

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



THE STANDARD
BEARER

S.R. CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First published in book form by Methuen & Co in 1898

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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THE STANDARD BEARER

INTRODUCTION

In *The Standard Bearer*, Crockett once more revisits familiar Covenanting territory. Published just a year after *Lochinvar*, it is set loosely at the turn of the eighteenth century, fictionalising events surrounding the then minister of Balmaghie, John MacMillan.

The story starts, as many of Crockett's romantic adventure stories do, in the relative peace of a natural landscape, with the young Quintin MacClellan out 'hefting' sheep. He is reading the work of Samuel Rutherford, the historic preacher and former minister of Anwoth (in whose honour Samuel Crockett added 'Rutherford' to his own name.) But peace is shortlived. Quintin sees men chased and shot dead by dragoons. Witnessing such a brutal murder marks the end of his childhood and the beginning of his commitment to the Covenanting cause.

The story moves on quickly and Quintin has to grow up as fast. Unlike the unlucky Will Gordon in the earlier *Men of the Moss Hags*, Quintin's father allows him to go to the Rising of the 7000 at the Sanquhar Declaration. In Crockett's fiction, this event is led by Will's father William Gordon, who is then killed at the Battle of Ayrsmoss along with 'The Lion of the Covenant' Richard Cameron.

The Standard Bearer's connection with events of *Men of the Moss Hags* and *Lochinvar* is loose, but anyone who has enjoyed those two novels will find familiar faces here and enjoy seeing events from yet another domestic perspective. Crockett reminds us

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once again that ordinary people were also part of great historical events and their individual lives were shaped and altered by the times and events they lived through.

Quintin MacClellan, who tells most of the story in his own voice, is loosely based on the real John MacMillan. Like MacMillan, Quintin goes to Edinburgh to study for the ministry. He is also brought up with the spirit of Richard Cameron. They share a belief that while a minister must know his Bible, he must have more practical skills as he is likely also to be a 'fighting' minister. To the modern reader, Quintin's lack of religiosity might seem odd. He observes *'The more I travailed at the theologies, the less of living religion was in my soul.'* This serves both to humanise Quintin and gives Crockett the chance to remind us that then (as now) there is much more to a spiritual life than simply the learning of religious doctrine.

Quintin's journey in this novel is towards understanding the practical nature of religion in his contemporary setting. His religious spirit is forged by the iniquity of the Killing Times. He stands up for the hill-folk and consequently is scorned by the establishment and by those who use religion for their own personal advancement. Crockett's indictment of the Presbytery at the time, barely hidden between the lines, is fierce. The influential historical figure Carstairs is referred to as the *'Pope of the reformed Kirk.'* Crockett has no patience for hypocrisy in the name of religion or politics and time and again throughout the story he shows how the tensions between the 'laws' and 'power' of Kirk and State are largely responsible for the Killing Times.

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The Standard Bearer is certainly about religion, but only because religion is the battleground of the politics of the day. And Crockett ably illustrates that ordinary people live in the context of religion and politics even without knowing it. When he finishes college Quintin spends a short period as a family chaplain, then becomes the incumbent at Balmaghie, a place we are familiar with from many other Crockett novels and always subject to Crockett's humorous descriptions. Here Quintin states: '*There's as many minds in Balmaghie as there's folks in it.*' Following a long and unpleasant battle with those in power, Quintin is finally cast out of the parish of Balmaghie because he claims '*the Kirk of God has no head upon earth.*' He is forced to become a preacher of the hill-folk, like Richard Cameron and Peden the Prophet before him.

Crockett's stock in trade is the historical adventure romance and it is no surprise to find the adventure story is framed round a love story. In *The Standard Bearer* the main love story concerns Quintin MacClellan and Mary Gordon (daughter of Sandy 'the Bull' Gordon - another familiar character from *Men of the Moss Hags* and *Lochinvar*). At the start of the novel the young Quintin takes the child Mary to safety on the fateful murderous day on the hillside, but subsequently she spurns all his advances. The path of true love never runs smoothly. Especially in a Crockett novel.

The love story is as complicated as ever. Mary Gordon may be disinterested in Quintin but Jean Gemmell sets her sights on him and is not to be dissuaded. Their encounter takes place even before his first preaching - abstracted from his journey he

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sits and eats her midday 'piece' while chatting to her. She falls in love with him and uses diverse wiles to win her man. But she cannot ever really win his heart since that has long before been given to the uninterested Mary Gordon. The reader can see that Mary does love Quintin but she isn't admitting it to herself – Crockett suggests, with his trademark irony, that this is often the way with women!

Crockett often uses the Galtian retrospective narrator as a technique but he isn't afraid to break with it or adapt it when it suits him. *The Standard Bearer* is mostly told retrospectively by Quintin himself, but Crockett has fun with his narrative form as well. In many of his novels Crockett likes to intervene directly as author/narrator from time to time but in *The Standard Bearer* Quintin's brother Hob interjects at regular intervals, adding his own commentary and giving the reader both amusement and more insight into Quintin's story. The layers of narrative provided by multiple first person narrators are both intriguing and amusing. Hobb adds a different perspective, preventing us or Quintin from taking himself too seriously. Through Hob, Crockett also gives us a parallel love story. The relationship between Hob and the exotically named Amazonian Alexander-Jonita – a girl who has a touch of the Annie Oakleys in her – adds to the romance and adventure of the story. Alexander-Jonita is Jean Gemmell's sister but they share nothing of the same spirit. It is Alexander-Jonita who leads 150 women against the armed forces of the Sheriff's men when they come to throw Quintin out of the Presbytery. Jean is a much more circumspect character. But

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neither of them is Mary Gordon.

Adopting his particular style of fictionalised history, Crockett plunders 'real' history for his characters as well as his action. For example, Alexander-Jonita was one of the real minister John MacMillan's children, who died as an infant. The links between MacMillan and the Gordon family are also fictionally appropriated (historical purists might say misappropriated) by Crockett. The real John MacMillan's second wife was Mary Gordon. John MacMillan, like Quintin, faced his day of judgement on 30th December 1703. However, unlike the real John MacMillan, who continued preaching in relative obscurity after this date, Crockett's character Quintin MacClellan has a much more exciting life and takes to the hills in the footsteps of the Covenanting martyrs Cameron and Peden.

Crockett makes sure that even the minor fictional characters add interest to the story. For example we find out more about Sandy Gordon (elder brother of Will Gordon, hero of *Men of the Moss Hags*). Sandy is shown throughout to be prone to bouts of 'madness.' Harking back to Crockett's earlier novella *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills* (1894) this Gothic style madness has its value in resolving issues between his daughter Mary and Quintin. The 'madness' scenes are also delivered with a fair amount of tongue in cheek. There are serious issues underneath though. Sandy 'The Bull' is primarily a man of action and Crockett shows him as being set up by the Presbytery. Sandy's 'madness' is a kind of 'bad behaviour' and yet we see those in religious power acting every bit as badly. Quintin, who has suffered the same fate, stands up for him, despite Sandy

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shooting him! But Quintin loves Mary and will put up with anything to win her.

In *The Standard Bearer*, men and women fight for their right to self-determination and religious freedom. They fight for the Church of Scotland. Families are pitted against each other and loyalty severely tested. And throughout it all, love rivalries continue unabated. There is certainly no shortage of action and adventure, or indeed romance. The narrative style is both interesting, amusing and complex, allowing Crockett to embed his themes into the lives of his characters without testing the reader too much. And while much of the history is fictionalised, it is still of great interest to the lover of history. Throughout the fast paced narrative we are carried along with the action, and taken back into The Killing Times in all their brutality.

Cally Phillips

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GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
TO THE GOOD AND KINDLY FOLK OF MY NATIVE
PARISH OF BALMAGHIE THIS RENDERING OF
STRANGE HAPPENINGS AMONG THEIR
FOREBEARS, OF WHICH THEY HAVE NOT YET
QUITE LOST THE MEMORY.

THE FOREWORD

A book iron-grey and chill is this that I have written, the tale of times when the passions of men were still working like a yeasty sea after the storms of the Great Killing. If these pages should chance to be read when the leaves are greening, they may taste somewhat unseasonably in the mouth. For in these days the things of the spirit had lost their old authority without gaining a new graciousness, and save for one man the ancient war-cry of 'God and the Kirk' had become degraded to 'The Kirk and God.'

This is the story of the one man whose weak and uncertain hand held aloft the Banner of Blue that I have striven to tell—his failures mostly, his loves and hates, his few bright days and his many dark nights. Yet withal I have found green vales of rest between wherein the swallow swept and the cuckoo called to her mate the cry of love and spring.

Who would know further and better of the certainty of these things must procure and read 'A Cameronian Apostle,' by my excellent friend, the Reverend H. M. B. Reid, presently minister of the parish wherein these things were done, in whose faithful and sympathetic narrative they will find many things better told than I can tell them. The book may be had of the Messrs. Gardiner, of Paisley, in Scotland.

Yet even in this imperfect narrative of strange events there may be heard the beating of a man's heart, weak or strong, now arrogant, and now abased, not according to the fear of man or even of

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the glory of God, but more according to the kindness which dwelt in woman's eyes.

For there is but one thing stronger in the world than the love of woman. And that is not of this world.

S. R. Crockett

CHAPTER ONE

THE YEAR TERRIBLE

This is what I, Quintin MacClellan, saw on the grassy summit of the Bennan—a thing which, being seen and overpast in an hour, changed all my life, and so in time by the grace of God and the chafe of circumstances made me for good or evil the man I am.

I was a herd laddie at the time, like David, keeping my father's flocks and kicking up my heels among the collie tykes, with many another shepherd-boy in the wide moorish parishes of Minnigaff, Dalry and the Kells.

Now my father (and his father before him) had been all his life 'indweller' in the hill farm of Ardarroch which sits on the purple braeface above the loch of Ken, with a little circumambient yard enclosed by cattle-offices and a dozen red-stemmed fir trees, in which the winds and the birds sing after their kind, winter and summer.

A sweet and grateful spot do I now remember that Ardarroch to be, and in these later days when I have tried so mickle of bliss and teen, and wearied my life out in so many wanderings and strivings, my heart still goes out kindly to the well-beloved place of my bairn-play.

It was the high summer of the fatal year 1685, when I saw the sight which put an end to my childhood. Well do I mind it that year, for amongst others, my father had to go for a while into hiding—not that he was any over-strenuous Covenant man,

but solely because he had never in his life refused bite and sup to any neighbour hard pressed, nor yet to any decent chiel who might scarcely be able to give an account of the quarrel he had with the Tyrant's laws.

So, during his absence, my brothers and I had the work of the farm to attend to. No dawn of day sifting from the east through the greenery of the great sloughing beeches and firs about the door ever found any of the three of us in our beds. For me, I was up and away to the hills—where sometimes in the full lambing time I would spend all night on the heathery fells or among the lirks and hidden dells of the mountain fastnesses.

And oh, but it was pleasant work and I liked it well! The breathing airs; the wide, starry arch I looked up into, when night had drawn her night-cap low down over the girdling blue-black hills; the moon glinting on the breast of Loch Ken; the moor-birds, whaup and snipe, plover and wild duck cheeping and chummering in their nests, while the wood-doves' moan rose plaintive from every copse and covert—it was a fit birthplace for a young lad's soul. Though indeed at that time none was farther from guessing it than Quintin MacClellan. For as I went hither and thither I pondered on nothing except the fine hunger the hills gave me, and the glorious draughts of whey and buttermilk my mother would serve out to me on my return, calling me meantime the greatest and silliest of her calves, besides tweaking my ears at the milk-house door if she could catch me ere I set my bare legs twinkling down the loaning.

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For the time being I say nothing more of my father, 'douce John of Ardarroch,' as all the parish called him, save that he was a moderate man and no high-flier as he would have described himself—yet out of whom his wife (and my good mother) had, by the constant dropping of argument, made a Covenant man, and even a fairly consistent follower of the Hill Folk. Neither will I bide to speak of my brothers Hob and David, for their names and characters will have occasion to appear as I write down my own strange history. Nor yet can I pause to tell of the sweetness and grace of my sister Anna, whose brown eyes held a charm which even my boyish and brotherly insensibility acknowledged and delighted in, being my elder by half-a-dozen years, and growing up amongst us rough louts of the heather like a white rose in the stocky corner of an herb-garden.

For I must tell of myself and what befell me on the Bennan top the twenty-first day of June —high Midsummer Day of the Year Terrible, and of all that it brought to me.

I had heard, indeed, often enough of chasings, of prisonments, of men and women sent away overseas to the cruel plantations, of the boot and the thumbscrew, of the blood of slain men reddening the heather behind dyke-backs. There was indeed little talk of anything else throughout all the land of the South and West.

But it so chanced that our House of Ardarroch, being set high up on the side of Bennan, and with no prominent Covenanters near by to be a mark for the fury of the persecutor, we MacClellans had thus far escaped unquestioned and scathless.

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Once, indeed, Lidderdale of the Isle, with twenty men, had made us a visitation and inquired somewhat curiously of us, and specially of my mother, whom we had entertained on such a night and whom on such another. After this occasion it was judged expedient that my father should keep wide of his own house for a while, lest the strict laws against intercommuning should lay him by the heels in the gaol of Kirkcudbright.

But to the young and healthy—so long at least as there is clothing for the back, good filling for the hungry belly, and no startling and personal evil befall—tales of ill, unseen and unproven, fall on the ear like the clatter of ancient head-shaking beldames croaking to each other by unswept ingle-nooks. At least, so it was with me.

But to my tale of Midsummer Day of the Terrible Year.

I had been out, since earliest morn, over the rough rigs of heather looking tentily to my sheep, for I had been 'hefting' (as the business is called in our Galloway land) a double score of lambs which had just been brought from a neighbouring lowland farm to summer upon our scanty upland pastures. Now it is the nature of sheep to return if they can to their mother-hill, or, at least, to stray further and further seeking some well-known landmark. So, till such new-comers grow satisfied and 'heft' (or attach) themselves to the soil, they must be watched carefully both night and day.

I was at this time thirteen years of my age, well nourished and light of foot as a mountain goat. Indeed, there was not a goat in the herd that I could not run down and grip by the neck. And when Hob,

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my elder brother, would take after me because of some mischief I had wrought, I warrant he had a long chase and a sore sweat before he caught me, if I got but ten yards' start and the heather free before me.

This day I had a couple of fine muckle scones in my pocket, which my mother had given me, besides one I had purloined for myself when she was not looking, but which my sister Anna had seen me take and silently shaken her head. That, however, I minded not a fly. Also I snatched up a little square book from the windowsill, hoping that in it I might find some entertainment to while away the hours in the bield of some granite stone or behind some bush of heather. But I found it to be the collect of Mr. Samuel Rutherford, his letters from Aberdeen and Anwoth, and at first I counted the reading of it dull enough work. But afterwards, because of the names of kenned places in our Galloway and also the fine well-smacking Scottish words in it, I liked it none so ill.

Ashie and Gray, my dogs, sat on either side of me. Brother and sister they were, of one year and litter, yet diverse as any human brother and sister— Ashie being gay and frisky, ever full of freits and caperings; his sister Gray, on the other hand, sober as a hill-preaching when Clavers is out on the heather looking for it.

As for Ashie, he nipped himself in the flank and pursued after his own tail as if he had taken some ill-will at it. But old-maidish Gray sat erect, cocking her short ears and keeping a sharp eye on the 'hefting' lambs, which went aimlessly straying and cropping below, seeking in vain for holms as kindly

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and pastures as succulent as those of the valley-crofts from which my father had driven them a day or two before.

For myself, in the intervals of my reading, I had been singing a merry stave, one you may be sure that I did not let my mother or my sister Anna hear. I had learnt it from wild David, who had brought the broad sheet back with him from Keltonhill Fair. Thus I had been carolling, gay as the laverock which I watched flirting and pulsing upwards out of the dun bents of the fell. But after a while the small print of my book and, perhaps, also the high instructiveness of the matter inclined me towards sleep.

The bleating of the sundered lambs desirous of lost motherly udders fell more soothingly and plaintively upon my ear. It seemed to bring dreams pleasant and delightful with it. I heard the note sink and change to that heavenly murmuring that comes with drowsiness, or which, mayhap, is but the sound of the porter opening the Poppy Gates of sleep— and which may break yet more delightfully on our ears when the gates that open for us are the gates of death.

I suppose that all the afternoon the whaups had piped and 'willywhaaed,' the snipes bleated and whinnied overhead, and that the peewits had complained to each other of the question boy-beast below them, which ran on two legs and waved other two so foolishly in the air. But I did not hear them. My ears were dulled. The moorland sounds melted deliciously into the very sough and murmur of reposefulness. I was already well on my way to Drowsieland. I heard my mother sing me a lullaby

somewhere among the tranced fields. Suddenly the cradle-song ceased. Through shut eyelids I grew conscious of a disturbing influence. Though my face nestled deep down in the crook of my arm I knew that Ashie and Gray had all suddenly sat up.

‘Ouf-ft’ quoth Ashie protestingly, deep in his stomach so that the sound would carry no further than his master’s ear.

‘Gur-r-rl’ growled Gray, his sister, yet more softly, the black wicks of her mouth pulled away from her wicked shining eye-teeth.

Thinking that the sheep were straying and that it might be as well by a timely shout to save myself miles and miles of hot chase over the heather, I sat up, ungraciously discontented to be thus aroused, and yet more unreasonably angry with the dogs whose watchfulness had recalled me to the realities of life. As I raised my head, the sounds of the hills broke on my ear suddenly loud— indeed almost insolently insistant. The suppressed far-away hush of Dreamland scattered itself like a broken glass before the brisk clamour of the broad wind-stirred day.

I glanced at the flock beneath me. They were feeding and straying quietly enough— rather widely perhaps, but nothing to make a fret about.

‘Restless tykes!’ I muttered irritably, striking right and left at the dogs with my staff. ‘De’il take you, silly beasts that ye are!’

‘Oufft’ said Ashie, warningly as before, but from a safer distance, his nose pointing directly away from the hefting lambs. Gray said nothing, but uncovered her shining teeth a little further and cocked her ears

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more directly towards the summit of the Bennan behind me.

I looked about me high and low, but still I could see no cause for alarm.

'Daft brutes! Silly beasts!' I cried again more crossly than ever. And with that I was about to consign myself to sleep again, or at least to seek the pleasant paths of the day-dreamland from which I had been so abruptly recalled.

But the dogs with bristling hair, cocked ears and proudly-plumaged tails were already ten yards up the slope towards the top of the fell, sniffing belligerently as though they scented an intrusive stranger dog at the entering in of the sacred enclosure of the farmyard of Ardarroch.

I was reaching for my stick to deal it liberally between them when a waft of warm summer wind brought to my ear the sound of the distant crying of men. Then came the clear, imperative 'Crack! Crack!' of musket shots— first two, and then half-a-dozen close together, sharp and distinct as an eager schoolboy snapping his finger and thumb to call the attention of the master to whom he has been forbidden to speak.

Then, again, on the back of this arrived silence, issuing presently in a great disturbed clamour of peewit flocks on the table-lands above me, clouds of them stooping and swooping screaming and scolding at some unlicensed and unprincipled intruders by me unseen.

I knew well what it meant in a moment. The man-hunt was afoot. The folk of God were once more being pursued like the partridge upon the mountain. It might be that the blood of my own father was even

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now making another crimson blossom of martyr blood upon the moors of Scotland.

'Down, down, Ashie!' I cried, but under my breath. 'Come in to my foot, Gray.' And, knowing by the voice that I was much in earnest, very obediently the dogs slung behind with, however, many little protesting 'gurrs' and chest rumblings of muffled rage.

'It must be Lag himself from the Garryhorn,' I thought; 'he will be at his old work of pursuing the wanderers with bloodhound and troop-horse.'

Then, with the craft which had perhaps been born in me and which had certainly been fostered by the years of watching and hiding, of open hatred and secret suspicion, I crept cautiously up the side of the fell, taking advantage of every tummock of heather and boss of tall bent grass. Ashie and Gray crawled after me, stiff with intent hate, but every whit as flatly prone and as infinitely cautious as their master.

For they, too, had been born in the Days of Fear, and the spirit of the game had entered into them ere ever they emerged from the blindness of puppydom.

As we ascended, nearer and nearer sounded the turmoil. I heard, as it were, the sound of men's voices encouraging each other, as the huntsmen do on the hillsides when they drive the red fox from his lair. Then came the baying of dogs and the clattering of irregular musketry.

Till now the collies and I had been sheltered by the grey clints and lichened rocks of the Bennan, but now we had to come out into the open. The last thirty yards of ascent were bare and shelterless, the

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short, mossy scalp of turf upon them being clean shaven as if cut with a razor.

My heart beat fast, I can tell you who read this tale so comfortably by the ingle-nook. I held it down with my hand as I crept upwards. Ashie and Gray followed like four-footed guardian angels behind, now dragging themselves painfully yard by yard upon their bellies, now lying motionless as stone statues, their moist jowls pressed to the ground and their dilated nostrils snuffing the air for the intelligence which only my duller eyes could bring me.

Yet I knew the risks of the attempt. For as soon as I had left the shelter of the boulders and scattered clumps of heather and bent, I was plain to the sight as a fly crawling over the shell of an egg.

Nevertheless, with a quick rush I reached the top and set my head over.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

The broad, flat table-top of the Bennan summit spread out before me like an exercise ground for troops or a racecourse for horses.

Yet not all barren or desolate, for here and there among the grey granite peeped forth the bloom of the young heather, making a livelier purple amid the burnt brown of the short grass, which in its turn was diversified by the vivid emerald green circling the 'quacking-quaas' or bottomless moss-holes of the bogs beneath.

Now this is what I saw, lying on my face, with no more than my chin set over the edge— two men in tattered, peat-stained clothing running for their lives towards the edge of the little plateau farthest from me.

Between me and them twenty or thirty dragoons were urging their horses forward in pursuit, weaving this way and that among the soft lairy places, and as many more whose steeds hid stuck fast in the moss were coursing the fugitives on foot as though the poor men had been beasts of the field.

Every now and then one of the pursuers would stop, set his musket to his shoulder and blaze away with a loud report and a drift of white smoke, shouting joyously as at a rare jest whether he hit or missed. And I thought that the poor lads would make good their escape with such sorry marksmen. But even whilst I was putting up a prayer for them as I lay panting upon the manifest edge, a chance

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shot struck the smaller and more slender of the wanderers. He stumbled, poor wretch, and fell forward upon his face. Then, mastering himself, and recognising his grievous case and how much of mercy he had to look for if his enemies came up with him, his strong spirit for an instant conquered his bodily hurt.

He rose immediately, set his hands one over the other upon his side, doubtless to stay the welling gap the bullet had riven there, and ran yet more determinedly after his companion. But close to the further verge his power went from him. His companion halted and would have come back to aid him, or more likely to die with him. But the wounded man threw out his hand in vehement protest.

'Run, Sandy,' he cried, so loudly and eagerly that I could easily hear him through all the shouting and pother. 'It will do no good. I am sped. Save yourself—God have mercy—tell Margaret...'

But what he would have told Margaret I know not, for even then he spread out his arms and fell forward on his face in the spongy moss.

At this his companion turned sharply and ran on by himself, finally disappearing among the granite boulders amid a brisk crackling of the soldiers' pieces.

But their marksmanship was poor, for though they were near to him, what with the breathless race and the unevenness of the ground, not a shot took effect. Nor showed he any sign of scathe when last I saw him, leaping nimbly from clump to clump of bent, where the green slimy moss wet with the peat-brew keeps all soft as a quicksand, so that neither

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hoof of a charger nor heavy military boot dare venture upon it, though the bare accustomed foot of one bred to the hills may carry him across easily enough. So the fugitive, a tall, burly man, cumbered with little besides a doublet and short hose, disappeared out of my sight, and the plain was bare save for the disappointed dragoons in their red coats and the poor man left fallen on his face in the morass.

I could never see him move hand or foot after he fell; and, indeed, it was not long that he had the chance. For even as I continued to gaze fascinated at the scene of blood which so suddenly had broken in upon the pastoral peace of our Kells hills, I saw a tall, dark soldier, one evidently of some authority among them, stride up to the fallen man. He strove to turn him over with his foot, but the moss clung, and he could not. So without a moment's hesitation he took a musket from the nearest dragoon, glanced coolly at the priming of the touch, set the butt to his shoulder, and with the muzzle within a foot shot the full charge into the back of the prostrate man.

At this I could command myself no longer. The pursuit and the shooting at the fugitives, even the killing when at least they had a chance for their lives, seemed nothing to this stonyhearted butchery. I gat me up on my feet, and in a boyish frenzy shouted curses upon the murderer.

'God shall send thee to hell for this, wicked man, black murderer that thou art!' I cried, shaking my clenched hand, like the angry impotent child I was.

The soldiers who were searching here and there, as it were, for more victims among the coverts turned their heads my way and gazed, hearing the

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voice but seeing no man. Others who stood upon the verge, taking shots as fast as they could load at the man who had escaped, also turned. I yelled at them that they were to show themselves brave soldiers, and shoot me also. The tall, dark buirdly man in the red coat who had fired into the wounded man cried to them 'to take a shot at the damned young Whig.' But I think the men were all too much surprised at my bold words to do it, for none moved, so that the speaker was obliged to snatch a pistol from his own belt, and let fly at me himself.

The whistle of the pistol ball as it sped harmlessly by waked me as from a dream. A quick horror took me by the throat. I seemed to see myself laid face down on the turf and the murderer of the poor wanderer pouring shot after shot into my back. I felt my knees tremble, and it seemed (as it often does in a nightmare) that if he pursued I should be unable to move.

But even as I saw the man in red reach for his other pistol the power came back to my limbs.

I turned and ran without knowing it, for the next thing I remember was the scuff of the wind about my ears as I sped recklessly down the steepest slope, with no feeling that my feet were touching the ground at all. I saw Ashie and Gray scouring far before me, with their tails clapped between their legs, for I suppose that their master's fear had communicated itself to them. Yet all the time I knew well that a single false step, a stumble upon a twisted root of burnt heather, a treacherous clump of grass amid the green slime of the morass, and the fate of the fallen martyr would be mine.

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But ere I passed quite out of range I heard the rattle of a dropping fusillade from the edge of the hill above me, as a number of the soldiers let off their pieces at me, firing, I think, half in sport and half from a feeling of chagrin that they had let a more important victim escape them. I heard the whisk-whisk of the balls as they flew wide, and one whizzed past my ear and buried itself with a vicious spit in the moss a yard or two before me as I ran—but all harmless, and soon I was out of range. For I think it was more in cruel jest and with raffish laughter than with any intent to harm me that the soldiers fired.

Nevertheless, my boy's heart was full of wild fear. I had seen murder done. The wholesome green earth was spotted black with crime. Red motes danced in the sunshine. The sun himself in the wide blue heavens seemed turned to blood.

Then, all suddenly, I thought of my mother, and my heart stood still. It would soon be the hour at which it was her custom to take out victual to the little craggy linn where my father was in hiding. So with a new access of terror I turned towards our house of Ardarroch, and ran to warn her of what I had seen upon the Bennan top.

I felt as I sped along that life could never be the same to me again. From a heedless boy I had grown into a man in one unutterable hour. I had, of course, heard much of killings, and even as a child the relation of the cruelties of the Highland Host had impressed me so that the red glinting of a soldier's coat would send me into the deepest thickets of Ardarroch wood. But it was the musket shot poured into the back of the poor helpless lad on the Bennan

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that made a lifelong Covenanter of Quintin
MacClellan.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LITTLE LADY OF EARLSTOUN

But it was not the will of God that I should warn my mother that day; for even as I ran, threading my way among the scattered boulders and whin bushes of the lower slopes, I came upon that which surprised me almost as greatly as the shooting itself.

Right in my path a little girl was sitting on a green mound like a deserted ant hillock. She had long yellow hair, and a red cloak was about her, with a hood to it, which came over her head and partly shaded her brow. A wooden pail had been placed carefully on the heather at her feet. Now, what with the perturbation of my spirits and my head being full of country tales of bogles and elves, at the first glance I took the maid for one of these, and would have avoided and given her a wide berth as something much less than canny.

But she wiped her eyes with her little white hand, and as I looked more closely I saw that she had been crying, for her face was rubbed red, and her cheeks all harrowed and begrutten with tears.

So at that I feared no more, but went nearer. She seemed about seven or eight, and very well grown for her age.

‘Why do you cry, little maid?’ I said to her, standing before her in the green path.

For a while she did not answer, but continued to sob. I went near to comfort her, but she thrust her hand impatiently out at me.

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'Do not touch me, ragged boy,' she said; 'it is not for herd laddies to touch little ladies.'

And she spoke the words with such mightily offended dignity that on another occasion I would have laughed.

Then she commanded herself and dried her eyes on her red cloak.

'Carry the can and come with me to find my father,' she ordered, pointing imperiously with her finger as if I had been no better than a blackamoor slave in the plantations.

I lifted the wooden pail. It contained, as I think, cakes of oatmeal with cheese and butter wrapped in green leaves. But the little girl would not let me so much as look within.

'These are for my father,' she said; 'my father is the greatest man in the whole world!'

'But who may your father be, little one?' I asked her, standing stock still on the green highway with the can in my hand. She was daintily arranging the cloak about her like a fine lady. She paused, and looked at me very grave and not a little indignant.

'That is not for you to know,' she said, with dignity; 'follow me with the pail.'

So saying she stalked away with dignified carriage in the direction of the hill-top. A wild fear seized me. One of the two men I had seen fleeing might be the little girl's father. Perhaps he into whose back—ah! at all hazards I must not let her go that way.

'Could we not rest awhile here,' I suggested, 'here behind this bush? There are wicked men upon the hill, and they might take away the pail from us.'

'Then my father would kill them,' she said, shaking her head sagely, but never stopping a

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moment on her upward way. 'Besides, my mother told me to take the pail to the hill-top and stand there in my red cloak till my father should come. But it was so hot and the pail so heavy that...'

'That you cried?' I said as she stopped.

'Nay,' she answered with an offended look; 'little ladies do not cry. I was only sorry out loud that my father should be kept waiting so long.'

'And your mother sent you all this way by yourself; was not that cruel of her?' I went on to try her.

'Little ragged boy,' she said, looking at me with a certain compassion, 'you do not know what you are saying; I cannot, indeed, tell you who my father is, but I am Mary Gordon, and my mother is the Lady of Earlstoun.'

So I was speaking to the daughter of Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, the most famous Covenanter in Scotland, and, next to my Lord Viscount of Kenmure, the chief landowner in our countryside.

'And have you come alone all the way from Earlstoun hither?' I asked in astonishment, for the distance was at least four or five miles and the road rough and ill-trodden.

'Nay,' she made answer, 'not so. My mother set me so far upon the way, and now she waits for me by the bushes yonder, so that I must make haste and return. We came in a boat to your waterfoot down there where the little bay is and the pretty white sand.'

And she pointed with her hand to where the peaty water of the moorland stream mingled with and stained the deep blue of the loch.

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'Haste you, laddie,' she cried sharply a moment after; 'my father is not a one to be kept waiting. He will be impatient and angry. And because he is so great a man his anger is hard to bide.'

'You must not go up to the hill-top,' I said, 'for there are many bad men on the Bennan today, and they would perhaps kill you.'

'But my father is there,' said she, stopping and looking at me reproachfully. 'I must go; my mother bade me.'

And haply at that moment I saw the entire company of soldiers, led by the man in the red coat, stringing down the farther side of the mountain in the line of flight by which the second fugitive had made good his escape. So I judged it might be as well to satisfy the lass and let her go on to the top. Indeed, short of laying hold of her by force, I knew not well how to hinder so instant and imperious a dame.

Besides, I thought that by a little generalship I would be able to keep her wide of the place where lay the poor body of the slain man.

So straight up the hill upon which I had seen such terrible things we went, Ashie and Gray slinking unwillingly and shamefacedly behind. And as I went I cast an eye to my flock. And it appeared strange to me that the lambs should still be feeding quietly and peacefully down there, cropping and straying on the green scattered pastures of Ardarroch. Yet in the interval all the world had changed to me.

We reached the summit.

'Here is the place I was to wait for my father,' said Mary Gordon. 'I must arrange my hair, little boy, for

my father loves to see me well-ordered, though he is indeed himself most careless in his attiring.'

She gave vent to a long sigh, as if her father's delinquencies of toilette had proved a matter of lifelong sorrow to her.

'But then, you see, my father is a great man and does as he pleases.'

She put her hand to her brow and looked under the sun this way and that over the moor.

'There are so many evil men hereabout— your father may have gone down the further side to escape them,' I said. For I desired to withdraw her gaze from the northern verge of the tableland, where, as I well knew, lay a poor riven body, which, for all I knew, might be that of the little maid's father, silent, shapeless, and for ever at rest.

'Let us go there, then, and wait,' she said, more placably and in more docile fashion than she had yet shown.

So we crossed the short crisp heather, and I walked between her and that which lay off upon our right hand, so that she should not see it.

But the dogs Ashie and Gray were almost too much for me. For they had gone straight to the body of the slain man, and Ashie, ill-conditioned brute, sat him down as a dog does when he bays the moon, and, stretching out his neck and head towards the sky, he gave vent to his feelings in a long howl of agony. Gray snuffed at the body, but contented herself with a sharp occasional snarl of angry protest.

'What is that the dogs have found over there?' said the little maid, looking round me.

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'Some dead sheep or other; there are many of them about,' I answered, with shameless mendacity.

'Have your Bennan sheep brown coats?' she asked, innocently enough.

I looked and saw that the homespun of the man's attire was plain to be seen. 'My father has been here before me, and has cast his mantle over the sheep to keep the body from the sun and the flies.'

For which lie the Lord will, I trust, pardon me, considering the necessity and that I was but a lad.

At any rate the maid was satisfied, and we took our way to the northern edge of the Bennan top.

CHAPTER FOUR

MY SISTER ANNA

Wending our way through the tangle of brown morass and grey boulder, we arrived, the little maid and I, at the extremity of the spur which looks towards the north. Immediately beneath us, already filling in with the oozy peat, I saw the ploughing steps of the successful fugitive, where he had leaped and slid down the soft mossy slopes. There to the right was the harder path by which the dragoons had led their horses, jibbing and stumbling as they went. But all were now passed away, and the landscape from verge to verge was bare and empty save for a few scarlet dots bobbing and weaving athwart one another down on the lake-shore, as the soldiers drew near their camp. Even the clamorous peewits had returned, and were already sweeping and complaining foolishly overhead, doubtless telling each other the tale of how the noise and white-blowing smoke had frightened them from their eggs among the heather.

The little lass stood awhile and gazed about her.

‘Certainly my father will see me now,’ she said, cheerfully enough; ‘I am sure he will be looking, and then he will know that all is well when his little girl is here.’

And she looked as if she were ready to protect Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun against Lag and all his troopers. But after a little I saw an anxious look steal over her face.

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'He is not coming. He does not see his little Mary!' she said, wistfully.

Then she ran to the top of the highest knoll, and taking off her red cloak she waved it, crying out, 'Father, father, it is I—little Mary! Do not be afraid!'

A pair of screeching wildfowl swooped indignantly, nearer, but no other voice replied. I feared that she might insist upon examining that which lay under the brown coat, for that it covered either her father or one of her kinsfolk I was well persuaded. The Bennan top had been without doubt the hiding-place of many besides Alexander Gordon. But at this time none were sought for in the Glenkens save the man upon whose head, because of the late plot anent the King's life, there was set so great a price. And, moreover, had the lady of Earlstoun not sent her daughter to that very place with provender, as being the more likely to win through to her husband unharmed and unsuspected?

Suddenly Mary burst into tears.

'I can not find him!' she cried; 'and he will be so hungry, and think that his little girl dared not come to find him. Besides, all the oaten cakes that were baked but this morning will be quite spoiled.'

I tried my best to comfort her, but she would not let me so much as touch her. And, being an ignorant landward lad, I could not find the fitting words wherewithal to speak to a maiden gently bred like the little Mary Gordon.

At last, however, she dried her tears. 'Let us leave the cakes here, and take the basket and go our way back again. For the lady my mother will be weary with waiting for me so long by the waterside.'

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So we two went down the hill again very sadly, and as we passed by she cast her eyes curiously over at the poor lad who lay so still on his face in the soft lair of the peat moss.

'That is a strange sheep,' she said; 'it looks more like a man lying asleep.'

So, passing by, we went down both of us together, and as we pushed a way through the bracken towards our own house of Ardarroch, I saw my sister Anna come up the burnside among the light flickering shadows of the birch and alder bushes. And when we came nearer to her I saw that she, too, had been weeping. Now this also went to my heart with a heavy sense of the beginning of unknown troubles. Ever since, from my sweet sleep of security on the hillside I had been suddenly flung into the midst of a troublous sea, there seemed no end to the griefs, like waves that press behind each other rank behind rank to the horizon.

'Has my father been taken?' I cried anxiously to Anna, as she came near. For that was our chief household fear at that time.

'Nay,' she answered, standing still to look in astonishment at my little companion; 'but there are soldiers in the house, and they have turned everything this way and that to seek for him, and have also dealt roughly with my mother.'

Hearing which, I was for running down to help, but Anna bade me to bide where I was. I would only do harm, she said. She had been sent to keep Hob and David on the hill, my mother being well assured that the soldiers would do her no harm for all the roughness of their talk.

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'And who is this?' said Anna, looking kindly down at little Mary Gordon.

