-rimmed spectacles were lying at that moment upon the closed Bible. He was kneeling at his great oaken chair in prayer. Yet she felt that her father could pray no real prayer that night, for the forgiveness of others' trespasses for Christ's sake had no part in it.

'It is a bonny star!' said little Miriam Tod; 'I wish it would shine brightly again.'

And even as she spoke Roger Marchbanks rose from his praying unsatisfied, and his lamp went up again.

Down in the children's room at Craiglee a little white-clad figure danced and clapped hands.

'The star is shining again,' she cried. And her mother prayed long and quietly by her side. Meantime, up in the house on the hill, Roger Marchbanks thought a long time on his daughter ere he took his lonely candle and paced sternly along the echoing passages to his room. But yet a while God hardened his heart until it should be the time of the latter rain.

The next day Ailie was walking along the woodland paths near the top of the hill, and for a while she stood wistfully by the open gate through which the road led to the house of Lochryan. It was an old gate, once painted blue, and she knew exactly the way it had of lurching to the side when you swung too far back on it. Gregor and little Rob ran here and there by her side, toddling and pulling flowers. But light-foot Miriam scoured the woods in search of rarer blossoms and wilder adventures.

As Ailie Marchbanks stood regarding, her father came striding solemnly up a by-path to the blue gate, and without a word or a look he shut it in her face. Then he turned away towards the house of Lochryan, and not a quiver of his eyelids betrayed that he had seen his only child.

But ere he had gone a dozen yards he met little Miriam coming flashing like a winged fairy along the sunlit spaces.

'See, mother,' she was crying, 'I have found the beautiful flower that you love. At sight of the tall,

stern, grey-headed man with the blue coat and the broad buttons upon it she stopped short. Also she saw in a moment that the gate was shut. But it was not Miriam's way to be afraid of anything that lived. 'Open the gate for Miriam, kind mannie,' she said imperiously, 'and I was give you flowers—nice, nice flowers.'

Roger Marchbanks dropped the sternness of his glance upon her. It might as well have been warm sunshine. He frowned a little at her familiar words. He might just as well have smiled.

Perhaps that was the reason why he turned abruptly, and with measured footsteps paced back again to the gate, opened it and stood aside like a courteous gentleman to let the little maid pass.

As she went out she thrust a handful of flowers into his hand.

'Thank you, kind mannie,' she said; 'here are the nice flowers I promised you.'

Roger Marchbanks resumed his sedate walk towards his lonely house of Lochryan. The flowers were still in his hand when he arrived at the turn of the avenue where his daughter Ailie used in old days to come running to meet him. He looked at the blossoms between his fingers.

'Forget-me-not!' he said bitterly.

And with that he took little Miriam's flowers and cast them from him as far as he could into the wood.

The young widow wept silently as she went homeward. But Miriam danced like a snowflake every way about the copses, and ran races with Gregor, shrieking with laughter, till the blackbirds in the hedges shrilly scolded at the unseemly riot.

That night, as Miriam was saying her prayers in the window, and her mother was putting Gregor to bed, the child stopped in the midst of her petitions.

‘O mother,’ she cried, with wonder in her voice, ‘come and see; the star up yonder has broken loose and lost its way.’

‘Nonsense, child! Say your prayers and get into bed out of the cold,’ said her mother. But all the same she went to the window, and saw that there was a light flickering hither and thither along the hillside.

Up aloft, under the scattered leaves at the homeward end of the avenue of Lochryan, an old man was wandering about with a lantern, holding the light near the ground. It was Roger Marchbanks.

‘Hae ye lost your pocket-book?’ said his grieve to him, after watching him for a little, ‘an’ can I help ye to look for it?’

‘Go to your bed and be ready to rise betimes tomorrow morning. That will fit you better!’ said his master, shortly. For the grieve was no early riser.

It was quite half-an-hour after before Roger Marchbanks found what he had been seeking—a handful of scattered Forget-me-nots thrown over the avenue hedge and scattered athwart the dewy grass. He carried them tenderly home and placed them, all wet as they were, within the covers of the family Bible.

From that day, though Roger Marchbanks never spoke to his daughter nor she to him, little Miriam was often to be seen with her hand in her grandfather's, tripping and dancing by his side, her tongue running all the time like a mill-hopper, and

her clear laughter plashing like water over a weir.

But there came a day—a day that shall not soon be forgotten on Lochryanside, and up to the hilltop, where sits the lonely house of the Marchbanks. A runaway horse, frantic with the clatter of the broken shafts behind him and the thresh of trailing harness, tore round a corner upon the children as they played together. Miriam sprang to draw little Rob out of danger. But a hoof struck her even as she clutched him. And so they brought the young child home and gave her to her mother.

It was by the window that looked upon the western sea that they laid her down, and she lay there a little time silent and very white. But by-and-by there came the morning and the dawn.

For it was June, and the daysprings are early then.

‘Look, mother,’ said Miriam, ‘look out of the nursery window for me, and see if there is any star on the hill tonight?’

‘No, no, Miriam,’ whispered her mother; ‘hush thee, dearest, and rest, for the stars are long ago gone to bed.’

‘But go and look, mother,’ said the child.

And her mother, willing to pleasure her in all, went. And lo, as she looked, she was aware of a tall figure like a grey shadow, that stood under the tree by the gate, and looked steadfastly towards the house.

It was her father, and Ailie's heart stood still.

She went back.

‘Well, mother, did you see the star?’

‘Childie,’ she said, bending over the cot, ‘there are no stars. It is coming bright day.’

'And did you see nothing, mother?' persisted Miriam.

'I saw a man standing by the gate.'

'Mother,' said the little one, 'lift me up in bed a little wee bit.'

Propped on pillows she looked out over the sea. A light sprang to her face as she gazed. 'Mother,' she said in a hushed, eager voice, 'why did you never show me the purple mountains over the sea before? Was I never awake at this time before? See, they are over yonder. The sun is shining so bright upon them. Look, look quickly, mother dear.'

And a cry sprang from the mother's heart as she looked, for there were no hills for many a thousand miles across that wide western sea.

'There are no mountains there, my lamb,' she said; 'only the sea as it has always been. Lie down now and sleep, dear one.'

'But, mother,' said Miriam, 'I see them; I see them so plainly. It is a fine morning there, and all the children will be going out to play and gather the flowers. Let me get up too, mother, and go out with the others to pick the flowers on the purple mountains.'

And her mother hid her face very deep in the pillow.

There stole a little hand to her head.

'That was grandfather's step on the gravel by the gate,' she said. 'Go out and fetch him in. Say little Miriam wants him. Perhaps he will see the purple mountains!'

And without a word her mother went. And without a word the old man came in. Father and daughter stood at opposite sides of the bed.

'Look, grandfather,' said Miriam. 'Isn't it funny? Mother says she cannot see the purple mountains over the sea there. And I see them so plain. Why, I can see the sun on their tops, and the little dimply valleys where the children play, and the woods. Oh, I can almost hear the birds sing. There are no sick children or sad folk anywhere. Look over the sea, grandfather, and tell me if you can see the purple hills with the sun shining on them. You will tell me true, won't you, grandfather?'

And she took the old man's hand. He stooped gravely over the bed, and his eyes followed along the direction of her finger.

'I see them,' he said. 'I see them plainly, little Miriam.'

She clapped her hands and cried aloud, 'I knew you would, grandfather. Now, mother, you see.'

Miriam reached up a hand to either side of the bed.

'Mother,' she said, 'it is growing a little dark again; I cannot find your hand—give it to me into mine.' She had taken the old man's hand already.

'Grandfather,' she said, 'take mother to the window and let her see the purple mountains. She cannot see them by herself'

And father and daughter withdrew to the window, and clasped each other for the first time in ten years.

But when they turned, little Miriam had gone out to play with the other children upon the purple mountains far beyond the sea, whereon the sunshine lies for ever and ever.

5. A GOLDEN MORNING

Sweetheart and I had had many adventures together, but there was one pleasure which I had hitherto kept to myself with a niggardliness quite unworthy of Sweetheart's broadminded generosity: I had never yet let her see the sunrise.

Now, I am a professional seer of sunrises, not having missed above a dozen or so in as many years. There were few tales that Sweetheart likes so well as to hear me tell of some of these in various quarters of the world.

'Tell about the man in Africa what wouldn't put the photograph box on his camel! No, that isn't the way—it begins, 'His name was Muhmmmed Ali Mustapha Ibharim el Raschid'—yes, indeedy, you said so last time, and you mustn't make it up as you go along, but tell it right.'

Or it might chance to be, 'The story of the man who climbed the cocoanut-tree to get you some milk when you were thirsty—or, no, about how Dog Royal took you in swimming and made you play truant. That is the best of all!'

'Sweetheart,' said I, with a sudden flash of recklessness at the sight of her bright face, 'if it is a fine morning tomorrow AND you go to sleep early tonight AND you are a good girl all day AND you promise that you won't tell.'

'Yes—yes, father—I will—I mean I won't—tell me what it is we are going to do and I'll be as good, as oh— that!'

And Sweetheart opened her arms to their fullest extent in order to express the measure of her

goodness.

‘Perhaps—I don't say I will. But if...’

‘Get on, father. You speak so slow when a little girl is waiting!’

‘Perhaps tomorrow you might see a sunrise for yourself!’

‘OO-oo-oooh! can I? I wish it were now, I shan't never sleep—not a wink, with thinkin' about it!’

‘But you must, or I shall not take you. So be calm!’

‘Shall I ever be as calm as you, father? You don't really care for sweets or bread and sugar, or gooseberry tart, or candied cocoanut, or anything just dreadful nice.’

Sweetheart and I were away for a little cheap trip on our own accounts. Our shining steed, a tricycle emphatically built for two (Sweetheart being a gentlewoman passenger), was being oiled up and its chain mended in the blacksmith's shop down in the village. It was very nearly the prettiest village in Scotland, where there are, out of Fife and Galloway, not many pretty villages. I love to call it Whinnyliggate, and Sweetheart likes to think that ‘Mr. Father’ went to school down there in that little low school-room with the wall round it.

The adventure came off just as it was planned, which things very seldom do in this world. Sweetheart had been ‘good’ (but not too good). It was a fine morning, flattering the turnip-shaws as well as the mountain tops—the sort of morning you want to drink, and then smack your lips and say, ‘How refreshing!’

I waked Sweetheart by rolling her up in her blanket and carrying her to the window.

'Oh, father,' she said, her eyes still dusked with sleep, 'is it review day?'

For whenever she is waked suddenly and taken to the window she always thinks that it is to see the soldiers pass, as she does once a year when in midsummer the volunteers march through our village (our real for-true home village) on their way to summer camp.

'No, Sweetheart,' I say. 'It is morning and you are going out to see the sun rise. But don't make a noise. Nobody will be up for hours yet, and so we must go out on tiptoe!'

Sweetheart is dressed to the accompaniment of little gurgles of sound expressive of intense delight. Sometimes when I have a safety-pin in my mouth she would give my arm a quick impulsive hug, and say, 'De-e-ear father!' for no particular reason except that she considered her own a particularly nice thing in fathers.

When all was finished, we began a raid on the pantry with enormous caution (Indians on the war-trail!) and captured bread, butter, and slices of ham sufficient for half-a-dozen sandwiches. Presently we were outside the door, and the dewy coolness dropped upon us like the first dip in the sea.

'It's like having your face washed without water!' said Sweetheart, as we made our way up the garden walk between the gooseberry bushes and over the wall. Here I mounted Sweetheart on my shoulders, for the big grass was long and dewy. Bees big and brown were already booming in the foxgloves, and pearls sparkled on the gossamer suspension bridges that spanned the path. The swifts were busily arranging their family affairs in

long screaming swoops. A little breeze came to us filtered through miles of dewy woodland. It was a good breeze and smelt of many pleasant things. Sweetheart on my shoulders clutched my hair and gave it little involuntary tugs as she looked all round the horizon. We were mounting the heathery hillside, and there was no trace of the sun to be seen anywhere.

I think that, even at the last moment, Sweetheart expected that he might outwit us. But no, he had not stolen a march upon us this time. Only away to the east there was a kind of fire-coloured wash in the hollow between two hills.

'I know,' said Sweetheart, who always explained everything, 'that's his bath getting ready for him. He's going to pop up just there!'

I think she expected the sun to shoot suddenly upward like a shuttlecock well hit. At last we had climbed high on the hill-crest where the rocks were dry and crisp for the feet. I set Sweetheart down. The wash of fire had grown rapidly larger. It spread to the higher clouds, which were flaked with sea-shell pink. Bars of crimson gathered across the sun's path— 'as if the horrid things would keep him down if they could!' she said. Then she grew a little frightened at the image she had conjured up.

'But they won't—will they, father?'

This little girl has always a fear lest some great pleasure, long looked forward to, should escape her at the pinch. Presently a new terror struck her.

'Does he go off with a bang—like the gun on the Castle at lunch-time?' she asked, and she caught my hand and held it very firmly to be ready 'in case.'

I reassured her on this score and we waited. We had not, however, long to wait now. A red rim, a sort of hush as the hilltop whirled into the westerly-bound wave of light, our shadows rushing out thirty yards behind us—and the sun rose. At the same moment a black cloud of rooks was flung high into the air from the woods about the hall, and drifted noisily away towards the turnip-fields.

Sweetheart did not say a word till all was over, then she drew a long long breath of raptest pleasure.

‘How quietly he does it!’ she said.

I could not help it—I never can when Sweetheart speaks like that. I am bound to improve the occasion. It must be some of the Westminster Catechism in my blood—the ‘Reasons Annexed’ as it were.

‘All the great things in the world are quiet,’ I said very sententiously— ‘dawn, spring, sleep, love’—(I was going to add death, but refrained).

‘But the birds sing,’ objected Sweetheart in a cavalier manner, ‘and please, if you don't mind, so would I. I didn't have time to say my prayers this morning, you see. So this is instead.’

‘You can say them now,’ I suggested.

‘No-o.’ Sweetheart gave the matter due consideration. ‘No—but I'll sing a little song instead!’

‘And what shall it be, Sweetheart?’

Sweetheart paused, finger on lip, telling over, as I thought, her roll-call of morning hymns.

‘I think ‘Bonny Dundee’ is best!’ she said at last.

Alas! that such a thing should be in a Roundhead and Covenanting household! But certain it is that Sweetheart's prayers were compounded for

by the stirring strains of Sir Walter's ballad.