I expected the little maid to answer as high and quick as she had done to me; but she stood fixed and intent awhile upon Anna, and then she went directly up to her and put her hand into that of my sister. There was ever, indeed, that about Anna which drew all children to her. And now the proud daughter of the laird of Earlstoun went to her as readily as a tottering cottar's bairn.

'You will take me to my mother, will you not?' she said, nestling contentedly with her cheek against Anna's homespun kirtle.

'That will I, and blithely, lambie!' my sister answered, heartily, 'if ye will tell me who the mother o' ye may be, and where she bides.'

But when I had told her, I saw Anna look suddenly blank, and the colour fade from her face.

'By the waterside— your mother!' she said, with a kind of fluttering uncertain apprehension in her voice. For my sister Anna's voice was like a stringed instrument, quavering and thrilling to the least thought of her heart.

We three turned to go down the hill to the waterside. I caught Anna's eye, and, observing by its signalling that she wished to speak with me apart, I allowed the little girl to precede us on the winding sheep track, which was all the path leading up the Bennanside.

'The soldiers had taken her mother away with them in the boat to question her. They suspected that she came to the water foot to meet her husband,' whispered Anna. 'You must take the little

one back to her folk—or else, if you are afraid to venture. Hob or David will go instead of you.’

‘Neither Hob nor yet David shall get the chance; I will go myself,’ cried I, firing at the notion that my two brothers could carry out such a commission better than I. ‘If you, Anna, will look to the sheep, I will leave Ashie and Gray behind to help you.’

‘I will indeed gladly stay and see that all is kept in due order,’ said Anna, and I knew that she was as good a herd as any one, and that when she undertook a thing she would surely perform it.

So I took leave of my sister, and she gave me some pieces of barley bread and also a few savoury crumblings she had discovered in the pocket which was swung on the outside of her short kirtle.

‘I will not go with you; I want to stay with this nice great girl, or else go home to my mother!’ cried the imperious little maid, stamping her foot and shaking her yellow curls vehemently as if she cherished a spite against me.

‘Your mother has been obliged to go home without you,’ I said, ‘but she has left word that you are to come with me, and I will take you home.’

‘I do not believe it; you are nothing but a little, ragged, silly boy,’ she answered, shaking her finger contemptuously at me.

I appealed to Anna.

‘Is it not so?’ I said.

Anna turned gently to little Mary Gordon.

‘Go with him, childie,’ she said; ‘your mother was compelled to go away and leave you. My brother will bring you safe. Quintin is a good lad and will take great care of you. Let him take you home, will you not?’

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And the child looked long up into the deep untroubled brown eyes of Anna, my sister, and was vanquished.

'I will go with the boy anywhere if you bid me,' she said.

[Note and Addition by me, Hob MacClellan, Elder Brother of the Writer.]

It chances that I, Hob MacClellan, have come into possession of the papers of Quintin, my brother, and also of many interesting documents that belonged to him. In time I shall leave them to his son Quintin, but ere they pass out of my hands it is laid upon me that I insert sundry observes upon them for the better understanding of what Quintin hath written.

For this brother of mine, whom for love I served forty years as a thirled labourer serves for his meat, whom I kept from a thousand dangers, whom I guided as a mother doth a bairn that learns to walk, holding it by the coaties behind—this Quintin whose fame is in all Scotland was a man too wrapt and godly to be well able to take care of the things of the moment, and all his life needed one to be in tendance upon him, and to see that all went forward as it ought.

My mother and his, a shrewd woman of the borderside stock, Elliot her name, used often to say, 'Hob, keep a firm catch o' Quintin. For though he may stir up the world and have the care of all the churches, yet like a bairn he needs one to draw tight the buckle of his trews, and see that he goes not to preach in the habit in which he rose from bed!'

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So it came about that I, having no clearness as to leaving him to himself, abode mostly near him, keeping the door of his chamber, as it were, on all the great occasions of his life. And Quintin my brother, though we differed oftentimes, ever paid me in love and the bond of an unbroken brotherhood. Also what he had I had, hand and siller, bite or sup, poverty and riches. I tilled his glebe. I brought home his kye and milked them. I stood at his back in the day of calamity. I was his groom when first he married so strangely. Yet through all I abode plain dour Hob MacClellan, to all the parish and wider far— ‘the minister's brother!’

And there are folk who have held me stupid because that ordinarily I found little to say, or dull in that I mixed not with their pothouse jollity, or proud because I could be better company to myself than a score of clattering fools.

Not that I despised the friendly converse in the green loaning when a man meets a man, or a man a bonny lass, nor yet the merry meeting about the ingle in the heartsome forenights, for I own that at one time my mind lay greatly that way.

I have loved good sound jocund mirth all my days; aye, and often learned that which proved of great advantage at such times, just because folk had no fear, but would speak freely before me. Whereas, so soon as Quintin came in, there passed a hush over every face and a silence of constraint fell upon them, as if he had fetched the two tables of stone with all the Ten Commandments upon them in his coat-tail pocket.

Now, though I hold to it that there never was a man in the world like our Quintin, at least, never

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since Richard Cameron was put down in red-running blood on the Moss of Ayr, yet I am free to admit that Quintin often saw things without that saving salt of humour which would have given him so much easier a tramp through the whins and thickets of life.

But this could not be. Quintin had by nature mother-wit enough, but he ever took things too hardly, and let them press upon his spirit when he had better have been on the ice at the channel-stanes than on his knees in his closet. At least that is my thought of it.

For some men see the upper side of human affairs, and some the under. But few there be who see both sides of things. And if any of the doctrines for which our Quintin fought seemed to me as the thin wind-clouds streaked like mare's tails high in the lift, the heartsome mirth and country 'gif-gaf,' which oft times made my heart cheerier, appeared to him but as the crackling of thorns under a pot.

And so when it shall be that this wondrous narrative of my brother Quintin's life (for it is both wondrous and true) is finally set forth for the edification of men and women, I recommend whoever has the perusal of it to read over also my few chapters of observes, that he may understand the true inwardness of the narrative and, as it were, the ingates as well as the outgates of it.

Now, for instance, there is this matter of the killing of the man upon the hill. Quintin hath written all his story, yet never said in three words that the man was not Muckle Sandy Gordon, the father of the little lass. He was, in fact, the son of one Edgar of Milnthird, and reported a clever lad at

his trade, which was that of a saddler in Dumfries. He had in his time great fights with the devil, who beset him roaring like a lion in the caves of Crichope and other wild glens. But this John Edgar would always vanquish him till he put on the red coat of Rob Grier of Lag, that noted persecutor. And so the poor lad got a settling shot through the back even as Quintin has written.

And, again, when Quintin says that it was the memory of that day which set him marching to Edinburgh with me at his elbow, to hold Clavers and his troop of Lairds and Highland-men in order—well, in my opinion we both marched to Edinburgh because my father bade us. And at that time even Quintin did not disobey his father, though I will say that, having the soft side of my mother, he got more of his own way even from a bairn than is good for any one.

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CHAPTER FIVE

I CONSTRUCT A RAFT

[The Narrative is again from the MS, of Quintin MacClellan.]

It was growing dusk when Mary Gordon and I came to the edge of the lake. Now, Loch Ken, though a narrow and winding piece of water, and more the extension of the river than, as it were, a lake of set intent, has yet many broad, still stretches and unexpected inlets, where it is a paradise for children to play. And these I knew like the way to our well at Ardarroch.

As Anna had foretold, we found upon the white sands neither the Lady of Earlstoun, nor yet the boat in which Mary and she had come from the head of the loch. We saw, however, the rut which the prow of the boat had made in taking the pebbles, and the large stone to which it had been fastened was there. The shingle also was displaced, and all about were deeply marked footprints like those made by men who bear a heavy burden.

Then, when I had sat down on a boulder by the water's edge, I drew the little maid to my knee, and told her that I must take her home to find her mother. And also that because the Earlstoun was a long way off, she must let me carry her sometimes when she grew weary.

'Is that what Anna would wish?' she asked, for from the first she had called my sister nothing else.

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I told her that it was, and immediately she put her hand in mine, yet not willingly nor yet trustingly as she had done to Anna, but rather with an air of protest and like one who does an irksome but necessary duty.

At the point of the loch at which we had arrived the trees crept down the hillside quite to the edge of the water, so that for the first quarter of a mile Mary Gordon and I proceeded northwards without ever needing to show ourselves out in the open.

Then there comes the narrow pass between the steepest crags of the Bennan and the water's edge. We had been moving cautiously through the trees, and were indeed just about to emerge from the brushwood, when a rotten stick cracked beneath my foot. Instantly a soldier's challenge rang sharply out in front of us.

'Halt! Who goes there?'

Though little better than bairns Mary Gordon and I cowered with the instinctive craft born of years of persecution and concealment. Again the man cried, 'Show yourselves there, or I fire!'

But as we lay still as death behind the tree he did not think it necessary to enter the wood — where, indeed, for all he knew a score of armed and desperate Whigs might have been in hiding.

Then we could hear his neighbours hail him from the next post and ask what the matter was.

'I heard a noise in the wood,' he returned, gruffly enough.

'A wandering pig or a goat from the hill!' cried his comrade higher up, cheerily. 'There are many of them about.' But the man in front of us was sullen and did not reply.

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'Sulky dog!' cried the man who had spoken—as it were, in order to close the conversation pleasantly.

The sound of his voice caused me to stop and reflect.

The hail of the second soldier had come distinctly from the rocks of the Bennan, therefore their commander had established a cordon of sentries in order to prevent the escape of some noted fugitive. What chance was there for a couple of children to pass the guarded line? By myself I might, indeed, have managed. I could well enough have rushed across the line when the sentry was at the extreme point of his beat, and risked a bullet as I plunged into the next belt of woodland; but, cumbered with the care of a maiden of tender years, this was impossible.

The night had drawn down into a cool, pleasant darkness. Softly Mary Gordon and I withdrew, taking care that no more rotten sticks should snap beneath our feet. For I knew that in the present state of the sentry's temper we would certainly not escape so easily.

Presently, at the southern verge of the straggling copse of hazel, and therefore close to the edge of the lake, we came upon a couple of sheepfolds. One of these belonged to our own farm of Ardarroch, and the other to our kindly neighbour, John Fullerton of the Bennan.

'I am tired—take me home. You promised to take me home!'

The little maid's voice was full of pitifulness and tears as she found herself going further and further from the house of Earlstoun.

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'We cannot pass that way—the soldier men would shoot us,' I answered her with truth.

'Then take me to my Auntie Jean,' she persisted, catching at my hand pettishly, and then throwing it from her, 'and my mother will come for me in the morning.'

'But where does your Auntie Jean live?'

'How can I tell—it is such a long way?' she answered. 'It is in a house in the middle of a loch!'

Now this could only mean in the old tower of Lochinvar. But that was a yet longer and more difficult road than to the Earlstoun, and the line of sentries up the Bennan side barred our progress as completely as ever.

Nevertheless there was something attractive in the little maid's idea. For that ancient strength, alone among all the neighbouring houses, sheltered no band of troopers. Kenmure, Earlstoun, Gordonston, and even our own little farm town of Ardarroch were all manned and watched, but the half-ruinous block-house of Lochinvar set in the midst of its moorland loch had been left untenanted. Its owner, Walter Gordon, the famous swordsman, was in exile abroad, so they said, and the place, save for a room or two, totally disrupted and broken down.

There was, therefore, no safer refuge for little Mary, if indeed her aunt dwelt there and we could find our way. Suddenly, as we looked about, an idea came to me, and, what is not so common, the means of carrying it out.

The sheepfolds (or 'buchs') in which we were hiding were walled in with rough stones from the hill, piled so as to form dry dykes, high and strong,

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and the entrances were defended by heavy wooden gates swung upon posts driven deep into the ground. The gates lifted away easily from their hinges. Two or three of these would make a secure enough raft if I could only fasten them together. And even as I set about to find ways and means, I was conscious of a change. A strange elation took me at the heart, and ran through my veins like unaccustomed wine.

I was no longer the careless herd laddie. I had entered life. I knew the penalty of failure. The man in the brown coat lying prone on his face up there above me on the crest of the Bennan quite clearly and sufficiently pointed that moral.

So, with the little girl close behind me, I searched both sets of 'buchts' from end to end. I found three gates which could be easily detached from their posts. These I dismounted one after another.

How, then, was I to get them to the water's edge, for they were far too heavy for my puny strength? I could only break a limb from a tree and draw them down to the loch shore on that, even as I had often helped my father to bring home his faggots of firewood from the hill upon a carr, or trail-cart of brushwood.

So we set off for the wood to break our branch. It was not long before I had one of beech lying upon the ground, with all its wealth of rustling leaves upon it. But the snap I made in breaking it off from the tree would certainly have betrayed us, had I not been cautious to keep a sufficient breadth of wood between us and our surly sentry.

Trailing this behind us we came again to the 'ewe-buchts.'

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It was now no difficult job to transport the raft of gates down to the water. I gave Mary Gordon a branch to tug at, which made her happier than anything I had done since Anna committed her to my care, for she pleased herself with thinking that she did the whole work.

I was almost on the point of using a hay-rope to bind them together as the best I could do, when I remembered that in the corner of our own 'bucht's' my father kept some well-tarred hempen cord, which I had seen him place there only the day before he had been compelled to go into hiding. If it chanced not to be removed, without doubt it would prove the very thing.

I found it where he had laid it, in the little shelf-press rudely constructed in the wall of four blocks of stone split into faces. There was little enough of it when I rove it out, but I thought I could make shift with it. It was, at any rate, far better than miles of hay-rope.

With this I tied the bars closely together by the corners and cross-bars, and presently had built up a very commodious raft indeed, though one more than a trifle heavy. It was some time before I hit upon a plan of launching my top-heavy craft. With the loose 'stob' of a gatepost I managed to lever the crank construction to the edge of a sloping bank down which she slid so quickly that I had to set my heels into the grass and hold back with all my might.

But a moment after, without a splash more than a wild duck might make, the raft floated high above the water. With the end of the rope in my hand I climbed on board, but soon found that with my weight the top 'liggate' of my craft was within an

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inch of the water. Clearly, then, it could not keep both of us dry.

But this troubled me little. I had not lived all my life on the shores of a loch to be afraid of swimming behind a raft on a midsummer night. For among other ploys Hob and I would often play at a sort of tilting or tournament, sitting astride of logs and trying to knock each other off into the water in the warm summer shallows.

So I placed the little girl upon the raft, cautioning her that as she hoped to see her mother again, she must in no circumstances make the least noise nor yet move from the centre of the raft where I had placed her. Soon she had begun to take an interest in the adventure, and had forgotten her weariness. She did not, however, again speak of her mother, but said that she was ready to 'go for a sail' with me if I was quite sure that on the other side she should see her aunt. And this, speaking somewhat hastily, I promised without condition.

CHAPTER SIX

ACROSS THE MOONLIGHT

For just then I became aware of a quickly growing light behind the eastern hills. It was the moon rising. I had not thought of this, and for a moment I was disconcerted. I knew that she would doubtless throw a sharp light upon the water, and that from the shore the raft would be as easily seen black against the broad and shining silver streak as if the time had been midday instead of midnight.

Then I remembered the branch which I had brought with me from the wood. I thrust the butt of it through the bars of the gates, and so disposed the leaves that from the shore they made at once a perfect shelter and a secure hiding-place for Mary, who sat there in state upon the raft, proud of going such an adventurous voyage, and perhaps also not a little elated to be up so late.

Being already stripped to the shirt and small clothes, I took off the former also, and dropped silently into the water behind the raft. I found the water warm, for the hot sun of June had beat upon it all the long day. A chill wind had sprung up within the last hour, and the wavelets broke on my back and upon the raft at my chin with a little jabble of sound. But it blew upon the leaves of the branch which acted as a sail and sent us so quickly northward that I had to swim sideways in order to keep in the right line of our voyaging.

The moon rose as we left the shallows of the shore. She looked coldly and blankly at us over the

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black Parton moors on the other side. But all the same she did us a mighty ill turn. For I knew that in her light the raft would be apparent to everyone on the bank where the soldiers lay.

I dived instantly and came up on the side furthest from the land. There I held the raft so that the branch would keep its thickest cover towards the sentry.

I could see him now, pacing to and fro in the moonlight across the grey turf and strip of white sand. He was plain to be seen against the shining beach, and his helmet sometimes flashed momentarily against the dark line of the woods behind. So that I knew how plainly he in his turn must be able to see us, as we crossed the broad silver stream of moonlight upon the water.

A camp fire glowed sullenly red among the trees, from which I gathered that the commander of the soldiers was very much in earnest indeed, in his resolve to catch his man. For it was but seldom that any of the red soldiers would consent to lie out at night, preferring instead to quarter themselves upon the people, to harry their houses and gear, insult their women folk, and requiring to be called 'your Honour' at every other word.

Meanwhile, the wind was doing its work, if not swiftly, at least with deliberate and unhalting steadiness. Mary sat like a statue under the green bough, and smiled at the dancing ripples. She looked very beautiful to see, aye, and winsome too, with my shirt-collar turned up about her ears and the empty sleeves hanging down on either side.

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But I had small time to observe such like, for soon we were crossing the bright water in front of the soldier.

He had paced down to the water's edge and now stood looking out towards us, leaning upon his musket. I could see the tails of his military coat blow back in the chill wind from the hills. He hugged himself as if he had been a-cold. Yet he stood looking so long that I feared he might suspect something. But after all it was only that he was a contemplative man, and that the object on the water was as good as anything else to fix his eyes upon. At any rate, all he did see was a floating branch being driven northward with the wind.

Presently, to my immense relief, he shouldered his piece and tramped away up towards the woods.

I drew a long breath, and swimming on my back I pushed the raft across the lake with my head.

Yet it seemed an age before we took ground on the further side, and I could carry the brave little maid ashore. She dropped almost instantly asleep on my shoulder.

'Have you given Matt his supper?' was her last speech. I thought Matt must be some pet dog of hers. In time, however, I found that he was a certain green caterpillar which she kept in a wooden box and fed upon cabbage leaves.

After this there came a long and weary tramp with many rests, and the infinite weariness of carrying the sleeping maid. She grew heavier and heavier every moment as I stumbled over the rough moor, so that my back was well nigh broken before I came to the verge of the little lake with the tower of Lochinvar in the midst of it.

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Here, in the dawning light, I laid her down under a bush of bog-myrtle, and swimming to the castle hand over hand I clamoured at the door.

For a time none answered, and I got a sharp, chilling fear in my stomach that I had brought the maid to a house uninhabited, but at long and last a window shot up and a voice hailed me.

'Who knocks so early at the door of Lochinvar?'

'Who are you that speers?' I returned, giving question for question in the Scots manner.

A kindly mellow voice laughed.

'Surely only an honest country lad would have answered thus,' said the voice; 'but since the times are evil, tell me who's bairn ye may be?'

So with that, somewhat reassured, I told very briefly for what cause I had come.

The window shut down again, and in a few minutes I heard a foot within coming slowly along a stone passage. Bolts withdrew, and the door was opened, creaking and squealing upon unaccustomed hinges.

A pleasant-faced old lady, wrapped about in a travelling cloak of blue frieze, stood there. She had a white nightcap on her head, frilled and goffered much more elaborately than my mother's at Ardarroch.

'Ye have brought Sandy Gordon's daughter to me. Her faither and her mother are taken, ye tell me. God help them!' she exclaimed.

So I told her that I knew not as to her father's taking with any certainty, for he might have been slain for aught I knew. I told her also the terrible thing I had been witness to on the top of Bennan,

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and the word of the lad in brown when he cried for Margaret. She set her hand to her heart.

‘Poor lads,’ she said, and again, ‘poor misguided lads.’

I thought in my heart that that was a strange way to speak of the martyrs, but it was not for a boy like me to make any objection.

The woman undid the boat which swung by a chain at the northern side of the castle secure within a little breakwater of hewn stone. We rowed across to the loch's edge, and there, in the first ruddy glow of the rising sun, with colour on her lips and her lashes lying long and dark upon her cheek, was the little Mistress Mary, safe under her bush of bog-myrtle, looking lovely as a fairy, aye, or the queen of the fairies herself.

Then I know not what cantrip took me, for at most times, both then and after, I was an awkward Scots boy, as rough and landward as Ashie or Gray, my questing collies. But certain it is that I stooped and kissed her on the cheek as she lay, and when I lifted her would have given her to her aunt.

But she stirred a little as I took her in my arms, and with a little petulant whimper she nestled her head deeper into my neck. My heart stirred strangely within me at the touch of the light curls on her forehead.

She opened her eyes of sleepy blue. ‘Has Matt had his breakfast?’ she said. And instantly fell to the sleeping again.

We laid her all comfortably in the stern of the boat. Her aunt stepped in and took the oars. She did not invite me to follow.

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‘Good morrow, lad,’ she said, not unkindly, ‘get you home speedily. I will see to the child. You have done well by Sandy’s bairn. Come and see her and me in happier times. I promise you neither she nor I will ever forget it.’

And I watched these two as the boat went from me, leaving three long wakes upon the water, one oily and broad where the keel stirred the peaty water, and two smaller on either side winking with bubbles where the oars had dipped.

And there in the stern I could just see the edge of the blue hood of frieze, wherein lay the golden head of Mary Gordon.

She was but a bairn. What did a grown laddie care for bairns? Yet was my heart heavy within me.

And that was the last I saw of Mary Gordon for many and many a year.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MY BROTHER HOB

The years which took me, Quintin MacClellan, from the boyishness of thirteen to eighteen and manhood were eventful ones for Scotland. The second Charles had died just when the blast was strongest, and for a while it looked as if his brother would be the worst of the two. But because he wished well to the Papists, and could not ease them without also somewhat benefiting us of the Covenant, the bitterness of the shower slackened and we had some peace.

But, as for me, it mattered not greatly. My heart within me was determined that which it should do. Come storm or peaceful years, come life or death, I was determined to stand in the forefront and hold up again the banner which had been dabbled in the blood of Richard Cameron at Ayrsmoss, and trailed in the dust of victory by the haughty and the cruel.

That very year I went to my father, and I asked of him a wage to be spent in buying me books for my learning.

'You want to be a minister?' said my father, looking, as he well might, no little astonished. 'Have you gotten the grace of God in your heart?'

'Nay, father,' I answered him, 'that I know not. But nevertheless I have a desire to know and to learn.'

But another voice cut into the matter and gravity of our discourse.

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'Bless the lad, and so you shall, Quintin!' cried my mother from the door.

I heard my father sigh as though he would have said, 'The fat is in the fire now!' Yet he refrained him and said nothing, standing as was his custom with his hands deep in the long side flaps of his waistcoat. Then he showed how hard it was to become a minister, and ever my mother countered his objections, telling how such-an-one's son had gone forward and been successful.

'And they had none such a comfortable down-sitting nor yet any such blessing in flocks and herds as you, goodman!' she would say.

'Nor yet a mother so set and determined in her own way!' cried my father a little sharply.

'Nay, now, John,' she made answer; 'I did but mention those other lads, because not one of them is to be compared with our Quintin.'

My father laughed a little.

'Well,' he said, 'at all events there is time enough. The lad is but fourteen, and muckle much good water will run under the brigs ere it be time to send him to the college. But I will speak to Gilbert Semple, the Edinburgh carrier, to ask his cousin, the goodly minister, what books are best fitted for a lad who desires to seek learning and college breeding. And in the meantime the laddie has aye his Bible. I mind what good Master Rutherford said when he was in Anwoth: If so be ye want manners e'en read the Bible. For the Bible is no ill-bred book. It will take you unashamed through an earthly court as well as through the courts of the Master of Assemblies, through the Star Chamber as well as through the chamber of the stars.'

And though at the time I understood not well then what my father meant, yet I read in my Bible as I had opportunity, keeping it with one or two other books in the poke-nook of my plaid whenever I went to the hills. After a while Gilbert Semple, the carrier, brought me from Edinburgh certain other volumes—some of Latin and Greek grammar, with one or two in the mathematics which were a sore puzzle and heartbreak to me, till there came among us one of the Hill Folk, a well-learned man, who, being in hiding in a Whig's hole on the side of Cairn Edward, was glad for the passing of the time to teach me to thread the stony desolation of verbs irregular and the quags of the rules of syntax.

Nevertheless, at this time, I fear there was in me no very rooted or living desire for the ministry. I longed, it is true, for a wider and more ample career than the sheep-herding on the hills of Kells could afford. And in this my mother supported me. Hob and David also, though they desired not the like for themselves, yet took some credit in a brother who had it in him to struggle through the narrow and thorn-beset wicket gate of learning.

Many a time did our great, stupid, kindly, butter-hearted Hob come to me, as I lay prone kicking my heels to some dyke-back with my Latin grammar under my nose, and stand looking over with a kind of awe on his honest face.

'Read us a bit,' he would say.

Whereat very gladly I would screeed him off half a page of the rules of the syntax in the Latin tongue, according to the Dutch pronunciation which the preacher lad of the Cairn Edward cave had taught me.

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And as I rolled the weighty and sounding words glibly off. Hob would listen with an air of infinite satisfaction, like one that rolls a sweet morsel under his tongue.

'Read that leaf again! It's a grand-sound-in' ane that! Like 'And the Lord said unto Moses' in the Book of Exodus. Certes, what it is to have learning!'

Then very gravely I would read to the foot of the page and stop.

Hob would stand a moment to digest his meal of the Humanities.

'Lie ye there, laddie,' he would say; 'gather what lear ye can out of your books. I will look to the hill sheep for you this day!'

I shall never forget his delight when, after great wrestlings, I taught him the proper cases of Penna, 'a pen,' which in time he attained so great a mastery over that even in his sleep he could be heard muttering, 'Penna, a pen; penna, of a pen.' And our David, slinking sulkily in at a wolf-lope from his night-raking among the Glenkens lasses, would sometimes bid him to be silent in no kindly tones, at which the burly Hob, who could have broken slender David over his knee, would only grunt and turn him over, recommencing monotonously under his breath, 'Penna, a pen!'

My father smiled at all this— but covertly, not believing, I think, that there was any out-gate for me into the ministry. And with the state of things in Scotland, indeed, I myself saw none. Nevertheless, I had it in me to try. And if Mr. Linning, Mr. Boyd, Mr. Shields, Mr. Renwick and others had gotten their learning in Holland, why should not I?

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In return for Penna, a pen (pennae, of a pen, et cetera), Hob taught me the use of arms, the shooting to the dot of an 'i' with a gun and a pistol, the broad sword and the small sword, having no mercy on me at all, but abusing me like a sheep-stealer if I failed or grew slack at the practice.

'For,' he said, 'if ever you are to be a right minister in Scotland, it is as like that ye will need to lead a charge with Richard Cameron, as that ye will spend all your time in the making of sermons and delivering them.'

So he taught me also single-stick till I was black and blue all over. He would keep on so long belabouring me that I could only stop him with some verbal quib, which as soon as it pierced his thick skull would make him laugh so long and so loudly that the lesson stopped of itself. Yet for all that he had in after time the mighty assurance to say that it was I who had no true appreciation of humour.

One day, when he had basted me most unmercifully, I said to him, 'I also would ask you one thing, Hob, and if you tell me without sleeping on it, I will give you the silver buckle of my belt.'

'Say on,' said he, casting an eager eye at the waist-leather which Jean Gordon had sent me.

'Wherein have I the advantage over the leopard?' I asked him.

He thought it over most profoundly.

'I give it up,' he said at last. 'I do not know.'

'Why,' said I, as if it had been the simplest thing, 'because when I play back-sword with you I can change my spots and Scripture declares that the leopard cannot.'

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This he understood not at the time, but the next Sabbath morning it came upon him in the time of worship in the kitchen, and in the midst of the solemnity he laughed aloud, whereat my father, much incensed, asked him what ailed him and if his wits had suddenly taken leave of him.

'It was our Quintin,' dithered Hob, tremulously trying to command his midriff; 'he told me that when I played back-sword with him he could change his spots and that the leopard could not.'

'When said he that?' asked my father, with cold suspicion, for I had been sitting demure as a gib cat at his own elbow.

'Last Monday in the gloaming, when we were playing at back-sword in the barn,' said Hob.

'Thou great fool,' cried my father, 'go to the hill breakfastless, and come not in till ye have learned to behave yourself in the time of worship.'

To which Hob responded nothing, but rose and went obediently, smothering his belated laughter in his broad bonnet of blue.

He was waiting for me after by the sheep-buchts, when I went out with a bicker of porridge under my coat.

'I am sore vexed to have made our father angry,' he said, 'but the answer came upon me suddenly, and in truth it was a proper jest— for, of course, a leopard could not play back-sword.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MUSTER OF THE HILL FOLK

Men who know the strange history of the later life of me, Quintin MacClellan, may wonder that the present narrative discovers so little concerning my changes of opinion and stresses of spiritual conflict. But of these things I have written in extension elsewhere, and those who desire more than a personal narrative know well where to find the recital of my difficulties, covenantings, and combatings for the cause.

For myself, the memory of the day on the Bennan top was more than enough, and made me a high Covenant man for life. So that when I heard how King James was fled and his son-in-law, William of Orange, landed I could not contain myself, but bade Hob and David to come with me and light a beacon-fire on the top of the Millyea, that fair and shapely mountain. This after severe labour we did, and they say that the light was seen over a dozen parishes.

Then there came word to the Glenkens that there was to be a Convention in Edinburgh of men chosen out of every shire and county, called and presided over by Duke Hamilton. But it was the bruit of the countryside that this parliament would turn out even as the others, and be ground under the heel of the old kingsmen and malignants.

So about this time there came to see my father two men grave and grey, their beards blanched with dripping hill-caves and with sleeping out in the snell winds and biting frosts of many a winter, without

better shelter than some cold moss-hag or the bieldy side of a snow wreath.

'There is to be a great rising of the Seven Thousand. The whole West is marching to Edinburgh!' cried in at the door the elder of the two—one Steel, a noted Covenanter from Lesmahago.

But the other, when his dark cloak blew back, showed a man of slender figure, but with a face of calm resolve and indomitable courage—the proven face of a soldier. He was in a fair uniform—that, as I afterwards found, of one of the Prince of Orange's Scots-Dutch regiments.

'This,' said Steel to my father, 'is Colonel William Gordon, brother of Earlstoun, who is come directly from the Prince of Orange to represent his cause in his own country of the West.'

In a moment a spark lighted in my heart, blazed up and leaped to my tongue.

'What,' I cried, 'William Gordon—who carried the banner at Sanquhar and fought shoulder to shoulder with Cameron at Ayrsmoss.'

For it was my mother's favourite tale.

The slender man with the calm soldier-like face smiled quietly and made me a little bow, the like of which for grace I had never seen in our land. It had so much of foreign habitude in it, mixed with a simple and personal kindness native to the man.

'Ah,' he said, 'I am ten years older since then—I fear me not ten years wiser.'

His voice sounded clear and pleasant, yet it was indubitably the voice of a man to be obeyed.

'How many sons and limber house-carles can you spare, Ardarroch,' said he, watching my father's

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face, 'to march with me to keep the Convention out of the clutches of my Lord Dundee?'

'Of the devil's hound, Clavers, mean ye?' corrected my father suddenly, the fierce, rooted light of hatred gleaming keen and sharp, like the blade of a dagger which is drawn just an inch from its sheath and then returned. 'There are three of us on the farm, besides the boy Quintin, my youngest son. And every one of them shall ride to Edinburgh with you on their own horses.'

'Four shall ride, father,' said I, stepping forward. 'I am the youngest, but let me also strike a blow. I am as fit of my body as either Hob or David there, and have a better desire and goodwill than either of them.'

'But, lad,' said my father, not ill pleased, 'there are your mother and sister to look after. Bide you here and take care of the house.'

'There needs none to take care of the house while ye leave us here with a musket or two and plenty of powder and lead,' cried my mother. 'Anna and I shall be safer, aye, and the fuller of gladness that ye are all in Edinburgh doing the Lord's work. Ride ye, therefore, all the four of you!'

'Yes,' added Anna, with the sweet stillness of her eye on the ground, 'let Quintin go, father. None would harm us in all the countryside.'

'Indeed, I think so,' growled my father, 'having John MacClellan to reckon with on our return.'

Whereat for very thankfulness I took the two women's hands, and Colonel Gordon said, 'Aye, Ardarroch, give the lad his will. In time past I had my share of biding by the house while my elders

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rode to battle, and I love the boy's eagerness. He has in him the stuff of good soldiers.'

And for these words I could have kissed the feet of Colonel William Gordon. The muster was appointed to be at Earlstoun on the morrow, and immediately there befell at Ardarroch a great polishing of accoutrement and grinding of swords, for during the late troubles the arms had been searched for over and over again. So it befell that they were hidden in the thatch of outhouse roofs, wrapped in cloths and carried to distant sandhills to be buried, or laid away in the damp caves of the linns.

Yet by the time all was brought in we were armed none so ill. My father had first choice, and then we three lads drew lots for the other weapons. To me came the longest straw, and I took the musket and a broad-bladed dagger, because I knew that our madcap David had set his heart on the basket-hilted sword to swing by his side, and I saw Hob's eyes fixed on the pair of excellent horse-pistols which my father had bought when the effects of Patrick Verner (called 'the Traitor') were sold in Dumfries.

At Earlstoun, then, we assembled, but not immediately at the great house—for that was presently under repair after its occupation by troops in the troubles—but at a farmhouse near by, where at the time were abiding Mistress Alexander Gordon and her children, waiting for the final release of her husband from Blackness Castle.

When it came to the point of our setting out, there came word from Colonel Gordon that no more than two of us were to go to Edinburgh on horseback, owing to the scarcity of forage in the city and the difficulty of stabling horses.

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‘Let us again draw lots!’ said my father.

But we told him that there was no question of that, for that he and David must ride while Hob and I would march afoot.

‘And if I cannot keep up with the best that our David can ride on Little Kate, I will drown myself in the first six-inch duck-pond upon the road to Edinburgh!’ cried Hob MacClellan.

So we went down the green loaning of Ardarroch with the women's tears yet wet upon our cheeks, and a great opening of larger hopes dominating the little hollow qualms of parting in our hearts. Wider horizons beckoned us on. Intentions and resolves, new and strange, thrilled us. I for one felt for the first time altogether a man, and I said within my heart as I looked at the musket which my father carried for me across his saddle-bow in order that I might run light, ‘Gladly will I die for the sake of the lad whom I saw murdered on the Bennan top!’

CHAPTER NINE

I MEET MARY GORDON FOR THE SECOND
TIME

And when we arrived, lo! before the little white farm there was a great muster. My Lord Kenmure himself rode over to review us. For the Committee of Estates drawn together by the Duke Hamilton had named him as responsible for the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright.

But that which was of greater interest to me than any commission or enrollment was the appearing of two women upon the doorstep of the cottage—the Lady of Earlstoun and her daughter Mary.

Now it is to be remembered that Alexander Gordon's wife was a sister of Sir Robert Hamilton, the commander at Bothwell Brig—a man whose ungovernable temper, and genius for setting one man at variance with his fellow, had lost us Bothwell Brig and the life of many a brave lad of the hills. And Mary's mother, Jean

Hamilton, was like her brother in that somewhat pretentious piety which is of all things the most souring and embittering.

So that even my father said, good, honest man, that would speak ill of none all the days of his life: 'If I had a wife like yon woman, I declare I would e'en turn Malignant and shoot her without warrant of law or benefit of clergy.'

Jean Gordon came down off the doorstep and stood in front of us four MacClellans, looking out upon us with her keen, black eyes, and seeming as

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it had been, ready to peck at us with her long nose, which was hooked like a parrot's in the middle.

'Have any of you paid the King's cess, or had any dealings with the malignants?' she said, speaking to us as to children taken in a fault.

'Not save along the barrel of a musket, my lady of Earlstoun!' quoth my father, drily.

The stern-visaged woman smiled at the ready answer.

'E'en stick to that, goodman of Ardarroch — it is the safest commerce with such ill-favoured cattle!' she said.

And with that she stepped further on to interrogate some newcomers who had arrived after us in the yard of the farm.

But indeed I minded her nothing. For there was a sweeter and fairer thing to see standing by the cheek of the door—even young Mary Gordon, the very maid I had once carried so far in my arms, now grown a great lass and a tall, albeit still slender as a year-old wand of willow by the water's edges. Her hair, which had been lint white when I brought her down the side of Bennan after the shooting of the poor lad, was now darkening into a golden brown, with thick streaks of a warmer hue, ruddy as copper, running through it.

This girl leaned against the doorstep, her shapely head inclined a little sideways, and her profile clear and cold as the graving on a seal ring, turned away from me.

For my life I could not take my eyes off her.

'I, even I, Quintin MacClellan, have carried that girl in my arms and thought nothing of it!' I said the

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words over and over to myself, and somehow they were exceedingly pleasing to me.

I had ever sneered at love and lovemaking before, but (I own it) after seeing that fair young lass stand by the low entering in of the farmhouse door, I scoffed no more.

Yet she seemed all unconscious that I or any other was near her. But it came to me with power I could not resist, that I should make myself known to her. And though I expected nothing of remembrance, grace, or favour, yet—such is the force of compelling love, the love that comes at the first sight (and I believe in no other kind) that I put all my pride under my feet, and went forward humbly to speak with her, holding my bonnet of blue in my hand.

For as yet we of the Earlstoun levies had fallen into no sort of order, neither had we been drilled according to the rules of war, but stood about in scattering groups, waiting for the end of the conference between my Lord of Kenmure and Colonel William Gordon.

As I approached, awkwardly enough, the maid turned her eyes upon me with some surprise, and the light of them shone cold as winter moonlight glinting upon new-fallen snow.