To the Lords of Convention 'twas Claverhouse spoke,

Ere the King's crown shall fall there are crowns to be broke;

*So let each cavalier who loves honour and me
Come follow the bonnet o' bonny Dundee.*

After all it did not greatly matter. The child's voice carried the intent of worship where many matin hymns do not reach.

'And now,' said Sweetheart, with a sharp stop, 'Ise hungry.'

We sat down by a crystal spring in the high brave morning air, and never did breakfast taste better. We took bite about of the sandwiches, and when it came to drinking-time I hollowed my palms and Sweetheart drank daintily out of that cup as a bird drinks at a fountain edge.

Then we went down, shouting aloud to awake the mountain echoes. The great things of the world are quiet. But we did not want to be great, only to be happy. So we climbed into the road, with its fine dust drenched and laid with the dew.

At the turn of the road, on a little patch of grass, a tramp family had encamped. There was a father, a mother with a young baby that wailed upon her breast, and a little girl who rose at sight of us and ran towards Sweetheart.

'We are awfu' hungry,' she said; 'we have had nothing to eat since yesterday morning.'

'The shops are not open,' said Sweetheart, rising to the occasion, 'but come with me and I'll steal you something out of the pantry. Father won't tell!'

This shows how badly Sweetheart has been brought up, and how little she thinks of a parent's honesty.

So the ragged little girl trotted along after us, Sweetheart looking over her shoulder every now and then with a reassuring air, as much as to say, 'He's all right. He looks very imposing, but, bless you, it's all put on!'

In this manner we came to the house of our lodgment. The door was as we left it. Not a soul stirred within. This was strange. It seemed the middle of the forenoon to us. Sweetheart entered, and after a while emerged with the ham bone, knuckly, but in spots capable of repaying attention. To this was added half a loaf, a large pat of butter, and an unopened tin of caviare—all the necessaries and luxuries of life.

'Now, can I give the little girl my Saturday's money? Let me, father!' she pleaded.

And whatever was thought by the Recording Angel of 'Bonny Dundee,' considered as a morning hymn, there can be no doubt of his opinion of this act of worship. For Sweetheart had cast into the treasury all that she had.

But as she watched the small tramp rush off with the ham bone and the loaf against her breast, and the sixpence of sterling silver clutched in her palm, Sweetheart heaved a long sigh.

'And I did so want a new dolly's bonnet for Isobel!' she said.

6. BILLIAM

'No, father,' said Billiam, with decision; 'I am not half good enough to make a parson of. You must give the living to Harry. He will make a first-rater. He is all the time mousing about among books!'

Billiam and his father were standing together in the rectory garden, which looked over the beautiful vale of St. John. Helvellyn slept above them, stretched out like a lion with his head low between his paws. The lake glimmered beneath all, dreamy in the light midsummer haze. Bees hummed in the old garden, and the flowers on which they made themselves drunken reeled and shook with the press of the revellers.

The old rector of Applethwaite was dead. This day of midsummer had been his funeral day. An old man full to the brim of years and dignities, he had lived all his life under the wing of his brother the squire, rooted safely in the family living, dining every Sunday and Thursday at the Hall, and reading his hundred sermons in a rotation as settled and regular as that of the crops. But now the old order was changed, and, according to the squire's providential arrangement, the new order was to be—Billiam.

His real name was William, with something very distinguished after it. Yet nobody thought of calling him anything but Billiam—except only the squire when, as at present, Billiam and he differed in opinion. Then he said, 'William Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, will you dare to disobey your father?'

And Billiam hung his head, for he knew that a day was coming when he would.

At school he had been called Billiam, for the reason that a 'Yorker' is called a 'Yorker,' because it was obvious that he could be called nothing else. The boy whose Latin verses he did said to him, 'Now, go on, old Billiam, hurry up! I want to go out to the playing fields to smite that young toad, Scott minor, for making faces at me and making me laugh in chapel!' So to save time Billiam gave him his own copy of verses, and saw the plagiarist pass to the head of the form next day, on the strength of Billiam's iambics. Yet that boy never even thought of thanking the author and origin of his distinction. Why should he? It was 'only old Billiam.'

Billiam failed also in gaining the love and respect of his masters, to the extent which, upon his merits, was his due. For one thing, he was forever bringing all manner of broken-down sparrows, maimed rabbits, and three-legged dogs into the school—and, if possible, even into the dormitory. Then smells of diverse kinds arose, and bred quarrelsome dissension of a very positive kind. The house-master came up one night to find Billiam with an open knife in his hand, driving fiercely into a throng of boys armed with cricket bats and wickets. Whereupon he promptly dashed at the young desperado, and wrested the knife out of his hands.

'Do you wish to murder somebody?' cried the house-master, shaking him.

'Yes,' said Billiam stoutly, 'if Lowther throws my white mice out of the window.'

No further proceedings were taken, because, upon examination, Billiam proved to be scored black

and blue with the wickets of his adversaries. He was, however, from this time forth given a bedroom upon the ground floor, with a little court in front which looked upon the laundry. And here Billiam, still unrepentant, was allowed to tend his menagerie in peace, provided always that it did not entirely destroy the sanitation of the school. But when the governing committee came to inspect the premises, the head-master carefully piloted them past the entrance of the court wherein dwelt Billiam, keeping well to windward of it.

Anybody else would have been promptly expelled, but Billiam's father was a very important person indeed, and the head-master had known him intimately at college. Besides, no one could possibly have expelled Billiam. The very ruffians who whacked him with cricket bats would straightway have risen in mutiny.

By-and-by Billiam's father tried him at Oxford, but, though Billiam stayed his terms, he would have none of it. So when the Rectory fell vacant, it seemed all that could be done to make arrangements by which Billiam would succeed his uncle. The Right Honourable Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, Billiam's 'pater,' saw no difficulty in the matter. He had been at Eton and Christchurch with the Bishop of Lakeland, and the matter lent itself naturally to this arrangement. Everyone felt this to be the final solution of a most difficult problem. Everybody even remotely connected with the family was consulted, and all expressed their several delights with relief and alacrity. But in the meantime nothing was said to Billiam, who had a setter with a broken leg upon his mind, and so lived mostly about the kennels and

smelled of liniment.

But when his father told the proximate rector that he must begin to prepare for the Bishop's examination, and go into residence for some months at St. Abb's famous theological college (called in clerical circles 'The Back Door'), Billiam most unexpectedly refused point blank to have anything to do with the plan. He would be no parson; he was not good enough, he asserted. Harry could have it. The Right Honourable Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, ex-Cabinet Minister and P. C, broke into a rage almost as violent as when his party leader proclaimed a new policy without consulting him. He informed Billiam (under the designation of William Reginald Setoun) how many different kinds of fool he was, and told him as an ultimatum that if he refused this last chance to establish himself in life, he need expect no further help or consideration from him.

Billiam listened uneasily, and with a deep-seated regret obvious upon his downcast face. It was pitiful, he thought privately, to see so dignified and respectable a man as his father thus losing control of himself. So Billiam fidgeted, hoping that the painful scene would soon be over, so that he might get back again to the lame setter at the kennels.

When Billiam's father had at once concisely and completely expressed his opinions as to Billiam's sanity, Billiam's ingratitude, Billiam's disgraceful present conduct and unparalleled future career, and when he had concluded with a vivid picture of Billiam's ultimate fate (which was obviously not to be drowned) he paused, partly in order to recover his breath and partly to invite

suggestions from the culprit. Not that he expected Billiam to answer. Indeed he held it almost an insult for one of his children to attempt to answer one of his questions at such a moment.

‘What have you to say to that, sir? What excuse have you to make? Answer me that, sir. Silence, sir, I will not listen to a single word. You may well stand abashed and silent. Have I brought a son into the world for this—kept you, given you an expensive education only for this?’

So Billiam kept silence and thought hard of the setter down at the kennels. Those bandages ought to be wet again. It was an hour past the time. He kept changing from one foot to the other upon the gravel walk.

‘Don't insult me by jumping about like a hen on a hot girdle,’ cried his father; ‘tell me what you think of doing with yourself, for I will no longer support you in idleness and debauchery.’

‘I should like to be a veterinary surgeon, sir,’ said Billiam, scraping with his toe.

‘Let that gravel alone, will you—a veterinary devil—an Ormithwaite a damned cow doctor! Get out of my sight, sir, before I strike you!’

And accordingly Billiam went—down to the kennels to visit the setter, wondering all the way whether, as the skin was not broken, he ought to use an embrocation or stick to the cold water bandages.

And this is briefly why Billiam found himself in Edinburgh, and established in a nest of unfurnished garret rooms which he had discovered by chance at

the end of Montgomery Street, in the Latin quarter of the city. Billiam had a hundred and thirty pounds—a hundred of which had been given him by his father with the information that it must see him through a year, and thirty which his elder brother Herbert (captain in the 110th Hussars) had sent him.

‘Young fool, Billiam—always was!’ said Captain Herbert; ‘guess he’s pretty tightly off.’ And with that he stuffed into the envelope the thirty pounds which he had set apart as a sedative for his tailor.

‘The young blackguard will need the money more than old Moses!’ said the Hussar.

Billiam had, to save appearances, compromised on the question of the veterinary surgeon. He was to study hard in order to become an ordinary surgeon and physician of humans. He was only to be allowed to come home once a year. He had agreed not to pester his father with requests for more money. In every way Billiam was made to feel that he was the prodigal son and a disgrace to the stock of the Ormithwaites of Ormithwaite. ‘One of the families, sir,’ said his father, ‘which have constituted for three hundred years the governing classes of these islands.’

So it was in this manner that Billiam took the very modest portion of goods which pertained to him, and departed to the far country of Montgomery Street, South Side, just where that notable thoroughfare gives upon the greasy gloom of the Pleasance. How Billiam spent his living, and upon whom, this history is intended to tell.

Day by day the student of medicine scorned delights. Day and night were to him alike laborious.

For Billiam, all unknown to his father, was also taking classes at the Veterinary College upon a most ingenious system of alternative truantry. He attended his medical professors upon such days as it was likely that cards would be called for. And in addition to this he procured a certain interim continuity in his studies by 'getting a look at another fellow's notes.'

Billiam's 'piggery' in Montgomery Street, as it was called by the few of his comrades who had ever seen its secrets, was something to wonder at. Instead of taking a comfortable sitting-room and bedroom in a well-frequented and sanitary neighbourhood, Billiam entered into the tenancy of an entire suite of rooms upon the garret floor of one of the high 'lands' which are a distinctive feature of the old quarter of St. Leonards.

Within this tumbledown dwelling Billiam found himself in possession of five large rooms, with wide windows and in some instances with skylights also. He was to pay at the modest rate of eight pounds in the half-year for the lot. Billiam counted down his first quarter's rent, and went out to order a brass plate. This cost him thirty shillings, and he had to pay separately for the lettering, which said, somewhat vaguely:

CONSULTATION FREE
EVERY MORNING BEFORE NINE,
AND
EVERY EVENING AFTER SIX.

This Billiam burnished up daily with the tail of his dress coat, which he had torn off for the purpose.

'I don't think I shall need it any more,' he said,

‘so I may as well use it.’

So he used it. It did very well, being lined with silk.

Then Billiam double-bolted the plate to the door, for he understood the way of Montgomery Street, and sat down to study the monograph of Herr Doctor Pumpenstock of Vienna upon headaches.

Billiam had three chairs to start with—two stiff-backed chairs for clients and an easy-chair, which cost 2s. 6d. at a cheap sale of furniture in Nicholson Street.

Billiam felt that he might go that length in luxury.

Billiam had once possessed more furniture than this. He had a wooden bed which he had bought in the Cowgate for 4s. and carried up the Pleasance himself, post by post and plank by plank. He only slept upon it one night. The next day he began to cut it up for fire-wood. It was a good bed though, he said, but not for sleeping on. After the first five minutes it began to bite you all over.

So Billiam burned the 4s. bed, and it turned out all right that way. It crackled like green wood as it burned. Presently the fame of Billiam's brass plate waxed great in the land. Dr. Macfarlane, a short-winded and short-tempered man, came upon the announcement quite unexpectedly as he was puffing his way up the weary, grimy, stone stairs, to visit the sister of the seamstress who lived upon the other side of the landing from Billiam.

To say simply that Dr. Macfarlane was astonished does considerable injustice to his state of mind. He stood regarding the brightly polished,

clearly lettered announcement for fully ten minutes. Then he rang the bell, and an answering peal came from just the other side of the panel. But no one arrived to open, for it was the middle of the day and Billiam was at his classes. Dr. Macfarlane could learn little from the seamstress or her sister, beyond the general suspicion that their neighbour upon the other side of the landing was 'maybes no verra richt in his mind.'

It was not the seamstress, but the seamstress's sister, who volunteered this information.

'But he sent us in these,' added the seamstress, who was a pale and exceedingly pretty girl, pointing to some nobly plumped purple grapes which lay on a plate on the little cracked table by the bedside.

'He'll be a kind o' young doctor seekin' a job, nae doot!' said the seamstress's sister, sinking back on her pillows. For gratitude was not her strong point.

The suggestion excited the doctor. For he was a man who had worked hard at his most uncertain and unremunerative practice. Besides which, he had a young family growing up about him. If therefore he was to have a young interloper settling in the centre of his sphere of influence, it was as well to know with whom he had to contend.

So he called upon Billiam.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Dr. Macfarlane came stumbling up Billiam's stairs. The door stood slightly ajar, and there came from the other side a confused murmur of voices, a yelping of dogs, with sundry other sounds which even the doctor's trained ear could not distinguish. But above

all there rose fitfully the shrill cry of an infant. Upon hearing this last the doctor pushed the door with the brass plate open, and entered unceremoniously. He found himself in a large unfurnished room, which, when he stepped within, seemed at first nearly full of people. It was brightly enough lighted, for the broad flame of a No. 6 gas-burner hissed with excess of pressure above the bare mantel-piece. A fire burned in the grate, which shone cheerfully enough, being heaped high with small lumps of coal.

Most of the people were ranged along the walls of the room, sitting with their backs against the wallpaper, upon which their shoulders had made a glossy brown strip all round—young lads with dogs between their knees, girls holding cats in baskets, middle-aged women nursing birds in cages.

They talked to each other in subdued tones, or to their pets in whispers. Sometimes a dog would become excited by the voice of a cat complaining of bonds and imprisonments near him, but he would be promptly cuffed into submission by his master; or a canary would suddenly flutter against the bars, warned by instinct of the proximity of so many enemies.

The doctor stood awhile rooted in amazement, and did not even take any notice when several of his former patients nodded affably across to him.

Presently, from an inner room, there came forth a hard-featured man, carrying a large book under his arm. Billiam followed behind him, his shock of dark hair tossed and rumpled. He was stooping forward, and eagerly explaining something to the man. So intent was he upon the matter in hand, that he passed the doctor without so much as

noticing him.

‘And I’ll look in and see how the pair of you have got on tomorrow,’ Billiam said, shaking the hard-featured man warmly by the hand at the door.

Billiam turned, and, for the first time, looked the doctor fairly in the face.

‘My name is Dr. Macfarlane. I have a practice in this neighbourhood,’ said the physician, ‘and I should like the favour of a few words with you.’

‘Certainly. By all means—with pleasure,’ replied Billiam. ‘Come this way.’

And they went together into the second of the Montgomery Street garrets. It was nearly as bare of furniture as the first. There was no more than a table, some bottles, and an instrument-case, while round the room, arranged so as to make the most of themselves, stood Billiam’s three chairs.

‘Take one,’ said the student politely. But Dr. Macfarlane preferred to stand till he knew exactly where he was.

‘I have the honour of addressing ,’ he said, and paused.

‘William Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite,’ said Billiam quietly.

‘You are a doctor?’ queried his visitor.

‘By no means; I am only a student,’ said Billiam quickly. ‘But I give these people a hand with anything they bring along.’

‘Do you possess any qualification?’ persisted Dr. Macfarlane.

‘Qualification?’ said Billiam, a little perplexed. ‘Well, I’ve been patching up dogs’ legs and things all my life.’

‘But, sir,’ cried the doctor indignantly, ‘this is

no better than an equivocation. I heard you with my own ears prescribing for the man who went out just now—an old patient of my own. if I mistake not. And I saw you with these eyes taking a fee from him as he passed through the door. Are you aware, sir, that the latter is an indictable offence?’

Billiam smiled with his usual quietly infinite tolerance.

‘Dr. Macfarlane,’ he said, ‘it may sound strange to you, but the fact is that man came to consult me about a separation from his wife. And he brought his family Bible out of the pawnshop to show me the dates of his marriage and birth of his children. I gave him something when he went away, so that he would not need to take the Bible back into pawn, at least not immediately. Do you think I need any qualification for that?’

‘And those people outside?’ said the doctor, not yet entirely convinced.

‘Will you go round the wards with me?’ said Billiam, smiling brightly and irresistibly.

Without another word he led the way to the door of the next room. It seemed to the doctor fuller than ever.

‘Lame dogs this way!’ said Billiam, in a matter-of-fact manner, and half-a-dozen men slouched after him. Very deftly Billiam laid out a row of small shining instruments upon the table, with salve, lint, and bandages arranged behind them.

Then he took animal after animal into his hands, set it upon the table, passed his fingers lightly to and fro over its head and ears a time or two, listened to the owner's voluble explanations without appearing to notice them, and forthwith

proceeded to deliver a little clinical lecture. His deft fingers snipped away the matted hair from a neglected and festering sore. He cleaned the wound tenderly, the dog often instinctively turning to snap. Yet all the time Billiam never once flinched, but talked steadily, impartially, and sympathetically to the animal and his master till the sore was dressed and the patient redelivered, with all due directions, to his owner.

Before long Dr. Macfarlane became so interested that he waited while case after case was disposed of with the unerring accuracy of an hospital expert. Sometimes he would instinctively have the lint or the bandage ready in his hand, just as if he had still been dresser at the old infirmary and waiting for Lister to work off his batch.

At the end of half-an-hour he had no more remembrance of Billiams want of qualifications. He asked him to come round to supper and smoke a pipe. But Billiam only smiled and said, 'Thank you a hundred times, doctor, but I have some private cases in the back room to attend to yet, and then I must read up my stuff for tomorrow.'

After a while there came to visit Billiam a minister or two familiar with the district, the young resident missionary from the Students' Hall, a stray lawyer's clerk or two—and the superintendent of police. They all came to cavil, but, one and all, they remained to hold bandages and be handy with the vaseline.

On one occasion the minister of St. Margaret's offered Billiam the use of a pew in his church. But Billiam said, 'Sunday is my day for out-patients, or I should be glad.' For Billiam was a gentleman, and

always answered even a dissenting clergyman politely.

'You should think of your immortal soul!' said the minister.

'Who knoweth,' said Billiam, 'the spirit of the beast, that goeth downward into the earth?'

And Billiam could never find out why the minister went away so suddenly, or why he shook his head ever afterward when they met in the street. It never crossed his mind that Mr. Gregson, of St. Margaret's, had taken him for an infidel and a dangerous subverter of the system of religion as by law established. Yet so it was.

In due time Billiam's nest of garrets became known as the 'Lame Dogs' Home,' and grew famous throughout the entire city—that is, the southern city of high lands, steep streets, winding stairs, and odorous closes, with their Arab population of boys and dogs.

'You let that long lanky chap alone,' cried one brawny burglar to another, 'or I'll smash your dirty face like a rotten turnip. Now mind me! Don't you know the Dog Missionary?'

Every policeman befriended Billiam, and the greater number of the policeman's ordinary clients. He could often be seen walking along the Pleasance or past the breweries in the Laigh Calton attended by a dozen dogs, which had followed Billiam far from their wonted haunts, on the chance of a word from him, and which departed obediently, if unwillingly, when he bade them return to their own places in peace.

Year by year Billiam studied and practised, never a penny the richer, but more and more loving

and beloved. His garret, however, grew somewhat better furnished. Through the mediation of his soldier brother, his father became so far reconciled to him that he increased his allowance. But Billiam lived in no greater comfort than before. He bought a cheap bedstead, it is true, and for a month or two dwelt in luxury, sleeping upon a real mattress with a clean sheet, and folding his overcoat for a pillow. But even that came to an end.

The circumstances were these:

Billiam had been down at Ormithwaite seeing his father, and his brother (of the 110th Hussars) insisted upon returning to Edinburgh with him.

'You'll have to rough it, mind you,' said Billiam, warning him.

'I'm a soldier,' said his brother stoutly, 'and I guess your hole can't be worse than some places I've put up in.'

'All right,' said Billiam, 'mind, I've warned you. Don't grumble when you get there.'

So at their journey's end, Billiam opened the door of the garret and invited his brother to step in. A curious damp smell met them on the threshold. 'That's all right,' said Billiam, reassuringly. 'I washed out the whole blooming shop with chloride of lime the night before I came away. It's healthy no end, if it does stink a bit.'

'Maybe,' said his brother the Captain, 'but it certainly does smell like stables.'

'Well, I'll have the fire lighted, and we'll have some supper before the people begin to come,' said Billiam calmly; 'you'll be picking these old rags for lint, and laying out the bandages.'

The Captain and Billiam dined upon a rasher

of bacon and eggs which Billiam fried in the pan, along with sliced potatoes and butter. The Hussar, being exceedingly hungry, thought he had never tasted anything more delicious.

'They don't do anything like this at the club. It is such a jolly flavour, too, quite unique,' he said with enthusiasm; 'seems as if it were seasoned with anchovy or some French sauce—quite Parisian, in fact!'

'Yes,' Billiam answered simply, 'that is the red herrings I had in the pan last week. With us coming in so quick, I hadn't time to clean him out properly.'

The outer room was filling up all this time, and the yelping, whistling and mewling grew louder than even the cawing of the rooks in the old trees above Ormithwaite.

'Tarantara! Tarantara!' cried the Hussar cheerfully. 'Turn out for kennel parade.' And for two hours he was kept busy enough with his lint and bandages.

'But where does the money come in!' he said, when it was all finished. He was smoking a cigarette, and Billiam was polishing up his instruments.

'Do it for nothing?—don't they even pay for all that vaseline and plaster? You are a blamed young fool, Billiam, and will die in the workhouse.'

Then the Captain yawned a little. 'It's too late for the theatre,' he said, 'even if you knew where one was, which I don't believe. I'm deuced tired, let us go to bed.'

Billiam looked about him doubtfully, and then suddenly threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

'I forgot, old chap; on my life and honour, I

quite forgot. I lent my bed to Peter Wilkins, the water-colour man. He had pawned his to pay his rent, but he thought he could get it out again before I came back.'

'You bet he couldn't,' said the Hussar, twirling his handsome moustache; 'I've seen that kind of man; there are several in my regiment.'

'Let's go and look Peter up, anyway,' said Billiam; 'perhaps we can get the bed after all.'

So the Hussar accompanied Billiam through the dimly-lighted streets, under gloomy archways, past great black chasms yawning between lofty houses, till they arrived at the dwelling of Wilkins, 'the water-colour man,' as Billiam said. It was a room upon the ground floor with a sunk area in front.

'It does not look promising,' said Billiam; 'the beast isn't lighted up. I guess old Wilkins is either drunk or has gone to the country.'

'Perhaps he has pawned your bed, too,' said the Hussar bitterly.

Billiam was hurt at the suggestion.

'Wilkins is a gentleman,' he said, 'and it was only last week he sent me his Skye terrier for me to doctor up and have all right for him when he came back. Peter isn't the chap to sell my bed and then bilk.'

They tried Wilkins' door in vain, and rang the bell repeatedly without producing the least effect. Apparently others had done the same, for at the first tug the bell-pull slid out about six inches in a silent, uncanny, unattached manner.

'That's no use,' said Billiam; 'let's climb up on the railings.'

'Ah!' he cried, as soon as he had mounted himself upon the area railings, whence he could look into the room of Wilkins, 'there is my bed standing against the wall, and the mattress beside it. You see, good old Wilkins is all right. It is a first-rate bed; better take a look at it, for it is all you will see of it this night.'

'Come doon oot o' that!' commanded a stern voice. 'What for are ye loitering wi' intent there for. I'll hae to tak' ye up.'

A portly policeman was standing behind them with much suspicion on his face. Billiam turned himself about quietly.

'John,' he said, 'I wish you could get me my bed. I lent it to Peter Wilkins, and his door is locked.'

'Guid save us!' cried the policeman, 'it's the Dog Missionary. Is that your bed?' he added, climbing up beside Billiam and looking critically at the object. The rays of a gas lamp upon the pavement shone upon it so that it glowed with a kind of radiance not its own.

'It looks a guid bed eneuch!' the policeman said as he climbed down.

'Can you not get it for us, John?' repeated Billiam.

'Dod, sir, I canna do that without hoose-breakin', an' I've been thirty years in the force,' answered John; 'but there's nae doot that the bed's a guid bed.'

And with that he walked heavily away.

The Hussar stood on the pavement with his legs very wide, and whistled fitfully.

'Well,' he said, 'what do you propose to do about it, Billiam? Say, let's both go to a hotel and

get supper. Then we can stop the night there.'

Billiam looked at him with a kind of sad reproach in his eyes.

'You forget,' he answered, 'that the new collie's bandages must be changed, and the little Yorkshire will need looking to twice or thrice during the night. But you can go, and I'll call round for you in the morning on my way to college.'

'Get out, you raving young idiot! On my word, I've heard of all sorts of lunatics, but I'm hanged if I ever heard of anybody before gone dotty on beastly stray dogs.'

'And there's the bull with the bad tear on his jaw. I must see that the stitches are keeping and give him some water,' continued Billiam meditatively.

'Of all the fools!' cried the Captain. 'Well, come on, Billiam, I'll be your keeper tonight, and see that you get a neat thing in strait-jackets right away.'

And the Hussar strode on with the air of a man who determines to see a desperate venture through to the bitter end.

They came in time to the corner of Montgomery Street, and again mounted up the crazy stairs. The fire had died down, and when Captain Ormithwaite went to the coal-box, it was empty.

'Hello, Billiam,' he said, 'how do you propose to keep us warm all night. Has somebody taken out your coals on loan as well as your bed?'

Billiam threw up his hands again with the same pathetic little gesture of despair.

'I don't know what you'll think of me, Herbert,' he said, 'but when I went away I gave all I had to the seamstress next door.'

'Well,' said the Captain, 'go and see if she can give you any back.' But at the suggestion Billiam's pale cheek flushed.

'I can't quite do that,' he said, 'but I think I can get some. You wait a minute and I'll run down and see.'

Then Billiam proceeded to array himself in an old ulster, remarkably wide and baggy about the skirts. He opened it and showed the Hussar how ingeniously he had sewn two large pockets of strong canvas to each side.

'I bring home the coals in these,' he said; 'isn't it a prime idea?'

'Where do you buy them?' asked the Captain.

'I don't usually buy them,' answered Billiam simply, 'I pick them!'

'Pick them and steal them,' said Captain Ormithwaite. 'You young beggar, what would the governor say if he knew?'

Billiam looked up a little wearily, as if the subject had suddenly grown too large for discussion.

'I shan't be very long,' he said, and went on buttoning the ulster about his slim young body.

'In for a penny, in for a pound,' said the soldier. 'I'll come and help you to steal coals, if I'm cashiered for it.'

Billiam pointed to an old overcoat which hung upon a nail behind the door.

'That's got pockets for coals and things, too, if you really want to come along,' he said, not very hopefully; 'but I think you had better look to the collie till I come back.'

'I'm on it,' said the Hussar; 'it's my night out. Come on!' he cried, pulling at the coat, which

threatened to turn out too small across the shoulders for him.

'What a rum smell it has, though!' he added, lifting up one of the lapels and sniffing at it.

'Oh!' said Billiam, 'that's only the dogs. Sometimes I wrap the worst cases up in it. But it's all right, old chap,' he added hastily. 'I always disinfect it carefully.'

They went down the dimly-lighted greasy stairs without meeting a soul. When they arrived at the foot, Billiam turned sharp to the left, and the Hussar found himself in a darkish wide lane, in which were no gas lamps. At the end of the lane was a great coal station, full of wagons and stacks of coal, black and shining, dimly seen between two tall gate-posts. The latest delivery wagons of the day were just leaving the yard on the way to the city coal stores, there to be ready for the morning demand. They rumbled out in a long procession, manned by men as rough and grim and black as the coal they worked among.

The coal carters kept up a brisk interchange of compliments with one another, varying this by an occasional lump of coal. Great wedges and nuts of it were also being jolted continually off the carts as they jostled and lurched through the dark and deeply-rutted lane.

'Come on,' said Billiam.

And he ran off among the grinding wheels, nipping up every piece of coal which lay on the road, and pushing it into his ulster pockets with trained alacrity. His brother endeavoured to imitate him, but he was unaccustomed and clumsy, and got but few pieces, and those small. It was interesting work, however, for the wagons surged and roared like a

maelstrom between the high walls and the tall houses. The Hussar found that it needed much quickness to seize the prey and bag it, evading, meanwhile, the succeeding carts, which came on at a pace which was almost a brisk trot.