I made my best and most dutiful obedience, even as my mother had showed me, for she was gentle of kin and breeding, far beyond my fathem.

‘Mistress Mary,’ I said, scarce daring to raise my eyes to hers, but keeping them fixed upon the point of my own rough brogans. ‘You have without doubt forgotten me. Yet have I never for an hour forgotten you.’

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I knew all the while that her eyes were burning auger holes into me. But I could not raise my awkward coltish face to hers. She stood a little more erect, waiting for me to speak again. I could see so much without looking. Whereat, after many trials, I mustered up courage to go on.

‘Mind you not the lad who brought you down from the Bennan top so long ago, and took you under cloud of night to the tower of Lochinvar on the raft beneath the shelter of beech leaves?’

I knew there was a kindly interest growing now in her eyes. But, dolt that I was, I could not meet them a whit the more readily because of that.

‘I scarcely remember aught of it,’ she said, ‘yet I have been told a hundred times the tale of your bringing me home to my aunt at Lochinvar. It is somewhat belated, but I thank you, sir, for your courtesy.’

‘Nay,’ said I, ‘tis all I have to be thankful for in my poor life, that I took you safely past the cruel persecutors.’

She gave me a quick, strange look.

‘Yet now do I not see you ready to ride and persecute in your turn?’

These words, from the daughter of Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, who was scarcely yet liberated from the prison of Blackness, astonished me so much that I stood speechless.

‘To persecute in my turn?’ said I. ‘Nay, my dear mistress, I go to uphold the banner of Christ's Kingdom against those that hate Him.’

Very scornfully she smiled.

‘In my short life,’ she said, ‘I've heard over much of such talk. I know to an ell how much it means. I

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have a mother, and she has friends and gossips. To me the triumph of what you call 'the Kingdom' means but two things—the Pharisee exalted and the bigot triumphant. Prince Jacob of Orange may supplant his father and take the crown; every canting Jack may fling away the white rose and shout for the Orange lily. But not I—not I?

She flaunted a little white hand suddenly palm upward, like an apple blossom blown off the branch by the wind.

To say that I was astounded by this outbreak is to say little. It was like an earthquake, the trembling and resolving of solid land under my feet. Alexander Gordon's child— 'the Bull of Earlstoun's' daughter—standing openly and boldly for the cause of those who had prisoned and, perhaps, tortured her father, and brought about the ruin of her house!

At last I managed to speak.

'You are a young maiden,' I said, as quietly as I could, 'and you know nothing of the great occasions of state, the persecutions of twenty-five years, the blood shed on lonely hillsides, the deaths by yet wearier sickness, the burials under cloud of night of those who have suffered!'

I would have said more, but that she prevented me imperiously.

'I know all there is to know,' she cried, almost insolently. 'Have I not broken fast with it, dined with it, taken my Four-hours with it, supped with it ever since I was of age to hear words spoken? But to my thinking the root of the matter is that you, and those like you, will not obey the rightful King, who alone is to be obeyed, whose least word ought to be sufficient.'

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'But not in religion— not in the things of conscience,' I stammered.

Again she waved her hand floutingly.

"Tis not my idea of loyalty only to be loyal when it suits my whim, only to obey when obedience is easy and pleasant. The man whom I shall honour shall know nothing of such summer allegiance as that!'

She paused a moment and I listened intently.

'Nay,' she said, 'he shall speak and I shall obey. He shall be my King, even as King James is the sovereign of his people. His word shall be sacred and his will law.'

There was a light of something like devout obedience in her eyes. A holy vestal flame for a moment lighted up her face. I knew it was useless to argue with her then.

'Nevertheless,' I answered very meekly, 'at least you will not wholly forget that I brought you to a place of safety, sheltering you in my arms and venturing into dark waters for your sake!'

Now though I looked not directly at her, I could see the cold light in her eyes grow more scornful.

'You do well to remind me of my obligation. But do not be afraid; you shall be satisfied. I will speak of you to my father. Doubtless, when he comes home he will be great with the Usurper and those that bear rule under him. You shall be rewarded to the top of your desires.'

Then there rose a hot indignation in my heart that she should thus wilfully misunderstand me.

'You do me great wrong, my Lady Mary,' I answered; 'I desire no reward from you or yours, saving only your kindly remembrance, nor yet any advancement save, if it might be, into your favour.'

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‘That,’ she said, turning petulantly away, ‘you will never get till I see the white rose in your bonnet instead of those Whiggish and rebel colours.’

CHAPTER TEN

THE BLUE BANNER IS UP

Now though at first I was grievously astonished that the daughter of Alexander Gordon and his wife Janet Hamilton should so speak, yet when I come to consider further of the matter it appears no ways so wonderful.

For her father, when I came to know him, showed himself a great, strong, kindly, hard-driving 'nowt' of a man, with a spiritual conceit equal to his knowledge of his bodily powers. But, for all his great pretensions, Sandy Gordon was essentially a man carnal and of the world, ever more ready to lay on lustily with the arm of the flesh than trust to the sword of the Spirit.

The 'Bull of Earlstoun' was he right fitly called.

And with his children his method of training would doubtless be 'Believe this! Receive that other!' Debate and appeal there would be none. So there is nothing to wonder at in the revolt of a nature every whit as imperious as that of her father, joined to a woman's natural whimsies and set within the periphery of a girl's slender form.

And then her mother!

If Sandy Gordon had proved trying to such a mind as that of Mary Gordon, what of Janet Hamilton, his wife?

She had been reared in the strictest sect of the Extremists. Every breath of difference or opposition to her orthodoxies or those of her brother Sir Robert was held rank treason to the cause. She had

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constant visions, and these visions pointed ever to the cardinal truth that Janet Hamilton was eternally right and everyone else eternally wrong.

So Alexander Gordon, as often as he was at home, bullied back and forth concerning Covenants and sufferings, while at other times his wife worried and yammered, bitter as the east wind and irritant as a thorn in the flesh, till the girl was driven, as it were, in self-defence into other and as intolerant extremes.

Yet when her parents were most angered with her for this perversity, some sudden pretty wile or quaint bairnliness would set them laughing in spite of themselves, or a loving word of penitence bring the tears into their eyes. And while she chose to be good Mary Gordon, the family rebel, the disgrace of a godly home, would be again their own winsome little May, with a smile as sweet as the Benediction after sermon on a summer Sabbath morn, when the lilac and the hawthorn blossom scent all the kirk.

But as for me, having had trial of none of these wiles and witchcrafts, I was grieved indeed to hear one so fair take the part of the cruel persecutors and murderers of our brethren, the torturers of her father, the men to whose charge could be laid the pillage and spoiling of the bonny house of Earlstoun, and the turning of her mother out upon the inclement pitiless-ness of a stormy winter.

But with old and young alike the wearing iteration of a fretful woman's yammering tongue will oftentimes drive further and worse than all the clattering horses and pricking bayonets of persecution.

Yet even then I thought within me, 'Far be it from me that I should ever dream of winning the heart of

so fair and great a lady. But if by the wondrous grace of God, so I ever did, I should be none afraid but that in a little blink of time she would think even as I did. And this was the beginning of the feeling I had for Mary Gordon. Yet being but little more than a shepherd lad from off the hills of heather she was to me almost as one of the angels, and I thought of her not at all as a lad thinks in his heart of a pretty lass, to whom one day if he prosper he may even himself in the way of love.

After a day or two at Earlstoun, spent in drilling and mustering, in which time I saw nothing more of Mary Gordon, we set off in ordered companies towards Edinburgh. The word had been brought to us that the Convention was in great need of support, for that Clavers (whom now they called my Lord Dundee) was gathering his forces to disperse it, so that every one of the true Covenant men went daily in fear of their lives.

Whereupon the whole Seven Thousand of the West and South were called up by the Elders. And to those among us who had no arms four thousand muskets and swords were served out, which were sent by the Convention to the South and West under cover of a panic story that the wild Irishers had landed and burnt Kirkcudbright.

Hob and I marched shoulder to shoulder, and our officer was of one name with us, one Captain Clelland, a young soldier of a good stock who in Holland had learnt the art of war. But Colonel William Gordon, the uncle of the lass Mary, commanded all our forces.

So in time we reached the brow of the hill of Liberton and looked northward towards the town of

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Edinburgh, reeling slantways down its windy ridge, and crowned with the old Imperial coronet of St. Giles where Knox had preached, while the castle towered in pride over all.

It was a great day for me when first I saw those grey towers against the sky. But down in the howe of the Grassmarket there was a place that was yet dearer—the black ugly gibbet whereon so many saints of God, dear and precious, had counted their lives but dross that they might win the crown of faithfulness. And when we marched through the West Port, and passed it by, it was in our heart to cheer, for we knew that with the tyrant's fall all this was at an end.

But Colonel William Gordon checked us.

'Rather your bonnets off, lads,' he cried, 'and put up a prayer!'

And so we did. And then we faced about and filed straight up into the town. And as the sound of our marching echoed through the narrows of the West Bow, the waiting faithful threw up their windows and blessed us, hailing us as their saviours.

Company after company went by, regular and disciplined as soldiers; but in the Lawmarket, where the great folk dwelt, there were many who peeped in fear through their barred lattices.

'The wild Whigs of the West have risen and are marching into Edinburgh!' so ran the cry.

We of Colonel Gordon's Glenkens Foot were set to guard the Parliament House, and as we waited there, though I carried a hungry belly, yet I stood with my heart exulting proudly within me to see the downtrodden at last set on high and those of low estate exalted.

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For the sidewalks and causeways of the High-street were filled with eager crowds, but the crown of it was kept as bare as for the passing of a royal procession. And down it towards Holyrood tramped steadily and ceaselessly, company by company, the soldiers of the Other Kingdom.

Stalwart men in grey homespun they were, each with his sword belted to him, his musket over his shoulder, and his store of powder and lead by his side. Then came squadrons of horses riding two and two, some well mounted, and others on country nags, but all of them steady in their saddles as King's guards. And when these had passed, again company after company of footmen.

Never a song or an oath from end to end, not so much as a cheer along all the ranks as the Hill Men marched grimly in.

'Tramp! tramp! Tramp' So they passed, as if the line would never end. And at the head of each company the blue banner of Christ's Covenant—the standard that had been trailed in the dust, but that could never be wholly put down.

Then after a while among the new flags, bright with silk and blazing, there came one tattered and stained, ragged at the edges, and pierced with many holes. There ran a whisper. 'It is the flag of Ayrsmoss!'

And at sight of its torn folds, and the writing of dulled and blistered gold upon it, 'For Christ's Cause and Covenant,' I felt the tears well from the heart up to my eyes, and something broke sharply with a little audible cry in my throat.

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Then an old Covenant man who had been both at Drumclog and the Brig of Bothwell, turned quickly to me with kindly eyes.

‘Nay, lad,’ he said, ‘rather be glad! The standard that was sunken in a sea of blood is cleansed and set up again. And now in this our day woe be to the persecutors! The banner they trailed in the dust behind the dripping head of Richard Cameron shall wave on the Nether Bow of Edinburgh, where the corbies picked his eyes and his fair cheeks blackened in the sun.’

And so it was, for they set it there betwixt the High-street and the Canongate, and from that day forth, during all the weeks of the Convention, the Covenant men held the city quiet as a frightened child under their hand.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE RED GRANT

It was while we continued to sojourn in Edinburgh for the protection of the Convention that first I began to turn my mind to the stated ministry of the Kirk, for I saw well that this soldiering work must ere long come to an end. And yet all my heart went out towards something better than the hewing of peats upon the moor and the foddering of oxen in stall.

Yet for long I could not see how the matter was to be accomplished, for the Cameronian hill-folk had never had a minister since James Renwick bade his farewell to sun and moon and Desirable General Meetings down in the Edinburgh Grassmarket. There was no authority in Scotland capable of ordaining a Cameronian minister. I knew how impossible it was that I could go to Holland, as Renwick and Linning and Shields had done, at the expense of the societies — for the way of some of these men had even now begun to sour and disgust the elders of the Hill Folk.

So since no better might be I turned my mind to the ministry of the Reformed Kirk as it had been established by law, and resolved to spend my needful seasons as a student of the theologies in the town of Edinburgh. I spoke to my father of my decision, and he was willing that I should try the work.

'I will gladly be at your college charges, Quintin,' he said; 'but mind, lad, it will depend how I sell my

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sheep, whether ye get muckle to put in your belly. Yet, perchance, as the auld saw hath it, 'hungry dogs hunt best.' So mayhap that may likewise hold true of the getting of learning.'

So in the autumn of that year of the Convention, and some months after our return, I made me ready to go to college, and to my infinite surprise Hob, my brother, declared that he would come also.

'For,' said he, 'my father does not need me now at home, at least, not till the spring and the lambing time.'

My father demurred a little. But Hob got his way because he had, as I well saw, my mother behind him. Now Hob was (and is) the best of brothers—slow, placid, self-contained, with little humour in him, but filled with a great, quiet faithfulness. And he has abode with me through many tears and stern trials.

So in due time to Edinburgh we twain went, and while I trudged it back and forth to the college Hob bought with his savings a pedlar's pack, and travelled town and country with swatches of cloth, taches for the hair, pins for the dresses of women-folk, and for the men chap-books and Testaments. But the strange thing is that, slow and silent as our Hob is at most times, he could make his way with the good wives of the Lothians as none of those bred to the trade could do. They tell me he was mightily successful.

I only know that many a day we two might have gone hungry to bed had it not been for what Hob brought home, instead of, as it was, having our kites panged full with good meat, like Tod Lowrie when the lambs are young on the hill.

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And often when my heart was done with the dull and dowie days, the hardness of my heart, and the wryness of learning. Hob would come in with a lightsome quirk on his queer face, or a jest on his tongue, picked up in some of the outlying villages, so that I could not help but smile at him, which made the learning all the easier afterward.

Yet the hardest part of my sore toil at college was the thought that the more I travailed at the theologies, the less of living religion was in my soul. Indeed, it was not till I had been back some time among the common folk who sin and die and are buried, that I began again to taste the savour of vital religion as of old. For to my thinking there is no more godless class than just the young collegers in divinity. Nor is this only a mock, as Hob would have made of it, saying with his queer smile, 'Quintin, what think ye o' a mission to the heathen divinity lads—to set the fire o' hell to their tails, even as Peden the Prophet bade Richie Cameron do to the border thieves o' Annandale?'

[Connect and Addition to Chapter Eleven made in after years by Me, Hob MacClellan.]

It is well seen from the foregoing that Quintin, my brother, had no easy time of it while he was at the college, where they called him 'Separator,' 'Hill Whig,' 'Young Drumclog,' and other nicknames, some of which grieved the lad sore.

Now they were mostly leather-jawed, slack-twisted Geordies from the Hieland border that so troubled our Quintin— who, though he was not averse to the sword or the pistol in a good cause, yet

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would not even be persuaded to lift his fist to one of these rascals, lest it should cause religion to be spoken against. But I was held by none of these scruples.

So it chanced that one night as we came out of the College Wynd in the early falling winter gloaming, one of these bothy-men from the North called out an ill name after us— ‘porridge-fed Galloway pigs,’ or something of the kind. Whereat very gladly I dealt him so sound a buffet on the angle of his jaw that his head was not set on straight again all the winter.

After this we adjourned to settle our differences at the corner of the plainstones; but Quintin and the other theologians who had characters to lose took their way home, grieved in spirit. Or so at least I think he pretended to himself.

For when I came in to our lodging an hour after his first words were: ‘Did ye give him his licks, Hob?’ And that question, to which I answered simply that I had and soundly, did not argue that the ancient Adam had been fully exorcised from our Quintin.

All the same the Highlandman was none so easy to handle, being a red-headed Grant from Speyside, and more inclined to come at you with his thick skull, like a charging boar of Rothiemurchus, than decently to stand up with the brave bare knuckles, as we are wont to do in the South.

A turn or two at Kelton Hill fair would have done him no harm and taught him that he must not fight with such an ungodly battering-ram as his head. I know lads there who would have met him on the crown with the toe of their brogans.

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But this I scorned, judging it feater to deal him a round-arm blow behind the ear and leap aside. The first of these discouraged the Grant; the second dropped him on the causeway dumb and limp.

'Well done, Galloway!' cried a voice above; 'but ye shall answer for this the morn, every man o' ye!'

'Run, lads, run! Tis the Regent!' came the answering cry from the collegers.

And with that every remaining student lad ran his best in the direction of his own lodging.

'Well, sir, have ye killed the Speyside Hielandman?' said the Doctor from his window, when I remained alone by the fallen chieftain. The Regent came from the West himself, and, they say, bore the Grants no love, for all that he was so holy a man.

'I think not,' I answered doubtfully, 'but I'll take him round to the infirmary and see!'

And with that I hoisted up the Red Grant on my shoulders, carried him down the Infirmary Close, and hammered on the door till the young chirurgion who kept the place, thinking me to be drunk, came to threaten me with the watch.

Then, the bolts being drawn, I backed the Highlandman into the crack of the door and discharged him upon the floor.

'There's a heap of good college divinity,' I said. 'The Regent sent me to bid ye find out if he be dead or alive.'

So with no more said we got him on a board, and at the first jag of the lancet my Grant lad sat him up on end with a loup like a Jack-in-the-box. But when he saw where he was, and the poor bits of dead folk that the surgeon laddies had been learning on that

day, he fetched a yell up from the soles of his Highland shoon, and bounced off the board, crying, 'Ye'll no cut me up as lang as Donald Grant's a leeving man, whatever ye may do when he's dead!'

And so he took through the door as if the dogs had been after him.

Then the blood-letting man was for charging me with the cost of his time, but I bade him apply to Regent Campbell over at the college, telling him that it was he who had sent me. But whether ever he did so or not I never heard.

Now the rarest jest of the whole matter was on the morrow, when Quintin went to attend his prelection in Hall. The lesson, so he told me, was in the Latin of Essenius, his Compend, and Quintin was called up. After he had answered upon his portion, and well, as I presume, for Quintin was no dullard at his books, Dr. Campbell looked down a little queerly at him.

'Can you tell me which is the sixth commandment?' says he.

'Thou shalt not kill!' answers Quintin, as simple as supping brose.

'Then, are you a murderer or no—this morning?'

Quintin, thinking that, after the fashion of the time, the Regent meant some divinity quirk or puzzle, laid his brains asteep, and answered that as he had certainly 'hated his brother,' in that sense he was doubtless, like all the rest of the human race, technically and theologically a murderer.

'But,' said the Professor, 'what of the Highland Grant lad that ye felled like a bullock yestreen under my window?'

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Now it had never struck me that I was like my brother Quintin in outward appearance, save in the way that all we black MacClellans are like one another— long in the nose, bushy in the eyebrows, which mostly reach over to meet one another. And I grant it that Quintin was ever better mettle for a lass's eye than I—though not worth a pail of calf's feed in the matter of making love as love ought to be made, which counts more with women than all fine appearings.

But for the nonce let that fly stick to the wall; at any rate, sure it is that the Professor loon had taken me for Quintin.

Now it will greatly help those who read this chronicle to remember what Quintin did on this occasion. I would not have cared a doit if he had said, in the plain hearing of the class, that it was his brother Hob the Lothian packman who had felled the Red Grant.

But would the lad betray his brother? No! He rather hung his head, and said no more than that he heard the Red Grant was not seriously hurt. For as he said afterwards, 'I did not know what such a tribe of angry, dirked Highlandmen might have done to you. Hob, if they had so much as guessed it was no colleger's fist which had taken Donald an inch beneath the ear.'

'Then,' said the Regent to Quintin, 'my warrior of Wild Whigdom, you may set to the learning of thirty psalms by heart in the original Hebrew. And after you have said them without the book I will consider of your letters of certification from this class.'

To which task my brother owes that familiarity with the Psalms of David which has often served him

to such noble purpose— both when, like Boanerges, he thundered in the open fields to the listening peoples, and when at closer range he spoke with his enemies in the gate. For thirty would not suit this hungrisome Quintin of ours. He must needs learn the whole hundred and fifty (is it not?) by rote before he went back to the Regent.

‘Which thirty psalms are ye prepared to recite?’ queried the Professor under the bush of his eyebrows.

‘Any thirty!’ answered brave Quintin, unabashed, yet noways uplifted.

Now the rest of my brother's college life may be told in a word. I know that he had written many chapters upon his struggles and heart-questionings as to duty and guidance at that time. But whether he destroyed them himself, or whether they exist in some undiscovered repository, certain it is that the next portion of his autobiography which has come into my hands deals with the time of his settlement in the parish of Balmaghie, where he was to endure so many strange things.

It is enough to say that year after year Quintin and I returned to the college with the fall of the leaf, I with my pack upon my back, ever gaining ready hospitality because of the songs and merry tales in my wallet. When we journeyed to and fro Quintin abode mostly at the road-ends and loaning-foots while I went up to chaffer with the good-wives in the hallans and ben-rooms of the farmhouses. Then, in the same manner as at first, we fought our way through the dull, iron-grey months of winter in Auld Reekie. Each spring, as the willow buds furred and yellowed, saw us returning to the hill-farm again

with our books and packs. And all the while I kept Quintin cheerful company, looking to his clothes and mending at his stockings and body-gear as he sat over his books. Mainly it was a happy time, for I knew that the lad would do us credit. And as my mother said many and many a time, 'Our Quintin has wealth o' lear and wealth o' grace, but he hasna as muckle common-sense as wad seriously blind a midge.'

So partly because my mother put me through a searching catechism on my return, and also because I greatly loved the lad, I watched him night and day, laid his clothes out, dried his rig-and-fur hose, greased his shoon of home-tanned leather to keep out the searching snow-brew of the Edinburgh streets. For, save when the frost grips it, sharp and snell, 'tis a terrible place to live in, that town of Edinburgh in the winter season.

Here begins again the narrative of Quintin my brother.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LASS IN THE KIRKYARD

I had been well-nigh a year about the great house of Girthon as family chaplain to the laird, when there came a call to accept the ministry of the Gospel among the people of Balmaghie. It was a parish greatly to my mind. It lies, as all know, in the heart of Galloway, between the slow, placid sylvan stretches of the Ken and the rapid, turbulent mill-race of the Black Water of Dee.

From a worldly point of view the parish was most desirable. For though the income in money and grain was not great, nevertheless the whole amount was equal to the income of most of the smaller lairds in the neighbourhood.

Yet for all these things, I trust that those in future times who may read this my life record will acquit me of the sin of self-seeking.

I mind well the first time that I preached in the parish which was to be mine own. I had walked with naught but my Bible in my pocket over the long, lone hill-road from Girthon to Balmaghie. I had with me no provender to comfort my stomach by the way, or to speed my feet over the miles of black heather moors and green morass.

For the housekeeper, to whom (for reasons into which I need not enter) everything in the laird's house of Girthon was committed, was a fair-faced, hard-natured, ill-hearted woman, who liked not the coming of a chaplain into the house— as she said, 'stirring up the servants to gad about to preachings,

and taking up their time with family worship and the like foolishness.'

So she went out of her way to ensure that the chaplains would stay only until they could obtain quittance of so bare and thankless a service.

When I arrived at the kirk of Balmaghie, having come all the long journey from Girthon on foot and fasting, I sat me down on a flat stone in the kirkyard, nearby where the martyrs lie snug and bieldy at the gable-end.

So exhausted was I that I know not what I should have done but for a young lass, comely and well put on, who gave me the farle of oatcake she had brought with her for her 'morning.'

'You are the young minister who is to preach to us this day?' she said, going over to the edge of the little wood which at that time bounded the kirkyard.

I answered her that I was and that I had walked all the way from the great house of Girthon that morning—whereat she held up her hands in utter astonishment.

'It is just not possible,' she cried.

And after pitying me a long time with her eyes, and urging me to eat her 'piece' up quickly, she featly stooped down to the water and washed her feet and ankles, before drawing upon them a pair of white hosen, fair and thin, and fastening her shoes with the buckles of silver after a pretty fashion which was just coming in.

It was yet a full hour and a half before the beginning of the morning diet of worship, for I had risen betimes and travelled steadily. Now the kirk of Balmaghie stands in a lonely place, and even the

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adjoining little clachan of folk averts itself some distance from it.

Then being hungry I sat and munched at the lass's piece, till, with thinking on my sermon and looking at her by the waterside, I had well-nigh eaten it every snatch. So when I awoke from my reverie, as from a deep sleep, I sat with a little bit of bread, the size of my thumb, in my hand, staring at it as if I had seen a fairlie.

And what was worse, the lass seeing me thus speechless, and with my jaws yet working on the last of the crust, went off into peal after peal of laughter.

'What for do ye look at me like that, young lad?' she said, when she had sufficiently commanded herself.

'I—I have eaten all your midday piece, whiles I was thinking upon my sermon,' I said.

'More befitting is it that you should think upon your sermon than of things lighter and less worthy,' said she, without looking up at me. I was pleased with her solid answer and felt abashed.

'But you will go wanting,' I began.

She gartered one shapely stocking of silk ere she answered me, holding the riband that was to cincture the other in her mouth, as appears to be the curious fashion of women.

'What matter,' she said, presently, as she stroked down her kirtle over her knee modestly, with an air that took me mightily, it was so full of distance and respect. 'I come not far, but only from the farm town of Drumglass down there on the meadow's edge. Ye are welcome to the bit piece; I am as glad to see ye eat it as of a sunny morn in haytime. You have come

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far, and a brave day's wark we are expecting from you this Sabbath day.'

Then, as was my duty, I rebuked her for looking to man for that which could alone come from the Master and Maker of man.

She listened very demurely, with her eyes upon the silver buckles of her shoon, which she had admiringly placed side by side on the grass, when she set herself down on the low boundary wall of the kirkyard.

'I ken I am too young and light and foolish to be fit company even for a young minister,' she said, and there was a blush upon her cheek which vexed me, though it was bonny enough to look upon.

'Nay,' answered I quickly; 'there you mistake me. I meant no such thing, bonnie lass. We are all both fond and foolish, minister and maid.' (Well might I say it, for—God forgive me!—at that very moment my mind ran more on how the lass looked and on the way she had of tapping the grass with her foot than on the solemn work of the day.)

'No, no,' she interrupted, hastily; 'I am but a silly lass, poor and ignorant, and you do well to fault me.'

Now this put me in a painful predicament, for I still held in my hand the solitary scraplet left of the young lass's 'piece,' and I must needs, like a dull, splenetic fool, go on fretting her for a harmless word.

She turned away her head a little; nevertheless, I was not so ill-learned in the ways of maids but that I could see she was crying.

'What is your name, sweet maid?' I asked, for my heart was wae that I had grieved her.

She did not answer me till she had a little recovered herself.

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‘Jean Gemmell,’ she said, at last, ‘and my father is the tenant of Drumglass up by there. He is an elder, and will be here by kirk-time. The session is holding a meeting at the Manse.’

I had pulled a Bible from my pocket and was thinking of my sermon by this time.

Jean Gemmell rose and stood a moment picking at a flower by the wall.

‘My father will be on your side,’ she said, slowly.

‘But,’ cried I, in some astonishment, ‘your father has not yet heard me preach.’

‘No more have I,’ she made answer, smiling on me with her eyes, ‘but, nevertheless, my father will be on your side.’

And she moved away, looking still very kindly upon me.

I cannot tell whether or no I was helped by this rencounter in my conduct of the worship that day in the parish kirk of Balmaghie. At any rate, I went down and walked in the meadows by the side of Dee Water till the folk gathered and the little cracked bell began to clank and jow from the kirk on the hill.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MY LADY OF PRIDE

Within the kirk of Balmaghie there spread from gable to gable a dim sea of faces, men standing in corners, men holding by windows, men peering in at the low doorway, while the women cowered upon folded plaids, or sat closely wedged together upon little creepie stools. So great a multitude had assembled that day that the bairns who had no voice in the ministerial call were in danger of being put without to run wild among the gravestones. But this I forbade, though I doubt not many of the youthful vagabondage would have preferred such an exodus to the hot and crowded kirk that day of high summer.

I was well through my discourse, and entering upon my last 'head,' when I heard a stir at the door. I paused somewhat markedly lest there should be some unseemly disturbance.

But I saw only a great burly red-bearded gentleman with his hair a little touched with grey. The men about the porch made room for him with mighty deference.

Clinging to his arm was a young girl, with a face lily-pale, dark eyes and wealth of hair. And instead of the bare head and modest snood of the country maid, or the mutch of the douce matron, there was upon the lady's head a brave new-fashioned hat with a white feather.

I knew them in a moment— Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun and his daughter Mary. I cannot tell if my

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voice trembled, or whether I showed any signs of the abounding agitation of my spirit. But certain it is that for a space, which to me seemed ages, the course of my thought went from me. I spoke words idle and empty, arid it was only by the strongest effort of will that I recalled myself to the solemn matters in hand. That this should have happened in my trial sermon vexed me sore. For at that time I knew not that these disturbances, so great-seeming to the speaker, are little, if at all, observed by his hearers, who are ever willing to lay the blame upon their own lack of comprehension rather than upon their instructor's want of clearness.

But the moment after, with a strong uprising of my spirit, I won above the turmoil of my intellects, and ended with a great outgoing of my heart, charging those before me to lay aside the evils of their life and enter upon the better way with zeal and assured confidence.

And seeing that the people were much moved by my appeal I judged wise to let them go with what fire of God they had gotten yet burning in their hearts. I closed therefore quickly, and so dismissed the congregation.

Then, when I came down to go from the kirk, the people were already dispersing. The great red-bearded man came forward and put his hand on my shoulder.

'Young sir,' he said, 'it is true that ye have left the hill-folk, and with your feet have walked in devious ways. Notwithstanding, if what we have heard today be your message, we shall yet have you on your knees before the Eldership of the Societies. For the heart of the man who can thus speak is with us of

the wilderness, and not among the flesh-pots of an Erastian Egypt.'

At which I shook my head, not seeing how true his words were to prove, nor yet how soon the Kirk of Scotland was to bow the head, which hitherto had only bent to her heavenly Lord, to the sceptre of clay and the rule of a feckless earthly monarch.

But though I looked wistfully at Mary Gordon, and would have gone forward to help her upon her horse where it stood tethered at the kirk-liggate, she passed me by as though she had not seen me, which surely was not well done of her. Instead she beckoned a young man from the crowd in the kirkyard, who came forward with his hat in his hand and convoyed her to her horse with a privileged and courtly air. Then the three rode off together, Alexander Gordon turning about in his saddle and crying back to me in his loud, hearty manner, 'Haste ye and come over to the Earlstoun, and we will yet show you the way across the Red Sea out of the Land of Bondage.'

And I was left standing there sadly enough, yet for my life I cannot tell why I should have been sad. For the folk came thronging about me, shaking me by the hand, and saying that now they had found their minister and would choose me in spite of laird or prince or presbytery. For it seems that already some of my sayings had given offence in high quarters.

Yet it was as if I heard not these good folk, for (God forgive me) even at that solemn moment my thoughts were circling about that proud young lass, who had not deigned me a look even in the hour of

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triumph, but had ridden so proudly away with the man who was doubtless her lover.

Thus I stood awhile dumbly at gaze, without finding a word to say to any. And the folk, thinking that the spirit of the spoken Word was yet upon me, drew off a little.

Then there came a voice in mine ear, low and persuasive, that awoke me from my dream.

'This is my father, who would bid ye welcome, and that kindly, to his house of Drumglass.'

It was the young maid whose piece I had eaten in the morning.

The feeling in my heart that I had been shamed and slighted by Mary Gordon made Mistress Jean Gemmell's word sweet and agreeable to me. I turned me about and found myself clasping the hands of a rugged old man with a broad and honest face, who took snuff freely with one hand, while he shook mine with the other.

'I'm proud to see ye, young sir,' he said, 'proud to see ye! My dochter Jean here, a feat and bonny bit lass, has telled me that I am to gie ye my guid word. And my guid word ye shall hae. And mony o' the elders and kirk-members owes siller to auld Drummie; aye, aye, and they shall do as I say or I shall ken the reason'

'But, sir,' I said hastily, 'I desire no undue influence to be used. Let my summons, if it come, be the call of a people of one mind concerning the fitting man to have the oversight of them in the things of the spirit.'

'Of one mind!' exclaimed the old man, taking snuff more freely than ever. 'Ye are dootless a maist learned and college-bred young lad, with rowth o'

lear and lashin's o' grace, but ye dinna ken this pairish o' Balmaghie if ye think that ye can ever hae the folk o' wan mind. Laddie, the thing's no possible. There's as mony minds in Balmaghie as there's folk in it. And a mair unruly, camsteery pairish there's no between Kirkmaiden and the wild Hieland border. But auld Drummie can guide them— ow, aye, auld Drummie can work them. He can turn them that owes him siller round his finger, and they can leaven the congregation— hear ye that, young man!

'If the people of this parish desire me for their minister, they will send me the call,' answered I, pointedly. For these things, as I have ever believed, are in a Higher Hand.

'Doubtless, doubtless,' quoth auld Drummie; 'but the Balmaghie folk are none of the waur o' a bit spur in their flank like a reesty powny that winna gang. They mind a minute's jag frae the law mair nor the hale grace o' God for a month, and mind ye that! Gin ye come amang us, lad, I'll learn ye a trick or twa about the folk o' Balmaghie that ye will be the wiser o'. Mind, I hae been here a' my life, and an elder o' the kirk for thirty year!'

'I am much indebted, sir, for your good intentions, but...'

'Nae buts,' cried auld Drummie. 'I hae my dochter Jean's word that ye are a braw callan and deserve the pairish, and the pairish ye shall hae.'

'I am much indebted to your daughter,' I made answer. 'She succoured me with bread to eat this morning, when in the kirkyard I was ready to faint with hunger. Without her kindness I know not how I would have come through the fatigues of this day's exercises.'

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'Ow, aye,' said the old man; 'that's just like my dochter Jean. And a douce ceevil lassock she is. But ye should see my ither dochter afore ye craw sae croose about Jean.'

'You have another daughter?' I said, politely.

'Aye,' he cried, with enthusiasm. 'Man, where hae ye comed frae that ye haena heard o' Alexander-Jonita, the lass wha can tame a wild stallion that horse-dealers winna tackle, and ride it stride-leg like a man. There's no' a maiden in a' the country can haud a cannle to Alexander-Jonita, the dochter o' Nathan Gemmell of Drumglass, in the pairish o' Balmaghie.'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE TALE OF MESS HAIRRY

So the service being ended for the day, I walked quietly over to Drumglass with Jean and her father. There I found a house well furnished, oxen and kine knee-deep in water, meadows, pastures, crofts of oats and bear in the hollows about the door, and over all such an air of bien and hospitable comfort that the place beckoned me to abide there.

Nathan Gemmell went beside me, regaling me with tales of the ancient days spoken in the broad and honourable sounding speech of the province.

'Hear ye, laddie,' he said, 'gin ye come to the pairish o' Balmaghie ye will need the legs o' a racer horse, and the airms o' Brawny Kim, the smith o' Carlinwark. Never a chiel has been fit to be the minister o' Balmaghie since Auld Mess Hairry died!

'He was a man— losh me, but he was a man!'

'I tell ye, sir, this pairish needs its releegion tightly threshed into it wi' a flail. Sax change-houses doon there hae I kenned oot o' seven cot-houses at the Kirk-clachan o' Shandk-foot, and a swearin', drinkin' set in ilka yin o' them.'

'And siccan reamin swatrochs of Hollands an' French brandy, lad! Every man toomin' his glass and cryin' for mair, tossing it ower their thrapples hand ower fist, as hard as the sweatin' landlords could open the barrels. And the ill words and the fechtin'—Lord, callant, ye never heard the like! They tell me that ye come frae the Kells. A puir feckless

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lot they are in the Kells! Nae spirit in their drink. Nae power or variety in their oaths and cursings!

'But Balmaghie! That was a pairish in the old time, till Mess Hairry came in the days after John Knox. He had been a Papish priest some-gate till he had turned his cassock alang wi' dour black Jock o' the Hie Kirk o' Edinburgh. But Mess Hairry they aye caa'ed him, for a' that. And there were some that said he hadna turned that very far, but was a Papish as great as ever under the black Geneva gown!'

'For he wad whiles gie them swatches o' the auld ill-tongued Laitin, till the folk kenned na whether they werena bein' made back again into limbs o' Rome, and their leave never so much as speered.'

'But Pope or reform, mass or sacrament, the pairish cared no a bursten chanter. Doon at the clachans the stark Hollands flowed like the water in a running spate, and the holy day o' the Sabbath was their head time for the evil wark—that is, till Mess Hairry cam', and oh, but he was the maisterfu' man, as my auld grandfaither used to say: What did he?—man, I will tell ye. And let it be a lesson to ye, young man, gin ye come to the pairish o' Balmaghie. The folk here like a tairgin' maisterfu' man. Hark ye to that! They canna bide chiels that only peep and mutter. The lads atween the waters o' Dee and Ken tak' a man maistly at his ain valuation, and if a minister thinks na muckle o' himself— haith, they will e'en jaloose that he kens best, and no think muckle o' him either!'

'At ony rate, the drinking gaed on, as I was tellin' ye, till yae day it cam' to a head. There had been a new cargo brought into the Briggus— it was afore

the days o' the ill-set customs duties— foul fa' them and the officers that wad keep a man frae brewin' his decent wormfu', or at least gar him tak' the bother o' doin' it in the peat-stack or on some gairy-face instead o' openly on his kitchen floor.'