Presently a huge coal carter, standing up on his waggon, caught sight of the Captain lifting a piece of coal from the side of the road. He sent a missile after him, which took effect just between his shoulder-blades.

‘Get oot o’ that, ye skulker ye!’ he shouted.

Captain Ormithwaite of the 110th Hussars sprang toward his assailant to take him by the throat; but the watchful Billiam had his brother promptly by the arm.

‘Mind what you are about!’ he said. ‘See; stand in there, and we’ll soon get enough to last us three or four days.’

The brothers took shelter in a cellar doorway, both of them grimed to the eyes. Billiam produced a hideous mask out of his side pocket, and put it on. Then he slid off the doorstep and took up his position on a little mound of hard trodden earth and engine ash.

‘Ho! Ha!’ he cried. ‘Ye are a set o’ dirty, lazy Gilmerton cairters!’

Every coalman on the waggons leaped up at the word as if he had been stung, and the rain of coal cobs which fell about Billiam was astonishing and deadly; but by long practice he evaded every one of them, letting some slip past him, and catching the straight ones as cleverly as ever he had done the ball when he kept wicket on the green playing fields.

Presently the Captain found Billiam, now a

very swollen and bulky Billiam, once more beside him.

'You go and fill up at the back of the mound where I was guying 'em,' he said; 'there's quite half a ton there.'

And very obediently the Hussar went, with a grim delight in his heart to think of the fit his C. O. would have if he could only have seen him. Presently he had filled up, and, leaving the roar of the coal avenue for the quiet of the house, Billiam and his brother slunk laboriously upstairs to their garret.

'Lord! shall I ever be clean again?' groaned the Captain, looking at his hands. 'To think what you have led an officer of the Queen into—you blessed young gallows-bird, Billiam!'

'Empty the coals here,' commanded Billiam; and his brother poured out his hoard into a large compartment built beside the window. How Billiam could have carried so great a load was a puzzle, but certainly there could not have been less than a hundredweight of coal in his canvas pockets alone. He hastened to fill a pot with water, and in a little while he had a shallow bath full of warm water. This he set out in a corner, behind a screen made of a grey sheet which hung upon a cord.

'Go in there,' he said, 'and get yourself cleaned, you horrible Sybarite!'

When he came back to take his turn at the bath, a fresh pot full of water was ready, and the room was bright and warm. The Hussar had attended to the fire and had swept the floor. The brothers were in the inner room in which Billiam usually camped. There was a sofa in it now.

'I'll toss you for the sofa, young 'un,' said the

Captain.

'Right!' said Billiam promptly. 'Tails!'

'Heads it is!' cried the Hussar with some relief.

'Glad of that,' quoth cheerful Billiam. 'I prefer the floor anyway. You can make quite a decent thing out of rugs and overcoats. And besides, sleeping on the floor makes you so jolly glad to get up in the morning.'

So they turned in and slept the sleep of the just. Billiam was up by daylight and had a cheerful fire burning when his brother awoke. He brought him a cup of tea and told him to roll over again. But the Captain was now wide awake and eager for talk.

'Why do you keep on at this kind of thing?' he said, 'and why don't you buy your coals like an ordinary being?'

'Well,' said Billiam, 'this is the sort of thing I take to, you see. It's interesting all the time. I suck in oceans of learning all day till I'm tight, and then I practise it all the evening. And as for coals— well, sometimes I do buy them. But £150 a year doesn't spread far in rent, classes, and victuals— not to speak of dressings and lint.'

'See here,' said the Captain, 'I think I could get over the governor to double your allowance. I've been pretty light on him lately, and he thinks me a good little man. If I do, will you leave off pigging up here and live decent?'

Billiam seized his hand.

'You are a good chap, sure,' he said. 'Try it on the dad, Heb! I could get proper cubicles for the beasts then, an operating table, and perhaps I might even afford to hire a yard.'

The Captain leaped from his sofa and began to

pace up and down in his pajamas.

'Of all the fools God ever made, Billiam, you are the most confounded! Why in creation didn't you settle down and be a proper parson, if you wanted to do all this kind of thing? It makes me sick!'

Billiam looked at him a while as if for once he would try to explain. But the hopelessness of the task made him turn away sadly. Nobody ever would understand. He must just go on and on, till they put him in a lunatic asylum.

'See here,' he said, 'better put on your clothes, Herbert. You'll be sure to catch cold, prancing about there in your night things. And you don't look pretty,' he added, looking at him critically.

'But why wouldn't you be a parson, Billiam? That beats me dead. You're just the sort of soft chap for a parson.'

'Stuff!' said Billiam; 'who ever heard of a parson just for splicing up dogs and cats and things?'

There's enough of the other kind to go round, surely. And there's only one of Billiam for this sort of parsoning.'

'Well, Billiam,' said Captain Ormithwaite a little later, 'I'm off up to town. This is all very well for a night, but a little more of it would kill me. I declare I shall smell doggy and chloratey for a month. Here's some sinews for you, Billiam. It's all I can spare.'

'Thank you,' said Billiam, pocketing the notes without demur. 'I may be the prodigal chap in the parable, but I'm blowed if you are the old kind of elder brother, the fellow who would not go in.'

'That's all right,' said the Captain. 'Let us hear that you keep ribald. I guess you'll slip into heaven

ahead of some of the parsons yet, Billiam.'

'It'll be when Peter's not looking, then,' said Billiam, shaking his head; 'but if they do nick me at the gate, why, I guess there'll always be plenty for a fellow like me to turn his hand to in the Other Place.'

[This is not, however, the end of Billiam. For there was a seamstress across the landing who seriously interfered with his plans.]

7. VERNOR THE TRAITOR

Being the Memoirs of Patrick Vernor, of Irongray, written by himself, and now published by his brother for the warning of others alike traitorous and malignant, and for the encouragement of them that do well.

PART ONE THE OUTCAST

I, Patrick Vernor the younger, of Irongray, in Galloway, now private in Colonel Douglas' regiment of Dragoons, take pen in hand in order that I may write, for the easing of my heart, the story of a life wherein the bitter has ever lapped over the sweet, the evil overflowed the good, and the faint visitings of worthy desire been blown away before the blasts of pride and black envy.

I mind well how it began. It was the day on which there came to visit us that best of ministers, good, simple Mr. John Welsh of Cluden. He had been over at the Scaur preaching, and after the sermon and the scattering of the folks—which as yet was done in peace, for Clavers had not then settled himself down to watch the Galloway hill-folk at the bridge-end of Dumfries—the minister came on with my father, John Vernor, to dine at our house of Irongray.

On the way he held converse with him concerning duty and privilege.

'Ye have seven sons, John Vernor; it behoves

you to give one of them to the Lord,' said Mr. Welsh to my father. 'Ye are a man that, so far as the times have sped, stand as yet in good odour with them that are in high places. You are a man of substance. Well can you afford to spend some of your living on the educating of one of your lads for the preaching of the Word. Now, I have come so far to tell you a thing which it behoves you to give ear to. There are four youths of promise who are going by ship to Rotterdam, on their way to the College of Groningen—William Gordon of Earlstoun, a lad of parts and promise, being one of them. Wherefore, then, having this good chance, John Vernor, do you not send one of yours with them, to skill himself in the humanities; and afterward, if so his heart incline, to be exercised in sound divinity by Mr. Brackel of Leeuwarden and the other great divines of the pure reformed kirk of Holland?'

And my father lent a not unwilling attendance, and considered of the matter, while I, who had been with him to the conventicle, pricked up my ears and listened. For so soon as I had heard of the journey to Holland, I was smitten with very great desire to go.

It was not that I had any great call to the preaching work—God wot. There was never aught of that about me. But (I may as well tell it out soon as syne), there was a lass over at the Torwood that I was fairly daft upon. She had so twined herself about my heart that in her presence I became but a little wimpling dog, that twists itself and grovels in the dust to draw its mistress's eye.

Isobel Weir was her name, and a sweet maid she was—bonny, aye, beyond all in that countryside, and with such a serene, persuasive way with her,

that there was nothing she would have asked that even a heart of stone could have refused. I loved her more than all this world, and infinitely more than the next. But me she would say no good word to. For I had the name of a wildish lad, and one that was a deal better at the sword-play than at the seventeen points of doctrine. But Isobel, as became a daughter of the Weirs of Torwood, was a true-blue maid of the Covenants. And many was the time she told me that if I wanted aught of her favour, I must company with those who sought the good way of her folk, and shun the back-swording and the weapon-showings, where only the ill-exam-pled and the unseemly congregated.

And so for a while, to the infinite weary trial of my spirit, I did. Yea, for the sake of Isobel Weir I attended the conventicles, and kept watch and ward for the coming of the 'persecutors' over the moor. Also sometimes when I sat near her my heart was glad, and methought that I had indeed found something of the religion of which my father and one or two of my brothers were always speaking. But when for a season I saw Isobel no more, and Gib Affleck or Wat Dickson called me in to drink a tass of brandy with them at the change-house, straightway I forgat. So I was counted as of them that backslid; and when Isobel met me again, she looked the other way, gave me her hand right coldly, and walked with Robert my younger brother, a callow, fushionless lad that never did wrong openly all the days of him.

So now on this afternoon when old Mr. Welsh came over with my father to Irongray, and I heard him speak of sending one of us to the college in

Holland, there came on me a great desire to go. Moreover, I felt that I had the right of it, for was I not the eldest of John Vernor's seven sons? Above all, I knew that merely shaping at the leading-strings of preacherdom would bring me favour in the eyes of Isobel Weir. And already I saw myself saying farewell to her, and asking of her a kindly word, and it might be a kiss, before I went for the good cause to a foreign land. I saw her eyes lift to mine with willingness and sweet surrender in them. Faith, I would have gone to Holland for less, had it been farther than the moon and aswarm with cannibals.

'I would see your sons,' said Mr. Welsh, after he and my father had arrived at the house door, 'and then there may come a message and a sign to me which of them the Lord has chosen for this work!'

'Content!' said my father. 'I will go gather the laddies in, that you may see whether there are signs of grace about any of them.'

Then, setting Mr. Welsh in the great oak chair by the window, and giving him the Bible to divert himself with, my father went to the barn-end, and, making a trumpet of his hands, he cried a far-heard cry up and down the Cluden water. And silent Duncan at the herding on the hill caught it, and he left his ewes in the charge of Tweed, his wise dog, to keep them from breaking bounds. And Gilbert, the ready of speech, hasted up from the meadow. I could see his scythe glittering as he set it against the dyke, for he had casten his coat and to the work as soon as ever he came back from the field-preaching. And the rest, my brothers, were all by this time in the little ben room—all saving Robert, who was my

youngest brother, and of little account amongst us. For his mother had spoiled him, making believe that he was delicate, and must not be stirred to rough work, when all the time he was but lazy and petted with being made much of, as the youngest of a household often is.

‘Where is Robert?’ said my father, when we were all settled in the room down the house.

‘I ken not that,’ said my mother, ‘but I will go and seek him. He will be busy with his learning in some corner, doubtless.’

Then, after she was gone out, the minister asked which amongst us most desired to go to Holland, and be colleged there with the young men who were about to set sail. Most of my brothers hung down their heads, being just come in from their work and having heard nothing of the matter. Besides, some of them had lasses who were fond of them in the countryside, and that made a great difference in their eagerness to adventure forth of the realm.

But I spoke up and said: ‘Mr. Welsh, I am the eldest son of this house, and if any ought to go forth to see strange lands and gather lear, it is surely I. If my father give his consent, I am ready to set sail with William Gordon and the rest. And I will strive every way to do your bidding, that I may prove no discredit to you either in the Low Countries or on my return. My father knows that I do not lie. And this I promise faithfully.’

Mr. Welsh turned his head toward me as I spoke. He had beautiful white hair, and a broad collar of fair linen came down over his coat.

‘Young man,’ he said, ‘ye speak somewhat

carnally, but fairly. What ye say is of a good sound so far as it goes. But whether ye have indeed the root of the matter in ye—that I know not.’

‘That,’ replied I, ‘I know not either. But at all events I have the will and desire for better things in me. And this, as I see it, is as much as at my age one may expect. I will e’en go to Holland to learn more.’

But my father shook his head.

(‘Ye are better foddering the horse, Patrick,’ he said. ‘I fear all that ye would learn of divinity at Groningen would not choke a week-old chicken. Mind, I will not spend my good undipped siller to let you play your plays among the Dutch birkies!’)

For this was ever his manner of making light of me. And his words made my heart bitter. For, had I had one to believe in me, all might have been different. But if a lad be flouted at home, with none to give him credit for good, he will soon seek credit of another sort elsewhere.

At this, the minister looked more kindly, methought, at me.

‘But tell me,’ he asked, ‘what is the reason that you so strongly desire to proceed overseas?’

So I spoke up bluntly, even as the words were given to me. For I never could cloak nor gloze things over prettily.

‘I am weary of the way of life here—of the stabling of horse and the milking of kye. I would fain lift my soul above the mixen. And there is a lass that wants me to gather learning over the water and to seek out the better way. I would fain do both for her sake.’

‘I hear no word of a leading and overruling

providence in this,' said my father. 'I am not surely to pay good coined siller that you may gain a lass's favour. What would that advantage the cause of the persecuted?'

The minister raised his hand and gently patted my father on the sleeve of his coat.

'Patience, good friend,' he said: 'there have been stranger things than this that have yet fallen out. The Lord's bright jewels have oftentimes been digged out of very black pits. Remember that mighty servant of the Lord, Mr. Richard Cameron, who was brought up in the camp of the enemy and served as a bishop's schoolmaster about the wicked town of Falkland in the shire of Fife.'

But just then came in my mother with my young brother Robert in her hand. She was lifting up her eyes and making a mighty phrase about something. We could hear her ere she came within the outer door.

'Such a marvel—a direct leading—even a prodigy!' she cried. 'Here when I went out to find this blessed lad, to bring him in to the man of God, where think ye I should come upon him, and how employed?'

'Maybe in the milk-house, talking with the byre-lass, and eating curds with his fingers—that was where I saw him last!' said I, bitterly enough. For I knew what would happen if once my mother got her oar into the water.

'Silence, sir!' cried my father to me, with a stamp of his foot.

'Oh, Mr. Welsh!' my mother went on, looking at the minister with tears in her eyes, 'this is he— this is indeed the chosen vessel. Believe it who will of one

so young. I found him even in the orchard under the tree where the Burgundy cherries grow. He kneeled on his knees, praying very preciously for a blessing on this poor Scotland.'

'So,' said I, as drily as I could, 'methinks he must have gotten a glimpse of the minister coming up the loaning before he set to his petitions.'

'You are a scoffer, Patrick,' said my mother, 'and will come to no good end. The lad was at his prayers, and among other things I heard him loud and instant that the sins of his brothers might be forgiven to them, and especially the often backsliding of this Patrick, who now takes it on him to flout the good lad for it.'

'Wait till I get the good lad out of hearing of the house. I will make him send up some few other petitions,' I said, shutting my fists for anger. But I said it low in to myself. Aloud I said: 'My brothers and I are muckle obliged to Robert for his prayers for our backsliding. It is well there is something that he can do besides hang to his mother's apron-strings and lie about dyke-backs. He never was worth his kail at a day's work in his life!'

'The lad is delicate and of another mind from these rough lads,' said my mother, to whom Robert was as the apple of her eye. 'He draws naturally to the quieter ways of the house and the company of women-folk.'

'So,' said I, again, 'then he will make a brave preacher to the hill-folk—he must thole wind and wet, endure hardness cheerfully, sleep on draggled heather roots, and die at the last in the Grassmarket with a tow rope round his neck and a second-hand testimony in his mouth.'

This daunted my mother a little, fearing for her petling.

‘Let us hear what the lad says himself,’ said the minister, who had been narrowing his eyes and bending the tips of his fingers together upon us as he looked from one to the other. I could see that his mood was one of deep consideration. Yet the loon Robert, being ever the favourite of my parents, so roused my spirit to a very gale of anger, that I could not restrain my tongue—though I well knew that I was playing havoc with my chances of going to Holland, as I so greatly desired to do. Yet, as I own, it was no ways for love of sanctity, but all for the sake of winning the favour of Isobel Weir, and also because one that had been there told me there was much gallant sword-play and good comradeship among the young collegers of Groningen.

Then that young supper-of-sowens, Robert Vernor, answered that he forgave me all my ill words of him, because that I knew no better, and spoke but after my kind. If he was judged worthy he was willing to go to Holland, for he had a call to the work and no fellowship with those foul talkers and evil livers that were about him here in Irongray. He was willing to give up all and adventure forth, if the minister and his father and mother bade him. He had been, he knew, already called of God. So he spoke meekly and pitifully, till I could have cast him into the horse-pond in fair disgust.

‘Oh! the blessed lad!’ cried my mother. ‘Patrick, there is a lesson for you—with your flouting and jeering. Did ye hear how beautifully he forgave you?’

The minister hung a while on Robert's words. At last he spoke.

‘I suppose the youngest will have to go,’ he said, ‘for by his words (at least) he shows much more inclination to the work. And his parents are desirous to send him. Yet I am none so sure but that that one’ (pointing at me) ‘might have turned out the better man, if his carnal nature had been in a little better subjection.’

‘Ah!’ said my mother, ‘it is my Robert that has the beautiful nature. Patrick was ever proud and upsetting from a boy, and now most cruelly overrides the lad. It will be better to separate them.’

‘Well, since it must be so!’ said the minister; ‘yet I fear the carnal heart within me leans to the other.’

He spake as a man that knows his mind.

But at this the devil in me rose, and I felt that in my heart which I must speak out.

‘Wait,’ I said. ‘I have a word to say. Hear ye all. Ye have spoken the worst things of me that am the eldest son of this house. They that brought me into being have proclaimed my faults. They have set aside my urgent desire—God knows all I ever asked of them. They have made me of none account—it is well. Now I will take no more than the clothes I wear and go forth. My ten years’ labour hath at least earned so much wages as a suit of grey homespun cleading. I bid you farewell. Father and mother, I leave you with your dear son—your perfect son. The black sheep goes forth, lest his foulness should corrupt this white, immaculate lamb.’

‘Go then, scoffer!’ cried my father, ‘and never cross the threshold of the door—so long, at least, as the house of Irongray stands by the waters of Cluden, and John Vernor lives to be the master of

it.'

But my mother put her apron to her eyes and wept aloud, whereat Robert went and put his arms about her neck. For of a certainty he had the art of comforting women-folk, ever phrasing and dandying about them.

'Do not weep, sweet mother,' he said; 'you still have one loving son left.'

I looked over at Robert, my brother.

'Pale wart,' said I; 'were it not for the presence of those whom I am bound to respect, I would even twist thy neck, thou young hypocrite!'

My father pointed to the door.

'Out of my house, sirrah!' he cried, working his brows up and down in a way he had when he was sorely angered.

So I went out with all my brothers following after me—Duncan and Gilbert first, and after them John, Martin, and Sandy. The five of these good lads said not a word, but came out at my heels, hanging their heads and looking mighty loath and sorrowful. So Robert was left in the room by himself with my father and mother and Mr. Welsh, the minister. And as we were already at the outer door, he called to me in his silky-soft, wheedling voice:

'Patrick, do not part in anger, my brother. Freely do I forgive you all the ill words ye have spoken of me.'

But I turned the back of my hand to him, as I stood for the last time on the threshold of the house of my fathers, from which I was now to be evermore on outcast.

'That for your forgiveness!' said I. 'Keep it to cozen older fools withal! You cannot take in Patrick

Vernor with your sugared lies!

So from the house of Irongray, where I was born and which I had counted as mine own, I was thus outlawed and extruded. 'Tis easy to say that I had but mine own self to blame. Had I bidden more at home o' nights and ever been in at the 'taking of the Book,' my father might have looked more kindly upon me. And I should, maybe, have pleased my mother better had I been more complaisant, and made pretence to a little religion of the easily carried kind which comes out in asking long blessings at meal-times and interlarding a sanctified word or two in common speech—such as: 'It'll be a fine day the morn, if the Lord will,' or, 'We'll shear the sheep on Monday, gin a kind Providence spare us!' For many is the sound reputation for godliness which has been built on just as little as that.

But I never had the art to guide my tongue all the days of me, and ofttimes, alas! I have permitted it to guide me; and a man lands surely in the mire when he lets his unruly evil take charge.

At all events, there I was outside the door of my father's house, and presently, being convoyed on my way by my five kindly brothers, whom I had not suspected of so much tenderness for their elder, I found myself at the loaning foot. There is a ford near by over the little water of Cluden and a crossing of stepping-stones, about which as bairns we had played the day by the length, before ever we heard a sound of the weary Covenants that have worked so muckle strife in this land. I had my foot on the first stone when Duncan nudged Gilbert to speak. He

was a fine, solid lad, Duncan, but not gleg at the talking.

'Duncan wants me to say, Patie,' said Gilbert, taking the signal reluctantly, 'that we are heart sorry for this cast oot. And we are a' vexed for ye, and we do not think that ye have been rightly used. But ye are to mind that the Irongray is your ain, and we will work it for you as the rightful heir. There's nane o' us that are Jacobs, or would supplant our brother. Is that no richt, lads?'

'Aye,' gruffly enough responded Duncan. And the others also said, 'Aye' with one voice.

'And ye are no to do onything rash, Patie,' he went on, 'for we have here some pickle siller that we had laid by us. It's no better than twenty Scots pounds, but ye are welcome, Patie (stop that whingein' and greetin', Martin; think shame o' yoursel', man!). And ye are to tak' it and look about ye a wee, and no do onything rash that ye would be sorry for after, like!'

'Lads,' I answered them, slowly, for I was near overcome, 'I canna tak' your hard-won siller. Ye'll be needing new plaids and bonnets, and I ken Duncan was saving for a Bible.'

'It's a lee—I wasna', said Duncan.

'Na, na, so long as Patrick Vernor has a pair of strong hands, the world will no come greatly wrong to him. Fare ye weel, honest lads. See and humour my faither, gin ye can. It was never a thing I was good at mysel'.'

So I shook hands with them all five, and turned away. I could hear poor Martin, that was ever a kenning soft in the heart, break into a passion of tears, at which Duncan took him by the neck of his

coat to shake the folly out of him.

‘Have ye no more sense?’ he said. ‘Dinna make it harder than it is for Patie.’

Ah, good lads, kindly lads—praise God for five brothers that are neither time-servers nor hypocrites !

But it was at the kirk-stile, as I went by the village, that I got the heaviest stroke. For there I met Isobel Weir. She came daintily over, lilting at a psalm, and putting up her hand, as she saw me, to the blue maiden's snood that belted her yellow hair.

‘You are bound for Holland, I hear,’ she said; ‘they tell me that Mr. Welsh has gone up to settle the matter with your father.’

‘Not I,’ I made answer, gloomily enough, ‘but Robert, my brother, goes to Holland in my stead. He, as we all ken, is the lad of grace in our household, and keeps himself first in favour with the godly. Who can contend with such a flower of sanctity?’

‘You forget yourself, Patrick Vernor,’ answered Isobel Weir, holding up her head severely; ‘better would it be for you to be likewise in favour with things honourable and great with godly men. Your brother Robert is truly a lad of promise.’

‘And also of comeliness—a very young David, with his love-locks and ruddy cheeks,’ said I bitterly. ‘Well am I aware that he has the favour of all you women, and specially of Isobel Weir of the Torwood.’

‘And though he hath, what is that to you? Patrick Vernor?’ the girl answered me. And there was fire in her eye, for I saw that she had taken my meaning but too well. Now all my days, though I loved her dear, yet had I never any power to please her. Nor were my words ever agreeable to her, like

the cunningly patient smiles, the quick observance and deference, of Robert my brother.

'Truly it is nothing to me: there say you rightly, Isobel Weir,' I said. 'If you had loved me it might have mattered more. But since you will not, why then, there is no more to the business, but just to shake hands and part. I bid you farewell, Isobel. It is a long day since I carried you over Cluden water on my back and ye called me your love, being then but a bairn. I bid you farewell, for when next you see me go by, it is little that you or any honest lass will have to say to Patrick Vernor.'

'What would you do to yourself?' she asked, looking, as I thought, a little dashed at my bitter words and determined air.

'Faith, I go to Dumfries to take the king's colours and ride merrily a-trooping. Since they will not make a soldier of me on the one side, what better can a landless and kinless loon do than take arms on the other?'

PART TWO
THE LOVE OF ENEMIES

With that I waved my hand to Isobel Weir, the lass I would have loved better than any other man, if so be she would have let me. For I saw that she would not even shake me by the hand for old sake's sake. And I desired to save her the pain of refusing.

Now let all men judge if my heart was not full to the brim of dule and waefulness that day as I went down the bonny knowes of the Cluden side. For, saving the brothers whom I had left behind, I had not a friend in the world. And when the heart is sore for a lass and her fickleness, it is not the love of brothers that brings much solid comfort. I thought chiefly indeed that another would kiss the lovely mouth I had longed to kiss, and I felt for my knife to kill him for it.

By the Red Yetts I heard a pitter-patter on the grass, and there, running behind me, was my dog Royal, racing from side to side of the way and smelling at rabbit-holes as if I had been going a little dauner to see the lasses in the gloaming. I bade him go home, but he did nothing but sit and look at me, considering, as it were, with his wise head to the side. Nor would he budge an inch when I spoke angrily, but only lay and cowered his head between his paws so meekly that I could not beat him for very pity.

So, though I feared that they would not abide him at the quarters of the Dragoons in Dumfries, I had perforce to let him follow on. And indeed he abode with me ever after, and is even now with the regiment.

When I came to Claverhouse's lodging I went boldly up to the sentinel and demanded of him to see Cornet Graham.

'Ho, Bluebonnet,' cried he, 'it is not often that a Whig comes speering for that name. What might you want of him, my brave Whiggie?'

'An' you had not that long piece in your hand with the pudding pricker at the end, I would e'en show you to whom you speak,' said I, shutting my fists; 'but an' you want to know, I come to enlist in his Majesty's Dragoons.'

When the soldier heard that his mood changed, and very good-naturedly he told me where I should find Cornet Graham, who had charge of the recruiting. To him I went, and we agreed so well that in an hour I was being measured for my accoutrement by the regimental tailor.

Then, when for the first time Trooper Patrick Vernor, eldest son to John Vernor of Irongray, rode out, judge ye what a cry there was in all the countryside. Some there were who said that I did but play the old game of 'Heads, I win; tails, my father does.' For (said they) if the King keeps his own, Irongray is safe in the hands of that good soldier of his Majesty and of Claverhouse's Private Patrick Vernor; but if the wild Whigs triumph in their Whiggery—why, here is a patriot and sufferer, John Vernor, restored to full possession, and, in addition, all his fines and king's dues are remitted.

But among the folk of the hillside and the field meeting I was outcast and thrice accursed. For soon after my enlisting there ensued the wildest times that we had ever had in Galloway—sudden marches during the night, moorland houses searched, half a

dozen poor, ignorant, praying lads turned out, some to get their quietus at the dyke-back with a charge of powder and a musket-bullet, the rest to go stringing away to Edinburgh on the backs of sorry nags, their feet tied under the bellies of their horses. It was weary work, and in my own country-side I liked it ill enough. But I was not the man to go back; and indeed, what, when all was said and done, had I to go back to?

Then in a while there came better of it. For the folk of the Covenant began to gather into disciplined companies and make a stand. And then what riding -and chasing there was between garrison and garrison —Colonel Douglas at Morton borrowing troopers from Captain Bruce of Earlshall at Crichton Peel, and both being drawn upon by John Graham of Claverhouse, who kept at Dumfries the head bees' byke, from which we swarmed out in all directions to win honey from the Whiggish pastures of Galloway.

So we went on, riding and killing, till it happened that we lay, one day, a hot Sabbath, by a hillside, and we had marched all night to take the Conventiclars in the midst of their preaching. It was about the noontide, and we were lying idly in the covert, with our horses cropping the coarse, lush grasses of the little forest glades. We could easily hear the sound of the preacher's voice from where we lay, and by crawling to the edge of the coppice we could see him—a tall, thin lad, with a fresh and beautiful countenance.

'I declare,' said Sergeant Driscoll, below his breath, 'if I had not seen psalm-singing Pat there lying on his belly and sucking of a straw, I had thought that he had given us the slip and gone back

to his old business. That preacher loon is the very moral of him.'

But it was too hot there in the wood to bandy words with a cross-eyed thief of the King's pet Irishry. So I let Driscoll talk on. I heeded not at all what he said concerning the preacher. I had seen too many of the breed, and, barring Ritchie Cameron, who had the heart of half a dozen brave men all inside of his one body, I had small enough liking for them, or indeed they for me. Truth to tell, they had spurgawed me over sorely with their catechisms and testimonies when I was young. And since Isobel Weir had given me the go-by, I had looked (God forgive me) at more than one along the shining barrel of a King's musket. For which as I say, may the Lord pardon me. For I but carried out the orders of my commander, and, like a soldier, took no account of the rights or wrongs of the matter.