'But be that as it may, it was when Mess Hairry was at his fencing prayer in the kirk on a Sabbath, as it micht be on this day o' June. He was just leatherin' aff the words that fast the folk couldna tell whether he is giein' them guid Scots or ill-contrived Laitin, when Mess Hairry stops and cocks his lug doon the kirk like a collie that hears a strange fit in the loanin.'

The folk listens, too, and then they heard the ower word o' a gye coarse sang from the clachan doon by, and the Muckle Miller o' Barnboard, Black Coskery, leadin' it wi' a voice like the thunder on Knockcannon. *The deil cam up to oor loan en' Smooored wi' the reck o' his black den.'*

There was nae mair sermon that day. Mess Hairry gied them but ae word. I wasna there, for I wasna born; but the granddaddy o' me was then a limber loon, and followed after to see what wad befa'. 'The sermon will be applied in the clachan this day in the name o' God and the blessed saint.' cried Mess Hairry.

'So the auld priest claught to him a great oak clickie stick he had brocht frae some enchanted wood, and doon the kirk road he linkit wi' strides that were near sax foot frae tae to heel. Lord, but he swankit it that day.

'And ever as he gaed the nearer, louder and louder raise Barnboard's chorus, *'The deil he cam' to*

our loan en' —till ye could hear the verra window-frames dirl.'

'But Mess Hairry he strode like the angel o' destruction to the door o' the first hoose. The bar was pushed, for it was sermon time, and they had that muckle respect. But the noise within was fearsome. Mess Hairry set the broad sole o' his foot to the hasp, and, man, he drave her in as if she had been paper. It was a low door as a' Galloway doors are. The minister dooked doon his heid, and in he gaed. Nane expected ever to see him come oot in life again, and a' the folk were thinking on the disgrace that the pairish wad come under for killin' the man that had been set over them in the things o' the Lord. For bravely they kenned that Black Coskery wad never listen to a word o' advice, but, bein' drunk as Dauvid's soo, wad strike wi' sword, or shoot wi' pistol as soon as drink another gill.'

There was an awesome pause after Mess Hairry gaed ben. The folk they stood about the doors and they held up their hands in peety. 'Puir man,' they said; 'they are killin' him the noo. There's Black Coskery yellin' at the rest to keep him doon and finish him where he lies. Puir man, puir man! What a death to dee, murdered in a change-hoose on the Lord's Day o' Rest, when he micht hae been by 'Thirdly' in his sermon and clearin' the points o' doctrine wi' neither tinker nor miller fashin' him! This comes o' meddlin' wi' the cursed drink.'

'Wilder and ever wilder grew the din. It was like baith Keltonhill Fair and Tongland Sacrament on a wet day. They had shut the doors when the priest gaed in to keep him close and do for him on the spot.'

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'My grand-daddy telled me that there was some ga'ed awa' for the bier-trams and the mort-claiths to carry the corpse to the manse to be ready for his coffining!'

'If they gang on like that there will no be enough left o' him to haud thegither till they row him in his shroud! Hear till the wild renegades!'

'And ever the thresh, thresh o' terrible blows was heard, yells o' pain an' mortal fear.

'Mercy! Mercy! For the Lord's dear sake, hae mercy!'

The door burst frae its hinges and fell blaff on the road!

'They are bringin' him oot noo. Puir man, but he will be an awesome sicht!'

There cam' a pour o' men folk frae 'tween the lintels, some bareheaded, wi' the red bluid rinnin' frae aboot their brows, some wi' the coats fair torn frae their backs—every man o' them wild wi' fear.

'They hae murdered him! Black Coskery has murdered him,' cried the folk without. 'And the ither lads are feared o' the judgment for the bluid o' the man o' God.'

'But it wasna that— indeed, far frae that. For on the back o' the men skailin', there cam' oot o' the cot-hoose wha but Mess Hairry, and he had Black Coskery by the feet trailin' him heid doon oot o' the door. He flang him in the ditch like a wat dish-clout. Syne he gfied his lang black coat a bit hitch aboot his loins wi' a cord, like a butcher that has mair calves to kill. Then he makes for the next change-hoose. But they had gotten the warnin'. They never waited to argue, but were oot o' the window, carrying wi' them sash and a'— so they say.'

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'And so even thus it was wi' the lave. The grace o' God was triumphant in the Kirk Clachan o' Ba'maghie that day.'

They took up a' that was mortal o' Black Coskery to the Bamboard on the bier they had gotten ready for the minister. He got better, but he was never the same man again; for whenever he let his voice be heard, or got decently fechtin' drunk, some callant wad be sure to get ahint a tree and cry, 'Rin, Coskery, here's Mess Hairry.' He couldna bide that, but cowered like a weel-lickit messan tyke.

'When they gaed into the first change-hoose, they say that the floor was a sicht to see. A' thing driven to kindlin' wood; for Mess Hairry had never waited to gie a word o' advice, but had keeled ower Black Coskery wi' ae stroke o' his oak clickie on the haffets. Then, faith, he took the fechtin' miller by the feet and swung him about his head as if he had been a flail.

'Never was there sic fectin' seen in the Stewartry. The men fell ower like nine-pins, and were richt glad to crawl to the door. But for a judgment on them it was close steekit, for they had shut it to be sure o' Mess Hairry.'

'They were far ower sure o' him, and they say that if the hinges had no' given way it micht hae been the waur for some o' them.'

'And that was the way that Mess Hairry preached the Gospel in Balmaghie. Ow, it's him that had the poo'er— at least, that's what my granddaddy telled me.'

'Ow, aye! Ba'maghie needs a maisterfu' man. But we'll never see the like o' Mess Hairry—rest his soul. He was indeed a miracle o' grace.'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ALEXANDER-JONITA

We had been steadily approaching the farm-steading of Drumglass, where it sits pleasantly under the hill looking down over the water-meadows, the while Nathan Gemmell told me his grandfather's tale showing how a man ought to rule the parish of Balmaghie.

We had gotten almost to the door of the farm when we saw a horse and rider top the heathery fell to the left, and sweep down upon us at a tearing gallop.

The old man, hearing the clatter of stones, turned quickly.

'Alexander-Jonita!' he exclaimed, shaking his head with fond blame towards the daring rider, 'I declare that lassie will break neck-bone some o' thae days. And that will be seen!'

With dark hair flying in the wind, eyes gleaming like stars, short kirtle driven back from her knees by the rush of the horse's stride, came a girl of eighteen or twenty on the back of a haltered but saddle-free mare.

Whether, as her father had boasted, the girl was riding astride, or whether she sat in the new-fangled way of the city ladies, I cannot venture to decide. For with a sharp turn of the hempen bridle she reined her beast within a few yards of us, and so had leaped nimbly to the ground before the startled senses could take in all the picture.

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'Lassie,' cried the elder, with a not intolerant reproof in his tones, 'where hae ye been that the kirk and the service of God saw ye not this day?'

The girl came fearlessly forward, looking me directly in the yes. The reins were yet in her hand.

'Father,' she said, gently enough, but without looking at him, 'I had the marches to ride, the 'aval' sheep to turn, the bitten ewes to dress with tar, the oxen to keep in bound, the horses to water; besides which, Jean wanted my stockings and Sunday gear to be braw the day at the kirk. So I had e'en to bide at hame!'

'Think shame o' yoursel', Alexander- Jonita,' cried her father, 'ye are your mither's dochter. Ye tak' not after the douce ways o' your faither. Spite o' a' excuses, ye should hae been at the kirk.'

'Is this the young minister lad?' said Alexander- Jonita, looking at me more with the assured direct gaze of a man than with the customary bashfulness of a maid. Singularly fearless and forthlooking was her every glance.

'Even so,' said her father, 'the lad has spoken weel this day!'

She looked me through and through, till I felt the manhood in me stir to vexation, not with shyness alone, but for very shame to be thus outfaced and made into a bairn.

She spoke again, still, however, keeping her eyes on me.

'I am no kirk-goer— no, nor yet great kirk-lover. But I ken a man when I see him,' said the strange maid, holding out her hand frankly. And, curiously enough, I took it with an odd sense of gratitude and comradeship.

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'The kirk,' said I, 'is not indeed all that it might be, but the kirk and conventicle alike are the gathering places of those that love the good way. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.'

'Even so, minister!' she said, with some sudden access of gravity, 'and this day I have been preaching the Gospel to the sheep and the oxen, the kye and the horse-beasts within the bounds of my parish, while ye spake your good word to human creatures that were maybe somewhat less grateful.'

'The folk to whom I spake had immortal souls,' said I, a little indignant to be thus bearded by a lassie.

'And how,' she retorted, turning on me quick as a fire-flash, 'ken ye that the beasts have none, or that their spirit goeth downward into the earth? Have they not bodies also and gratitude? There was a sore distressed sheep this morning at Tomorrach that looked at me first with eyes that spake a prayer. But after I had cleansed and dressed the hurt, it breathed a benediction, sweet as any said in the Kirk of Balmaghie this day!'

'Nevertheless it was for men and women, perishing in sin, that Christ died!' I persisted, not willing to be silenced,

'How ken ye that?' she said; 'did not the same Lord make the sheep on the hills and the kye in the byres? Will He that watches the sparrow fall think it wrong to lift a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath? The Pharisees are surely not all dead to this day!'

'E'en let her alane, ye will be as wise,' said her father; 'she has three words to every one that are given to men o' sense. But she is withal a good lass

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and true of speech. Alexander-Jonita, stable your beast and come ben to wait on the minister in the ben room.'

The girl moved away, leading her steed, and her father and I went on to the house of Drumglass.

When we entered the table was not yet set, and there were no preparations for a meal. Nathan Gemmell looked about him with a certain severe darkening expression, which told of a temper not yet altogether brought into obedience to the spirit.

'Jean— Jean Gemmell!' he cried, 'come hither, lass!' He went and knocked loudly at the chamber door, which opened at one side of the kitchen.

'Wherefore have ye not set the table for the meal of meat?' he asked, frowning upon the maiden whom I had first seen. She stood with meek and smiling face looking at us from the lintel. Her face was shining and her hair very becomingly attired, though (as I observed) in a different fashion from what it had been in the morning by the kirk-gate when she gave me her piece to stay my hunger.

'I have been praying upon my knees for a blessing upon the work of this day in the kirk,' said Jean Gemmell, looking modestly down, 'and I waited for Alexander-Jonita to help me to lay the table.'

'Were ye not vainly adoring your frail tabernacle? It seems more likely!' said her father, somewhat cruelly as I thought.

Then she looked once across at me, and her eyes filled with tears, so that I was vividly sorry for the maid. But she turned away from her father's reproof without a word.

'We can well afford to wait. There is no haste,' I said, to ease her hurt if so I could; 'this good kind

maiden gave me all she had this morning in the kirk-yard, or I know not how I should have sped at the preaching work this day!’

Jean Gemmell paused half-way across the floor, as her father was employed looking out of the little window to catch a glimpse of Alexander-Jonita. She lifted her eyes again to mine with a look of sweet and tender gratitude and understanding which more than thanked me for the words I had spoken.

At that moment in came Alexander-Jonita with a free swing like some stripling gallant of high degree. I own that even at that time I liked to see her walk. She, at least, was no proud dame like—well, like one whose eyes abode with me, and the thought of whose averted gaze (God pardon me!) lay heavy about my heart when I ought to have been thinking of other and higher things.

Alexander-Jonita waited for no bidding, but after a glance which took in at once the empty board and Jean's smooth dress and well-ordered hair, she hastened to spread a white cloth on the table, a coverture bleached and fine as it had been laundered for a prince's repast. Then to cupboard and aumrie she went, bringing down and setting in order oaten bread, sour-milk scones of honest crispness, dried ham-of-mutton which she sliced very thin before serving—the rarest dainty of Galloway, and enough to make a hungry man's mouth water only to think upon.

Then came in Jean Gemmell, who made shift to help daintily as she found occasion. But, listening over-closely to the converse of her father and myself, it chanced that she let fall a platter, which breaking, set her sister in a quick high mood. So that she

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ordered the lass to go and sit down while folk with hands did the work.

Now this somewhat vexed me, for I could see by the modest, covert way the girl glanced up at me as she set herself obediently down in the low window seat that her heart was full to the overflowing. Also something in the wild girl's tone nettled me.

So I said to Jean across the kitchen, 'Be of good cheer, maiden. There was one at Bethany who waited not, but yet chose the better part.'

'Aye,' cried Alexander-Jonita as she turned from the cupboard with a plate of butter, 'say ye so? I ever kenned that you young ministers thought excellent things of yourselves, but I dreamed not that ye went as far as that.'

Whereat I blushed hotly, to think that I had unwittingly compared myself to One who sat with Martha and Mary in the house. And after that I was dumb before the sharp-tongued lass all the time of eating. But under the table Jean Gemmell put her hand a moment on mine, seeing me fallen silent and downcast.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CORBIES AT THE FEAST

Now when after all the call came for me to be placed minister of the parish, and I was placed there with the solemn laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, I thought in my folly as every young minister does, that the strivings of my life had come to an end. Whereas, had I known it, they were but beginning. For the soil was being fattened for the crop of troubles I was to harvest into a bitter garner ere many years had come and gone.

Strait and onerous were the charges the reverend brethren laid upon me. I had been of the Hill-folk in my youth. So more than once I was reminded. It might be that I was not yet purged of that evil taint. Earnestness in labour, sanctity of life, would not avail alone. I must keep me in subjection to the powers that be. I must purge myself of partial counsel and preach the Gospel in moderation—with various other charges which I pass over in silence.

Yet all the while I had the conceit within me that I knew better than these men could tell me what I had come to Balmaghie to perform. I minded me every day of the Bennan top and of the men that had been slain on the heather—specially on the poor lad in the brown coat. And I was no ways inclined to be over lenient with those who had wrought the damage, nor yet with those who had stood by with their hands in their pockets and whistled while the deed was being done.

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After the ordination, as was the custom, there was a great dinner spread in a long tent set up by the Kirk Clachan of Shankfoot.

Here the Presbytery, the elders and such of the leading men of the parish as were free of scandal (few enough there were of these!) were entertained at the expense of the session.

One there was among the brethren who had watched me keenly all the day—Cameron, the minister of Kirkcudbright, an unctuously smiling man, but with a sidelong and dubious eye that could not meet yours. He had the repute of great learning, and was, besides, of highest consideration among the members, because he was reckoned to be the blood brother of the famous Richard Cameron, who died at Ayrsmoss in the year of 1680, and whether that were so or no, at least he did not deny it.

As for me, I talked mostly to a little wizened, hump-shouldered man, with a hassock of black hair which came down over his forehead, and great eyes that looked out on either side of a sharp hawk's nose. A peeping, peering, birdlike man I found him to be—one Telfair of Rerrick, the great authority in the South Country on ghosts and all manifestations of the devil.

'Methinks the spirit of evil is once more abroad,' I heard Telfair say in a shrill falsetto to his next neighbour as they sat at meat. 'Rerrick hath seen nothing like it since the famous affair of the Ringcroft visitation, so fully recounted in my little pamphlet—which, as you are aware, has run through several editions, not alone in Scotland, but also among the wise and learned folk of London. The late King even ordered a copy for himself, and was

pleased to say that he had never read anything like it in all his life before; and by the grace of God he never would again. Was not that a compliment from so great a prince?’

‘A compliment indeed,’ cried Cameron of Kirkcudbright, nodding his head ironically, yet watching me all the time as I talked with Nathan Gemmell of Drumglass; ‘but what is this new portent?’

‘Tis but the matter of a bairn-child near the village of Orraland, which, as all the world knows, is the heart of my parish. A bairn, the son of very respectable folk, looking out upon the moon, had a vision of a man in red apparel cutting the moon in two with a sword of flame, whereat the child screamed and ran in to its mother to tell the marvel. And as soon as they came to me, I said: ‘There is that to be done today which shall cut the Kirk of God in twain within the bounds of this Presbytery.’

‘Truly a marvellous child, and of insight justly prophetic!’ said Cameron, again nodding as he went about the ordering of his dinner and calling the waiting folk to be quick and set clean platters before the hungry Presbyters.

‘Now,’ said Telfair, looking straight at me, ‘there hath nothing happened this week in the Presbytery save the ordaining of this young man. Think ye that through him there will come this breaking asunder of the Kirk?’

Cameron smiled sardonically.

‘How can ye suppose it for a moment? Mr. MacClellan is a youth of remarkable promise and rumour. We have, indeed, yet to learn whether there

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be aught behind this sound and show of religion and respect for the authority of the Kirk.'

All this time Drumglass was pouring forth without stint his joy at my settlement among them.

'Be never feared for the face o' man, young sir,' he cried. 'Be bold to declare what ye think and believe, and gif ye ken what ye want and earnestly pursue it, tak' auld Drumglass' word for it, there are few things that ye may not attain in this world.'

At long and last the day came to an end. The ministers of the Presbytery one by one took horse or ferry and so departed. I alone returned with Nathan Gemmell over to the house of Drumglass. For I was deady wearied, and the voice of Nathan uplifted by the way to tell of old things was like the pleasant lapping of water on the sides of a boat in which one rocks and dreams. Indeed, I was scarce conscious of a word he said, till in the gloom of the trees and the creamy evening light, we met the two lasses, Jean and Alexander-Jonita walking arm in arm.

As we came within the shadow, they two divided the one from the other, the wild lass going to her father's side, Jean being left to come to mine.

'I saw you not at the ordination, Alexander-Jonita!' said her father.

'No,' she answered sharply, 'it was a brave day for the nowt to stray broadcast over the fell, and there was never a man, woman, or bairn about the house. Well might I remain to keep the evil-doers from the doors.'

I felt a soft hand touch mine as if by accident, and a low voice whispered close to my ear.

‘But I was there. I watched it all, and when I saw you were kneeling before them all with the hands of the ministers upon your head, I had almost swooned away!’

The soft hand was fully in mine now. I was not conscious of having taken it, but nevertheless it lay trembling a little and yet nestling contentedly in my palm. And because I was tired and the day had been a labour and a burden to me, I was comforted that thus Jean's hand abode in mine.

I pressed it and said, perhaps more gently than I ought, ‘Little one, I am glad you were there. But the work is a great one for so young and unworthy as I. It presses hard upon me!’

‘But you have good friends,’ said Jean, ‘friends that—that think of you always and wish you well.’

We had fallen a little way behind, and I could hear Alexander-Jonita in her high clear voice telling her father how she had found a sick sheep on the Duchrae Craigs and carried it all the way home on her back.

‘What,’ cried her father, ‘ower the heather and the moss-hags?’

‘Aye,’ she answered, as if the thing were nothing, ‘and what is more the poor beast is like to live and thrive.’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE BONNY LASS OF EARLSTOUN

So I was settled in my parish, which was a good one as times went. The manse had recently been put in order. It was a pleasant stone house which sat in the bieldy hollow beneath the Kirk Knowe of Balmaghie. Snug and sheltered it lay, an encampment of great beeches sheltering it from the blasts, and the green-bosomed hills looking down upon it with kindly tolerant silence.

The broad Dee Water floated silently by, murmuring a little after the rains; mostly silent however—the water lapping against the reeds and fretting the low cavernous banks when the wind blew hard, but on the whole slipping past with a certain large peace and attentive stateliness.

My brother Hob abode with me in the manse of Balmaghie to be my man. It was great good fortune thus to keep him; and in the coming troublous days I ken not what I should have done without his good counsel and strongly willing right hand. My father and mother came over to see me on the old pony from Ardarroch, my mother riding on a pillion behind my father, and both of them ready on the sign of the least brae to get off and walk most of the way, with the bridle over my father's arm, while my mother discoursed of the terrible thing it was to have two of your sons so far from home, strangers, as it were, in a strange land.

It had not seemed so terrible to her when we went to Edinburgh, both because she had never been to

the city herself, and never intended to go. On these occasions Hob and I had passed out of sight along the green road to Balmaclellan on the way to Minnyhive, and there was an end of us till the spring, save for the little presents which came by the carrier, and the letters I had to write every fortnight.

But this parish of Balmaghie! It was a far cry and a coarse road, said my mother, and she was sure that we both took our lives in our hands each time that we went across its uncanny pastures.

Nevertheless, once there, she did not halt nor slacken till she had taken in hand the furniture and plenishing of the manse, and brought some kind of order out of the piled and tortured confusion, which had been the best that Hob and I could attain.

'Keep us, laddies!' she cried, after the first hopeless look at our handiwork. 'I canna think on either o' you takin' a wife. Yet I'm feared that a wife ye maun get atween ye. For I canna thole to let ye gang on this wild gate, wi' the minister's meal o' meat to ready, and only gomeril Hob to do it.'

'Then ye'll let Anna come to bide with us for a while, if ye are so vexed for us,' I said, to try her.

'Na, indeed, I canna do that. Anna is needed at hame where she is. There's your faither now—he's grown that bairnly he thinks there can be nae guid grass in the meadow that Anna's foot treads not on. The hens wouldna lay, the kye wouldna let doon their milk without Anna. Ardarroch stands on the braeface because 'tis anchored doon wi' Anna. Saw ye ever sic a fyke made about a lass?'

'Quintin has!' said Hob with intention, for which I did not thank him.

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'What!' cried my mother, instantly taking fire, 'hae some o' the impudent queans o' Balmaghie been settin' their caps at him already?'

'There ye are, mither,' said Hob, 'ye speak bravely about Quintin gettin' married. But as soon as we speak about ony lass— plaff, ye gang up like a waft o' tow thrown in the fire.'

'I wad like to see the besom that wad make up to my Quintin!' said my mother, her indignation beginning to simmer down.

'Then come over to the Drum,' he was beginning.

'Hob,' said I, sternly, 'that is enough.'

And when I spoke to him thus Hob was amenable enough.

'Aweel, mither!' continued Hob in an injured tone, 'ye speak aboot mairrying. Quintin there, ye say, is to get mairried. But how can he get mairried without a lass that is fond o' him? It juist canna be done, at least no in the parish o' Balmaghie.'

It was my intent to accompany my father and mother back to Ardarroch in name of an escort, but, in truth, chiefly that I might accept the invitation of the laird of Earlstoun and once more see Mary Gordon, the lass whose image I had carried so long on my heart.

For, strange as it may appear, when she went forth from the kirk that day she left a look behind her which went straight to my heart. It was like a dart thrown at random which sticks and is lost, yet inly rankles and will not let itself be forgotten.

I tried to shut the desire of seeing her again out of my heart. But do what I could this was not to be. It would rise, coming between me and the very paper on which I wrote my sermon, before I began to learn

to mandate. When the sun looked over the water in the morning and shone on the globed pearls of dew in the hollow palms of the broad dockleaves on the gracious clover blooms, and on the bending heads of the spiked grasses, I rejoiced to think that he shone also on Earlstoun and the sunny head of a fairer and more graceful flower.

God forgive a sinful man! At these times I ought to have been thinking of something else. But when a man carries such an earthly passion in his heart, all the panoply of heavenly love is impotent to restrain thoughts that fly swift as the light from hilltop to hilltop at the sun-rising.

So I went home for a day or two to Ardarroch, where with a kind of gratitude I stripped my coat and fell to the building of dykes about the home park, and the mending of mangers and corn-chests with hammer and nail, till my mother remonstrated. 'Quintin, are ye not ashamed, you with a parish of hungry souls to be knockin' at hinges and liftin' muckle stanes on the hillsides o' Ardarroch?'

But Anna kept close to me all these days, understanding my mood. We had always loved one another, she and I. I had used to say that it was Anna who ought to have been the minister; for her eyes were full of a fair and gracious light, the gentle outshining of a true spirit within. And as for me, after I had been with her awhile, in that silence of sympathy, I was a better and a stronger man—at least, one less unfit for holy office.

Right gladly would I have taken Anna back with me to the manse of Balmaghie, but I knew well that she would not go.

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'Quintin,' she was wont to say, 'our faither and mither are not so young as they once were. My faither forgets things whiles, and the herd lads are not to trust to. David there is for ever on the trot to this farm-town and that Other—to the clachan o' St. John, to the New Town of Galloway, or to Balmaclellan— 'tis all one to him. He cannot bide at home after the horses are out of the collar and the chain drops from the swingle-tree into the furrow.'

'But some day ye will find a lad for yourself, Anna, and then you will also be leaving Ardarroch and the auld folk behind ye.'

My sister smiled a quiet smile and her eyes were far away.

'Maybe—maybe,' she said, temperately, 'but that day is not yet.'

'Has never a lad come woin' ye, Anna? Was there not Johnny of Ironmacanny, Peter Tait frae the Bogue, or...'

'Aye,' said Anna, 'they cam' and they gaed away to ither lasses that were readier to loe them. For I never saw a lad yet that I could like as well as my great silly brother who should be thinking more concerning his sermon-making than about putting daft thoughts into the heads of maidens.'

After this there was silence between us for a while. We had been sitting in the barn with both doors open. The wide arch to the front, opening out into the quadrangle of the courtyard, let in a cool drawing sough of air, and the smaller door at the back let it out again, and gave us at the same time a sweet eye-blink into the orchard, where the apples were hanging mellow and pleasant on the branches, and the leaves hardly yet loosening themselves for

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their fall. The light sifted through the leaves from the westering sun, dappling the grass and wavering upon the hard-beaten earthen floor of the bam.

'I am going over by to Earlstoun!' I said to Anna, without looking up.

Anna and I spoke but half our talks out loud. We had been such close comrades all our lives that we understood much without needing to clothe our thoughts in words.

Apparently Anna did not hear what I said, so I repeated it.

'Dinna,' was all she answered.

'And wherefore should I not?' I persisted, argumentatively. 'The laird most kindly invited me, indeed laid it on me like an obligation that I should come.'

'Ye are going over to Earlstoun to see the laird?'

'Why, yes,' I said; 'that is, he has a desire to see me. He is the greatest of all the Covenant men, and we have much in common to speak about.'

'Tomorrow he will be riding by to the market at Kirkcudbright, where he has business. Ye can ride with him to the cross roads of Clachan Pluck and talk all that your heart desires of Kirk and State.'

'Anna,' said I, seriously, 'I tell you again I am going to the house of Earlstoun tomorrow.'

In a moment she dropped her pretence of banter.

'Quintin, ye will only make your heart the sorer, laddie.'

'And wherefore?' said I.

'See the sparkle on the water out there,' she said, pointing to the bosom of Loch Ken far below us, seen through the open door of the barn; 'it's bonny. But can ye gather it in your hand, or wear it in your

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bosom? Dear and delightsome is this good smell of apples and of orchard freshness, but can ye fold these and carry them with you to the bare manse of Balmaghie for comfort to your heart? No more can ye take the haughtiness of the great man's daughter, the glance of proud eyes, the heart of one accustomed to obedience, and bring them into subjection to a poor man's necessities.'

'Love can do all,' said I, sententiously.

'Aye,' she said, 'where love is, it can indeed work all things. But I bid ye remember that love dwells not yet in Mary Gordon's breast for any man. Hers is not a heart to bend. For rank or fame she may give herself, but not for love.'

'Nevertheless,' said I, 'I will go to the house of Earlstoun tomorrow at ten o' the clock.'

Anna rose and laid her hand on mine.

'I kenned it,' she said, 'and little would I think of you, brother of mine, if ye had ta'en my excellent advice.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ONE WAY OF LOVE

It was the prime of the morning when I set out for Earlstoun. My mother called after me to mind my manners, as if I had still been but a herd boy summoned into the presence of the great. My father asked me when I would be back. Only Anna said nothing, but her eyes were sad. Well she knew that I went to give myself an aching heart.

Now the Ken is a pleasant water, and the road up the Glenkens a fine road to travel. But I went it that morning heavily—rather, indeed, like one who goes to the burying of a friend than like a lover setting out to see his mistress.

I turned me down through the woods to Earlstoun. There were signs of the still recent return of the family. Here on the gate of the lodge was the effaced escutcheon of Colonel Theophilus Oglethorpe, which Alexander Gordon had not yet had time to replace with the ancient arms of his family. For indeed it was to Colonel William, Sandy Gordon's brother, he who had led us to Edinburgh in the Convention year, that the recovery of the family estates was due.

I had not expected any especially kind welcome. The laird of Earlstoun had been a mighty Covenanter, and now wore his prisonments and sufferings somewhat ostentatiously, like so many orders of merit. He would think little of one who was a minister of the uncovenanted Kirk, and who, though holding the freedom of that Kirk as his

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heart's belief, yet, nevertheless, demeaned him to take the pay of the State. To be faithful and devoted in service were not enough for Alexander Gordon. To please him one must do altogether as he had done, think entirely as he thought.

Yet I was to be more kindly received than I anticipated.

It was in the midst of the road where the wood, turning sharp along the waterside, a narrow path twines and twists through sparkling birches and trembling alders. The pools slept black beneath as I looked down upon them from some craggy pinnacle to which the grey hill lichen clung. The salmon poised themselves motionless, save for a waving fin, below the fish-leaps, ready for their rush upstream when the floods should come down brown with peat water from Cairnsmore and the range of Kells.

All at once, as I stood dreaming, I heard a gay voice lilting at a song. I wavered a moment in act to flee, my heart almost standing still to listen.

For I knew among a thousand the voice of Mary Gordon. But I had no time to conceal myself. A gleam of white and lilac through the bushes, a bright reflection as of sunshine on the pool—then the whole day brightened and she stood before me.

The song instantly stilled itself on her lips.

We stood face to face. It seemed to me that she paled a little. But perhaps it was only that I, who desired so greatly to see any evidence of emotion, saw part of that which I desired.

The next moment she came forward with her hand frankly outstretched.

'I bid you welcome to Earlstoun,' she said. 'Alas! that my father should this day be from home. He is

gone to Kirkcudbright. But my mother and I will show you hospitality till he return. My father hears a great word of you, he tells us. The country tongue speaks well of your labours.'

Now it seemed to me that in thus speaking she smiled to herself, and that put me from answering. I could do naught but be stiffly silent.

'I thank you, Mistress Mary, for your kind courtesy!' was all that I found within me to say. For I felt that she must despise me for a country lout of no manners and ungentle birth. So at least I thought at the time.

We passed without speech through the scattering shadows of the birches, and I saw that her hair (on which she wore no covering) had changed from its ancient yellow as of ripened com into a sunny brown. Yet as I looked furtively, here and there the gentle crispen wavelets seemed to be touched and flecked with threads of its ancient sheen, a thing which filled me strangely with a desire to caress with my hand its desirable beauty—so carnal and wicked are the thoughts of the heart of man.

But when I saw her so lightsome and dainty so full of delight and the admirable joy of living, a sullen sort of anger came over me that I should chance to love one who could in no wise love me again, nor yet render me the return which I so greatly desired.

'You have travelled all the long way from the Manse of Balmaghie?' she said, suddenly falling back to my side where the path was wider, as if she, too, felt the pause of constraint.

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'Nay,' I answered, 'I have been at Ardarroch with my father and mother for two days. And tomorrow I must return to the people among whom I labour.'

She stole a quick glance at me from beneath her long dark lashes. There was infinite teasing mischief in the flashing of her eyes.

'You have an empty manse by the waterside of Dee. Ye will doubtless be looking for some douce country lass to fill it.'

The words were kindly enough spoken, yet in the very frankness of the speech I recognised the distance she was putting between us. But I had not been trained in the school of quick retorts nor of the light debate of maidens. For all that I had a will of mine own, and would not permit that any woman born of woman should play cat's-cradle with Quintin MacClellan.

'Lady,' said I, 'there is, indeed, an empty manse down yonder by the Dee, and I am looking for one to fill it. But I will have none who cannot love me for myself, and also who will not love the work to which I have set my hand.'

She held up her hand in quick merriment.

'Do not be afraid,' she cried, gaily. 'I was not thinking of making you an offer!'

And then she laughed so mirthsome a peal that all against my will I was forced to join her.

And this mended matters wonderfully. For after that, though I had my own troubles with her and my heart-breaks as all shall hear, yet never was she again the haughty maiden of the first sermon and the midsummer kirk door.

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'They tell me that once ye brought me all the way from the Bennan top to the tower of Lochinvar, where our Auntie Jean was biding?'

'I found no claims to your good-will on that,' said I, mindful of the day of my first way going to Edinburgh; 'but I would fain have you think well of me now.'

'Ye are still over great a Whig. Mind that I stand for the White Rose,' she said, stamping her foot merrily.

'Tis a matter ye ken nothing about,' said I, roughly. 'Maidens had better let the affairs of State alone. Methinks the White Rose has brought little good to you and yours.'

'I tell you what. Sir Minister,' she cried, mocking me, 'there are two great tubs in the pool below the falls. Do you get into one and I will take the other. I will fly the white pennon and you the blue. Then let us each take a staff and tilt at one another. If you upset me, 'pon honour, I will turn Whig, but if you are ducked in the pond, you must wear henceforth the colours of the true King. Tis an equal bargain. You agree?'

But before I could reply we were near by the gate of Earlstoun, and there came out a lady wrapped in a shawl, and this though the day was hot and the autumnal air had never an edge upon it.

'Mother,' cried Mary Gordon, running eagerly to meet her. The lady in the plaid seemed not to hear, but turned aside by the path which led along the water to the north.

The girl ran after her and caught her mother by the arm.

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'Here is Mr MacClellan, the minister from Balmaghie, come to see my father,' said she. 'Bide, mother, and make him welcome.'

The lady stopped stiffly till I had come immediately in front of her.

'You are a minister of the Established and Uncovenanted Kirk?' she asked me, eyeing me sternly enough.

I told her that I had been ordained a week before.

'Then you have indeed broken your faith with the Persecuted Remnant, as they tell me?' she went on, keeping her eyes blankly upon my face.

'Nay,' said I; 'I have the old ways still at heart and will stand till death by the faith delivered to the martyrs.'

'What do ye, then, clad in the rags of the State?'

Whereat I told the Lady of Earlstoun how that I was with all my heart resolved to fight the Kirk's battle for her ancient liberties and for the power to rule within her own borders. But that if those in authority gave us not the hearing and liberty we desired, I, for one, would shake off the dust of the unworthy Kirk of Scotland from my feet— as, indeed, I was well resolved to do.

But Mary Gordon broke in on my eager explanation.

'Mother, mother,' she cried, 'come your ways in and entertain the guest. Let your questionings keep till our father comes from Kirkcudbright. Assuredly they will have a stormy fortnight of it then. Let the lad now break bread and cheese.'

The lady sighed and clasped her hands.

'I suppose,' she said, 'it must even be so; for men are carnal and their bodies must be fed. Alas, there

are but few who care for the health of their souls! As for me, I was about to retire to the wood that I might for the hundred three score and ninth time renew my covenanting engagements.'

'You must break them very often, mother, that they are ever needing mending,' said her daughter, not so unkindly as the words look when written down, but rather carelessly, like one who has been oftentimes over the same ground and knows the landmarks by heart.

'Mary, Mary,' answered her mother, 'I fear there is no serious or spiritual interest in you. Your father spoils and humours you. And so you have grown up— not like that godly lad Alexander Gordon the younger, who when he was but three years of his age had read the Bible through nineteen times, and could rattle off the books of the Old and New Testaments whiles I was counting ten.'

'Aye, mother,' replied the lass, 'and in addition could make faces behind your back all the time he was doing it!'

But the lady appeared not to hear her daughter. She continued to clasp her hands convulsively before her, and to repeat over and over again the words, 'Eh, the blessed laddie —the blessed, blessed laddie!'

How long we might have stood thus in the glaring sun I know not; but, without waiting for her mother to take the lead or to go in of her own accord, Mary Gordon wheeled her round by the arm and led her unresisting towards the courtyard gate. She accompanied her daughter with the same weary unconcern and passionless preoccupation she had shown from the first, twisting and pulling the fringes

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of the shawl between her fingers, while her thin lips moved, either in covenant-making or in the murmured praises of her favourite child.

The room to which we were brought was a large one with panels of oak carven at the cornices into quaint and formal ornaments.

Mary went to the stairhead and cried down as to one in the kitchen: 'Thomas Allen! Thomas Allen!'

A thin, querulous voice arose from the depths: 'Sic a fash! Wha's come stravagin at this time o' day? He will be wantin' victual dootless. I never saw the like. *Thomas Allen! Haste ye fast, Thomas!*' Comin', mem, comin' What's your fret? There's naebody in the deid-thraws, is there?' As the last words were uttered, an old serving-man, in a blue side-coat of thirty years before, with threadbare lace falling low at the neck and hands in a forgotten fashion, appeared at the doorway. His bald and shining head had still a few lyart locks clinging like white fringes about the sides. These, however, were not allowed to grow downward in the natural manner, but were trained as gardeners train fruit trees against walls that look to the south. They climbed directly upward so that the head of Thomas Allen was criss-crossed in both directions by streaks of hair, interlaced like the fingers of one's hands netted together. But owing to the natural haste with which Thomas did his work, these were never all seen in place at one time. Invariably they had fallen to one side or the other, and being stiffened with candle grease or other greyish unguent, they stood out at all angles like goose quills from a scrivener's inkpot.

During the perfunctory repast which was finally brought forward and placed on the table by the

reluctant Thomas, Mistress Mary sat directly opposite to me with her chin resting on her fingers and her elbows on the table. Her mother, at the upper end of the chamber, occupied herself in looking out of the window, occasionally clasping her hands in the urgency of her supplications or giving vent to a pitiful moan which indicated her sense of the hopeless iniquity of mankind.