So presently it was time for us to drive among them. The men awaked and stretched themselves. Then they leaped up from their beds of heather, looked to their equipment, and secured each his own charger. The Colonel divided us into two parties, and we rode out of the wood at opposite ends, to take the Conventiclors in flank and rear.

Here and there we could see a sentinel standing leaning on his gun, or moodily pacing to and fro. But, one and all, they were paying more attention to the preacher than to walking about Zion and felling the enemies thereof. At all events, we were well out of the wood before any alarm was given. But when they saw us come, then indeed there was a buzz and a stir among them like bees

swarming.

Certain of the stronger and more determined men drew themselves together into some sort of disciplined order about the preacher. But the most part of them ran every way, making specially towards a large wild moss with many quags and green slimy morasses, over which they supposed our heavy horses could not go.

It so chanced that my own squadron, with Colonel Douglas at its head, was the first to reach the little band of the fanatics that stood at bay about the preacher. As we came, a tall, grey-headed man among them, whom for the press I could not see clearly, gave the word of command, and they fired irregularly when we were about thirty yards from them. I saw the smoke spring white as it had been under the very nose of my horse. At my elbow Jock Cannon, for ordinary my rear rank man, grunted, fell forward on his horse's neck, and his sword dropped from his hand. Looking about me, I could see several saddles emptied, but whether with bullets that wounded or that killed, I knew not. So there ran the word along the line of our charge that no prisoners were to be taken, except the preacher, on whose head there was a price. And in a moment we were among them, and I was striking down the sword-blade of the man who opposed me—a stout countryman, who had a cloak wrapped about his left arm for a guard. But there was no seeing much, for the place where we fought was in a hollow, and what with the lack of wind and the much firing, all was a turmoil and a confused smother of the blue reek of powder.

Now, mine enemy was a stout lad enough, but

with his heavy blade and small experience, he could not hope to keep it up with an exercised soldier of his Majesty. So I had presently his sword out of his hand, and was just about to cleave him to the brisket, when my gentleman, instead of crying 'Quarter!' as many of them did, leaped at me with a broad-bladed dagger-knife before I had time to shorten grips on my sword.

And then, when his face was near enough mine to see clearly through the smoke, and his knife within six inches of my buff coat, I saw who he was—mine own brother Duncan. And at the same moment he knew me.

'Patrick!' he cried, and let his knife drop.

'Lord love you—Duncan,' I said, stopping my horse. 'Get out of this as fast as you may. Are there any more of the Irongray folk among them?'

'We are all here together,' he said, 'all except Martin.'

The tide of battle had somewhat passed us, sweeping on over the muir, so I bade him slip away as quietly as he might; for by this time our line had broken, as was usual, into a great number of separate combats. So it was with little difficulty that I let Duncan escape through my fingers, pretending a misunderstanding with my horse, and pursuing after him vainly with a loud outcry.

When I returned, I found that the skirmish was over, and all the fanatics either dead or captured.

I looked carefully at the former, one after another. There were none of them that I knew, till I turned a tall man lying face down in the moss, who had been slain at the first fire. It was the dead body of my father, John Vernor of Irongray.

Then it was that the enormity of taking part against my name and folk was first fully brought home to me. For mostly I had loved the horsemanship part of this soldiering business—the clattering gaiety of the march, the mustering in haste, the cool night rides, the constant change of quarters, the thrilling trump of battle, and the companionship of just such brisk, heedless lads as myself. But when I saw my father's dead body lying there, with the moss water running down his beard and mixing itself with the blood from his deadly wound, the black side of my trade came over me. I felt like the murderer of my father and the traitor they called me at their Society meetings.

And of that I was very soon to be remembered. For we had taken the preacher lad.

‘Sure, ‘tis Pat Vernor's self we have caught at the conventicling,’ cried Driscoll the Irishman; ‘we will even make him deliver himself to Satan for persecuting the saints, and then shoot himself for field-preaching.’

And with that I went forward, and there, with his hands tied behind his back, stood the conventicle preacher, with a lass clasping him about the neck and the soldiers standing a little way off waiting for the coming of the Colonel.

Now, though a man is not a good judge of his own likeness, I could not but see that this man was the very moral of me—hair, eyes, and features—aye, even the very way he had of standing with his head thrown back looking over the lass's shoulder with a kind of defiance.

Presently the maid raised her eyes, as it had been in a prayer to Heaven. For she knew well that it

was little use making an appeal to the King's troopers on behalf of a field Conventicler.

Then I saw who they were that stood before me.

The preacher was my brother, Robert Vernor, home from Holland, a full-fledged minister, and the maid whose arm was about his neck was Isobel Weir.

Presently my brother's eyes fell on me, and he started like one who sets his foot on a thorn.

'So, Judas,' he cried, 'you have slain your father and killed your brother! God shall judge thee, thou wicked man—thou bloody son. Sorrow shalt thou sup for all the evil thou hast wrought. Patrick Vernor, I deliver thee to the judgment of Almighty God for this your deed.'

And as he spoke Isobel Weir turned her about and looked at me, as one would at a very demon of cruelty, so that my heart quailed and turned sick within me at the glance. And even then she kept one arm about my brother's neck, and so for a moment she stood gazing at me.

'Traitor!' she said at last, with a certain slow, quiet bitterness, exceeding hard to bear; 'slayer of your father and heart-breaker of your mother—do not stay your hand till you have taken my blood and that of this poor lad. He is your youngest brother, and little more than a bairn. But that will make it the sweeter to you, and after that we are all under clod, then you may rest happy at last, and receive the reward of your brave soldier deeds in the slaying of women and children.'

To this I answered no word, but with my heart cankered and drowned in the very gall of bitterness I stood and looked at the two.

Then came Colonel Douglas, and, as was usual with him, his orders were swift and stern.

'How now!' he said, 'what's this? Take away the lass—we cannot shoot women. Let her be going to her own folk—we cannot have such with the troops. And bring the preacher to the tolbooth of Dumfries. He can be shot in the morning. But for the sake of the five hundred marks on the head of him, we must give him a trial and get the due certificate for his death.'

So they gave Isobel Weir leave to go, and, setting Robert into the midst of the company on a masterless horse, we rode into Dumfries. Douglas stayed behind to direct that the wounded of his troops should be well cared for in the neighbouring farm-towns, and to leave a visiting guard to see that they were kindly treated by the country people, who had indeed small reason to love us.

And as we rode on behind my brother, I had time to bethink me. The words of Isobel Weir pressed hard upon me—harder, as I think, than even the sight of John Vernor, whom I had seen lying dead on the moss. For I never greatly loved my father, and there is, so far as I have seen, no great instinct of affection in that relationship. For I find that as many sons hate their fathers as inordinately love them, while most are wholly indifferent as to the matter.

But whenever I rode within earshot of the preacher, he was crying blood and vengeance on my head, till the lads of the escort fell to the laughing.

'Come nearer, Pat,' they called, when we were out of hearing of the commander; 'he has just taken a new text and is expounding your iniquities under

the head of fifthly.'

But God knows it was no such laughing matter to me. For all the months and years of recklessness and all the riding and killing came back, salt and bitter on me. And my anger and estrangement at them of Irongray melted away. I minded only the early days and the still Sabbath morns at the old house—my mother sitting smelling at a spray of southernwood, and my father standing by her with his Bible under his arm, both of them waiting to take me by the hand and go our ways down the green loan, under the lilac bushes of the spring, to the kirk of Irongray.

'Ah, God!' I cried in my misery, 'keep any other poor soul from so going against his folk. For me there is, I know, no forgiveness. But let none other in blind pride of heart drive devilward as I have done. It is true—true what the lad Robert says— my father's blood is on my head!'

So in this blank despair we came to the prison, and the commander directed the jailer to put Robert in the thieves' hole for safety, and not into the general room, wherein debtors, ordinary sorners, and all the scourings of south-country rascaldom were put.

It was late in the afternoon, and as soon as Colonel Douglas had supped, he went over to call upon his crony Robert Grier of Lag, who abode mostly by the White Horse, at the foot of the Vennel; and having sent for the Provost of the town and also for a guard to bring the prisoner, they proceeded to try Robert Vernor. It was a simple form, for the lad had gotten some iron in his blood over in Holland and denied nothing. He owned that he had been

preaching the doctrine of resistance. He would have none of the Test. He owned not His Majesty King Charles. The Duke was the devil incarnate; in each of his first half-dozen statements there was enough to hang a parish.

‘It is well said,’ cried Douglas; ‘you are a manful laddie, and come, I hear, of good blood. Thou shalt have the estate, Robin Grier,’ he said, turning to Lag. ‘It lies contiguous to your own properties and policies—for the old man Vernor is killed in the skirmish.’

But at this I stepped forward and saluted.

‘May it please your excellencies,’ said I, ‘I have ever been a faithful soldier of His Majesty's. I have now served with the colours four years with honour as a private of His Majesty's Dragoons. I am the eldest son of Vernor of Irongray. There is surely no reason why his estates should be forfeit, or that my patrimony should be taken away from me.’

At this Grier of Lag looked sour and strange; but Colonel Douglas beat upon the table with his hand.

‘It is true—and Pat is a good lad—I will not see him wronged. I myself will write of this matter to the council.’

So he bade them to take Robert Vernor back to the prison, and there shoot him instead of hanging him. And this was counted a great favour.

‘Tomorrow, at the rising of the sun,’ said Douglas.

And so they took my brother out.

‘May it please you,’ said I to those of the court, ‘that I may be permitted free access to my brother during these his last hours. For there is much to

arrange between him and Andro Gibson, my late father's lawyer.'

'God wot, yes—an' it liketh you—go in and bide with him till he gets the garments for his martyrdom,' said Douglas. I had not known you were so fond of your kith and kin.'

So he wrote me a pass. For the prison was held by a guard of the foot from Tarbat's country, ignorant landwardmen from the North, who had no knowledge of us of the Dragoons and, indeed, no goodwill to our colours.

So I went away and groomed my horse, but had no stomach for supper. Then I walked a while on the banks of the river on the Galloway side of the bridge. And as I walked, I tried to pray, but the words would not come. I thought of Isobel Weir and her curse of me. So an hour ago I came away in hither to my quarters, and am now set down to add a few words to this story of my worthless and wasted life. God knows there is nothing I can say or do to obtain forgiveness, for Isobel's curse lies justly upon me. My father and her lover will both be cold corpses by the morning.

I know there is the way of the Scripture—the preacher's way. And as I sit and think the old words come back: repentance — forgiveness — mercy — 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour'—how run the words? But all these matter little to me now. They were not meant for a traitor and a parricide. Besides, what are words out of a book? I would give something to cover my father's face from my sight.

Yet there is a text something about shedding of blood—if only I could remember it. I heard a minister once preach upon it, and thought him

wearisome. Would that I could remember it now!

I have it. Quite suddenly it has leaped clear into my mind, shining in letters of fire, like that writing on the wall as the king's feast in the Book of Daniel.

'Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.' Surely it runs something like that.

It has come to me. I see a possible chance. I will at least go and speak with my brother. I have the Colonel's pass in my pocket.

It is all done now, save one thing, and I may add a word or two to my paper ere the sun rise and they come knocking at my door. I passed the guard with my mandate. They were drinking and carousing—the jailer with them. My brother received me with cursings and hateful words—as, indeed, was his right. But I told him the thing that I had come to do. I bade him put on my clothes and uniform, and give me his clothing in exchange. He could then pass freely with the order which was in my hand, for none would be at the shooting that knew me—for our Dragoons of Douglas' regiment were to march at midnight for Galloway.

'But mark,' I said, 'this is not for your own sake, Robert Vernor, nor yet because you are my brother. It is for the sake of the lass that put her arm about your neck—even for the sake of Isobel Weir. I pray you tell her this.'

'It shall be done,' said he, in the smooth way which I have ever hated and hate now, for his tone changed whenever he knew that there was a chance of safety.

'And you,' he said, 'what will you do?' 'I will abide the morning—and the opening of the doors,'

said I, as lightly as I could.

'And they will find you in preacher's clothes!' he said. 'Ah, well, I suppose they have found you too good a tool to punish you very severely for helping a poor field-preacher and your own brother to escape.'

'Likely enough,' said I shortly. And when he stood up in the regimental dress, and when I had done the sword and the spurs upon him and put the cloak about him, he looked none so ill a soldier, though not well set up about the shoulders.

I pushed him to the door and heard him tramp into the outer hall, where the Northern men sat singing and carousing with the jailer.

'Never mind your pass—we've seen it before. Open the door, Jock!' cried the jailer, never looking up from the dice, and, as I well understood, with his greedy eyes fixed on the stakes. Then I heard my brother's step die down the street towards the bridge-end and liberty.

So here I sit. Will they pardon me for this? For the sake of four years of service. Will John Graham overlook this connivance at rebellion? But what matter, after all—Isobel Weir's curse is on me. She would not take it off, even if I lived to be a hundred, and released to her a score of lovers.

But there is the text. There may be something in that. 'Without shedding of blood there is no remission.' Therefore in the shedding of blood there is remission—that seems clear. God help me! I think I can do no better. The east is brightening. They will be coming for me—they are lads of Tarbat's regiment, who know me not. It is not a long death. I have seen many die. 'Make you ready! Present! Fire!' Half-a-dozen bullets splash on the wall, but, thank

God! the other six will be in my sinful heart.

‘Without shedding of blood.’

I can hear them coming. May God forgive me
—and Isobel Weir! I must hide the paper.

(Postscript to the Memoir of Vernor the Traitor, written by the Reverend Robert Vernor, his brother, after the glorious Revolution.)

This paper and declaration of my elder brother was found in a wall-press in the Thieves' Hole of Dumfries, when it was pulled down by the order of the magistrates at the time when a more commodious and suitable prison was being erected. It purports to have been written by the hand of Patrick Vernor, who of a certainty aided me to escape from the hands of my cruel enemies. He was my brother. I judge him not. He has been for many years in his own place. There are those who think well of him for the manner of his death, and indeed I myself am grateful, and also my wife, Isobel, though she never names his name.

Yet what hope can any have of his salvation when it is well known that he died with a lie upon his lips —yea, even with blasphemy? For those that saw him put to death by the bullets of Tarbat's footmen declare that when some of them taunted him that he was a dumb dog and died without a testimony, he cried out these words :

‘Sons of dogs, ye liel!’ (that was the expression he used). ‘I have a testimony. And it is this: ‘Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.’ Tell Isobel Weir I died for her. God have mercy on my

soul!’

So, with no more said, the officer gave the word. And thus was a wicked man cut off ere he had lived half his days; as sayeth the Scriptures: ‘But the horn of the righteous shall be exalted.’

8. THAT POPIISH PARSON FELLOW

'Na, na,' said Muckle Rob as he led the way from the quoiting-green, where he had stopped the game, 'Na, I dinna haud wi' the Papishes—nor yet wi' the Englishers. And I wadna advise ony ane o' ye to say that I do. But that's nae reason for you to disturb the lad's bit service wi' your sweerin' an' the jingling o' your quoits!'

The miner folk of Lochfinny were not specially inclined to religion at any time. As Muckle Rob would have said, 'they werena juist broadened on it.' But no men in Scotland had a clearer sense of what was the right and chivalrous thing to do.

But the new English 'priest' with his daily services and early communion, his incense pot and acolyte, his Fridays for confession and his outspoken contempt for their own quiet steady-going Presbyterian ministers, was certainly more than a little hard to bear. There had indeed been for a long time a 'Catholic Chappel' cowering back among the out-houses in a quiet corner of the village. But as Muckle Rob said, 'Frae oot-an'-oot Papishes, ye kenned what to expec'! So ye looked for nae better!'

It was therefore, considered as, at the worst, a sort of half-deserved jest that the Lochfinny quoiting club should have started four of its youngest and noisiest rinks on a vacant piece of ground just outside the new enclosure of the Englishers. Eugene Challoner, priest of the mission church of Saint Ethelreda the Less, celebrated Evensong at the hour when the game was apt to be briskest. And the

gravity of the choir-boys, and even of the acolyte (who for many reasons had a bad time of it outside, till the parson made him his gardener and bell-ringer), was liable to be upset by the jests of Wull Sproat, the champion of the village; while the solemnity of the observances was not improved by the 'language' of the 'shankers' who were sinking the shaft of a new pit. The settled miners looked down a little upon these shankers as wild asses, who are here today and away to another job tomorrow. But they make 'big money,' and expected the license of a cavalry colonel as to language.

The Reverend Eustace had indeed protested, first mildly and then vehemently, over the wire fence.

But Tam Galletly and Pate Miller, young and ill-set loons both of them, had stood at the rink end, and, as the village put it, 'had set up a' manner o' lip an' back-talk to the man in the white sark.' The village did not indeed entirely approve. It considered that 'there was nae need for the like o' that.' But no active measures of prevention were taken till Muckle Rob came home. It was currently reported that Rob could lick any two men in the village with one hand tied behind his back. It is not clear that this particular wager of battle was ever brought to an issue; but the fact that with his two hands normally free Rob could handle a large proportion of the male population of the village to their damage, was sufficient to give the weight of a full bench of judges to his slightest utterances.

Muckle Rob had been away on a visit to a place 'in the Lowdons,' where there was a good job, and had just returned at the end of his contract with full

pockets and an air of prosperity which in any other person would have been considered exceedingly offensive.

When any of the inhabitants went upon a jaunt, it always took a day to accustom them to Lochfinny upon their return, so Rob took the time out in a tour of inspection. He heard that Andrew Grieve was lying up again and sending out his wife to do washing. So he called on Andrew and swore by the powers above and below that he would break every bone in his body if he was not found working on the 'face' by the first shift tomorrow. Andrew complained of a pain in the sma' of his back.

'The pain will be in the braid o' your back, gin ye are no forrit wi' your tools as soon as the lave o' us the morn!' said Rob, as he slouched out with elbows very wide of his sides, in the position in which he held them when he was making ready for a fight.

Towards sundown Rob, in his comprehensive survey of Lochfinny, arrived at the new quoiting-green. He leaned his arms on a dyke and attended to the points of the game with the air of a past master. Tam Galletly was ringing in the clanking disks, each fair on the pin. Then Pate Miller with his next quoit would 'raise him oot o' that!' It was a fine level game, point about, and evens between times. At least twenty miners, mostly shankers, were cheering on their favourites, and the noise was like a menagerie at the time of feeding.

But through the uproar there stole to the ears of Muckle Rob an unwonted sound. It was music, and there was something solemn about it— as Rob thought, like the first psalm on Communion

Sabbath. He heard it only faintly through the quieter blinks of the roaring quoiters. The high clear voices of boys steadied and weighed by one deep bass. The sound came through the windows of the 'Englishy chappel' beside the rinks.

'What's that?' queried Muckle Rob, suddenly, like a dog as it pricks its ears, and Gilbert Grey, commonly called 'Powhead Gibby,' explained the matter to him, with many chuckles and bursts of open laughter. But curiously enough Muckle Rob did not laugh at all. He was indeed more than ordinarily grave as he listened, so that Gibby wondered, after all, he had not got his pay for the contract 'over the water.'

At the end of the story Muckle Rob said never a word. But he slowly took his arms off the dyke and stepped over into the field. He strode forward towards the rinks as if more closely to inspect the game. The players made haste to welcome so mighty a champion, but Rob went solemnly to the tee, and kicked out the steel pins at the end of the rink to the back of which the signal paper was tucked. He sent the quoits spinning on their rims into the distant hedge. He took Tam Galletly and Pate Miller by the cuff of the neck, and, knocking their heads together, he marched them off the field.

'Deil's buckies!' said he, between every shake, 'hae ye no the hale green to play on, that ye maun come here to raise a disturbance? I'll learn ye!'

It was not often that Muckle Rob took so active a hand in matters ecclesiastical; and while nobody dared to contradict him, all were naturally anxious to come at the explanation of the matter.

'What's ta'en ye, Rab, since ye gaed awa?'

asked one of his mates. 'Ye used to be sair again the Papes? Hae ye turned your coat?'

'Na,' said Rob, 'I hae neither turned Pape nor yet Methody in my auld age, but for a' that I'm tellin' ye that the man who meddles wi' the Englishy chiel will ken the smell o' my five knuckles!'

There was a respectful silence. Several had tried the perfume mentioned but had misliked it.

'Come your ways to the wood end an' I'll tell ye the tale,' said Rob, in a more persuasive manner, as one who is conscious that he has hardly done justice to the softer emotions.

'Noo, hearken,' said Muckle Rob, when all the company had subsided into the convenient posture of attention known as 'hunkering,' 'an' when I hae dune ye'll agree on a new quoitin'-green. Or else—Weel, we'll 'gree on a new quoitin'-green!'

It was my wee Airchie, him that was ta'en last year when he was thirteen. Ye maybe mind o' him. He kepted the second door on the west side o' No. 4 Pit. He was a boy like the rest o' the reckless loons—could lee and sweer, and aiblins, when I wasna within hearin' tak' a drap drink and smoke his pipe wi' the aulder anes. Fine do I ken that my lad was nae wee white hen that never laid away!

'But ae Pay-Saturday, wha should come frae Manchester but the lad's auntie, our Elizabeth's sister, ye ken, wha's man has done so weel at the 'pack.' An' she telled Airchie aboot the grand place that the toon was, and the big pays, and the theayturs an' a' the ongauns, till she had the laddie fair by himsel'. I mis-caa'ed her for a daft haverel, pittin' notions into the bit bairn's head.

'But after that we had nae peace. Airchie

fleeched and cried on, till nocht wad serve but he maun gang awa back to Manchester wi' his auntie — her payin' his passage and giein' him his meat, as it were. So that we had no great loss, but only his day's wage.

'Noo for a woman that was sic a warrior at the eatin' an' drinkin', for her weight was twenty stane an' her customary drink stone ale, Marget was an awesome woman for meetin's an' preachin's—juist fair unbelievable—and as for texts, boys—O—, she could rattle them aff like a string o' empties gaun doon the do ok. She never got to the end o' yin o' them afore the ither was at its tail.

'So I kenned weel what the laddie wad get in Manchester. There was his uncle—a muckle bag-git Englishman that had made a heap o' siller by keepin' nocht but 'prentices to the pack, and sackin' them before their time was oot. He took Airchie to the theaytre the ae nicht—an' the next his auntie Marget garred him trot awa' mighty un-willin', to some o' her revival meetin's!

'But o' them a', there was no yin that Airchie cared a docken for, till on the Saturday Marget gets word o' a terrible genteel kid glove Methody meetin'. The folk were just crazy to gang to it, because it was hadden in the head kirk o' the place, that was caa'ed the Cathedral. Though what for it wasna juist decently caa'ed 'the Kirk' is mair than I can tell ye.

'Jam-packed it was at ony rate when Marget an' Airchie got there. They were squeezed like herrings, and it was as warm as lying on your back in the pit an' howkin' at the roof. The preacher chap was a' done up in a sheet, wi' a face like chalk, hair like ink, and e'en like holy fire. Marget said when

she cam' hame, that she had heard some preachin' in her life—mair maybe than had done her muckle good—but there was nocht in a' her experience to touch that chap. He mixed the folk up, he twisted them, he garred them laugh or greet juist as if they had been bairns an' him the dominie.

'Marget was in great fettle (so her man said) when she gat hame to her stone ale an' mutton pies. It was the grandest 'season' she had ever had. But my wee Airchie never said onything, but cam' his way back to Lochfinny an' gaed to his wark at No. 4 as he had done afore.

'But for a' that he was a different boy, I could see that. He gaed aboot that quiet, the day by the length ye wadna hae heard him lettin' an ill word oot o' the mouth o' him. His mother was fair feared that he was gaun in a decline. I asked Airchie what ailed him. But he looked doon and said, 'Nocht particular, faither.' So as he aye took his meal o' meat regular, I took nae mair heed either.

'But there cam' that smash in number fower the nicht the engineman got fu'—careless drucken deevil he was—an' we Airchie got the nip. So we took him hame to his mither, mairchin' slow and carefu', ye ken ower weel the way that brings the women doon the road like bees, to ken wha's man or bairn it is they're carryin'.

'They brought Airchie to the bed, that he had risen frae sae brisk that morning', ta'en his bit can and set oot whistling like a mavis. They laid him doon, and syne oor doctor cam'. He was kind and quiet—touchin' and bandagein', and aye wi' a joke an' a heartsome word.'

'Three cheers for the Doctor!' said someone in

the background. But Muckle Rob took no heed, but steadily told his tale.

Neel he bade Airchie be a guid lad, to mind his prayers, and do what his mither telled him, an' he wad gaffer the pit some day yet.

'But, lads, when he gaed oot, he gied yon thraw o' his nose owre his shooder at me, where I was standing like a useles lump in the corner. I saw he wanted me to speak at the door, an' my heart gaed down like lead.

'Rob,' he said, layin' his hand on my arm, 'better let Airchie get what he wants. He will no want it lang.' An' lads, I was near the greetin'— I dinna need to tell ye hoo near, for ye ken.

'But Airchie wanted naething, only to be letten alane. Sae in the afternune his mither said to him, 'Airchie, lad, ye had better ken—ye are gaun to leave us, Airchie—to leave your faither an' your mither. Is there ocht that ye wad like dune?'

'But Airchie lay still and made nae mair sign than if she had telled him to gang to 'hush-a-by' when he was a bairn. But in a while he said, 'Mither, if I maun dee, I wad like awesome well to see the chap in the white goon that preached when I was wi' Auntie Marget.'

'But we talked to him an' argufied wi' him, to pit him by the notion, sayin' that the man was some great Englisher, and, besides a' that, it was an awfu' lang road off. And that it wasna to be expected that he could leave his wark an' come awa' to see a collier lad here in Scotland. Sae we asked him gin the minister here wadna do, for he was a decent man and weel liked.

'But Airchie was mighty set in his mind, and he

said, 'I ken it's no to be expected, but if I canna hae the chap in the white goon to speak to me, I want naebody,' says he.

'Sae as I was writing to his Auntie to tell about the accident at ony rate, I put in a bit about what Airchie had said—never thinkin' but that it wad juist pleasure her to ken that Airchie minded the preachin,' wi' nae thocht ava o' onything mair.

'But Marget was ever, as ye ken, a forritsome woman. I think it maun hae been wi' companyin' so muckle wi' thae Englishers, for it wasna o' her kind o' folk. Sae as soon as she got the letter, what does the daft woman do, but pits on her bonnet an' awa to the graund hoose whaur Maister Cox Noble (for that was the name of the chap), leaved. But he wasna in. He was awa' on his holidays that verra mornin', awa' in Cornwall where the Methody miners comes frae. He was fair dune wi' workin' at his revivalin', the hoosekeeper said.

'Then Auntie Marget was gaun awa' dishearken-ened like, when the woman cried her back.

'But,' says she, 'ye nicht tell me what ye cam' about, if it's no a secret. For the master likes to hear when he comes hame.' Then Marget telled her a' about the puir lad that had been hurt awa' in the north. I jaloose she was glad to hae somebody to tell. And sae she gaed her ways back hame.

'We were a' sittin' up wi' Airchie that night, and I could see that he wadna be lang. It was far ower in the mornin'—on the back o' twa'—that there cam' a canny chappin' at the door. The laddie's mither gaed to it, thinkin' it was aiblins a neebour corned to speir hoo Airchie was. But when she opened it, there on the step, wi' a wee bag in his hand, was the

Englishy parson, white as the sheet he had preached in, wi' the e'en o' him fair sunk in his head wi' travel and want o' sleep. Sax hundred mile he had come to see my wee Airchie. We couldna speak to him, we war that pitten aboot.

'So he cam' ben, an' ye should hae seen the laddie's face as pleased like as if he had seen an angel frae heeven.

'I can dee noo!' he said.

'And there the Englishy chiel sat, wi' my boy's hand in his, a' the nicht till the mornin', whiles speakin' a wee an' whiles no.

'An' so they sat till Airchie heard the doors opening up and doon the raw, and the men gangin' awa' to the pit wi' their cannies and their lamps.

'That is the day-shift, minister,' he said; 'I maun gang too!'

'An' that was the way oor wee Airchie gaed oot wi' the day-shift!'

And at the road end, there was silence a little when the tale was done, and Muckle Rob sat with his hand covering his brow.

At last Pete Miller spoke.

'We'll hae nae mair quoitin' ower by the chaypel,' he said.

'Na,' said all the men, rising together very soberly. 'Nae mair quoitin' at the chaypel after this!'