Then with more kindness than she had ever yet shown me, Mary Gordon asked of my people of Balmaghie, whether the call had been unanimous, who abode with me in the manse, and many other questions, to all of which I answered as well as I could. For the truth is, that the nearness of so admirable a maid and the directness of her gaze wrought in me a kind of desperation, so that it was all I could do to keep from telling her then that I had come to the house of Earlstoun to ask her to be my wife.

Not that I had the wildest hope of a favourable answer, but simply from inexperience at the business of making love to a young lass I blundered blindly on. Plain ramstam Hob could have bested me fairly at that. For he had not talked so long to the good-wives of the Lothians without getting a well hung tongue in the head of him.

I looked sideways at the Lady of Earlstoun. She was mumbling at her devotions, or perhaps meditating other and more personal covenantings. Mary Gordon and I were in a manner alone.

‘Mistress Mary,’ I said, suddenly leaning towards her, my desperation getting the better of my natural prudence, ‘I know that I speak wholly without hope. But I came today to tell you that I love you. I am but

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a cotter's lad, but I have loved you ever since I ferried you, a little maid, past the muskets of the troopers.'

I looked straight enough at her now. I could see the colour rise a little in her cheek, while a strange expression of wonder and pride, with something that was neither, overspread her face. Up to this point I might have been warned, but I was not to be holden now.

'Before I had no right, nor, indeed, any opportunity to tell you this. But now, as minister of a parish, I have an income that will compare not unfavourably with that of most of the smaller gentry of the county.'

The girl nodded, with a swift hardening of the nostril.

'It will doubtless be a fine income,' she said, with a touch of scorn. 'Did I understand you to offer me your manse and income?'

'I offer you that which neither dishonours an honest girl to hear or yet an honest man to speak. I am offering you my best service, the faith and devotion of a man who truly loves you.'

'I thank you, sir,' she said, lifting up her head and letting her eyes dwell on me with some of their former haughtiness; 'I am honoured indeed. Your position, your manse, your glebe! How many acres did you say it was? Your income, good as that of a laird. And you come offering all these to Mary Gordon? Sir, I bid you carry your business transactions to the county market-place. Mary Gordon is not to be bought and sold. When she loves, she will give herself for love and love alone. Aye, were it to a poke-laden houseless cadger by the

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roadside, or a ploughman staggering between the furrows.'

And with that she rose and walked swiftly to the door. I could hear her foot die away through the courtyard; and going blankly to the window, I watched her slim figure glance between the clumps of trees, now in the light, now in the shadow, and anon lost in the yellowing depths of the forest.

Nor, though I watched all through the long hot afternoon, did she return till she came home riding upon her father's horse, with Sandy Gordon himself walking bareheaded beside his daughter, as if he had been escorting a queen on her coronation day.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE

[Comment and Addition by Hob MacClellan.]

Lord! Lord! Was there ever a more bungled affair— a more humiliating confession. Our poor Quintin— great as he was at the preaching, an apostle indeed, none in broad Scotland to come within miles of him in the pulpit— with a lass was simply fair useless. I must e'en tell in a word how mine own wooing sped, that I may prove there was some airt and spunk left among the MacClellans.

For by Quintin's own showing the girl had no loop-hole left, being wooed as if she had been so many sacks of corn. She was fairly tied up to refuse so hopeless and fushionless a suitor.

But of all this there was no suspicion at the time, neither in the parish of Balmaghie, or yet even among ourselves at Ardarroch. For though nothing gets wind so quickly in a parish as the news that the minister is 'seekin'— that is, going from home courting, yet such was my brother's repute for piety 'within the bounds of the Presbytery,' such the reverence in which he was held, that the popular voice considered him altogether trysted to no maiden, but to the ancient and honourable Kirk of Scotland as she had been in the high days of her pride and purity.

'Na,' they would say, 'our minister will never taingle himsel' wi' marriage engagements while there is a battle to be fought for the Auld Banner o' Blue.'

So whereas another might not so much as look over the wall, my brother might have stolen all the horses before their eyes.

And I think it was this great popular repute of him which first set his fellow-ministers against him, far more than any so-called defections and differences either ecclesiastical or political.

I have seen him at a sacrament at Dalry hold the listening thousands so that they swayed this way and that like barley shaken by the winds. Never beheld I the like—the multitude of the folk all bending their faces to one point—careless young lads from distant farms, light-headed limmers of lasses, bairns that had been skipping about the kirk-yard and playing 'I spy' among the tombstones while other ministers were preaching—all now fixed and spellbound when my brother rose to speak, and his full bell-like voice sounded out from the preaching-tent over their heads.

I think that if at any time he had held up his hand and called them to follow him to battle, every man would have gone forth as unquestionably as did Cameron's folk on that fatal day of the Moss of Ayr.

But I who sat there, with eyes sharpened and made jealous by exceeding love for my brother, could see clearly the looks of dark suspicion, the sneers that dwelt on sanctimonious lips, the frowns of envy and ill-will as Quintin stood up, and the folk poured anxiously inward towards the preaching-tent to hear him. I noted also the yet deeper anger of those who succeeded him, when multitudes rose and forsook the meeting because there was to be no more of the young minister o' Balmaghie that day.

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Now though it was rather on the point of politics and of the standing of the kirk, her right to rule herself without interference of the State, her ancient independence and submission to Christ the only head of the church, that Quintin was finally persecuted and called in question, yet, as all men know in Galloway, it was really on account of the popular acclaim, the bruit of great talents and godliness which he held among all men, beyond any that ever came into the countryside, and of his quietness and persistence also in holding his own and keeping a straight unvarying course amid all threatenings and defections, which brought the final wrath upon him and constituted the true head and front of his offending.

Aye, and men saw that the storm was brewing over him long before it burst.

For several of the Galloway ministers had deliberately left the folk of the mountains for the sake of a comfortable down-sitting in bein and sheltered parishes. Some of them even owed their learning at the Dutch Universities to the poor purses of these covenanting societies.

And so when papers came down from the Privy Council or from the men who, like Carstairs, posed as little gods and popes infallible the Presbytery men greedily signed them, swallowing titles, oaths and obligations with shut eye and indiscriminate appetite lest unhappily they would be obliged to consult their consciences.

Such men as constituted the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright had but one motto— a clear and useful one indeed at such a time, 'Those in power can do no wrong!'

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So three years went uneasily by, and meantime the parish of Balmaghie had grown to know and love our Quintin. There was hardly a rascal drover, a common villain pig-dealer who was not ready to crack a skull at an ill word said of him even in jest. Men who in time past had sneered at religion, and had never any good report of ministers, dull clods with ideals tethered to the midden and the byre, waked up at sight of him, and would travel miles to hear him preach.

And thus three happy unstirred years went by. I abode in the manse with Quintin, and every morning when I arose at break of day to take the cattle afield, or to set the plough in the glebe, I would see that his window-blind was withdrawn, his candle alight if it were winter, and that he had already set him down with his book. Or sometimes when the summer evening darkened to dusk I would meet him wandering, his hands clasped behind his back, and his whole soul steeped in meditation by the whispering rushes of the waterside.

Yet what a simpleton in worldly things he was; and, mayhap, that was what made me love him the more.

For about this time there began a stir and a bruit of the matter of little Jean Gemmell, a soft-voiced, die-away lass that I would not have troubled my head about for a moment. She had, truth to tell, set herself to catch our foolish Quintin, whose heart was in good sooth fully given to another. And how she did it, let himself tell. But I, that thought nothing of a lass without spirit, would often warn him to beware. But he minded me not, smiling and giving the subject the go-by in a certain sober and

serious way he had which somehow silenced me against my will.

But in between my brother's ill-starred wooing of the bonny lass of Earlstoun, and Jean Gemmell's meek-eyed courtship of him, I also had been doing somewhat on mine own account.

At the house of Drumglass there abode one who to my mind was worth all the haughty damsels of great houses and all the sleek and kittenish eyes-makers in broad Scotland.

When first I saw Alexander-Jonita come over the hill, riding a Galloway sheltie barebacked, her dark hair streaming in the wind, and the pony speeding over the heather like the black charger of Clavers on the side of Cairn Edward, I knew that there was no hope for my heart. I had indeed fancied myself in love before. So much was expected of a lad in our parts. But Alexander-Jonita was a quest worth some enterprising to obtain.

The neighbours, at least the rigidly righteous of them, were inclined to look somewhat askance upon a lass that went so little to the Kirk, and companioned more with the dumb things of the field than with her own kith and kin. But Quintin would ask such whether their own vineyard was so well kept, their own duty so faultlessly done, that they could afford to keep a stone ready to cast at Alexander-Jonita.

I remember the first time that ever I spoke to her words beyond the common greetings and salutations of lad and lass.

It was a clear night in early June. I had been over at Ardarroch seeing my mother, and now having passed high up the Black Water of Dee, I was

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making my way across the rugged fells and dark heathery fastnesses to the manse of Balmaghie.

The mist was rising about the waterside. It lingered in pools and drifts in every meadowy hollow, but the purpling hilltops were clear and bare in the long soft June twilight.

Suddenly a gun went off, as it seemed in my very ear. I sprang a foot into the air, for who on honourable business would discharge a musket in that wild place at such a time.

But ere I had time to think, above me on the ridge a figure stood black against the sky—a girl's shape it was, slim, tall, erect. She carried something in one hand which trailed on the heather, and a musket was under her arm, muzzle down.

I had not yet recovered my breath when a voice came to me.

'Ah, Hob MacClellan, the ill deil tak' your courting-jaunts this nicht! For had ye bidden at hame I would have gotten baith o' the red foxes that have been killing our weakly lambs. As it is, I gat but this.'

And she held up a great dog fox by the brush before throwing the body into a convenient moss-hole.

It was Alexander-Jonita, the lass whom our college-bred Quintin had once called the Diana of Balmaghie. I care not what he called her. Without question she was the finest lass in the countryside. And that I will maintain to this day.

'Are you going home, Jonita?' cried I, for the direction in which she was proceeding led directly away from the house of Drumglass.

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'No,' she answered carelessly, 'I am biding all night in the upper 'buchs.' The foxes have been very troublesome of late, and I am thinning them with the gun. I have the feck of the lambs penned up there.'

'And who is with you to help you?' I asked her in astonishment.

'Only the dogs,' she made answer, shifting the gun from one shoulder to the other.

'But, lassie,' I cried, 'ye surely do not sleep out on the hills all your lone like this?'

'And what for no?' she answered sharply. 'What sweeter bed than a truss of heather? What safer than with two rough tykes of dogs and a good gun at one's elbow, with the clear airs blowing over and the sheep lying snugly about the folds?'

'But when it rains,' I went on, still doubtfully.

'Come and see,' she laughed; 'we are near the upper 'buchs' now!'

Great stone walls of rough hill boulders, uncut and unquarried, rose before me. I saw a couple of rough collies sit guardian one at either side of the little lintelled gate that led within. The warm smell of gathered sheep, ever kindly and welcome to a hill man, saluted my nostrils as I came near. A lamb bleated, and in the quiet I could hear it run pattering to nose its mother.

Alexander-Jonita led me about the great 'bucht' to a niche formed by a kind of cairn built into the side of a wall of natural rock. Here a sort of rude shelter had been made with posts driven into the crevices of the rock and roughly covered with turves of heather round the sides of a ten-foot enclosure. The floor was of bare dry rock, but along one side there was

arranged a couch of heather tops recently pulled, very soft and elastic. At first I could not see all this quite clearly in the increasing darkness, but after a little, bit by bit the plan of the shelter dawned upon me, as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light.

‘When it rains,’ she said, going back to my question, ‘I set a post in the middle for a tent pole, spread my plaid over it and fasten it down at the sides with stones.’

‘Jonita,’ said I, ‘does your sister never come up hither with you?’

‘Who—our Jean!’ she cried, astonished, ‘faith, no! Jean takes better with the inside of a box-bed and the warmth of the red ashes on the hearth! And, indeed, the lass is not over-strong. But as for me, more than the cheeping of the house-mice, I love the chunnering of the wild fowl in their nests and the bleat of the sheep. These are honey and sweetness to me.’

‘But, Jonita,’ I went on, ‘surely no girl is strong enough to take shower and wind-buffet night and day on the wild moors like this. Why, you make me ashamed, me that am born and bred to the trade.’

‘And what am I?’ she asked sharply, ‘I am over twenty, and yet nothing but an ignorant lass and careless of seeming otherwise. I am not even like my sister Jean that can look and nod as if she understood everything your brother is talking about, knowing all the while naught of the matter. But, at least, I ken the ways of the hills. Feel that!’

She thrust her arm suddenly out to me.

I clasped it in my hands, sitting meantime on a great stone in the angle, while she stood beside me with the dogs on either side of her. It was a smooth,

well-rounded arm, cool and delicate of skin, that she gave into my fingers. Her loose sleeve fell back, and if I had dared to follow my desire, I should have set my lips to it, so delightful did the touch of it seem to me. But I refrained me, and presently underneath the satin skin I felt the muscles rise nobly, tense yet easy, clean of sinew and spare flesh, moulded alike for strength and suppleness.

'I would not like to pull at the swingle-tree with you, my lass,' said I, 'and if it came to a Keltonhill collieshangie I would rather have you on my side than against me.'

And I think she was more pleased at that than if I had told her she was to be a great heiress.

As I waited there on the rough stones of the sheepfold, and looked at the slight figure sitting frankly and easily beside me, thinking, as I knew, no more of the things of love than if she had been a neighbour lad of the hills, a kind of jealous anger came over me.

'Jonita,' said I, 'had ye never a sweetheart?'

'A what?' cried Jonita in a tone of as much surprise as if I had asked her if she had ever possessed an elephant.

'A lad that loved you as other maids are loved.'

'I have heard silly boys speak nonsense,' she said, 'but I am no byre-lass to be touselled in corners by every night-raker that would come visitng at the Drumglass.'

'Jonita,' I went on, 'hath none ever helped you with your sheep on the hill, run when you wanted him, stopped when you told him, come like a collie to your foot when he was called?'

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'None, I tell you, has ever sat where you are sitting Hob MacClellan! And hear ye this, had I thought you a silly cuif like the rest, it would have been the short day of December and the long again before I had asked you to view my bower under the rock.'

'I was only asking, Jonita,' said I; 'ye ken that ye are the bonniest lass in ten parishes, and to me it seemed a strange thing that ye shouldna hae a lad.'

'Bah,' said she, 'lads are like the pebbles in the brook. They are run smooth with many experiences, courting here and flattering there. What care I whether or no this one or that comes chapping at my door? There are plenty more in the brook. Besides, are there not the hills and the winds and the clear stars over all, better and more enduring than a thousand sweethearts?'

'But,' said I, 'the day will come, Jonita, when you may be glad of the friend's voice, the kindly eye, the helping hand, the arm beneath the head'

'I did not say that I desired to have no friends,' she said, as it seemed in the darkness, a little shyly.

'Will you let me be your friend?' I said, impulsively, taking her hand.

'I do not know,' said Alexander-Jonita; 'I will tell you in the morning. It is over-dark tonight to see your eyes.'

'Can you not believe?' said I. 'Have you ever heard that I thus offered friendship to any other maid in all the parish?'

'You might have offered it to twenty and they taken it every one for aught I care. But Alexander-Jonita Gemmell accepts no man's friendship till she has tried him as a fighter tries a sword.'

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'Then try me, Jonita!' I cried, eagerly.

'I will,' said she, promptly; 'rise this instant from the place where ye sit, look not upon me, touch me not, say neither good e'en nor yet good-day, but take the straight road and the ready to the manse of Balmaghie.'

The words were scarce out of her mouth when with a leap so quick that the collies had not even time to rise, I was over the dyke and striding across the moss and whinstone-crag towards the house by the waterside, where my brother's light had long been burning over his books.

I did not so much as look about me till I was on the crest of the hill. Then for a single moment I stood looking back into the clear grey bath of night behind me, where the lass I loved was keeping her watch in the lonely sheepfold.

Yet I was pleased with myself too. For though my dismissal had been so swift and un expected, I felt that I had not done by any means badly for myself.

At least I could call Alexander-Jonita my friend. And there was never a lad upon all the hills of heather that could do so much.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MUTTERINGS OF STORM

[*The Narrative of Quintin MacClellan resumed.*]

It was a day of high summer when the anger of mine enemies drew finally to a head, and that within mine own land of Balmaghie. The Presbytery were in the habit of meeting at a place a little way from the centre of the parish, called Cullenoch—or, as one would say in English, 'The Woodlands.'

In twos or threes they came, riding side by side on their ponies, or appearing singly out of some pass among the hills. So, as I say, the Presbytery assembled at Cullenoch, and the master of it, Andrew Cameron of Kirkcudbright, was there, with his orders from wily Carstairs, the pope of the restored Kirk of Scotland.

To this day I can see his aspect as he rose up among the brethren with a great roll in his hand—solemn, portentous, full of suave, easy words and empty, sonorous utterances.

'Fathers and brethren,' he said, looking on us with a comprehending pity for our feebleness of capacity, 'there hath come that from Her Most Noble and Christian Majesty the Queen Anna, which it behooves us to treat with all the respect due to one who is at once the Anointed of God, and also as the fountain of all authority, in some sense also the Head of the Church!'

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As he finished he laid upon the table a great parchment, and tapped it impressively with his finger.

'It is, if I may be permitted the words, the message of God's vicegerent upon earth, whom His own finger has especially designed to rule over us. And I am well assured that no one among the brethren of the Presbytery will be so ill-advised as not at once to sign this declaration of our submission and dutiful obedience to our Liege lady in all things.'

This he uttered soundingly, with much more to the same purpose, standing up all the time, and glowering about him on the look-out for contradiction.

Then, though I was the youngest member of the Presbytery, save one, I felt that for the ancient liberty of the Kirk and for the sake of the blood shed on the moors, I could not permit so great a scandal as this to pass. I rose in my place, whilst Cameron looked steadily upon me, endeavouring to browbeat me into silence.

Somewhat thus I spoke:

The most learned and reverend brother brings us a paper to sign—a paper which we have neither seen nor yet heard read. It comes (he tells us) from the Church's head, from God's vicegerent. It is to be received with hushed breath and bowed knee. 'The Head of the Church!' says Mr. Cameron— ah, brethren, the men who have so lately entered into rest through warring stress, sealed with their blood the testimony that the Kirk of God has no head upon earth. The Kirk of Scotland is the Kirk of Jesus Christ, the alone King and Head of the Church. The

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Kirk of Scotland is more noble, high and honourable in herself than any human government. She alone is God's vicegerent. She alone has power within her own borders to rule her own affairs. The Kirk has many faults, but at least she will surely never permit herself to be ruled again by Privy Councils and self-seeking state-craft. Is she not the Bride, the Lamb's wife? And for me, and for any that may adhere to me, we will sign no test nor declaration which shall put our free necks beneath the yoke of any temporal power, nor yet for fear of this or that Queen's Majesty deny the Name that is above every name.'

Whilst these words were put into my heart and spoken by my voice, I seemed, as it were, taken possession of. A voice prompted me what I was to speak. I heard the sound of rushing wings, and though I was but lately a herd-lad on the hills of sheep I knew that the time had come, which on the day of the Killing on the Bennan Top I had seen afar off.

Whilst I was speaking, Cameron stood impatiently bending the tips of his politic fingers upon the document on the table. A dark frown had been gathering on his brow.

'This is treason, black treason! It is blank defiance of the Queen's authority!' he cried; 'I will not listen to such words. It is the voice of a man who would raise the standard of rebellion, and disturb the peace of all the parishes of our Kirk, recently and adequately settled according to the laws of the land.'

But I had yet a word to say,

'I am neither rebel nor heretic,' said I; 'I am, it is true, the youngest and the least among you. But

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even I am old enough to have seen men shot like running deer for the liberties of the Kirk of God. I have heard the whistle of the deadly bullet flying at the command of kings and queens called in their day Heads of the Church. I have seen the martyr fall, and his blood redden the ooze of the moss hag. We have heard much of tests and papers to sign, of allegiances to other divine vicegerents upon earth, even to such Lord's anointed as James and Charles, the father and the uncle of her in whose name the Privy Council of Scotland now demands this most abject submission. But for myself I will sign no such undertaking, give countenance to no bond which might the second time deliver us who have fought for our ancient liberties with weapons in our hands, bound hand and foot to the powers temporal—yea, that we might wrest the powers of the spiritual arm from the Son of God and deliver them to the daughter of James Stuart.'

'And who are you,' cried Cameron, 'thus to teach and instruct men who were ministers when you were but a bairn, to reprove those who have wrought in sun and shine, and in gloom and darkness alike, to make the Kirk of Scotland what she is this day?'

There was a noise of some approval among the Presbytery. I knew, however, that I had small sympathy among those present, men fearful of losing their pleasant livings and fat stipends. Nevertheless, very humbly I made answer. 'It is not Quintin MacClellan, but the word he speaks that cannot be gainsaid. There is also an old saying that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God expects the perfection of praise.'

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'Fool!' cried Cameron, 'ye would endanger and cast down the fair fabric of this Kirk of Scotland, ignorantly pulling down what wiser and better men have laboriously built up. Ye are but a child throwing stones at windows and ready to run when the glass splinters. You stand alone among us, sir—alone in Scotland!'

'I stand no more alone,' I replied, 'than your brother Richard Cameron did at Ayrsmoss when he rode into the broil and tumult of battle for the honour of the Covenant. The Banner of Christ's cause that was trampled in the pestt-brew of the moss of Ayr, is a worthier standard than the rag of submission which lies upon the table under your hand.'

Cameron was silent. He liked not the memory of his great brother. I went on, for the man's pliable pitifulness angered me.

'Think you that Richard Cameron would have signed words like these? Aye, I think he would. But it would have been with his sword, cutting the vile bond into fragments, giving them to the winds, and strewing them upon the waters.'

Then the Presbytery would hear no more, but by instant vote and voice they put me forth. Yet ere I went from their midst, I cried, 'If there be any that think more of the freedom of God's Kirk in this land of Scotland than of their stipends and glebes, let them come forth with me.'

And two there were who rose and followed —Reid of Carsphairn, a man zealous and far-seeing, and one other, a young minister lately come within the bounds.

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So the door was shut upon us, and they that hated us were left to concert their measures without let or hindrance.

And for a moment we three clasped hands without the door.

'Let us stand by each other and the word of truth,' I said, 'and the truth shall never make us ashamed.'

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

THE EYES OF A MAID

Now throughout all the parish, aye, and throughout all Galloway there arose infinite noise and bruit of this thing. Specially was there the buzz of anger in the hill parishes, where the men who had lain in the moss-hags and fought for the ancient liberties dwelt thickest— in Carsphairn, in the Glenkens, and in mine own Balmaghie.

As I went over the hill from farm-town to farm-town the herds would cry down 'Well done!' from among the sheep. Old men who had seen the high days of the Kirk before the fatal homecoming of King Charles; rough, buirdly men who had done their share of hiding and fighting in the troubles; young men who, like myself, had heard in their cradles but the murmur of the fray, came to shake my hand and bid me strengthen my knees and stick to my testimony.

'For,' said a venerable elder, one Anthony Lennox of the Duchrae, who had been a famous man in the sufferings, 'this is the very truth for which we bled. We asked for the kernel, and lo! they have given us the dry and barren husk. We fought for 'Christ's Crown and Covenant,' and they have sent us a banner with the device— 'Queen Anne's Crown and the Test!'

But I think that the women were even more warmly on our side, for the canker of persecution had eaten deeper into their hearts, that had only

waited and mourned while their men folk were out suffering and fighting.

'Be ye none feared, laddie,' said Millicent Hannay, an ancient dame who had stood the thumbikins thrice in the gaol of Kirkcudbright; 'the most part of the ministers may stick like burrs to their manses and glebes, their tiends and tithings. But if so be, ye are thrust forth into the wilderness, ye will find manna there—aye, and water from the rock and a pillar of fire going before to lead you out again.'

But nowhere was I more warmly welcomed than in the good house of Drumglass. The herd lads and ploughmen were gathered at the house-end when I came up the loaning, and even as I passed one of them came forward with his blue bonnet in his hand.

'Fear not, sir,' he said, with a kind of bold, self-respecting diffidence common among our Galloway hinds. 'I speak for all our lads with hearts and hands. We will fight for you. Keep the word of your testimony, and we will sustain you and stand behind you. If we will unfurl the blue banner again, we will plant right deep the staff.'

And from the little group of stalwart men at the barn-end there came a low murmur of corroboration, 'We will uphold you!'

Strange as it is today to think on these things when most men are so lukewarm for principle. But in those days the embers of the fires of persecution were yet warm and glowing, and men knew not when they might again be blown up and fresh fuel added thereto.

'Come awa',' cried Nathan Gemmell heartily, from where he sat on the outer bench of moss-oak by the

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door cheek, worn smooth by generations of sitters, 'come awa', minister, and tell us the news. Faith, it makes me young-like again to hear there is still a man that thinks on the Covenants and the blue banner wi' the denty white cross. And though they forget the auld flag noo, I hae seen it gang stacherin' doon the streets o' the toon o' Edinburg wi' the folk cryin' 'Up wi' the Kirk an' doon wi' the King!' till there wasna a sodjer body dare show his face, nor a King's man to be found between the Castle and the Holy-rood House. Hech how-aye! auld Drumglass has seen that.'

'And eke he saw the lads that were pitten doon on the green Pentland slopes in the saxty-sax start frae the Clachan o' Saint John wi' hopes that were high, sharpening their bits o' swords and scythes to withstand the guns o' Dalzyell. And but few o' them ever wan back. But what o' that? It's a brave thrang there wad be about heaven's gates that day—the souls o' the righteous thranging and pressing to win through, the rejoicing of a multitude that had washed their robes and made them white in the blood o' the Lamb.

'Ow, aye, ye wonder at me, that am a carnal man, speakin' that gate. But it is juist because I am a man wha' has been a sore sinner, that I wear thae things sae near my heart. My time is at hand. Soon, soon will auld Drumglass, wastrel loon that he is, be thrown oot like a useless root ower the wa' and carried feet foremost from out his chamber door. But if it's the Lord's will,' (he rose to his feet and shook his oaken staff) 'if it's the Lord's will, auld Drumglass wad like to draw the blade frae the scabbard yince mair, and find the wecht o' the steel

in his hand while yet his auld numb fingers can meet about the basket hilt.'

'Oh, I ken, I ken; ye think the weapons of our warfare are not to be swords and staves, minister—truth will fight for us, ye say.'

'I daresay ye are right. But gin the hoodie-craws o' the Presbytery come wi' swords and staves to put ye forth from your parish and your kindly down-sitting, ye will be none the worse of the parcel o' brow lads ye saw at the barn-end, every man o' them wi' a basket-hilted blade in his richt hand and a willing Galloway heart thump-thumpin' high wi' itching desire to be at the red coaties o' the malignants.'

Then we went in, and there by the fireside, looking very wistfully out of her meek eyes at me, stood the young lass, Jean Gemmell. She came forward holding out her hand, saying no word, but the tears still wet on her lashes— why, I know not. And she listened as her father asked of the doings at the Presbytery, and looked eager and anxious while I was answering. Presently Auld Drumglass went forth on some errand about the work of the plough-lads, and the lass and I were left alone together in the wide kitchen.

'And they will indeed put you forth out of house and home?' she asked, looking at me with sweet, reluctant eyes, the eyes of a mourning dove. She stood by the angle of the hearth where the broad ingle-seat begins. I sat on her father's chair where he had placed me and looked over at her. A comely lass she was, with her pale cheeks and a blush on them that went and came responsive to the beating of her heart.

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I had not answered, being busy with looking at her and thinking how I wished Mistress Mary Gordon had been as gentle and biddable as this lass. So she asked again, 'They will not put you forth from your kirk and parish, will they?'

'Nay, that I know not,' I said, smiling; 'doubtless they will try.'

'Oh, I could not listen to another minister after...'

She stopped and sighed.

It was in my mind to rebuke her, and to bid her remember that the Word of God is not confined to any one vessel of clay, but just then she put her hand to her side, and went withal so pale that I could not find it in my heart to speak harshly to the young lass.

Then I told her, being stirred within me by her emotion, of the two who had stood by me in the Presbytery, and how little hope I had that they would manfully see it out to the end.

'Tis a fight that I must fight alone,' I said.

For I knew well that it would come to that, and that so soon as the affair went past mere empty words those two who had stood at my shoulder would fall behind or be content to bide snugly at home.

'Not alone!' said the young lass, quickly, and moved a step towards me with her hand held out. Then, with a deep and burning blush, her maiden modesty checked her, and she stood red like a July rose in the clear morning.

She swayed as if she would have fallen, and, leaping up quickly, I caught her in my arms ere she had time to fall.

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Her eyes were closed. The blood had ebbed from her face and left her pale to the very lips. I stood with her light weight in my arms, thrilling strangely, for, God be my judge, never woman had lain there before.

Presently she gave a long snatching breath and opened her eyes. I saw the tears gather in them as her head lay still and lax in the hollow of my arm. The drops did not fall, but rather gathered slowly like wells that are fed from beneath.

'You will not go away?' she said, and at last lifted her lashes, with a little pearl shining wet on each, like a swallow that has dipped her wings in a pool.

Then, because I could not help it, I did that which I had never done to any woman born of woman: I stooped and kissed the wet sweet eyes. And then, ere I knew it, with a little cry of frightened joy, the girl's arms were about me. She lifted up her face, and kissed me again and again and yet again.

When I came to myself I was conscious of another presence in the kitchen. I looked up quickly, and there before me, standing with an ash switch swaying in her hand, was Alexander-Jonita. I had not supposed that she could have looked so stern.

'Well?' she said, as if waiting for my explanation.

'I love your sister,' I replied; for indeed, though I had not thought thus of the matter before, there seemed nothing else to be said.

But the face of Alexander-Jonita did not relax. She stood gazing at her sister, whose head rested quiet and content on my shoulder.

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‘Jean,’ she said at last, ‘knowing that which you know, why have you done this?’

The girl lifted her head, and looked at Jonita with a kind of glad defiance.

‘Sister,’ she said, ‘you do not understand love. How should you know what one would do for love?’

‘You love my sister Jean?’ Jonita began again, turning to me with a sharpness in her words like the pricking of a needle's point.

‘Yes!’ I answered, but perhaps a little uncertainly.

‘Did you know as much when you came into the kitchen?’

‘No,’ said I.

For indeed I knew not what to answer, never having been thus tangled up with women's affairs in my life before.

‘I thought not,’ said Jonita, curtly. Then to Jean, ‘How did this come about?’ she said.

Jean lifted her head, her face being lily-pale and her body swaying a little to me.

‘I thought he would go away and that I should never see him again!’ she replied, a little pitifully, with the quavering thrill of unshed tears in her voice.

‘And you did this knowing—what you know!’ said Jonita again, sternly.

‘I saw him first,’ said Jean, a little obstinately, looking down the while.

Her sister flushed crimson.

‘Oh, lassie,’ she cried, ‘ye will drive me mad with your whims and foolish speeches; what matters who saw him first? Ye ken well that ye are not fit to be...’

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'She is fit to be my wife,' I said, for I thought that this had gone far enough; 'she is fit to be my wife, and my wife she shall surely be if she will have me!'

With a little joyful cry Jean Gemmell's arms went about my neck, and her wet face was hidden in my breast. It lay there quiet a moment; then she lifted it and looked with a proud, still defiance at her sister.

Alexander-Jonita lifted up her hands in hopeless protest.

She seemed about to say more, but all suddenly she changed her mind.

'So be it,' she said. 'After all, 'tis none of my business!'

And with that she turned and went out through the door of the kitchen.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

THE ANGER OF ALEXANDER-JONITA

[Comment and Addition by Hob MacClellan.]

I met my lass Jonita that night by the sheep-fold on the hill. It was not yet sundown, but the spaces of the heavens had slowly grown large and vague. The wind also had gradually died away to a breathing stillness. The scent of the bog-myrtle was in our nostrils, as if the plant itself leaned against our faces.

I had been waiting a long time ere I heard her come, lissomly springing from tuft to tuft of grass and whistling that bonny dance tune, 'The Broom o' the Cowdenknowes.' But even before I looked up I caught the trouble in her tones. She whistled more shrilly than usual, and the liquid fluting of her notes, mellow mostly like those of the blackbird, had now an angry ring.

'What is the matter, Alexander-Jonita?' I cried, e'er I had so much as set eyes on her.

The whistling ceased at my question. She came near, and leaning her elbows on the dyke, she regarded me sternly.

'Then you know something about it?' she said, looking at me between the eyes, her own narrowed till they glinted wintry and keen as the gimlet-tool wherewith the joiner bores his holes.

'Has your father married the Dairymaid, or Meg the pony cast a shoe?' I asked of her, with a lightness I did not feel.

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'Tut,' she cried, 'tis the matter of your brother, as well you know.'

'What of my brother?'

'Why, our silly Jean has made eyes at him, and let the salt water fall on the breast of his black minister's coat. And now the calf declares that he loves her!'

I stood up in sharp surprise.

'He no more loves her than...than...'

'Than you love me,' said Alexander-Jonita; 'I know—drive on!'

I did not notice her evil-conditioned jibe.

'Why, Jonita, he has all his life been in love with the Lady Mary—the Bull of Earlstoun's daughter.'

Alexander-Jonita nodded pensively.

'Even so I thought,' she said, 'but, as I guess, Mary Gordon has sent him about his business, and so he has been taken with our poor Jean's puling pussydom. God forgive me that I should say so much of a dying woman.'

'A dying woman?' cried I, 'there is nothing the matter with Jean.'

Alexander-Jonita shook her head.

'Jean is not long for this world,' she said, 'I bid you remember. Saw you ever the red leap through the white like yon, save when the life burns fast to the ashes and the pulse beats ever more light and weak?'

'And how long hath this thing been afoot?'

'Since the day of your brother's first preaching, when to save her shoon Jean must needs go barefoot and wash her feet in the burn that slips down by the kirkyard wall.'

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‘That was the day Quintin first spoke with her, when she gave him her nooning piece of bread to stay his hunger.’

‘Aye,’ said Alexander-Jonita; ‘better had he gone hungry all sermon-time than eaten of our Jean’s piece.’

‘For shame, Alexander-Jonita!’ I cried, ‘and a double shame to speak thus of a lassie that is, by your own tale, dying on her feet—and your sister forbye. I believe that ye are but jealous!’

She flamed up in sudden anger. If she had had a knife or a pistol in her hand, I believe she would have killed me.

‘Get out of our ewe-buchts before I twist your impudent neck. Hob MacClellan!’ she cried. ‘I care not a docken for any man alive — least of all for you and your brother. Yet I thought, from what I heard of his doings at the Presbytery, that he was more of a man than any of you. But now I see that he is feckless and feeble like the rest.’

‘Ah, Jonita, you snooded folk tame us all. From David the King to Hob MacClellan there is no man so wise but a woman may tie him in knots about her little finger.’

‘I thought better of your brother!’ she said more mildly, her anger dying away as suddenly as it had risen, and I think she sighed.

‘But not better of me!’ I said.

She looked at me with contempt, but yet a contempt mightily pleasant.

‘Good e’en to ye, Hob,’ she cried. ‘I was not so far left to myself as to think about you at all!’

And with that she took her light plaid over her arm with a saucyish swirl, and whistling on her

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dogs, she swung down the hill, carrying, if you please, her shoulders squared and her head in the air like a young conceited birkie going to see his sweetheart.

And then, when the thing became public, what a din there was in the parish of Balmaghie! Only those who know the position of a young minister and the interest in his doings can imagine. It was somewhat thus that the good wives wagged their tongues.

'To marry Jean Gemmell! Aye, juist poor Jean, the shilpit, pewlin' brat that never did a hand's turn in her life, indoor or oot! Fegs, a bonny wife she will mak' to him. Apothecaries' drugs and red claret wine she maun hae to leeve on. A bonnie penny it will cost him, gin ever she wins to the threshold o' his manse!'

'But she's no there yet, kimmer! Na— certes no! I mind o' her mither weel. Jean was her name, too, juist sich anither cloyt, a feckless, white-faced bury-me-decent, withoot as muckle spirit as wad gar her turn a sow oot o' the kailyard. And a' the kin o' her were like her—no yin to better anither. There was her uncle Jacob Ahanny a' the Risk; he keepit in wi' the Government in the auld Persecution, and when Clavers cam' to the door and asked him what religion he was o', he said that the estate had changed hands lately, and that he hadna had time to speer at the new laird. And at that Clavers laughed and laughed, and it wasna often that Jockie Graham did the like. Fegs no, kimmers! But he clappit Jacob on the shooder. 'Puir craitur,' quo' he; ye are no the stuff that rebels are made o'. Na, there's nocht o' Richie Cameron aboot you.'

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'Aye, faith, do ye tell me, and Jean is to mairry the minister, and him sae bauld and croose before the Presbytery. What deil's cantrip can hae ta'en him?'

'Hoot, Mary McKeand, I wonder to hear ye. Do ye no ken that the baulder and greater a man the easier a woman can get round him?'

'Aweel, even sae I hae heard. I wish oor Jock was a great man, then; I could maybe, keep him awa' frae the change-hoose in the clachan. But the minister, he had far better hae ta'en yon wild sister.'

'Her? I'se warrant she wadna look at him. She doesna even gang to Balmaghie Kirk to hear him preach.'

'Mary McKeand, hae ye come to your age without kennin, that the woman that wad refuse the minister o' a parish when he speers her, hasna been born?'

'Aweel, maybe no! But kimmer harken to me, there's mony an egg laid in the nest that never leaved to crawl in the morn. Him and her are no married yet. Hoot na, woman!'

And so without further eavesdropping I took my way out of the clachan of Pluckamin, and left the good wives to arrange my brother's future. I had not yet spoken to him on the subject, but I resolved to do so that very night.

It was already well upon the grey selvage of the dark when I strode up the manse-loaning, intent to have the matter out with my brother forthwith. It was not often that I took it on me to question him; for after all I was but a landward lout by comparison with him. I understood little of the high aims and purposes that inspired him, being at best but a

plain country lad with my wits a little sharpened by the giff-gaff of the pedlar's trade. But when it came to the push I think that Quintin had some respect for my opinion— all the more that I so seldom troubled him with it.

I found my brother in the little gable-room where he studied, with the window open that he might hear the sough of the soft-flowing river beneath, and perhaps also that the drowsy hum of the bees and the sweet-sour smell of the hives might drift in to him upon the balmy air of night.

The minister had a great black-lettered book propped up before him, which from its upright thick and thin letters (like pea-sticks dibbled in the ground) I knew to be Hebrew. But I do not think he read in it, nor gathered much lear for his Sabbath's sermon.

He looked up as I came in.

'Quintin,' said I, directly, lest by waiting I should lose courage, 'are you to marry Jean Gemmell?'

He kept his eyes straight upon me, as indeed he did ever with whomsoever he spake.

'Aye, Hob,' he said, quietly; 'have ye any word to say against that?'

'I do not know that I have,' I answered, 'but what will Mary Gordon say?'

I could see him wince like one that is touched on an unhealed wound.

But he recovered himself at once, and said calmly, 'She will say nothing, feel nothing, care nothing.'

'I am none so sure of that,' said I, looking as straightly at him as ever he did at me.

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He started up, one hand on the table, his long hair thrown back with a certain jerk he had when he was touched, which made him look like a roused lion that stands at bay. 'By what right do ye speak thus, Hob MacClellan?'

'By the right of that which I know,' said I; 'but a man who will pull up the seed which he has just planted, and cast it away because he finds not ripened ears, deserves to starve all his life on sprouted and musty corn.'

'Riddle me no riddles,' said my brother, knocking on the table with his palm till the great Hebrew book slid from its prop and fell heavily to the floor; 'this is too terrible a venture. Speak plainly and tell me all you mean.'

'Well,' said I, 'the matter is not all mine to tell. But you are well aware that Hob MacClellan can hold his peace, and is no gossip-monger. I tell you that when you went from Earlstoun the last time the Lady Mary went to the battlement tower to watch you go, and came down with her kerchief wringing with her tears.'

'It is a thing impossible, mad, incredible!' said he, putting his elbow on the table and his hand to his eyes as if he had been looking into the glare of an overpowering sun. Yet there was hardly enough light in the little room for us to see one another by. After a long silence Quintin turned to me and said, 'Tell me how ye came to ken this.'

'That,' said I, bluntly, 'is not a matter that can concern you. But know it I do, or I should not have troubled you with the matter.'

At this he gave a wild kind of throat cry that I never heard before. It was the driven, throttled cry of

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a man's agony, once heard, never forgotten. Would that Mary Gordon had hearkened to it! It is the one thing no woman can stand. It either melts or terrifies her. But with another man it is different.

'Ah, you have troubled me— you have troubled me sore!' he cried. And with no more than that he left me abruptly and went out into the night. I looked through the window and saw him marching up and down by the kirk, on a strip of greensward for which he had ever a liking. It was pitiful to watch him. He walked fast like one that would have run away from melancholy thoughts, turning ever when he came opposite the low tomb-stone of the two martyr Hallidays. He was bareheaded, and I feared the chilling night dews. So I lifted down his minister's hat from the deer's horn by the hallan door and took it out to him.

At first he did not see me, being enwrapped in his own meditations, and it was only when a couple of blackbirds flew scolding out of the lilac bushes that he heard my foot and turned.

'Man Hob,' he said, speaking just the plain country speech he used to do at Ardarroch, before ever he went to the college of Edinburgh, 'it's an awfu' thing that a man should care mair for the guid word of a lass than about the grace o' God and the Covenanted Kirk of Scotland!'

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

AT BAY

[The Narrative of Quintin MacClellan is resumed.]

Dark was the day, darker the night. The matters which had sundered me from the Presbytery mended not—nor, indeed, was it possible to mend them, seeing that they and I served different gods, followed other purposes.

It was bleak December when the brethren of the Presbytery arrived to make an end of me and my work in the parish of Balmaghie. They came with their minds made up. They alone were my accusers. They were also my sole judges. As for me, I was as set and determined as they were. I refused their jurisdiction. I utterly contemned their authority. To me they were but mites in the cheese, pottle-bellied batteners on the heritage and patrimony of the Kirk of Scotland. Siller and acres spelled all their desires, chalders and tiends contained all the rounded tale of their ambitions.

But for all that, now that I am older, I can scarce blame them— at least, not so sorely as once I did.

For to them I was the youngest of them all, the least in years and learning, the smallest in influence—save, perhaps, among the Remnant who still thought about the things of the Kirk and her spiritual independence.

I was to the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright but the troubler of Israel, the disturber of a quiet Zion. Save for poor Quintin MacClellan, the watchman might

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have gone from tower to tower along ramparts covered and defended, and his challenge of 'What of the night?' have received its fitting answer from this point and that about the city, 'The morning cometh! All is well!'

Yet because of the Lad in the Brown Coat with his dead face sunk in the Bennan flowe I could not consent to putting the Kirk of Scotland, once free and independent, under the control, real or nominal, the authority, overt or latent, of any monarch in Christendom.

More than to my fathers, more than to my elders it seemed to me that the old ways were the true ways, and that kings and governments had never meddled with religion save to lay waste the vineyard and mar the bridal portion of the Kirk of God.

But all men know the cause of the struggle and what were the issues. I will choose to tell rather the tale of a man's shame and sorrow— his, indeed, who had taken the Banner of the Covenant into unworthy hands, yet time after time had let it fall in the dust. Nevertheless, at the hinder end, I lived to see it set again in a strong base of unhewn stone, fixed as the foundations of the earth. Nor shall the golden scroll of it ever be defaced nor the covenant of the King of kings be broken.

So on the day of trial, from all the parishes of the Presbytery east and west, gathered the men who had constituted themselves my judges —nay, the men who were already my condemnators. For Cameron had my sentence in his pocket before ever one of the brethren set a foot over his doorstep, or threw a leg across the back of his ambling sheltie.

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I had judged it best to be quiet and staid in demeanour, and had gone about to quiet and persuade the folk of Balmaghie, who were eager to hold back the hunters from their prey.

The Presbytery had sent to bid me preach before them, even as the soldiers of the guard had bidden Christ prophesy unto them, that they might have occasion to smite Him the oftener on the mouth. So when I came before them they posed me with interrogatories, threatened me with penalties, and finally set me to conduct service before them, that they might either condemn me if I refused, alleging contumacy; or, on the other hand, if I did as they bade me, they would easily find occasion to condemn the words of my mouth.

Then I saw that though there was no way to escape their malice, yet there was a way to serve the cause.

So I went up into the pulpit after the folk had been assembled, and addressed myself to them just as if it had been an ordinary Sabbath day and the company met only for the worship of God.

For I minded the word which my good Regent, Dr. Campbell, had spoken to me in Edinburgh ere I was licensed to preach, or thought that one day I myself should be the carcase about which the ravens should gather.

'When ye preach,' said Professor Campbell, 'be sure that ye heed not the five wise men!'

So I minded that word, and seeing the folk gathered together, I cast my heavy burden from me, and called them earnestly to the worship of Him who is above all courts and assemblies.

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Then in came Cameron, the leader of their faction, jowled with determination and rosy-gilled with good cheer and the claret wine of St. Mary's Isle. With him was Boyd, also a renegade from the Society Hill Folk. For with their scanty funds the men of the moss-hags had sent these two as students to Holland to gather lear that they might thereafter be their ministers. But now, when they had gotten them comfortable down-sittings in plenteous parishes, they turned with the bitter zest of the turncoat to the hunting of one who adhered to their own ancient way.

But though I could have reproached them with this and with much else, I judged that because they were met in the Kirk of God no tumult should be made, at least till they had shown the length and breadth and depth of their malice.

Then, when at the last I stood single and alone at their bar and was ready to answer their questions, they could bring nothing against me save that I had refused their jurisdiction. Their suborned witnesses failed them. For there was none in all the parish who wished me ill, and certainly none that dared testify a word in the midst of the angry people that day in the Kirk of Balmaghie.

'Have ye naught to allege against my life and conduct?' I asked of them at last. 'Ye have set false witnesses to follow me from place to place and wrest my words. Ye have spied here and there in the houses of my people. Ye have tried to entrap my elders. Is there no least thing that ye can allege? For three years I have come and gone in and out among this folk of Balmaghie. I have companioned with you. I have sat in your meetings. I have not been

silent. Ye have watched me with the eyes of the greedy gled. Ye have barked and waited and sharpened claws for me as a cat does at a mouse-hole'

'Will ye submit and sign the submission here and now?' interrupted Cameron, who liked not the threatening murmur of approbation which began to run like wild-fire among the folk.

'There is One,' answered I, the words being as it had been given to me, 'whose praise is perfected out of the mouths of babes. It is true that among you I am like a young child without power or wisdom. Ye are great and learned, old in years and full of reverence. But this one thing a young man can do. He can stand by the truth ye have deserted, and lift again the banner staff ye have cast in the mire. As great Rutherford hath said, 'Christ may ride upon a windle straw and not stumble.'

Then I turned about to the people, when the Presbytery would have restrained me from further speech.

'Ye folk of this parish,' I said, 'what think ye of this matter? Shall your minister be thrust out from among you? Shall he bow the head and bend the knee? Must he let principle and truth go by the board and whistle down the wind? I think ye know him better. Aye, truly, this parish and people would have a bonny bird of him, a brave minister, indeed—if he submitted before being cleared of that whereof, all unjustly, his enemies have accused him, setting him up in the presence of his people like a felon in the dock of judgment!'

Then indeed there was confusion among the black-coated ravens who had come to gloat over the

feast. I had insulted (so they cried) their honourable and reverend court. I had refused a too lenient and condescending accommodation. Thus they prated, as if long words would balance the beam of an unjust cause.

But at that moment there came a stir among the folk. I saw the elders of the congregation appear at the door of the kirk. And as they marched up the aisle, behind them thronged all the men of the parish, in still, stern, and compact mass.

Then a ruling elder read the protest of the common people. It was simple and clear. The parish was wholly with me, and not with mine enemies. Almost every man within the bounds had signed the paper whereon was written the people's protest. The Presbytery might depose the minister, but the people would uphold him. Every man in Balmaghie knew well that their pastor suffered because he had steadfastly preferred truth to compromise, honour to self, conscience to stipend. That the Presbytery themselves had sworn to uphold that which now they condemned.

'Are ye who present this paper ordained elders of the Kirk?' asked Cameron of the leaders, glowering angrily at them.

'We are,' responded Nathan Gemmell, stoutly.

'And ye dare to bring a railing accusation against the ministers of your Presbytery?'

'We are free men—ruling elders every one. You, on your part, are but teaching elders, and, save for the usurpation of the State, ye are no ways in authority over us,' was the answer.

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‘And who are they for whom ye profess to speak?’ continued Cameron, looking frowningly upon Drumglass and his fellows.

‘They are here to speak for themselves!’ cried Nathan Gemmell, and as he waved his hand, the kirk was filled from end to end with stalwart men, who stood up rank behind rank, all very grave and quiet.

I saw the ministers cower together. This was not at all what they had bargained for.

‘We are plainly to be deforced and overawed,’ said Cameron. ‘Let us disperse today and meet tomorrow in the Kirk of Crossmichael over the water.’

And lo! it was done—even as their leader said. They summoned me to stand at their bar on the morrow in the Kirk of Crossmichael, that I might receive my doom.

But quietly, as before, I told them that I refused their court, that I would in no wise submit to their sentence, but would abide among my people both tomorrow and all the tomorrows, to do the duty which had been laid upon me, in spite of anathema, deposition, excommunication. ‘For,’ said I, ‘I have a warrant that is higher than yours. So far as I may, in a man's weakness and sin, I will be faithful to that mandate, to my conscience, and to my God.’

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

MARY GORDON'S LAST WORD

The next day was the 30th of December, a day of bitter frost, so that the Dee froze over, and the way which had been broken for the boats to ferry the Presbytery across from the dangerous bounds of Balmaghie was again filled with floating ice.

The Kirk of Crossmichael sits, like that of Balmaghie, on a little green hill above Dee Water. One House of Prayer fronts the other, and the white kirkyard stones greet each other across the river, telling the one story of earth to earth. And every Sabbath day across the sluggish stream two songs of praise go up to heaven in united aspiration towards one Eternal father.

But this 30th of December there was for Quintin MacClellan small community of lofty fellowship across the water in Crossmichael. It was to me of all days the day bitterest and blackest. I have indeed good cause to remember it.

Right well was I advised that, so far as the ministers of the Presbytery were concerned, there was no hope of any outcome favourable to me. They had only been scared from their prey for a moment by the stern threatening of the folk of the parish. The People's Paper in particular had frightened them like a sentence of death. But now they were free to make an end.

My brother Hob was keen to head a band pledged to keep them out of Crossmichael Kirk also. But I forbade him to cross the water.

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'Keep your own kirk and your own parish bounds if ye like, but meddle not with those of your neighbours!' I told him. 'Besides ye would only drive them to another place, where yet more bitterly they would finish their appointed work!'

But though the former stress of trial was over, this day of quiet was far harder to bear than the day before. For, then, with the excitation of battle, the plaudits of the people, the quick necessities of verbal defence against many adversaries, my spirits were kept up. But now there was none in the manse beside myself, and I took to wandering up and down the little sequestered kirk-loaning, thinking how that by this time the Presbytery was met to speed my doom, and that the pleasant place which knew me now would soon know me no more for ever.

As I lingered at the road-end, thinking how much I would have given for a heartening word, and vaguely resolving to betake me over to the house of Drumglass, where at the least I was sure of companionship and consolation, I chanced to cast my eyes to the southward, and there along the light grey riverside track I beheld a lady riding.

As she came nearer, I saw that it was none other than Mistress Mary Gordon. I thought I had never seen her look winsomer—a rounded lissom form, a perfect seat, a dainty and well-ordered carriage.

I stood still where I was and waited for her to pass me. I had my hat in my hand, and in my heart I counted on nothing but that she should ride by me as though she saw me not.

But on the contrary, she reined her horse and sat waiting for me to speak to her.

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So I went to her bridle-rein and looked up at the face, and lo! it was kindlier than ever I had seen it before, with a sort of loving pity on it which I found it very hard to bear.

'Will you let me walk by your side a little way?' I asked of her. For as we had parted without a farewell, so on this bitterest day we met again without greeting.

'My Lady Mary,' I said at last, 'I have gone through much since I went out from your house at Earlstoun. I have yet much to win through. We parted in anger but let us meet in peace. I am a man outcast and friendless, save for these foolish few in this parish who to their cost have made my quarrel theirs.'

At this she looked right kindly down upon me and paused a little before she answered.

'Quintin,' she said, 'there is no anger in my heart anywhere. There is only a great wae. I have come from the place of Balmaghie where my cousin Kate of Lochinvar waits her good father's passing.'

'And ride you home to the Earlstoun alone?' I asked.

'Aye,' she said, a little wistfully. And the saying cheered me. For this river way was not the girl's straight road homeward, and it came to me that mayhap Mary Gordon had wished to meet and comfort me in my sorrow.

'My father is abroad, we know not well where,' she said, 'or doubtless he would gladly support you in the way that you have chosen. Perhaps your way is not my way, but it must be a good way of its kind, the way of a man's conscience.'

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She reached down a hand to me, which I took and pressed gratefully enough.

It was then that we came in sight of the white house of Drumglass sitting above the water-meadows. At the first glimpse of it the Lady Mary drew away her hand from mine.

'Is it true,' she said, looking at the blue ridges of Cairnsmore in the distance, 'that which I have been told, that you are to wed a daughter of that house?'

I inclined my head without speech. I knew that the bitterest part of my punishment was now come upon me.

'And did you come straight from the Earlstoun to offer her also your position, your well-roofed manse, your income good as that of any laird?'

We had stopped in a sheltered place by the river where the hazel bushes are many and the gorse grows long and rank, mingling with the bloom and the fringing bog-myrtle.

'My Lady Mary,' said I, after a pause, 'I offered her not anything. I had nothing to offer. But in time of need she let me see the warmth of her heart and—I had none other comfort!'

'Then upon this day of days why are you not by her side, that her love may ease the smart of your bitter outcasting?'

'In yonder kirk mine enemies work my doom,' said I, pointing over the water, 'and ere another sun rise I shall be no more minister of Balmaghie, but a homeless man, without either a roof-tree or a reeking ingle. I have nothing to offer any woman. Why should I claim this day any woman's love?'

'Ah,' she said, giving me the strangest look, 'it is her hour. For if she loves you, she would fly today to

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share your dry crust, your sapless bite. See,' she cried, stretching out her hand with a large action, 'if Mary Gordon loved a man, she would follow him in her sark to the world's end. If so be his eyes had looked the deathless love into hers, his tongue told of love, love, only of love. Ah, that alone is worth calling love which feeds full on the scorns of life and grows lusty on black misfortune!'

'Lady Mary,' I began.

But she interrupted me, dashing her hand furtively to her face.

She pointed up towards the house of Drumglass.

'Yonder lies your way, Quintin MacClellan. Go to the woman you love— who loves you.'

She lifted the reins from the horse's neck and would have started forward, but again I had gotten her hand. Yet I only bent and kissed it without word, reverently and sadly as one kisses the brow of the dead.

She moved away without anger and with her eyes downcast. But on the summit of a little hill she half turned about in her saddle and spoke a strange word.

'Quintin,' she said, 'wherefore could ye not have waited? Wherefore kenned ye no better than to take a woman at her first word?'

And with that she set the spurs to her beast and went up the road toward the ford at the gallop, till almost I feared to watch her.

For a long time I stood sadly enough looking after her. And I grant that my heart was like lead within me. My spirit had no power in it. I cried out to God to let me die. For it was scarce a fair thing that she

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should have spoken that word now when it was too late.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

BEHIND THE BROOM

But this 30th of December had yet more in store for me. The minting die was yet to be dented deeper into my heart.

For, as I turned me about to go back the way I came, there by the copse side, where the broom grew highest, stood Jean Gemmell, with a face suddenly drawn thin, grey-white and wan like the melting snow.

‘Jean!’ I cried, ‘what do ye there?’

She tried to smile, but her eyes had a fixed and glassy look, and she seemed to be mastering herself so that she might speak.

I think that she had a speech prepared in her heart, for several times she strove to begin, and the words were always the same. But at last all that she could say was no more than this, ‘You love her?’

And with a little hand she pointed to where the Lady Mary had disappeared. I could see it shaking like a willow leaf as she held it out.

‘Jean,’ said I, kindly as I could, ‘what brought you so far from home on such a bitter day? It is not fit. You will get your death of cold.’

‘I have gotten my death,’ she said, with a little gasping laugh, ‘I have gotten my sentence. Do not I take it well?’

And she tried to smile again.

Then I went quickly to her, and caught her by the hand, and put my arm about her. For I feared that she would fall prostrate where she stood.

Notwithstanding, she kept on smiling through unshed tears, and never for a moment took her eyes off my face.

‘I heard what you and she said. Yes, I listened. A great lady would not have listened. But I am no better than a little cot-house lass, and I spied upon you. Yes, I hid among the broom. You will never forgive me.’

I tried to hush her with kind words, but somehow they seemed to pass her by. I think she did not even hear them.

‘You love her,’ she said; ‘yes, I know it. Jonita told me that from the first—that I could never be your wife, though I had led you on. Yes, I own it. I tried to win you. A great lady would not. But I did. I threw myself in your way. Shamelessly I cast myself—Jonita says it—into your arms! Ah, God,’ she broke off with a little frantic cry, sinking her head between her palms quickly, and then flinging her arms down. ‘And would I not have cast myself under your feet as readily, that you might trample me? I know I am not long for this world. I ken that I have bartered away eternity for naught. I have lied to God. And why not? You that are a minister, tell me why not? Would not I gladly barter all heaven for one hour of your love on earth? You may despise me, but I loved you. Yes, she is great, fair, full of length of days and pride of life—the Lord of Earlstoun's daughter. Yet—and yet—and yet, she could not love you better than I. In that I defy her!

‘And she shall have you—yes, I will give you up to her. For that is the one way an ignorant lass can love. They tell me that by tomorrow will be no longer minister. You will be put out of the manse

like a bird out of a harried nest. And at first I was glad when I heard it. For (thought I) he will come and tell me. We will be poor together. She said the truth, for indeed she knoweth somewhat, this Lady Mary— 'Love is not possessions!' No, but it is possessing. And I had but one— but one! And that she has taken away from me.'

She lifted her kerchief to her lips, for all suddenly a fit of coughing had taken her.

In a moment she drew it away, glanced at it quickly, and lo! it was stained with a clear and brilliant red.

Then she laughed abruptly, a strange, hollow-sounding little laugh.

'I am glad—glad,' she said. 'Ah! this is my warrant for departure. Well do I ken the sign, for I mind when my brother Andrew saw it first. Quintin, dear lad, you will get her yet, and with honour.'

'Come, Jean,' said I, gently as I could, 'the air is shrewd. You are ill and weak. Lean on my arm, and I will take you home.'

She looked up at me with dry, brilliant eyes. There was nothing strange about them save that the lids seemed swollen and unnaturally white.

'Quintin,' she made answer, smiling, 'it was foolish from the first, was it not, lad o' my love? Did you ever say a sweet thing to me, like one that comes courting a lass in the gloaming? Say it now to me, will you not? I would like to hear how it would have sounded.'

I was silent. I seemed to have no words to answer her with.

She laughed a little.

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'I forgot. Pardon me, Quintin. You are in trouble today—deep trouble. I should not add to it. It is I who should say loving things to you. But then—then— you would care more for flouts and anger from her than for all the naked sweetness of poor Jean Gemmell's heart.'

And the very pitifulness of her voice drew a cry of anger out of my breast. At the first sound of it she stopped and leaned back in my arms to look into my face. Then she put up her hand very gently and patted me tenderly on the cheek like one that comforts a fretful fractious child.

'I vex you,' she said, 'you that have overmuch to vex you. But I shall not vex you long. See,' she said, 'there is the door. Yonder is my father standing by it. He is looking at us under his hand. There is Jonita, too, and your brother Hob. Shall we go and tell them that this is all a mistake, that there is to be no more between us?—that we are free— free, both of us— you to wed the Lady Mary, I to keep my tryst—to keep my tryst— with Death!'

At the last words her voice sank to a whisper.

Something broke in her throat and seemed to choke her. She fell back in my arms with her kerchief again to her mouth.

They saw us from the door, and Alexander-Jonita came flying towards us like the wind over the short grass of the meadow.

Jean took her kerchief away, without looking at it this time. She lifted her eyes to mine and smiled very sweetly.

'I am glad—glad,' she whispered; 'do not be sorry, Quintin. But do just this one thing for me, will you, lad— but only this one thing. Do not tell them. Let

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us pretend. Would it be wrong, think you, to pretend a little that you love me? You are a minister, and should know. But, if you could—why, it would be so sweet. And then it would not be for long, Quintin.'

She spoke coaxingly, and withal most tenderly.

'Jean, I do love you!' I cried.

And for the first time in my life I meant it. She seemed to be like my sister Anna to me.

By this time, seeing Jonita coming, she had recovered herself somewhat and taken my arm. At my words she pressed it a little, and smiled.

'Oh,' she said, 'you need not begin yet. Only before them. I want them to think that you love me a little, you see. Is it not small and foolish of me?'

'But I do—I do truly love you, Jean,' I cried. 'Did you ever know me to tell a lie?'

She smiled again and nodded, like one who smiles at a child who has well learned his lesson.

Alexander-Jonita came rushing up.

'Jean, Jean, where have you been? What is the matter?'

'I have been meeting Quintin,' she said, with a bright and heavenly look; 'he has been telling me how he loves me.'

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

JEAN GEMMELL'S BARGAIN WITH GOD

Yet more grimly bitter than the day of December the thirtieth fell the night. I wandered by the bank of the river, where the sedges rustled lonely and dry by the marge, whispering and chuckling to each other that a forlorn, broken man was passing by. A smurr of rain had begun to fall at the hour of dusk, and the slight ice of the morning had long since broken up. The water lisped and sobbed as the wind of winter lapped at the ripples, and the peat-brew of the hills took its sluggish way to the sea.

Over against me, set on its hill, I saw the lighted windows of the kirk of Crossmichael. Well I knew what that meant. Mine enemies were sitting there in conclave. They would not rise till I was no more minister of the Kirk of Scotland: They would thrust me out, and whither should I go? To what folk could I minister—an it were not, like Alexander-Jonita, to the wild beasts of the hills? A day before I should have been elated at the thought. But now, for the first time, I saw myself unworthy.

Who was I, that thought so highly of myself, that I should appoint me Standard Bearer of the noble banner of the Covenants. A man weak as other men! Nay, infinitely weaker and worse. The meanest hind who worked in the fields to bring home four silver shillings a week to his wife and bairns was better than I.

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A Standard Bearer! I laughed now at the thought, and the rushes by the water's edges chuckled and sneered in answering derision.

A Standard Bearer, God wot! Renegade and traitor, rather; a man who could not keep his plain vows, whose erring and wandering heart went after vanities; one that had broken a maiden's heart—unwitting and unintending, did he pretend? Faugh! that was what every Lovelace alleged as his excuse.

I had thought myself worthy to do battle for the purity of the Kirk of my fathers. I had pretended that her independence, her position and her power were dearer than life to me. I saw it all now. It was mine own place and position I had been warring for.

Also had I not set myself above my brethren? Had I not said, 'Get far from me, for am I not holier than thou?'

And God, who does not pay His wages on Saturday night, had waited. So now He came to me and said, 'Who art thou, Quintin MacClellan, that thou shouldst dare to touch the ark of God?'

And as I looked across the dark waters I saw the light burn clearer and clearer in the kirk of Crossmichael. They were lighting more candles that they might see the better to make an end.

'God speed them,' cried I, in the darkness; 'they are doing God's work. For they could do nothing except it were permitted of Him. Shall I step into the boat that rocks and clatters with the little wavelets leaping against its side? Shall I call John the ferryman and go over and make my submission before them all?'

I could tell them what an unworthy, forsworn, ill-hearted man I am.

Thus I stood by the riverside. Almost I had lifted up my voice to cry aloud that I would make this acknowledgment and reparation, when through the darkness I saw a shape approach.

A voice said in my ear, 'Come—Jean Gemmell is taken suddenly ill. She would see you at once.'

Then I was aware that this 30th of December was to be my great day of judgment and wrath, when the six vials were to be loosed upon me. I knew that the Lord whose name I had taken in vain was that day to smite me with a great smiting, because, being unworthy, I had put out my hand to stay the ark of the covenant of God.

'Hob,' said I, for it was my brother who had come to summon me, 'is she yet alive?'

'Alive!' said he, abruptly. 'Why, bless the man, she wants you to marry her.'

'Marry' said I, 'I am a minister of the kirk. I have ever spoken against irregular marriages. How can I marry without another minister?'

Hob laughed a short laugh. He never thought much of my love-making.

'Better marry than burn!' quoth he, abruptly. 'Mr. Hepburn, of Buittle Kirk, is here. He came over to hearten you in the day of your adversity.'

Then I recognised the hand of God in the thing and bowed my head.

So in an aching expectant silence, hearing only a poor divided heart pulse within me, I followed Hob over the moor, and up by the sides of the frozen mosses to the house of Drumglass. He knew the way blindfold, which shows what a wonderful gift he had among the hills. For I myself had gone that way ten times for his once. Yet that night, save for my

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brother, I had stumbled to my hurt among the crags.

Presently we came to the entering in of the farmyard. Lights were gleaming here and there, and I saw some of the servant men clustered at the stable door.

There was a hush of expectation about the place, as if they were waiting for some notable thing which was about to happen.

Nathan Gemmell met me in the outer hall, and shook me by the hand silently, like a chief mourner at a funeral. Then he led the way into the inner room. Hepburn came forward also, and took my hand. He was a man of dark and determined countenance, yet with singularly lovable eyes which now and then unexpectedly beamed kindness.

Jean sat on a great chair, and beside her stood Alexander-Jonita.

When I came in Jean rose firmly to her feet. She looked about her with a proud look like one that would say, 'See, all ye people, this is he!'

'Quintin!' she said, and laying her thin fingers on my shoulders, she looked deep into my eyes.

Never did I meet such a look. It seemed to be compound of life and death, of the love earthly and the love eternal.

'Good friends,' she said, calmly turning to them as though she had been the minister and accustomed to speak in the hearing of men, 'I have summoned my love hastily. I have somewhat to say to him. Will you leave us alone for ten minutes? I have a word to say in his ear alone. It is not strange, is it, at such a time?'

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And she smiled brightly upon them, while I stood dumb and astonished. For I knew not whence the lass, ordinarily so still and fond, had gotten her language. She spoke as one who has long made up his mind, and to whom fit and prepared words come without effort.

When they were gone she sat down on the chair again, and, taking my hand, motioned me to kneel down beside her.

Then she laid her hand to my hair and touched it lightly.

‘Quintin,’ she said, ‘you and I have not long to sit sweethearting together. I must say quickly that which I have to say. I am, you will peradventure think, a bold, immodest lass. You remember it was I who courted you, compelled you, followed you, spied on you. But then, you see, I loved you. Now I want to ask you to marry me!’

‘Nay,’ she said, interrupting my words more with her hand than her voice, ‘misjudge me not. I am to die—to die soon. It has been revealed to me that I have bartered the life eternal for this. And, since so it is, I desire to drink the sweetness of it to the cup’s bottom. I have made a bargain with God. I have prayed, and I have promised that if He will put it in your heart to wed with me for an hour, I will take with gratitude and thankfulness all that lies waiting over there, beyond the Black River.’

She waved her hand down toward the Dee water.

I smiled and nodded hopefully and comfortingly to her. At that moment I felt that nothing was too great for me to do. And it mattered little when I married her. I had ever meant to be true to her— save in that which I could not help, the love of my heart of

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hearts, which, having been another's from the beginning was not mine to give.

Jean Gemmell smiled.

'I thank you, Quintin,' she said, 'this is like you, and better than I deserve. Had it been a matter of days or weeks I would never have troubled you. But 'tis only the matter of an hour or two!'

She paused a little, stroking my head fondly.

'And afterwards you will say, remembering me, *'Poor young thing, she loved me, loved me truly!'* Ah, Quintin, I think I should have made you a good wife. Love helps all things, they say. Put your hand below my head, Quintin. Tell me again that you love me. Sweetheart' (now she was whispering), 'do you know I have to tell you all that you should say to me? Is that fair—that I should make love to you and to myself too?'

I groaned aloud.

'God help us, Jean,' I said, 'we shall yet be happy together.' And at the moment I meant it. I felt that a lifetime of sacrifice would not make up for such love.

She patted me on the head pacifyingly as if I had been a fractious bairn that needed humouring.

'Yes, yes, then,' she said, soothingly, 'we shall be happy, you and I. What was it you said the other Sabbath day? I knew not what it meant then. But methinks I begin to understand now— passing the love of woman!'

The cough shook her, but she strove to hide it, going on quickly with her words like one who has no time to lose.

'That is the way I love you, Quintin, 'passing the love of women.' Why, I do not even grudge you to her.'

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She smiled again, and said cheerfully, 'Now we will call them in.'

I was going to the door to do it according to her word, for that night we all obeyed her as though she had been the Queen. I was almost at the door when she rose all trembling to her feet and held out her arms entreatingly.

'Quintin, Quintin, kiss me once,' she said, 'once before they come.'

I ran to her and kissed her on the brow. 'Oh, not there! On the mouth. It is my right. I have paid for it!' she cried. And so I did.

Then she drew down my head and set her lips to my ear. 'I lied to you, laddie— yes, I lied. I do grudge you to her. Oh, I do, I do!'

And for the first time one mighty sob caught her by the throat and rent her.

Nevertheless she straightened herself with her hand to her breast, like a wounded soldier who salutes his general ere he dies, and commanded her emotion. 'Yes,' she said, looking upwards and speaking as if to one unseen, 'I will play the game fairly; I have promised and I will not repine, nor go back on my word!'

She turned to me, 'It is not a time for bairn's greeting. We are to be married, you and I, are we not? Call them in.'

And she laughed a little bashfully and fitly as the folk came in and smiled to one and the other as they entered.

Then to me she beckoned.

'Come and hold my hand all the time. Clasp my fingers firmly. Do not let them go lest I slip away too

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soon, Quintin. I need your hand in mine— for tonight, Quintin, just only for this one night!’

Even thus Jean Gemmell and I were married.

And after all was done I laid her on her bed, and she rested there till near the dawning with my hand firmly held in hers. Mostly her eyes were shut, but every now and then she would smile up at me like one that encourages another in a weary wait.

Once she said, ‘Isn't it sweet?’

And then again, and near to the gloaming of the morn, she whispered, ‘It will not be long now, laddie mine?’

Nor was it, for within an hour the soul of Jean Gemmell went out in one long loving look, and with the faintest murmur of her lips which only my ear could catch— ‘Passing the love of women,’ she said, and again, ‘passing the love of women!’

And it was my hand alone that spread the fair white cloth over her dead face which still had the smile upon it, and over the pale lips that she had asked me to kiss.

Then, as I stumbled blindly down the hill, I looked beyond the dark and sluggish river rolling beneath over to the Kirk of Crossmichael. And even as I stood looking, the lights in the windows went out. It was done. I was a man in one day widowed, forsaken, outcast.

But more than kirk or ministry or even Christ's own covenant, I thought upon Jean Gemmell.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

RUMOUR OF WAR

[Connect and Addition by Hob MacClellan.]

The crown had indeed been set upon the work. The business, as said the Right Reverend Presbytery, was finished, and with well-satisfied hearts the brethren went back to their manses.

It was long ere in his private capacity my brother could lift up his head or speak to us that were about him. The dark day and darker night of the 30th of December had sorely changed him. He was like one standing alone, the world ranged against him. Then I that was his brother according to the flesh watched him carefully. Never did he pace by the rivers of waters nor yet climb the heathery steeps of the Dornal without a companion. There were times when almost we feared for his reason. But Quintin MacClellan, the deposed minister of Balmaghie, was not the stuff of which self-slayers are made.

When it chanced that I could not accompany him, I had nothing to do but arrange with Alexander-Jonita, and she would take the hill or the water's edge, silent as a shadow, tireless as a young deer. And with her to guard I knew that my brother was safe.

Never did he know that any watched him, for during these days he was a man walking with shadows. I think he never ceased blaming himself for poor Jean's death. At any rate Quintin

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MacClellan was a changed man for long after that night.

My mother came down from Ardarroch to bide a while with him, and at orra times he aroused himself somewhat to talk with her. But when she began to speak of the ill-set Presbytery, or even of the more familiar things at home—the nowt, the horse, and the kindly kye—I, who watched every shade on Quintin's face as keenly as if he had been my sweetheart, knew well that his mind was wandering. And sometimes I thought it was set on the dead lass, and sometimes I thought that he mourned for the public misfortune which had befallen him.

To the outer world, the world of the parish and the countryside, he kept ever a brave face. He preached with yet more mighty power and acceptance. The little kirk was crowded Sabbath after Sabbath. Those who had once spoken against him did it no more openly in the parish of Balmaghie.

With calm front and assured carriage he went about his duties, as though there were no Presbyteries nor forces military to carry out his sentence of removal and deposition.

Only the chief landowners wished him away. For mostly they were men of evil life, rough-spoken and darkly tarred with scandal. My brother had been over-faithful with them in reproof. For it was of Quintin that an old wife had said, 'God gie thee the fear o' Himsel', laddie! For faith, ye haena the fear o' man about ye!'

But there were others who could take steps as well as Presbyteries and officers of the law.

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Alexander-Jonita rode like a storm-cloud up and down the glen and listed the lads to do her will, as indeed they were ever all too ready to do. Her father, with several of the elders, men grave and reverend, met to concert measures for defending the bounds, lest the enemy should try to oust their minister out of his 'warm nest,' as they called the manse which covered down under lee of the kirk.

So it came about that there was scarce a man in Balmaghie who was not enrolled to protect the passage perilous of kirk and manse. The parish became almost like a defended city or an entrenched camp. There were watchers upon the hilltops everywhere. Week-day and Sabbath-day they abode there. All the fords were guarded, the river-fronts patrolled, for save on the wild and mountainous side our parish is surrounded by waters deep and broad or else rapid and dangerous.

Did a couple of ministers approach from Crossmichael to 'preach the kirk vacant' their boat was pushed back again into the stream, and a hundred men stood in line to prevent a landing. Yet all was carried out with decency and order, as men do who have taken a great matter in hand and are prepared to stand within their danger.

The elders also held mysterious colloquies with men from a distance, who went and came to their houses under cloud of night. There was discipline and drill by Gideon Henderson and other former officers of the Scotch Dutch regiments. I remember a muster on the meadows of the Duchrae at which a stern-faced man; with his face half muffled, came and put us through our duty. I knew by the tones of his voice that this was none other than the Colonel

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Sir William Gordon who had marched with us to Edinburgh in the great convention year.

But the climax was yet to come.