9. THE EXERCISE BOOK OF FIELD-MARSHAL PRINCE ILANTZ

They buried the Prince Ilantz, Commandant of all the Kaiserlich Armies. With massed battalions of infantry, tramp of cavalry, thunder of artillery, they buried him. The chosen bands of a dozen army corps made the Dead March to rend men's hearts and overflow the eyes of women. The Prince's own Uhlan regiment, of which he was Colonel, escorted his body to the grave. They led his charger behind him, saddle-empty. And because there was no relative to be chief mourner, the King-like, Kaiser-like Majesty in person followed after.

They laid him away in his Field-Marshal's uniform, which might have been covered with medals and decorations as thick as plate armour. But because it was his will and custom to wear only the Iron Cross of Valour upon it, which any common soldier might wear, and wear as well as he—even thus they buried him who had been the first soldier of his time, and died Field-Marshal the Prince of Ilantz. And between his hands was placed a young girl's exercise-book, for so it was written in his will. Also it had been his last dying command. When the end drew very near, his sovereign stooped to whisper a word of cheer to the man who had girded his throne with a ring of unconquered swords.

'Is there aught that I can do, Prince Field-Marshal?' asked the Emperor. The eye which had a hundred times set the battle in array flashed a

message and directed his master with a look to his desire.

'The box?—am I to open it?' asked the Emperor gently.

The dying general nodded. It was a tiny casket of gold, of beautiful inlaid workmanship, which stood beside the bed—sole ornament of a chamber sternly bare, as had been the great soldier's quarters on active service.

The Emperor opened the close-fitting, smooth-shutting golden lid. There was a little paper-covered book within. 'Will your High Majesty deign to set that book between my hands when I am dead, and so command to bury me?' said the Prince Ilantz. 'Wife or child, brother or sister have I none. But if my Kaiser will do this for his servant, I have not lived in vain.'

So the gold box stood for ever afterwards on the Emperor's own table. But the book he placed himself with honour and observance between the dead man's fingers. So it had remained while he lay in state. So it kept place through the ordered ceremonial of the military funeral. There it was, when about the open grave the picked soldiers of a dozen army corps, commanded by the Emperor, wheeled solemnly and inevitably into their places about the bier. For the dead, and he alone, had taught them how. The paper book was there when the artillery thundered the last earth-shaking salute. The dead hand held it when the Emperor took the vacant place at the head of the Field-Marshal's Uhlans regiment, for it was an Imperial rescript that none save the Emperor himself should ever be their Colonel after Herman von Edelwald, Prince of Ilantz

and first soldier of the Empire.

And the girl's grey paper exercise-book abides to this day where an Emperor placed it—under the piled marble of the monument raised by his country.

But no one, not even the Emperor himself, knows what is in that book—except one old woman whose name is Augusta. Yet I will tell the story of the paper book of grey in the dead soldier's hand.

Once in golden weather a young man abode all the summer upon the tableland of Ilantz. He was a soldier by profession, but a wound had given him at once promotion and a prolonged furlough.

Every era has its favourite health resorts. Ilantz was the fashion in the days when the young officer of Uhlans rested his wounded left arm and painted indefatigably with his right.

Famous men and beautiful women frequented the hotels of Ilantz. But the young soldier-artist passed shy and silent among them. He made friends with no one. He entered no coterie. He was a member of no clique. He was asked to no reception. He had only his modest bedroom and his place at table in the vast caravanserai. But his fellow-guests passed about him like the shadows of the passers-by upon the ceiling of a darkened room.

In the first burst of summer which arrives with June, there came to the Hotel of the Baths a brother and two sisters. The young officer knew the newcomers by sight, for they came from his own part of the country. They were the Graf von Eulenstein and his sisters Augusta and Margaret, from their castle in grey Pomerania. Very poor the

Eulensteins were; but of lineage old as the Paladins of Charles the Great. The Count was tall and dark, and his poverty made him hide his kindness under a mantle of reserve. His sister Augusta was like him in appearance, stately and dignified, and the faded lace on her shoulders became her like a queen's coronet.

But Margaret, the second sister, was ten years younger. And something broke like a violin string in the heart of the young painter-lieutenant as he looked at the maid Margaret in the simple beauty of her maidenhood. She was fair of face, white as a lily, and the rose-blush went and came with the breath on her cheek. Her eyes were blue—cool, like wells where clear water is—and the long lashes which shaded them were dark and most modestly lowered.

The young officer could scarce tear his eyes away from such beauty as he had never seen before. Herman von Edelwald was a soldier, but he had no soldierly boldness with women. He went to his work the next day as usual, and the day after that, and so till the weeks passed by. But he watched the hotel doors for her coming. He waited for the passing of the Eulensteins as they made their daily promenades. The Count and Augusta often walked rapidly before, talking seriously together, while Margaret followed a little behind, as if she were easily tired, or it might be a little lonely, being younger than the others.

In the evening the Lieutenant's table was opposite to theirs, and the young man allowed himself occasionally the shy luxury of a prolonged gaze. But once he caught the Count's eye instead of Margaret's, and it seemed to him that its glance was

sharp as a sword-blade.

The next evening Margaret had changed places. The Count was opposite to him, and there was a vacant place between the two sisters. Presently there came in a young officer, whom Edelwald had seen about headquarters. He was the son of a rich and influential official. He sat down by Margaret Eulenstein, and, so soon as he began to talk, there remained in the artist's mind no doubt of his position. He posed openly as the accepted family suitor for the hand of Margaret. But though her brother talked freely enough and Augusta glanced meaningly at her, Margaret sat silent, looking down and eating little. She was pale as marble, and Edelwald noticed that the rose-leaf flush did not now come and go upon her cheeks of lilies.

Then the Lieutenant went out, and walked for hours upon the moors. The world was very black that night, and there was no God anywhere. Yet he watched for her every day, and his eyes followed after the party of four, with the brother and sister in front and the silent pair lagging behind.

Yet when their eyes met again on the stairs, there was no brightness of the happy lover on the face of Margaret.

'I am tired,' she would say to her brother; and often, instead of dining, would ask permission to go quietly to her own room. She kissed his ring as she rose from table, and then the men would unconcernedly go on with their talk. But Augusta would wait a little and quietly glide after her sister.

Paler and always paler grew the young maid Margaret. Edelwald raged within himself. The scoundrel Seidlitz (he thought) was not treating the

girl properly. She was pining for his warmer affection, or afraid that he would give her up because of her delicate health.

'This girl, who is to me as my life, is dying by inches; and I cannot help her or even speak to her!' So cried the soul of Edelwald to the flying clouds of the moorlands as he paced the heath.

One evening in September the Lieutenant had gone down to dine with a number of officers whom he had known in the campaign where he got his wound. Seidlitz was there, and, being flushed with wine, grew volubly thick of speech.

He was rallied as to his reason for remaining at Ilantz, and made no scruple to declare that it was because his father insisted upon his marrying the younger Eulenstein. But he was determined not to marry a sick woman, who might be an encumbrance all her life. He was ready to throw the girl over and fight the brother, if necessary, he said. 'I am not going to marry a...' And the French word he used was not a pretty one.

But the young Lieutenant rose from his place, and without a single syllable of speech he struck the brute Seidlitz on the mouth. They fought outside, and in spite of his wounded arm Edelwald hit his foe on the shoulder, and might, had he chosen, have killed him. After the wound was dressed, the Lieutenant went up to Seidlitz. 'You will not send that letter you spoke of to your father,' he said. 'You will continue the arrangements for your betrothal to Margaret Eulenstein.'

'And pray by whose orders am I to do these things?' said Seidlitz scornfully.

'You will do them,' said the Lieutenant, under

his breath, 'because, if you do not, I, Herman Edelwald, will follow you over the earth to kill you. I do not swear it. I simply say it. I will kill you if you give a moment's pain to Margaret Eulenstein.'

Yet, in spite of the clear Alpine air, the care of physicians, and the new and evident devotion of Seidlitz, the girl paled and fainted. Bitterly and silently the Lieutenant watched. Seidlitz also saw it. All, save the Count and his sister knew the truth. They, or at least the Count, were intent only on pushing on the betrothal.

But one morning Margaret did not come down. She lay still on her bed, and her cheek was no paler in death than it had been for many days in life. The Count and Augusta were distracted. The blow had fallen as from God. They knew that Margaret was delicate of constitution. But they had never thought of this. Nevertheless, their sister, for whom they had schemed, lay dead upstairs, and all their scheming for her was in ruins below.

As the brother and sister sat wrapped in their sudden terror of darkness, a card was brought to them.

The Lieutenant Herman Freiherr von Edelwald was the antique style of the name. 'It is the young painter,' said Augusta. 'What can he want?'

'To offer his services, without doubt,' said the Count. 'But I did not know he was noble.'

So the Lieutenant at last had speech with two of those to whom he had so often desired to speak.

'I am an artist as well as a soldier,' he said to the Count and his sister. 'I have heard of your great sorrow. It is also a deep sorrow of mine. I come to ask you to allow me to paint and present to you a

picture of your sister as a last memorial.'

The Count was on the point of declining somewhat brusquely. It was the intrusion of a stranger, well meant, but impossible and almost intolerable. But as he rose to put an end to the matter, his sister Augusta, whose grey hair seemed greyer than ever, stayed him with her hand.

'After all,' she said, 'might not this fall out well? We have had no picture of Margaret of any kind taken since she was a child.'

The Count bent his brows impatiently. His sister continued to look at him.

'Well,' he said, 'after all, how do you know that the gentleman could paint the picture to give any likeness of the well-beloved sister we have lost?'

'I see it in his face,' said Augusta. For she also was a woman.

As the Lieutenant sat down to his work a letter was brought to him. His presence was urgently commanded at the headquarters of his regiment. He hurriedly calculated that he had but six hours to do the work. But when Augusta raised the light linen coverture from the pale face which had now no rose-leaf blush upon it, the beating of his heart wondrously stilled itself. He felt that the first immediate presence of the beloved was to him as the eve of a marriage day.

He began slowly, looking often at Margaret's face, and at the folds of fine coverlet which outlined her limbs.

But soon Edelwald began to work more swiftly. He looked less often at Margaret's face. His hands seemed hardly to leave the picture. The afternoon lengthened, and the shadows stretched out.

The bells of the little church sounded the hour of evening worship. It was the Sabbath, and many peasant women-folk went soberly and trustfully towards the pleasant, solemn sound. Their feet clattered on the round paving-stones of the village street. The hired carriage Edelwald had ordered jingled to the door. At last the artist looked at his watch and stood back from his picture.

Augusta came softly from her window-seat and looked also. At the first glance she gave a little cry. 'It is herself!' she cried. 'Our Margaret as she was when she came from school! How did you know? You had never seen her thus. How is such a marvel possible?'

'Ich habe gelicht' said the Lieutenant simply, and bowed his head, and went away. So Augusta was left with the picture of wide-eyed smiling maidenhood upon the easel, and the other still innocence upon the bed, with the eyelids closed upon the true sweet eyes for ever. Yet when she went to the pillow to cover the face again with the white linen, there was a smile upon it she had never seen before. It seemed the reflected joy which shone in the picture which Herman the soldier had painted 'because he loved her.'

Next morning, after the funeral, Augusta found a book—a little grey paper book. It was laid away carefully and sacredly in Margaret's desk, among her simple treasures and books of devotion. Augusta opened it a little carelessly. She expected copies of favourite verses, or it might be a few pressed flowers. She read the first page. She shut the book. Then she opened it again, and passed rapidly over the pages to the last, which had been left unfinished.

'Today I stood beside him for a moment in the hall when he came in with his painting. His shoulder touched mine. It is foolish, I know, but if Augusta had not caught me, I should have fallen. I wish now I could have lived a little longer. For I love him—I love him!'

The words had been written the day before Margaret's death. As her sister finished the reading, the Count came in, and Augusta hastily hid the book in the pocket of her dress.

'After all, the book is for no man's eyes—for no eyes but mine, indeed. And even I shall read no more,' Augusta said. So she went back to the emptiest room in the world. And even as she looked, lo! there was the light of a new thing in the eyes which looked at her out of Edelwald's picture.

She gazed at it long through her tears, fingering the while the little exercise book under her gown.

'Yes, for the eyes of one other!' she said. And she went hastily and made a little parcel.

And that is the story of the grey paper book which the Emperor placed in the dead hands of Field-Marshal Prince Ilantz, first soldier of the Empire.

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING
OF THE COMPLETE CROCKETT

- 1893 The Stickit Minister and some common men
1894 Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills
1894 The Play Actress
1894 The Raiders
1894 The Lilac Sunbonnet
1895 Bog Myrtle and Peat
1895 A Galloway Herd
1895 Men of the Moss Hags
1896 Cleg Kelly
1896 The Grey Man
1896 Sweetheart Travellers
1897 Lads' Love
1897 Lochinvar
1897 Sir Toady Lion
1898 The Red Axe
1898 The Standard Bearer
1899 The Black Douglas
1899 Kit Kennedy
1899 Ione March
1900 Joan of the Sword Hand
1900 Stickit Minister's Wooing
1900 Little Anna Mark
1901 Cinderella
1901 The Firebrand
1901 Love Idylls
1901 The Silver Skull
1902 The Dark o' the Moon
1902 Flower o' the Corn
1903 The Adventurer in Spain
1903 The Banner of Blue
1904 Love of Miss Anne

- 1904 Strong Mac
1904 Raiderland
1904 Red Cap Tales
1905 Maid Margaret
1905 The Cherry Ribband
1905 Kid McGhie
1905 Sir Toady Crusoe
1906 White Plumes of Navarre
1907 Me and Myn
1907 Little Esson
1907 Vida
1908 Deep Moat Grange
1908 Princess Penniless
1908 Bloom o' the Heather
1908 Red Cap Adventures
1909 The Dew of Their Youth
1909 Men of the Mountain
1909 Seven Wise Men
1909 My Two Edinburghs
1909 Rose of the Wilderness
1910 Young Nick and Old Nick
1911 The Lady of a 100 Dresses
1911 Love in Pernicketty Town
1911 The Smugglers
1912 Anne of the Barricades
1912 Sweethearts at Home
1912 The Moss Troopers
1913 Sandy's Love
1913 A Tatter of Scarlet
1914 Silver Sand

POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides

1917 The Azure Hand
1920 The White Pope
1926 Rogues' Island
2016 Peter the Renegade

Find out more about Crockett's life literature and legacy at:

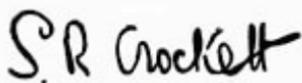
www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

www.srcrockett.weebly.com

and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at

www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.