It was in July that the Sheriff had first tried in vain to land at the Kirk-Knowe in order to expel my brother from his manse. But a hundred men had started up out of the bushes, and with levelled pistols turned the boat back again to the further shore.

Next there was a gathering of the Presbytery at Cullenoeh, under the wing of the Laird of Balmaghie, to concert measures with the other landowners, who in time past had often smarted under Quintin's rebuke. It was to be held at the inn, and the debate was to settle many things.

But alas! when the day came every room in the hostel was filled with armed men, so that there was no place for the reverend fathers and their terrified hosts.

So without in the wide spaces where four roads meet, the Presbyters one by one addressed the people, if addresses they could be called, which were interrupted at every other sentence.

It was Warner, the father of the Presbytery, who was speaking when I arrived. He was one of those who had sat safe and snug under the King's indulgences and agreements in the days of persecution.

'People of Balmaghie,' he cried, 'hearken to me. Ye are supporting a man that is no minister, a man outed and deposed. Your children will be

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unbaptized, your marriages unblessed, yourselves excommunicated, because of this man!

'Maister Warner,' cried a voice from the crowd, which I knew for that of Drumglass, 'I am auld enuch to mind how ye were a member in the Presbytery at Sunday-wall that sat on Richard Cameron in order to depose him. Now ye wad spend your persecuting breath on our young minister. Gang hame, man, and think on your latter end!'

But, indeed, as half-a-dozen bare swords were within a yard of his nose, Mr. Warner might quite as well have thought on his latter end where he was.

Then it was Cameron's turn. But him the people would not listen to on any protest, because he had been accounted chief agent and mover in the process of law against their minister.

'Better ye had died at Ayrsmoss wi' you twa brithers,' they cried to him; 'man, ye'll never win nearer to them than Kirkcudbright town. And Guid kens that's an awesome lang road frae heeven!'

To Telfair the Ghost-seer of Rerrick, they cried, when he strove to say a word, 'What for did ye no bring the deil wi' ye in a bag? Man, ye are ower great wi' him. But there's neither witch nor warlock can look at MacClellan's cup nor come near our minister. It's easy seen Quintin MacClellan wasna in the Presbytery when the deil played sic pliskies doon about the Rerrick shores.'

Then came Boyd, who in his day had proclaimed King William at Glasgow Cross. But he found that an easier task than to shout down the cause of righteousness at the Four Roads of Pluckemin.

'You pay overmuch attention to the words of a man without honour!' This was his beginning, heard

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over all the crowd to the very midst of the street, for he had a great voice, which in a better cause would have been listened to like the voice of an apostle.

'Have ye paid back the siller the poor hill-folk spent on your colleging?' they asked him. 'Our minister paid for his ain schooling.'

The question was a feathered arrow in the white, but Boyd avoided it.

'Your minister is a man that should be ashamed to enter a kirk and preach the Gospel. Who would associate with the like of Quintin MacClellan?'

'Of a certainty not traitors and turncoats!' cried a deep voice in the background, toward which all turned in amazement.

It was that of Sir Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, the reputed head of the Societies, whose boast it had been that he could call seven thousand men to arms in the day of trouble.

I saw Boyd pale to the lips at sight of him.

'I do not argue with sectaries!' he stammered, turning on his heel.

'Nor I with knavish deceivers,' cried Alexander Gordon, 'of whom there are two here—Andrew Cameron and William Boyd. With this right hand I paid them the golden money for their education, wrung from the instant needs of poor hill folk who had lost their all and who depended often time on charity for their bite of breads. From men attained, from men earning in foreign lands the bitter bread of exile, from men and women imprisoned, shilling by shilling, penny by penny, that money came. It was ill-spent on men like these. William Boyd and Andrew Cameron swore solemn oaths. They took upon them the unbreakable and immutable

Covenants. In time came ministers, and we looked for light and wisdom and guidance from them. But we of the Faithful Remnant looked in, For lo! Caesar sat upon his throne, and gladly they bowed the knee. They licked gold from his garments like honey, mumbled his shoe-string that he might graciously permit them to sit at ease in his high places.

'Bah!' he cried, so that his voice was heard miles off on the hill-tops, 'out upon all such cowards and traitors! And now, folk of this parish, will ye let such scurril loons persuade you to give up your true and faithful minister, on whose tongue is the word of truth, and in whose heart is no fear of the face of any man?'

The frightened Presbyters melted before him, some of them swarming off with the men of evil life—the lairds and heritors of the parish. Others mounted their horses and rode homeward as if the devil of Rerrick himself had been after them.

Thus was ended the Disputation of Cullenoch near to Clachanpluck, in the shaming of those that withstood us.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

ALEXANDER-JONITA'S VICTORY

But as for my brother, concerning whom was all this pother, he took no hand at all in the matter. If the people wished him to abide with them, they must maintain him there. Contrariwise, if the Master he served had other fields of labour, he would break down dykes and make plain his path before him.

But as it was, he went about as usual with his pilgrim staff in his hand visiting the sick, succouring the poor, lifting up the head of weakness and pain.

On the day when the Sheriff came with his men to the water-edge, Quintin saw from the manse window a little cloud of men running hither and thither upon the river-bank.

'There is surely some great ploy of fishing afoot!' he said, quietly, and so let his eyes fall again contentedly upon his book.

'Faith, 'tis easy to hoodwink a learned man,' cried Alexander-Jonita when I told her.

It was at this time that I grew to love the lass yet more and more. For she flashed hither and thither, and whereas she had been no great one for housework hitherto, now since her sister's death she would be much more indoors. Also, with the old man her father, she was exceedingly patient in his often time garrulity. But specially in the defence of the parish on Quintin's behalf against the civil arm, she was indefatigable.

Often she would go dressed as a heartsome young callant, with clothes that her own needle had made,

her own deft fingers fashioned. And in cavalier attire, I tell you, Alexander-Jonita took the eyes of lass and lady. Once, when we rode by Dee bridge, a haughty dame sent back her servant to ask of me, whom she took to be a man-in-waiting, the name of the handsome young gentleman I served.

I replied with dignity, 'Tis the young Lord Alexander Johnstone,' which was as near the truth as I could come at a quick venture.

In that crowning ploy of which I have still to tell, it was Alexander-Jonita who played the leading part. The Sheriff, being admonished for his slackness by his legal superiors, and complained of by the reverend court of the Presbytery, resolved to make a bold push for it, and at one blow to take final possession of kirk and manse.

So he summoned the yeomanry of the province to meet him under arms at the village of Causewayend, which stands near the famous and beautiful loch of Carlinwark, on a certain day, under penalties of fine and imprisonment. And about a hundred men on horseback, all well armed and mounted, drew together on the day appointed. A fine breezy day in August, it was— when many of them doubtless came with small good-will from their corn-fields, where a winnowing wind searched the stooks till the ripe grain rustled with the parched well-won sound that is music to the farmer's ear.

But if the news of gathering of the yeomanry had been spread by summons, far more wide and impressive had been the counter call sent throughout the parish of Balmaghie.

For farmer and cotter alike knew that matters had come to the perilous pinch with us, and if it

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should be that the civil powers were not turned aside now, all the past watching and sacrifice would prove in vain.

It was about noon when the sentinels reported that the Sheriff and his hundred horsemen had crossed Dee water, and were advancing by rapid stages.

Now it was Jonita's plan to draw together the women also—for what purpose we did not see. But since she had summoned them herself it was not for any of us young men to say her nay.

So by the green roadside, a mile from the manse and kirk, Jonita had her hundred and fifty or more women assembled, old and young, mothers of families and wrinkled grandmothers thereof, young maidens with the blushes on their cheeks and the snood yet unloosed about their hair.

Faith, spite of the grandmothers, many a lad of us would have desired to be of that company that day! But Alexander-Jonita would have none of us. We were to keep the castle, so she commanded, with gun and sword. We were to sit in our trenches about the kirk, and let the women be our advance guard.

So when the trampling of horses was heard from the southward, and the cavalcade came to the narrows of the way, 'Halt!' cried Alexander-Jonita suddenly. And leaping out of the thicket like a young roe of the mountains, she seized the Sheriff's bridle rein. At the same moment her hundred and fifty women trooped out and stood ranked and silent right across the path of the horsemen.

'What do ye here? Let go, besom!' cried the Sheriff.

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'Go back to those that sent ye, Sheriff,' commanded Alexander-Jonita, 'for an' ye will put out our minister, ye must ride over us and wet the feet of your horses in our women's blood.'

'Out upon you, lass! Let men do their work!' cried the Sheriff, who was a jolly, rollicking man, and, moreover, as all knew, like most sheriffs, not unkindly disposed to the sex.

'Leave you our minister alone to do his work. I warrant he will not meddle with you,' answered Alexander-Jonita.

'Faith, but you are a well-plucked one!' cried the Sheriff, looking down with admiration on her, 'but now out of the way with you, for I must forward with my work.'

'Sir,' said the lass, 'ye may turn where ye are, and ride back whence ye came, for we will by no means let you proceed one step nearer to the kirk of Balmaghie this day!'

'Forward!' cried the Sheriff, loudly, to his men, thinking to intimidate the women.

'Stand firm, lasses!' cried Alexander-Jonita, clinging to the Sheriff's bridle-rein.

And the company of yeomanry stood still, for, being mostly householders and fathers of families, they could not bring themselves to charge a company of women, as it might be their own wives and daughters.

'Forward!' cried the Sheriff again.

'Aye, forward, gallant cavaliers!' cried Alexander-Jonita, 'forward, and ye shall have great honour. Sheriff! More famous than my Lord Marlborough shall be ye. Ride us down. Put your horses to their speed. Be assured we will not flinch!'

THE STANDARD BEARER

Time and again the Sheriff tried, now threatening and now cajoling; but equally to no purpose.

At last he grew tired.

'This is a thankless job,' he said, turning him about; 'let them send their soldiers. I am not obliged to fight for it.'

And so with a 'right about' and a wave of the hand he took his valiant horsemen off by the way they came.

And as they went they say that many a youth turned him on his saddle to cast a longing look upon Alexander-Jonita, who stood there tall and straight in the place where she had so boldly confronted the Sheriff.

Then the women sang a psalm, while Alexander-Jonita, leaping on a horse, rode a musket-shot behind the retiring force, till she had seen them safely across the river at the fords of Glenlochar, and so finally out of the parish bounds.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

THE ELDERS OF THE HILL FOLK

[The Narrative taken up again by Quintin MacClellan.]

It was long before I could see clearly the way I should go, after that dismal day and night of which I have told the tale.

It seemed as if there was no goodness on the earth, no use in my work, no right or excellency in the battle I had fought and the sacrifice I had made. Ought I not even now to give way? Surely God had not meant a man so poor in spirit, so easily cast down to hold aloft the standard of his ancient kirk.

But nevertheless, here before me and around me, a present duty, were my parish and my poor folk, so brave and loyal and steadfast. Could I forsake them? Daily I heard tidings of their struggling with the arm of flesh, though I now judge that Hob, in some fear of my disapproval, would not venture to tell me all.

Yet I misdoubted that I had brought my folk into a trouble which might in the event prove a grievous enough one for them.

But a kind Providence watched over them and me. For even when it came to the stormiest, the wind ceased and there was a blissful breathing time of quietness and peace.

Also there was that happened about this time which brought us at least for a time assurance and security within our borders.

THE STANDARD BEARER

It was, as I remember it, a gurly night in late September, the wind coming in gusts and swirling flaws from every quarter, very evidently blowing up for a storm.

Hob had come in silently and set him down by the fire. He was peeling a willow wand for his basket-weaving and looking into the embers. I could hear Martha Little, our sharp-tongued servant lass, clattering among her pots and pans in the kitchen. As for me I was among my books, deep in Greek, which to my shame I had been somewhat neglecting of late.

Suddenly there came a loud knocking at the outer door. I looked at my plaid hung up to dry, and bethought me who might be ill and in want of my ministrations upon such a threatening night.

I could hear Martha go to the door, and the low murmur of voices without.

Then the door of the chamber opened and I saw the faces and forms of half-a-dozen men in the passage.

'It has come at last,' thought I, for I expected that it might be the Sheriff and his men come to expel me from the kindly shelter of the manse. And though I should have submitted, I knew well that there would be bloodshed on the morrow among my poor folk.

But it turned out far otherwise.

The first who entered into the house-place was a tall, thin, darkish man, with a white pallor of face and rigid fallen-in temples. His eyes were fiery as burning coals, deep set under his bushy eyebrows. Following him came Sir Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun and in the lee of his mighty form three or

four others—douce, grave, hoddengrey men every one of them, earnest of eye and quiet of carriage.

Hob went out, unobserved as was his modest wont, and I motioned them with courtesy and observance to such seats as my little study; afforded.

As usual there were stools everywhere, with books upon them, and I observed with what careful scrupulosity the men laid these upon the table before sitting down. A Hebrew Bible lay open on the desk, and one after another stooped over it with an eager look of reverence.

I waited for them to speak.

It was the tall dark man who first broke silence.

‘Reverend sir,’ he said, ‘what my name is, it skills me not to tell. Enough that I am a man that has suffered much from the strivings of fleshly thorns, from the persecutions of ungodly man. But now I am charged with a mission and a message.

You have been cast out of the Kirk for adherence to the ancient way. Yet you have upheld in weakness and the frailty of mortal man the banner of the older Covenant. You are not ignorant that there are still societies and general meetings of the Suffering Remnant of men who have never declined, as you yourself have done, from the plain way of conscience and righteousness.

‘Yet the man doth not live who doeth good and sinneth not. So because we desire a minister, we would offer you the strong sustaining hand. Though you be not able at once to unite with us, nor for the present to take upon you our strait and heavy testimony, yet because you have been faithful to

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your lights we will stand by you and see that no man hinder or molest you.'

And the others, beginning with Sir Alexander Gordon, said likewise, 'We will support you!'

Then I knew that these men were the leaders and elders among the Hill Folk, and the ancient reverence to which I was born took hold on me. For I had been brought up among them as a lad, and my mother had spoken to me constantly of their great piety and abounding steadfastness in the day of trouble. These were they who had never tangled themselves with any entrapping engagements. They alone were no seceders, for they had never entered any State Church.

With a great price had I obtained this freedom, but these men were free-born.

'I thank you, sirs,' I answered, bowing my head. 'I have indeed sought to keep the Way, but I have erred so greatly in the past that I cannot hope to guide my path aright for the future. But one thing I shall at least seek after, and that is the glory of the great King, and the honour and independence of the Kirk of God in Scotland, Covenanted and Suffering!'

The dark stern-faced man spoke again.

'You are not yet one of us. You have yet a far road to travel. But I, that am old, see a vision. And one day you, Quintin MacClellan, shall serve tables among us of the Covenant. I shall not see it with the eyes of flesh. For even now my days are numbered, and the tale of them is brief. Farewell! Be not afraid. The Seven Thousand will stand behind you. No evil shall befall you here or other where. The Seven Thousand have sworn it—they have sworn it on the

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Holy Book, in the place of Martyrs and in the House of Tears!

And with that the six men went out through the door and were lost in the darkness of the night. And the wind from the waste swept in and the lowe of the candle flickered eerily as if they had been visitants from another world.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

It was not long after this that I found myself, almost against my will, skirting the side of the long Loch of Ken, on the road to the Great House of Earlstoun.

The lady of the Castle met me by the outer gate. When I came near her she lifted up her hands like a prophetess.

‘Three times have ye been warned! The Lord will not deal always gently with you. It is ill to run with the hares and hunt with the hounds!’

‘Mistress Gordon,’ said I, ‘wherein have I now offended?’ For indeed there was no saying what cantrip she had taken into her head.

‘How was it then,’ she said, ‘that the talk went through the countryside that ye were married to that lassie Jean Gemmell on her dying bed?’

‘It is true,’ said I, ‘but wherein was the sin?’

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘the sin was not in the marrying (though that was doubtless a silly caper and the lass so near Dead’s door), but in being married by a minister of the Kirk Established and uncovenanted.’

‘But what else could I have done?’ I hastened to make answer; ‘there are none other in all Scotland. For the Hill Folk have never had an ordained minister, since they took down James Renwick’s body from the gallows tree, and wrapped him gently in swaddling clothes for his burial.’

‘It is even true,’ she said, ‘but I would have gone unmarried till my dying day before I would have let

an Erastian servant of Belial couple me. But I forgot—'tis not long since you yourself escaped from that fold!

So there she stood so long on the step of the door and argued concerning the points of faith and doctrine without ever asking me in, that at last I grew weary, and begged that she would permit me to sit and refresh me on the step of the well-house, which was close at hand, even under the arch of the gateway. 'Aye, surely, ye may that!' she made me answer, and again took up her parable without further offer of hospitality.

And even thus they found us, when Mary Gordon and her father returned from the hill, walking hand in hand as was their wont.

'Wi' Janet, woman!' cried hearty Alexander, 'what ails you at the minister that ye have set him down there by the waters o' Babylon like a pelican in the wilderness? Could ye no hae asked the laddie ben and gied him bite and sup? Come, lad,' cried he, reaching me a hand, 'step up wi' me— there's brandy in the cupboard as auld as yoursen.'

But as for me I had thought of nothing but the look in Mary Gordon's eyes.

'Brandy!' cried Jean Hamilton. 'Alexander, think shame— you that are an elder and have likewise been privileged to be a sufferer for the cause of truth, to be speaking about French brandy at this hour o' the day. Do ye not see that I have been refreshing the soul of this poor, weak, downcast brother with appropriate meditations from my own spiritual diary and covenantings?'

She took again a little closely-written book from her swinging side-pocket.

THE STANDARD BEARER

'Let me see, we were, I think, at the third section, and the...'

'Lord help us — I'm awa!' cried Sandy Gordon suddenly, and vanished up the turnpike stair. Mary Gordon held out her hand to me in silence, permitted her eyes to rest a moment on mine in calm and friendly fashion, all without anger or embarrassment, and then softly withdrawing her hand she followed her father up the stairs.

I was again left alone with the Lady of Earlstoun.

'Tis a terrible cross that I must bear,' said that lugubrious professor, shaking her head, 'in that my man hath not the inborn grace of my brother— ah—that proven testifier, that most savoury professor. Sir Robert Hamilton. For our Sandy is a man that cannot stand prosperity and the quiet of the bielder bush. In time of peace he becomes like a rusty horologe. He needs affliction and the evil day, that his wheels may be taken to pieces, oiled with the oil of mourning, washed with tears of bitterness, and then set up anew. Then for a while he goes on not that ill.'

'Your husband has come through great trials!' I said. For indeed I scarce knew what to say to such a woman.

'Sandy—O aye!' cried his wife. 'But what are his trials to the ills which I have endured with none to pity? Have not I suffered his carnal doings well-high thirty years and held my peace? Have I not wandered by the burn-side and mourned for his sin? And now, worse than all, my children seek after their father's ways.'

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‘Janet Hamilton,’ cried a great voice from a window of the tower, ‘is there no dinner to be gotten this day in the house of Earlstoun?’

The lady lifted up her hands in holy horror.

‘Dinner, dinner— is this a time to be thinking about eating and drinking, when the land is full of ravening and wickedness, and when iniquity sits unashamed in high places?’

‘Never ye heed fash your thumb about the high places, Janet my woman,’ cried her husband from the window, out of which his burly, jovial head protruded. ‘E'en come your ways in, my denty, and turn the weelgaun mill-happer o' your tongue on yon lazy, guid-for-nae-thing besoms in the kitchen. Then the high places will never steer ye, and ye will hae a stronger stomach to wrestle wi' the rest o' the sins o' the times!’

‘Sandy, Sandy, ye were ever by nature a mocker! I fear ye have been looking upon the strong drink!’

‘Faith, lass,’ replied her husband, with the utmost good humour, ‘I was e'en looking for it— but the plague o' muckle o't there is to be seen.’

The Lady of Earlstoun arose forthwith and went into the tall tower, from the lower stories of which her voice, raised in flyting and contumelious discourse, could be distinctly heard.

‘Ungrateful madams,’ so she addressed her subordinates, ‘get about your business! Hear ye not that the Laird is quarrelling for his dinner, which ought to have been served half-an-hour ago by the clock! Nay, tell me not that I kepted you so long at the taking of the Book that there was no time left for the kirning of the butter. Never ought is lost by the service of the Lord.’

Thus I sat on the well kerb, listening to the poor wenches getting, as the saw hath it, their kail through the reek. But at that moment I observed Sandy Gordon's head look through the open window. He beckoned me to him with his finger in a cunning manner. I went up the stairs with intent to find the room where he was, but by a curious mischance I alighted instead on the long oaken chamber where I had been entertained of yore by Mistress Mary.

I found her there again, busy with the ordering of the table, setting out platters and silver of price, the like of which I had never seen, save as it might be in the house of the Laird of Girthon.

'Come your ways in, sir,' she said, briskly, 'and help me with my work.'

This I had been very glad to do, but that I knew her father was waiting for me above.

'Right willingly,' said I, 'but Earlstoun himself desires my presence aloft in his chamber.'

She gave her shoulders a dainty little shrug in the foreign manner she had learned from her cousin Kate of Lochinvar.

'I think,' she said, 'that the job at which ye would find my father can be managed without your assistance.'

So in the great chamber I abode very gratefully. And with the best will in the world I set myself to the fetching and carrying of dishes, the spreading of table-cloths fine as the driven snow. And all the time my heart beat fast within me. For I had never before been so near this maid of the great folk, nor so much as touched the robe that rustled about her, sweet and dainty.

And I do not deny (surely I may write it here) that the doing of these things afforded me many thrills of heart, the like of which I have not experienced oft times even on other and higher occasions.

And as I helped the Lady Mary, or pretended to help her rather, she continued to converse sweetly and comfortably to me. But all as it had been my sister Anna speaking— a thousand miles from any thought of love. Her eyes beneath the long dark lashes remained cool and quiet.

‘I am glad,’ she said, ‘that ye have played the man, and withstood your enemies even to the last extremity.’

‘I could do no other,’ I made answer.

‘There are very many who could very well have done other without stressing themselves,’ she said.

And I well knew that she meant Mr. Boyd, who was the neighbouring minister and a recreant from the Societies.

Then she looked very carefully to the ordering of certain wild flowers, which like a bairn she had been out gathering, and had now set forth in sundry flat dishes in the table-midst, in a fashion I had never seen before. More than once she spilled a little of the water upon the cloth, and cried out upon herself for her stupidity in the doing of it, discovering ever fresh delights in the delicate grace of her movements, the swinging of her dress, and in especial a pretty quick way she had of jerking back her head to see if she had gotten the colour and ordering of the flowers to her mind.

This I minded for long after, and even now it comes so fresh before me that I can see her at it now.

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'I heard of the young lass of Drumglass and her love for you,' she said presently, very softly, and without looking at me, fingering at the flowers in the shallow basins and pulling them this way and that.

I did not answer, but stood looking at her with my head hanging down, and a mighty weight about my heart.

'You must have loved her greatly?' she said, still more softly.

'I married her,' said I, curtly. But in a moment was ashamed of the answer. Yet what more could I say with truth? But I had the grace to add, 'Almost I was heartbroken for her death.'

'She was happy when she died, they said,' she went on, tentatively.

'She died with her hand in mine,' I answered, steadily, 'and when she could not speak any longer she still pressed it.'

'Ah! that is the true love which can make even death sweet,' she said. 'I should like to plant Lads' Love and None-so-pretty upon her grave.'

Yet all the while I desired to tell her of my love for herself, and how the other was not even a heat of the blood, but only for the comforting of a dying girl.

Nevertheless I could not at that time. For it seemed a dishonourable word to speak of one who was so lately dead, and, in name and for an hour at least, had been my wife.

Then all too soon we heard the noise of Sandy her father upon the garret stair, trampling down with his great boots as if he would bring the whole wood-work of the building with him bodily.

Mary Gordon heard it, too, for she came hastily about to the end of the table where I had stood

transfixed all the time she was speaking of Jean Gemmell.

She set a dish on the cloth, and as she brought her hand back she laid it on mine quickly, and, looking up with such a warm light of gracious wisdom and approval in her eyes that my heart was like water within me, she said: 'Quintin, you are a truer man than I thought. I love your silences better than your speeches.'

And at her words my heart gave a great bound within me, for I thought that at last she understood. Then she passed away, and became even more cold and distant than before, not even bidding me farewell when I took my departure. But as I went down the loaning with her father she looked out of the turret window, and waved the hand that had lain for an instant upon mine.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

THE FALL OF EARLSTOUN

It was toward the mellow end of August that there came a sough of things terrible wafted down the fair glen of the Kens, a sough which neither lost in volume nor in bitterness when it turned into the wider strath of the Dee.

It arrived in time at the Manse of Balmaghie, as all things are sure to turn manse ward ere a day pass in the land of Galloway.

One evening in the quiet space between the end of hay and the first sickle-sweep of harvest, Hob came in with more than his ordinary solemn staidness.

But he said nothing till we were over with the taking of the Book and ready to go to bed. Then as he was winding the watch I had brought him from Edinburgh he glanced up once at me.

'When ye were last at Earlstoun,' he said, 'heard ye any news?'

I thought he meant at first that Mary was to be married, and it may be that my face showed too clearly the anxiety of the heart.

'About Sandy himself?' he hastened to add.

'About Alexander Gordon?' cried I in astonishment. 'What ill news would I hear about Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun?'

He nodded, finished the winding of his horologe, held it gravely to his ear to assure himself that it was going, and then nodded again. For that was Hob's way.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘the Presbytery have had him complained of to them for drunkenness and worse. And they will excommunicate him with the greatest excommunication if he decline their authority.’

‘But Earlstoun is not of their communion,’ I cried, much astonished, the matter being none of the Presbytery’s business; ‘he is of the Hill-folk, an elder and mainstay among them for thirty years.’

‘The Presbytery have made it their business because he is a well-wisher of yours,’ said Hob. ‘Besides, the report of it has already gone abroad throughout the land, and they say that the matter will be brought before the next general meeting of the societies.’

‘And in the meantime?’ I began.

‘In the meantime,’ said Hob, ‘those of the Hill-folk who form the Committee of the Seven Thousand have suspended him from his eldership!’

Hob paused, as he ever did when he had more to tell, and was considering how to begin.

‘Go on, Hob,’ cried I— testily enough, I fear.

‘They say that his old seizure has come again upon him. He sits in an upper room like a beast, and will be approached by none. And some declare that, like King David, he feigns madness, others that he has been driven mad by the sin and the shame.’

Now this was sore and grievous tidings to me, not only because of Mary Gordon, but for the sake of the cause.

For Alexander Gordon had been during a generation the most noted Covenanter of the stalwart sort in Scotland. He had suffered almost unto death without wavering in the old ill times of Charles and James. He had languished long in

prison, both in the Castle of Edinburgh and that of Blackness. He had come to the first frosting of the hair with a name clear and untainted. And now when he stood at the head of the Covenanting remnant it was like the downfall of a god that he should so decline from his place and pride.

Then the other part of the news that the Presbytery, as the representatives and custodians of morals, were to lay upon him the Greater Excommunication was also a thing hard and bitter. For if they did so it inferred the penalties of being shut off from communion with man in the marketplace and with God in the closet. The man who spoke to the excommunicated partook of the crime. And though the power of the Presbytery to loose and to bind had somewhat declined of late, yet, nevertheless, the terror of the major anathema still pressed heavily upon the people.

Hob went soberly up to his bedroom. The boards creaked as he threw himself down, and I could hear him fall quiet in a minute. But sleep would not come to my eyelids. At last I arose from my naked bed and took my way down to the water-side by which I had walked oftentimes in dark days and darker nights.

Then as I was able I put before Him who is never absent the case of Alexander Gordon.

And I wrestled long as to what I should do. Sometimes I thought of him as my friend, and again I knew that it was chiefly for the sake of Mary Gordon that I was thus greatly troubled.

But with the dawning of the morning came some rest and a growing clearness of purpose— such as always comes to the soul of man when, out of the indefinite turmoil of perplexity, something to be

done swims up from the gulf and stands clear before the inward eye.

I would go to Earlstoun and have speech with Alexander Gordon. The Presbytery had condemned him unheard. His own folk of the Societies—at least, some of the elders of them —had been ready to believe an evil report and had suspended him from his office. He needed a minister's dealing, or at least a friend's advice. I was both, and there was all the more reason, because I was neither of the Kirk that had condemned nor of the communion which was ready to believe an ill report of its noblest and highest.

It was little past the dawning when, being still sleepless, I set my hat on my head, and, taking staff in hand, set off up the wet meadow-edges to walk to Earlstoun. I heard the blackcap sing sweetly down among the gall-bushes of the meadow. A blackbird turned up some notes of his morning song, but drowsily, and without the young ardour of spring and the rathe summer time. Suddenly the east brightened and rent. The day strode over the land.

I journeyed on, the sun beating hotly upon me. It was very evidently to be a day of fervent heat. Soon I had to take off my coat, and as I carried it country fashion over my shoulder the harvesters gave me good-day from the cornfields of the pleasant strath of the ken, and over the hated park-dykes which the landlords were beginning to build.

Mostly when I walked abroad I observed nothing, but today I saw everything with strange clearness, as one sometimes does in a vision or when stricken with fever.

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I noted how the red willow-herb grew among the river stones and set fire to little pebbly islands. The lilies, yellow and white, basked and winked belated on the still and glowing water. The cattle, both nolt and kye, stood knee-deep in the shallows—to me the sweetest and most summersome of all rural sights.

As I drew near to New Galloway a score of laddies squattered like ducks and squabbled like shrill scolding blackbirds in and out of the water, or darted naked through the copsewood at the loch's head, playing 'hide-and-seek' about the tree-trunks.

And through all pulsed the thought, 'What shall I say to my friend? Shall I be faithful in questioning, faithful in chastening and rebuke? Shall I take part with Mary Gordon's father, and for her sake stand and fall with him? Or are my message and my Master more to me than any earthly love?' I feared the human was indeed mightier in my heart of hearts. Nevertheless something seemed to arise within me greater than myself.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

LOVE OR DUTY

I passed by the little Clachan of St. John's Town of Dalry, leaving it stretching away up the braeface on my right hand. A little way beyond the kirk I struck into the fringing woods of Earlstoun which, like an army of trainbands in Lincoln green, beset the grey tower.

I was on the walk along which I had once before come with her. The water alternately gloomed and sparkled beneath. The fish sulked and waved lazy tails, anchored in the water-swirls below the falls, their heads steady to the stream as the needle to the pole.

The green of summer was yet untouched by autumn frosts, save for a russet hair or two on the outmost plumes of the birks that wept above the stream.

Suddenly something gay glanced through the wavering sunsprays of the woodland and the green scatter of the shadows. A white summer gown, a dainty hat white-plumed, but beneath the bright feather a bowed head, a girl with tears in her eyes—and lo! Mary Gordon standing alone and in sorrow by the water-pools of the Deuch.

I had never learned to do such things, and even now I cannot tell what it was that came over me. For without a moment's hesitation I kneeled on one knee, and taking her hand, I kissed it with infinite love and respect.

THE STANDARD BEARER

She turned quickly from me, dashing the tears from her face with her hand.

‘Quintin!’ she cried—I think before she thought.

‘Mary!’ I said, for the first time in my life saying the word to my lady’s face.

She held her hand with the palm pressed against my breast, pushing me from her that she might examine my face.

‘Why are you here?’ she asked anxiously, ‘you have heard what they say of my father?’

‘I have heard, and I come to know?’ I said quietly.

She clasped her hands in front of her breast and then let them fall loosely down in a sort of slack despair.

‘I will tell you,’ she said, ‘it is partly true. But the worst is not true!’

She was silent for a while, as if she were mastering herself to speak.

Then she burst out suddenly, ‘But what right have you or any other to demand such things of me? Is not my father Sir Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, and who has name or fame like him in all Scotland? They that accuse him are but jealous of him—even you would be glad like the others to see him humiliated—brought low!’

‘You do me wrong,’ said I, yet more quietly; ‘you know it. Mary, I came because I have no friends on earth like you and Alexander Gordon. And the thing troubled me.’

‘I know—I know,’ she said, distractedly. ‘I think it hath well-nigh driven me mad, as it hath my poor father.’

She put her hand to her forehead and pressed it, as if it had been full of a great throbbing pain.

I wished I could have held it for her.

Then we moved side by side a little along the path, both being silent. My thoughts were with hers. I saw her pain; I felt her pride, her reluctance to speak.

Presently we came to a retired place where there was an alcove cut out of the cliff, filled with all coolness and the stir of leaves.

Hither, as if moved by one instinct, we repaired. Mary sat her down upon the stone seat. I stood before her.

There was a long waiting without a word spoken, so that a magpie came and flicked his tail on a branch nearby without seeing us. Then cocking his eye downward, he fled with loud screams of anger and protestation.

'I will tell you all!' she said, suddenly.

But all the same it seemed as if she could not find it in her heart to begin.

'You know my father—root and branch you know him,' she said, at last; 'or else I could not tell you. He is a man. He has so great a repute, so full a record of bravery, that none dares to point the finger. Through all Scotland and the Low Countries it is sufficient for my father to say 'I am Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun.'

'But as I need not tell you, a very strong man is a very weak man. And so they trapped him, William Boyd, who called himself his friend, being the traitor. For my father had known him in Holland and aided him with money and providing when he studied as one of the lads of the Hill-folk at the University of Groningen.

Now this a man like William Boyd could not forgive—neither repay. But in silence he hated and bode his time. For, though I am but young, I see that nothing breeds hate and malice more readily than a helping hand extended to a bad man.

'So devising evil to my father in secret, he met him at the Clachan of Saint John as he came home from the market at Kirkcudbright, where he had been dining with Kenmure and my Lord Maxwell. Quintin, you know how it is with my father when he comes home from market—he is kind, he is generous. The world is not large enough to hold his heart. Wine may be in, but wit is not out.

'So Alexander Gordon being in this mood, Boyd and two or three of his creatures met him in the highway.

'My father had oftentimes thwarted and opposed Boyd. But now his stomach was warm and generous within him. So he cried to them, 'A fair good e'en to ye, gentlemen.'

'Whereat they glanced cunningly at one another, hearing the thick stammer in my father's voice.

'And good e'en to you, Earlstoun!' they answered, taking off their hats to him.

The courtesy touched my father. It seemed that they wished to be friends, and nothing touches a big careless gentleman like Alexander Gordon more than the thought that others desire to make up a quarrel and he will not.

'So with that he cried, 'Let us bury bygones and be friends.'

'Agreed,' answered Boyd, waving his hand jovially; 'let us go to the change-house and toast the reconciliation in a tass of brandy.'

'This he said knowing that my father was on his way from market.'

'For this,' said I, not thinking of my place and dignity, 'will I reckon with William Boyd.'

Mary Gordon went on without noticing my interruption.

'So though my father told them that he could not go, that his wife waited for him by the croft entrance and that his daughter was coming down the water-side to meet him, yet upon their crying out that he must not be henpecked in the matter of the drowning of an ancient enmity, my father consented to go with them.'

Mary Gordon looked before her a long time without speaking, as though little liking to tell what followed. 'They knew,' she said, 'that he was to preside that night at a meeting of the eldership and commissioners of the Hill-folk. So they brought him as in the change-house they had made him to the meeting.'

There was a long silence.

'And this was all?' I asked. For the accusation which had come to me had been far graver than this.

'As I live and must die, that is all. The other things which they testify that he did that night are but the blackness and foulness of their own hearts.'

'I will go speak with him,' I said, moving as to pass on.

Mary Gordon had been seated upon a wall which jutted out over the water. She leaped to her feet in an instant and caught me by the wrist, looking with an eager and passionate regard into my eyes.

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'You must not— you shall not!' she cried. 'My father is not to be spoken to. He is not himself. He has sworn that he will answer no man, speak to no man, have dealings with no man, till the shame be staunched and his innocency made to appear.'

'But I will bring him to himself,' I said, 'I will reason with him, and that most tenderly.'

'Nay,' she said, taking me eagerly by the breast of my coat, 'I tell you he will not listen to a word.'

'It is my duty,' I answered.

'Wherefore?' she cried, sharply. 'You are not his minister.'

'No,' said I, 'but I am more. I am both his friend and yours.'

'Do you mean to reprove him?' she asked.

'It is my duty—in part,' said I, for the thought of mine office had come upon me, and I feared that for this girl's sake I might even be ready ignominiously to demit and decline my plain duty.

'For that wherein he has given the unrighteous cause to speak reproachfully, I will reprove him,' I said. 'For the rest, I will aid, support, and succour him in all that one man may do to another. By confession of his fault, such as it has been, he may yet keep the Cause from being spoken against.'

'Ah, you do not know my father, to speak thus of him,' Mary Gordon cried, clasping her hands. 'When he is in his fury he cares for neither man nor beast. He might do you a hurt, even to the touching of your life. Ah, do not go to him.' (Here she clasped her hands, and looked at me with such sweet, petitionary graciousness that my heart became as wax within me.) 'Let him come to himself. What are reproof and hard words, besides the shame that

comes when such a man as my father sits face to face with the sins of his own heart?’

Almost I had given way, but the thought of the dread excommunication, and the danger which his children must also incur, compelled me.

‘Hear me, Mary,’ I said, ‘I must speak to him. For all our sakes—yours as well—I must go instantly to Alexander Gordon.’

She waved her hand impatiently.

‘Do not go,’ she said. ‘Can you not trust me? I thought you—you once told me that you loved me. And if you had loved me, I do not know, I might...’

She paused. A wild hope—warm, tender, gloriously insurgent, rose-coloured—welled up triumphantly in my heart. My blood hummed in my ears.

‘She would love me; she would give herself to me. I cannot offend her. This alone is my happiness. This only is life. What matters all else?’

And I was about to give way. If I had so much as looked in her face, or met her eyes, I must have fallen from my intent.

But I called to mind the path by which I had been led, the oath that had been laid upon me to speak faithfully. The lonely way of a man—a sinful man trying to do the right—gripped me like a vice, and compelled me against my will.

‘Mary,’ I said, solemnly, ‘I love you more than life—more, perchance, than I love God. But I cannot lay aside, nor yet shut out the doing of my duty.’

She thrust her hand out suddenly, passionately, from her, as if casting me out of her sight for ever. She set her kerchief to her eyes.

‘You have chosen!’ she cried. ‘Go, then!’

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'Mary,' I said, turning to follow her.

All suddenly she turned upon me and stamped her foot.

'I dare you to speak with me!' she cried, her eyes flashing with anger. 'I thought you were a man, and you are no better than a machine. You love! You know not the ABC of it. You have never passed the hornbook. I doubt not that you broke that poor lassie's heart down there in the farm by the water-side. She loved a stone and she died. Now you tell me that you love me, and the first thing I ask of you, you refuse, though it is for my own father, and I entreat you with tears!'

'Mary,' I began to say quietly, 'you do me great wrong. Let me tell you.'

But she turned away down the path. I followed after, and at the parting of the ways to house and stable she turned on me again like a lioness. 'Oh, go, I tell you! Go!' she cried. 'Do your precious duty. But from this day forth never, never dare to utter word to Mary Gordon again!'

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

THE DEMONIAK IN THE GARRET

As all may understand, it was with bowed head and crushed heart that I bent my steps towards the grey tower, sitting so stilly among the leafage of the wood above the water.

Duty is doubtless noble, and virtue its own reward. But when there is a lass in the case— why, it is somewhat harder to go against her will than to counter all the law and the prophets.

I went up the bank towards the tower of Earlstoun, and as I came near methought there was a strange and impressive silence over everything— like a Sabbath-day that was yet no common or canny Sabbath.

At the angle of the outer wall one Hugh Halliday, an old servant of the Gordons, came running toward me.

‘Minister, minister,’ he cried, ‘ye mauna come here. The maister has gotten the possession by evil spirits. He swears that if ever a minister come near him he will brain him, and he has taken his sword and pistols up into the garret under the roof, and he cries out constantly that if any man stirs him, he shall surely die the death.’

‘But,’ I answered, ‘he will not kill me, who have had no hand in the matter—me who have also been persecuted by the Presbytery and by them deposed.’

‘Ah, laddie,’ said the old man, shaking his palsied hand warningly at me, ‘ye little ken the laird, if ye think that when the power o’ evil comes ower him,

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he bides to think. He lets drive richt and left, and a' that remains to be done is but to sinder the dead frae the leevin, or to gather up the fragments that remain in baskets and corn-bags and sic-like. For instance, in the auld persecutin' days there was Gleg Toshie, the carrier, that was counted a great man o' his hands, and at the Carlin's Cairn Sandy—the laird I mean—cam' on Toshie spyin' on him, or so he thocht. And oor Maister near ended him when he laid hand on him.

'Haud aff,' cried Peter Pearson the curate, 'Wad ye kill the man, Earlstoun?'

'I would kill him and eat him too!' cries the laird, as he gied him aye the ither drive wi' his neive. O he's far frae canny when he's raised.'

'Nevertheless I will see him,' said I; 'I have a message to deliver.'

'Then I hope and trust ye hae made your peace wi' your Maker, for ye will come doon frae that laft a dead stiff corp and that ye'll leeve to see.'

By the gate the Lady of Earlstoun was walking to and fro, wringing her hands and praying aloud.

'Wrath, wrath, and dismay hath fallen on this house!' she cried. 'The five vials are poured out. And there yet remains the sixth vial. O Sandy, my ain man, that it should come to this! That ye should tak' the roofs like a pelican in the desert and six charges o' pooder in yon flask, forbye swords and pistols. And then the swearin'—nae minced oaths, but as braid as the back o' Cairnsmuir. Waes me for Sandy, the man o' my choice! A carnal man was Sandy a' the days o' him, a man no to be ruled nor yet spoken to, but rather like a lion to be withstood face to face.'

But then a little while and his spirit would come to him like the spirit of a little child.'

We could hear as we walked and communed a growling somewhere far above like the baffled raging of a caged wild beast.

'It is the spirit of the demoniac that is come to rend him,' she said. 'Hear to him, there he is; he is hard at it, cursing the Presbytery and a' ministers. He is sorest upon them that he has liked best, as, indeed, the possessed ever are. He says that he knows not why he is restrained from braining me—me that have been his wife these many sorrowful years. But thus far he hath been kept from doing any great injury. Even the servant man that brought the message from his master, William Boyd, summoning Alexander to appear before the Presbytery, he cast by main force into the well, and if the man had not caught at the rope, and so gone more slowly to the bottom, he would surely have been dashed to pieces.'

'But how long has he been thus?' I said. For as we listened, quaking, the noise waxed and grew louder. Then anon it would diminish almost like the howling or whimpering of a beaten dog, most horrid and uncanny to hear.

'Ever since yesterday at the hour when he gat the summons from the Presbytery,' said the lady of Earlstoun.

'And have none been near him since that time?'

'Only Mary,' she said; 'she took up to him a bowl of broth. For he never lifted his hand to her in his life. He bade her begone quickly, because he was no fit company for human kind any more. She asked him very gently to come to his own chamber and lie

down in peace. But he cried out that the ministers were coming, and that she must not stand in the way. For he was about to shoot them all dead, like the black hoodie-craws that pyke the young lambs' e'en!

'And a bonny bit lamb ye are, faither,' said Mary, trying to jest with him to divert his mind; 'a bonny lamb, indeed, with that great muckle heather besom of a beard.'

'But instead of laughing, as was his wont, he cursed her for an impudent wench, and told her to begone, that she was no daughter of his.'

'Has he been oftentimes taken with this seizure?' I asked.

'It has come to him once or twice since he was threatened with torture before the lords of the Privy Council, and brake out upon them all as has often been told— but never before like this.'

'I will go to him,' I said, 'and adjure him to return to himself. And I will exorcise the demon, if power be granted me of the Lord.'

'I pray you do not!' she cried, catching me and looking at me even more earnestly than her daughter had done, though, perhaps, somewhat less movingly. 'Let not your blood also be upon this doomed house of Earlstoun.'

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

THE CURSING OF THE PRESBYTERY

As gently as I could I withdrew from her grasp, and with a pocket Bible in my hand (that little one in red leather of the King's printers which I always carried about with me), I climbed the stair.

The word I had come so far to speak should not remain unspoken through my weakness, neither must I allow truth to be brought to shame because of the fears of the messenger.

So I mounted the turret stairs slowly, the great voice sounding out more and more clearly as I advanced. It came in sighs and bursts, alternating with low intervals filled with indistinct mutterings. Then again a great volley of cursing would shake the house, and in the afterclap of silence I could hear the waesome yammer of my lady's supplication beneath me outside the tower.

But within, save for the raging of the stormy voice, there was an uncanny silence. The dust lay thick where it had been left untouched for days by any hand of domestic. I glanced within the great oaken chamber where formerly I had spoken to Mary Gordon. It was void and empty. A broken glass of carven Venetian workmanship and various colours lay in fragments by the window. A stone jar with the great bung of Spanish cork stood on the floor. There was a crimson sop of spilled wine on the table of white scoured wood. The table-cloth of rich Spanish stuff wrought with arabesques had been tossed into the corner. A window was broken, and there were

stains on the jagged edges, as if someone had thrust his hand through the glass to his own hurt.

Nothing moved in the room, but in the thwart sunbeams the motes danced, and the unstable shadows of the trees without flecked the floor.

All the more because of this unwholesome quiet in the great house of Earlstoun, it was very dismaying to listen to the roll and thunder of the voice up there, speaking on and on to itself in the regions above.

But I had come at much cost to do my duty, and this I could not depart from. So I began to mount the last stairs, which were of wood, and exceedingly narrow and precipitous.

Then for the first time I could hear clearly the words of the possessed:

'Cast into deepest hell, Lord, if any power is left in Thee, the whole Presbytery of Kirkcudbright! Set thy dogs upon them, O Satan, Prince of Evil, for they have worked ill-will and mischief upon earth. Specially and particularly gie Andrew Cameron his paiks! Rub the fiery brimstone flame onto his bones, like salt into a new-killed swine. Scowder him with irons heated white hot. Tear his inward parts with twice-barbed fishing hooks. Gie William Boyd his bellyful of curses. Turn him as often on thy roasting-spit as he has turned his coat on the earth. Frighten wee Telfair wi' the uncanniest o' a' thy deils' imps. And as for the rest of them may they burn back and front, ingate and outgate, hide, hair, and harrigals, till there is nocht left o' them but a wee pluff o' ash, that I could hold like snuff between my fingers and thumb and blaw away like the white head o' the dandelion.'

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He came to an end for lack of breath, and I could hear him stir restlessly, thinking, perhaps, that he had omitted some of the Presbytery who were needful of a yet fuller and more decorated cursing.

I called up to him.

‘Alexander Gordon, I have come to speak with you.’

‘Who are you that dares giff-gaff with Alexander Gordon this day?’

‘I am Quintin MacClellan, minister of the Gospel in Balmaghie, a friend to Alexander Gordon and all his house.’

‘Get you gone, Quintin MacClellan, while ye may. I have no desire for fellowship with you. You are also of the crew of hell—the black corbies that cry ‘Glonk! Glonk!’ over the carcase of puir perishing Scotland.’

‘Hearken, Alexander Gordon,’ said I, from the ladder’s foot, ‘I have been your friend. I have sat at your table. A word is given me to speak to you, and speak it I will.’

‘And I also have a gun here that has a message rammed down its thrapple. I warn ye clear and fair, if ye trouble me at all with any of your clavers, ye shall get that message frae the black jaws of Bell-mouthed Mirren.’

And as I looked up the wooden ladder which led into the dim garret above me, I saw peeping through the angle of the square trap-door above me the wicked snout of the musket—while behind, narrowed to a slit, glinted, through a red mist of beard and hair, the eye of Sandy Gordon.

‘Ye may shoot me if ye will, Alexander,’ said I; ‘I am a man unarmed, defenceless, and so stand fully

within your danger. But listen first to that which I have to say.

You are a great man, laird of Earlstoun. Ye have come through much and seen many peoples and heard many tongues. Ye have been harried by the Malignants, prisoned by the King's men, and now the Presbytery have taken a turn at you, even as they did at me, and for the same reason.

You were ever my friend, Earlstoun, and William Boyd mine enemy. Therefore he was glad to take up a lying report against you that are my comrade; for such is his nature. Can the sow help her foulness, the crow his colour? Forbye, ye have given some room to the enemy to speak reproachfully. You, an elder of the Hill-folk, have collogued in the place of drinking with the enemies of our cause. They laid a snare for your feet, and like a simple fool ye fell therein. So much I know. But the darker sin that they witness against you—what say ye to that?’

‘It is false as the lies that are spewed up from the vent of Hell!’ cried the voice from the trap-door above, now hoarse and trembling. I had touched him to the quick.

‘Who are they that witness this thing against you?’

He was silent for a little, and then he burst out upon me afresh.

‘Who are you that have entered into mine own house of Earlstoun to threat and catechise me? Is Alexander Gordon a bairn to be harried by bairns that were kicking in swaddling clouts and buttock-hippens when he was at the head of the Seven Thousand? And who may you be? A deposed minister, a college jackdaw whom the other daws

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have warned from off the steeple. I will not kill you, Quintin MacClellan, but I bid you instantly evade and depart, for the spirit has bidden me fire a shot at the place where ye stand!’

‘Ye may fire your piece and slay your friend on the threshold of your house, an’ it please you, laird of Earlstoun,’ cried I, ‘but ye shall never say that he was a man unfaithful, a man afraid of the face of men!’

‘Stand from under, I say!’

Nevertheless I did not move, for there had grown up a stubbornness within me as there had done when the Presbytery set themselves to vex me. Then there befell what seemed to be a mighty clap of thunder. A blast of windy heat spat in my face; something tore at the roots of my hair; fire singed my brow, and the reek of sulphur rose stifling in my nostrils.

The demon-possessed had fired upon me. For a moment I knew not whether I was stricken or no, for there grew a pain hot as fire at my head. But I stood where I was till in a little the smoke began to lazily clear through the trap-door into the garret.

I put my hand to my head and felt that my brow was wet and gluey. Then I thought that I was surely sped, for I knew that men stricken in the brain by musket shot oft times for a moment scarce feel their wound. I understood not till later the reason of my escape, which was that the balls of Earlstoun’s fusil had no time to spread, but passed as one through my thick hair, snatching at it and tearing the scalp as they passed.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

LIKE THE SPIRIT OF A LITTLE CHILD

The smoke of the gun curled slowly and reluctantly out of the narrow windows, and through the garret opening I heard a hurried rush of feet beneath me on the stairs, light and quick—a woman's footsteps when she is young. My head span round, and had it not been for Mary Gordon, whose arm caught and steadied me, I should doubtless have fallen from top to bottom.

'Quintin, Quintin,' she cried, passionately, 'are you hurt? Oh, my father has slain him. Wherefore did I let him go?'

I held by the wall and steadied myself on her shoulder, scarce knowing what I did.

Suddenly she cried aloud, a little frightened cry, and, drawing her kerchief from her bosom, she reached up and wiped my brow, down which red drops were trickling.

'You are hurt! You are sore hurt!' she cried. 'And it is all my fault!'

Then I said, 'Nay, Mary, I am not hurt. It was but a faintish turn that came and passed.'

'Oh, come away,' she cried; 'he will surely slay you if you bide here, and your blood will be upon my hands.'

'Nay, Mary,' I answered; 'the demon, and not your father, did this thing, and such can do nothing without permission. I will yet meet and expel the devil in the name of the Lord!'

She put her netted fingers about my arm to draw me away; nevertheless, even then, I withstood her.

‘Alexander Gordon,’ I cried aloud, ‘the evil spirit hath done its worst. He will now depart from you. I am coming up the ladder.’

I drew my arm free and mounted. As my head rose through the trap-door I own that my heart quaked, but there had come with the danger and the excitement a sort of angry exaltation which, more than aught else, carried me onward. Also I knew within me that if, as I judged, God had other work yet for me to do in Scotland, He would clothe me in secret armour of proof against all assault.

Also the eyes of Mary Gordon were upon me. I had passed my word to her; I could not go back. As I looked about the garret between the cobwebs, the strings of onions, and the bunches of dried herbs, I could see Sandy Gordon crouching at the far end, all drawn together like a tailor sitting cross-legged on his bench. He had his musket between his knees, and his great sword was cocked threateningly over his shoulder.

‘What, Corbie! Are ye there again?’ cried he, fleeingly. ‘Then ye are neither dead nor feared.’

‘No,’ said I; ‘the devil that possesses you has been restrained from doing me serious hurt. I will call on the Lord to expel what He hath already rendered powerless.’

‘Man, Quintin,’ he cried, ‘ye should have fetched Telfair and the Presbytery with you. Ye are not fit for the job by yourself. Mind you, this is no hotchin' wee de'il, sitting cross-legged on the hearth in the gloaming like Andrew Mackie's in Ringcroft. It takes the black Father of Spirits himself, ripe from hell, to

grip the Bull of Earlstoun, and set him to roaring like this in the blank middle of the day.'

'But,' said I, 'there is One stronger than any devil or devilkin—your father's and your mother's God! You are but a great bairn, Sandy. Do ye mind where ye first learned the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm?'

At my words the great mountain of a man threw his head back and dropped his sword.

'Aye, I mind,' he said, sullenly.

'Where was it?' said I.

'It was at my mother's knee in the turret chamber that looks to the woods, if ye want to ken.'

'What did your mother when ye had ended the lesson?'

'What is that to you, Quintin MacClellan?' he thundered, fiercely. 'I tell you, torment me not!'

He snarled this out at me suddenly like the roar of a beast in a cage, thrusting forth his head at me and showing his teeth in the midst of his red beard.

'What did your mother when ye had learned your psalm?'

'She put her hands upon my head.'

'And then what did she?'

'She prayed.'

'Do ye mind the words of that prayer?'

'I mind them.'

'Then say them.'

'I will not!' he shouted loud and fierce, clattering his gun on the floor and leaping to his feet. His sword was in his hand, and he pointed it threateningly at me.

'You will not say your mother's prayer,' I answered; 'then I will say it for you.'

'No, you shall not, Quintin MacClellan,' he growled. 'If it comes to that, I will say it myself. What ken you about my mother's prayer?'

'I have a mother of mine own, and not once nor twice she hath said a prayer for me.'

The point of the sword dropped. He stood silent.

'Her hands were on your head,' I suggested, 'you had finished your prayers. It was in the turret chamber that looks to the north.'

'I ken—I ken!' he cried, turning his head this way and that like a beast tied and tormented.

But in his eyes there grew a far-away look. The convulsive fingers loosened on the sword hilt. The blade fell unheeded to the ground and lay beside the empty musket.

'O Lord!' he gasped, hardly above his breath, 'from all the dangers of this night keep my laddie. From powers of evil guard him with thy good angels. The Lord Christ be his yoke-bearer. Deliver him from sin and from himself. When I am under green kirk-yard sward, be Thou to him both father and mother. O God, Father in Heaven, bless the lad!'

It was his mother's prayer. And as the words came softer Alexander Gordon fell on his knees, and moaned aloud in the dim smoky garret.

Then, judging that my work was done, I, too, kneeled on my knees, and for the space of an hour or thereby the wind of the summer blew through the chamber, the shadows crawled up the walls, and Alexander Gordon moved not nor spoke.

Then I arose, took him by the hand, and bade him follow me. We went down both of us together. And in the room below we found Mary, who had sat listening with her head on her hand.

THE STANDARD BEARER

'Here is your father,' I said; 'take him to his chamber, and when he is ready bring him again into the great room.'

So very obediently he went with her as a little child might.

Presently she brought him in again, clean washed and with the black look gone from his brow.

I bade her set him by the window. She looked at me to see if she should leave us alone. But I desired her to stay. Then very gently I set the right way before him.

'Alexander,' said I, 'ye have done that which has worked great scandal. Ye shall confess that publicly. Ye are innocent of the greater iniquity laid to your charge. Ye shall clear yourself of that by a solemn oath taken both in the presence of God and before men.'

'That I cannot,' said he, speaking for the first time; 'the Presbytery have refused me the privilege.'

'There is a door open for you,' I said, 'in a place where the Presbytery and your enemies have no power. It may not be long mine to offer you. But for one day it shall be yours, and after the service on Sabbath in the Kirk of Balmaghie ye shall stand up and clear yourself by oath of the greater sin—after having made confession of the more venial fault.'

'I will do it!' he said, and put his hand in mine.

So I left him sitting there with his daughter, with the knowledge that my soul had power over his. And in the eventide, greatly comforted, I took my way homewards, knowing that he would not fail me.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

THE STONE OF STUMBLING

But whilst I had been going about my work the enemies had not been idle. They had deposed me from the ministry. They could not depose me from the hearts of a willing and loyal people. They had invoked the secular arm, and that had been turned back.

Now, by hasty process, they had also appointed one, McKie, to succeed me—a young man that had been a helper to one of them, harmless enough, indeed, in himself, a good and quiet lad. Him, for the sake of the stipend, they had persuaded to be their cat's-paw.

But the folk of Balmaghie were clear against giving him any foothold, so that he made little more of it than he had done at first.

But it chanced that on the day on which I had gone to Earlstoun to speak with Alexander Gordon, the more active of the Presbytery had gathered together many of the wild and riotous out of their parishes, and had sent them to take possession of the manse and glebe of Balmaghie.

Hob, my brother, was over by at the house of Drumglass, helping them with the last of their meadow hay, being a lad ever kind and helpful to all, saying little but doing much.

So that the house, being left defenceless in fancied security, the young lad McKie and his party had been in and about the manse for a full hour before any brought word of their approach.

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McKie, acting doubtless under the advice of those that were more cunning than he, had intruded into the kitchen, extinguished the fire on the hearth and relighted it in his own name.

Also the folk who were with him, men from other parishes, wholly ignorant of the matter, had brought a pair of ploughs with them. To these they now harnessed horses and would have set to the ploughing up of the glebe, which was of ancient pasture, the grass clean and old, a paradise of verdure, smooth as a well-mown lawn.

But by this time the noise and report of the invasion had spread abroad, and from farm-towns far and near swarmed down the angry folk of Balmaghie, like bees from a dyke upon a company of harrying boys.

The mowers took their scythes over their shoulders and set off all coatless and bonnet-less from the water-meadows. The herds left their sheep to stray masterless upon the hill, and came with nothing but their crooks in their hands. The farmers hastily ran in for Brown Bess and a horn of powder. So that ere the first furrow was turned from end to end the glebe was black with people, swarming like an angry hive whose defences have been stormed.

So the invaders could not stand, either in numbers or anger, against the honest folk who had sworn to keep sacred the home of the man of their choice.

Even as I came to the entering in of the Kirk loaning, I saw the ending of the fray. The invaders were fleeing down the water-side the poor lad McKie, who in his anger had stricken a woman to the ground and stamped upon her, had a wound in his

hand made by a reaping-hook. The ploughs had been thrown into the Dee, and the folk of Balmaghie were pursuing and beating stray fugitives, like school laddies threshing at a wasps' nest.

Then I, who had striven so lately with the powers of evil in high places, was stricken to the heart at this unseemly riot, and resolved within me that there should be a quick end to this.

Who was I that I should thus be a troubler of Israel, and make the hot anger rise in these quiet hearts? Could I stand against all Scotland? Nay, could I alone be in the right and all the others in the wrong? There was surely work for me to do outside the bounds of one small parish— at least, in all broad Scotland, a few godly folk of the ancient way to whom I could minister.

So I resolved then and there, that after the Sabbath service at which I had bidden Earlstoun to purge himself by oath and public confession, I would no longer remain in Balmaghie to stir up wrath, but depart over Jordan with no more than my pilgrim-staff in my hand.

So, when at last the people had vanquished the last invader and come back to the kirk, I called them together and spoke quietly to them.

'This thing,' said I, 'becomes a scandal and a shaming. This is surely not the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace. True, not we, but those who have come against us, began the fray.

But when men stumble over a stone in the path, it is time that the stone be removed.

Now I, Quintin MacClellan, your minister, am the stone of stumbling—I, and none other, the rock of

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offence. I will therefore remove myself. I will cease to trouble Israel.'

'No, no,' they cried; 'surely after this they will leave us alone. They will never return. Bide with us, for you are our minister, and we your faithful and willing folk.'

And this sasing of theirs, in which all joined, moved me much; nevertheless I was fixed in my heart, and could make no more of it than that I must depart.

Which, when they heard, they were grieved at very sorely, and appointed certain of them, men of weight and sincerity, to combat my resolution.

But it was not to be, for I made up my mind.

I saw that there might be an open door elsewhere, and though I would not abandon my work in Balmaghie, yet neither would I any more confine my ministrations. I would go out to the Hill-folk, who before had called me, and if they accepted of me, well! And if not— why, there were heathen folk enough in Scotland with none to minister to them; and it would be strange if He who sent out his disciples two by two, bidding them take neither purse nor script, would not find bread and water for a poor wandering teacher throughout the length and breadth of Scotland.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

FARE YOU WELL!

The fateful Sabbath came— a, day of infinite stillness, so that from beside the tombs of the martyr Hallidays in the kirkyard of Balmaghie you could hear the sheep bleating on the hills of Crossmichael a mile away, the sound breaking mellow and thin upon the ear over the still and azure river.

To me it was like the calm of the New Jerusalem. And, indeed, no place that ever I have seen can be so blessedly quiet as the bonnie kirk-knowe of Balmaghie, mirrored on a windless day in the encircling stillness of the Water of Dee.

The folk gathered early, clouds upon clouds of them, so that I think every man, woman, and child in the parish must have save the children that could not walk, and the aged who dwelt too far away to be carried.

Alexander Gordon sat at my right hand, immediately beneath the pulpit. There seemed an extraordinary graciousness in the singing that day, a special fervour in the upward swell of the voices, a more excellent, sober sweetness in the Sabbath air. And of that I must not think, for I was to leave all this—to leave for ever the vale of blessing wherein I had hoped to spend my days.

Yes, I would adventure forth alone rather than that a loyal folk should suffer any more because of me. But first, so far as in me lay, I would set right the matter of Alexander Gordon and his trouble.

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It was the forty-sixth Psalm that they were singing, and as they sang the people tell that herds on the hill stood still to listen to the chorus of that mighty singing, and, without knowing why, the water stood in their eyes that day. There seemed to be something by-ordinarily moving in all that was done. Thus wise it went:

God is our refuge and our strength, In straits a present aid, Therefore although the earth remove, We will not be afraid.

And as she sang I saw Mary Gordon looking past me with the glory of the New Song in her eyes. And I knew that her heart, too, was touched.

By the pillar in the arched nook at the door stood Hob my brother, and by him Alexander-Jonita. They looked sedately down upon one psalm-book. And in that day I was glad to think that one man was happy.

Poor lad! That which it was laid upon me to do came as a sad surprise to him. Out of the window, as I stood up to the sermon, I could see the river slowly take its way. It glinted back more blue and sparkling than ever I had seen it, and my heart gave a great stound that never more was I to abide by the side of that quiet water, and in the sheltered nook where I had known such strange providences. Once I had thought it would be gladsome for me to leave it, but now, when the time came, I thought so no more.

Even the little glimpses I had of that fair landscape through the narrow kirk windows brought back a thousand memories. Yonder, by the thorn, I had seen a weak one made nobler than I by the mighty power of love.

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Down there beside the dark still waters I had watched the lights glimmer in the Kirk of Crossmichael, where sat my foes, angry-eager to make an end. But the psalm again seized my heart and held it.

A river is, whose streams do glad, The city of our God, The Holy Place wherein the Lord Most High hath His abode.

And in a moment the Dee Water and its memories of malice were blotted out. The ripples played instead over the River that flows from about the Throne of God. I saw all the warrings of earth, the heart-burnings, the strifes, the little days and evil nights washed away in a broad flood of grace and mercy.

I was ready to go I knew not whither. It might be that there was a work greater and more enduring for me to do, my pilgrim staff in my hand, among the flowe-mosses and peaty wildernesses of the South-west than here in the well-sheltered strath of Dee.

Now, at all events, I must face the blast, the bluster and the bite of it. But though I was to look no more on these well-kenned, kindly faces as their minister, I knew that their hearts would hold by me, and their lips breathe a prayer for me each day at eventide.

And so I bade them farewell. What I said to them is no man's business but theirs and mine, and shall not be written here. But the tears flowed down and the voice of mourning was heard.

Then, ere I pronounced the benediction, I told them how that one dear to me and well known to them had a certain matter to set before them.

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With that uprose Alexander Gordon in the midst, looming great like a hero seen in the morning mist.

I put him to the solemn oath, and then and there he declared before them his innocence of the greater evil, purging himself, as the manner was, by solemn and binding oath, which purgation had been refused him by the Presbytery.

'By the grace and kindness of your minister, I, Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun, being known to you all, declare myself wholly innocent of the crime laid to my charge by the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright. May the Lord in whom I believe have no mercy on my soul if I speak not the truth.

'But as for the lesser shame,' so he continued, 'that I brought on myself and on the cause for which I have been in time past privileged to suffer, in that I was overcome with wine in the change-house of St. John's, Clachan — that much is true. With contrition do I confess it. And I confess also to the unholy and hellish anger that descended on my spirit, from which blackness of darkness I was brought by your minister. For which I, unworthy, shall ever continue to praise the Lord of mercies, who did not cut me off with my sin unconfessed or my innocence unproclaimed.'

Alexander Gordon sat down, and there went a sigh and a murmur over all the folk like the wind over ripe wheat in a large field.

Then I told them how that my resolve was taken, and that it was necessary that I should depart from the midst of them in order that there might be peace.

But one and another throughout the kirk cried, 'Nay, we will not let you go! We have fought for you;

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desert us not now. The bitterness of the blast is surely over; now they will let us alone!’

Thus one and another cried out there in the kirk, but the most part only groaned in spirit and were troubled.

‘Ye shall not be less my people that another is set in my place. I go indeed to seek a wider ministry. I have been called by the remnant of the Hill-folk that have so long been without a pastor. Whether I am fitted to be their minister I do not know, but in weakness and the acknowledgment of it there is ever the beginning of strength. I have loved your parish and you. Dear dust lies in that kirkyard out there, and when for me the Angel of the Presence comes who calls not twice, that is where I should like to lie, under the blossoming hawthorn trees near by where the waters of Dee flow largely and quietly about the bonny kirk-knowe of Balmaghie.’

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

I LOVE YOU, QUINTIN

There was little more to do. The scanty stock of the glebe was, by Hob's intervention, sold in part to Nathan Gemmell, of Drumglass, and the remainder driven along the Kenside by the fords of the Black Water to Ardarroch, where my mother received it with uplifted, querulous hands, and my father calmly as if he had never expected anything else.

'To think,' cried my mother, 'that the laddie we sent so proudly to the college should shut himself out of manse and kirk, and tak' to the moors and mosses as if the auld persecuting days were back again.'

'It is in a guid cause,' said my father, quieting her as best he could.

'I daresay,' said my mother, 'but the lad will get mony a wet fit and weary mile if he ministers to the Hill-folk. Aye, and mony a sair heart to please them.'

'Fear ye not for Quintin,' said my father, to soothe her, 'for if it comes to dourness the Lord pity them that try to overcrow our Quintin.'

I made no farewell round of the kindly, faithful folk of Balmaghie. My heart would have had too many breakings. Besides, I promised myself that, when I took up the pilgrim's staff and ministered to the remnant scattered abroad, seeking no reward, I should often be glad of a night's shelter at Drumglass or Cllenoch.

Nevertheless, for all my brave resolves, it was with an overweighted heart that I passed the Black Water

at the Tornorrach fords with my staff in my hand. I had as it were come over in two bands, with Hob driving the beasts for the glebe, and I the house furniture upon a car or trail cart.

Now I left the parish poorer than I entered it. I knew not so much as where I would sleep that night. I had ten pounds in my pocket, and when that was done— well, I would surely not be worse off than the King's Blue Gown. I was to minister to a scattered people, mostly of the poorest. But at the worst I was sure of an inglenook, a bed in the stable-loft, and a porringer of brose at morn and e'en anywhere in Scotland. And I am sure that oft times the Galilean fishermen had not so much.

My mother threw her arms about my neck.

'O laddie, laddie, ye are ganging far awa on a rough road and a lonely. Guid kens if your auld mither will ever look on your face again. Quintin, this is a sair heartbreak. But I ken I hae mysel' to thank for it. I bred ye to the Hill-folks' ways mysel'. It was your ain mither that took ye in her arms to the sweet conventicles on the green bosom of Cairnsmuir, that delectable mountain. I, even I, had ye baptized at the Holy Linn by guid Maister Semple, and never a whinge or a greet did ye gae when he stappit ye into the thickest o' the jaw.'

And the remembrance seemed in part to reconcile my mother to the stern Cameronian ministry I was about to take up.

'And what stipend are they promising ye?' she said, presently, after she had thought the matter over.

'Nothing!' I answered, calmly.

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'Nocht ava'— no a bawbee— and a' that siller spent on your colleging.'

Then my mother's mind took a new tack.

'And what will puir Hob be gaun to do puir fellow? He has had nae it her thocht than you since ever he was a laddie.'

'Faith,' said I, smiling back at her, 'I am thinking that now at last he has some other thought in his mind.'

My mother fell back a step.

'No a lassie!' she cried, 'a laddie like him.'

'Hob is no week-old bairn chicken, mother,' said I; 'he will be five-and-thirty if he is a day.'

'But our Hob—to be thinking o' a lassie!'

'At what age might ye have been married, mother?' I asked, knowing that I could turn her from thinking of Hob's presumption and my own waygoing.

'Me? I was married at seventeen, and your father scant a score. Faith, there was spunk in the countryside then. Noo a lass will be four-and-twenty before she gets an offer; aye, and not think hersel' ayont the mark for the wedding-ring, when I had sons and dochters man and woman-muckle!'

'Then,' said I, 'that being so, ye will not be hard on Hob if he marries and settles himself down at Drumglass.'

My father clapped me on the shoulder.

'God speed ye,' he said; 'I need not tell ye to be no ways feared. And if ye come to the bottom of your purse— well, your faither is no rich man. But there will be aye a bit of yellow siller for ye in the cupboard of Ardarroch.'

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I had meant to take my way past Earlstoun without calling. And with that intent it was in my mind to hold directly over the moor past Lochinvar. But when it came to the pinch I simply could not do it.

So to the dear grey tower chin-deep among the woodlands I betook me once more. My eyes had been looking for the first glint of it over the tree tops for miles ere I came within sight of it. 'There,' and 'there,' so I said to myself,' under that white cloud, by the nick of that hill, where the woodland curls down, that is the place.'

At last I arrived.

'Quintin MacClellan, come your ways in. Welcome are ye as the smell o' the supper brose,' cried Alexander Gordon, coming heartily across from the far angle of the courtyard at sight of me. 'Whither away so travel-harnessed?'

'To the Upper Ward,' said I, 'to make a beginning on the widest minister's charge in Scotland.'

'You are, then, truly bent on leaving all and taking upon you the blue bonnet and the plaid of the minister of the Remnant?'

'I have already done it,' said I, 'burned my boats, emptied my house, sold my plenishing and bestial. And now with my scrip and staff I go forth, whither I know not—perchance to a hole in the hedge-root and the death of a dog.'

'Tut, man,' cried Alexander Gordon, 'tis not thus that the apostle of the Hill-folk, the bearer of their banner, should go forth. Bide at least this night with me, and I will set you up the waterside, aye, and fit you with a beast to ride on forbye.'

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I thank you from my heart, Earlstoun. This is spoken like a true man and from the heart. Only Alexander Gordon would offer as much. But I would begin as I must end if I am to be the poor man's minister. I must not set out on my pilgrimage riding on the back of Earlstoun's charger. I must tramp it—moss and mountain, dub and mire. Yet, friend of mine, I could not go without bidding you a kindly adieu.'

At least bide till the mistress and Mary can shake ye by the hand,' cried Alexander Gordon.

And with that he betook him to the nearest window, and without ceremony pushed it open, for the readiest way was ever Sandy Gordon's way. Then he roared for his wife and daughter till the noise shook the tower like an earthquake.

In a moment Mary Gordon came out and stood on the doorstep with her fingers in her ears, pretending a pretty anger.

'What an unwholesome uproar, father! Well do they call you the Bull of Earlstoun, and say that they hear you over the hill at Ardoch bidding the herd lads to be quiet!'

Then seeing me (as it appeared) for the first time, she came forward and took my hand simply, and with a pleasant open frankness.

'You will come in and rest, will you not?' she said. 'Are you here on business with my father?'

'Nay,' said I, smiling at her; 'I have no business save that of bidding you farewell.'

'Farewell!' cried she, dropping the needlework she held in her hand, 'why farewell?'

I go far away to a new and untried work. I know not when nor how I shall return.'

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She gave a little quick shivering gasp, as if she had been about to speak.

‘At the least, come in and see my mother,’ she said, and led the way within.

But when we had gone into the long oaken chamber naught of the Lady of Earlstoun was to be seen. And the laird himself cried up to Mary to entertain me till he should speak to his grieve over at the cottage.

In the living room of Earlstoun was peace and the abiding pleasant sense of an ordered home. As soon as she had shut the door the lass turned upon me.

‘You have truly given up your parish?’ she said, holding her hands before her with the fingers clasped firmly together.

I nodded.

‘And you are journeying to the west to join the Hill-folk?’

I smiled as I looked into her deep and anxious eyes.

‘Again you have rightly divined,’ I said.

‘And what stipend are ye to get from them?’

‘I am to have no stipend. It has not been mentioned between us.’

‘O Quintin!’ she cried suddenly, her eyes growing ever larger and darker, till the pupil seemed to invade the iris and swallow it up.

But though I waited for her to speak further she said nothing more.

So I went on to tell her how I was going to the west to spend my life among the poor folk there who had been so long without a shepherd.

‘And would you’—she paused— ‘would you leave us all?’

'Nay,' said I, 'for this Earlstoun shall ever be a kindly and a beloved spot to me. Often when the ways are long and dreary, the folk unfriendly, will my heart turn in hither. And, whenever I am in Galloway, be sure that I will not pass you by. Your father hath been a good and loving friend to me.'

'My father!' she cried, with a little disdainful outward pout of the lip.

'Aye, and you also. Mistress Mary. You have been all too kind to a broken man—a man who, when the few coins he carries in his purse are expended, knows not whence he will get his next golden guinea.'

I was silent for a while and only looked steadily at her. She moved her feet this way and that on the floor uncertainly. Her grace and favour cried out to me anew.

'As for me, Mary,' I said, 'I need not tell you that I love you. I have loved you ever since I met you on the Bennan brae-face. But now more greatly—more terribly that I love altogether without hope. I had not meant to speak again, but only to take your hand once thus— and get me gone!'

Impulsively she held her fingers out to me and I clasped them in mine.

I thought she was ready to bid me farewell, and that she desired not to prolong the pain of the interview.

'Fare thee well then, Mary,' said I. 'I have loved the cause because it is the Cause of the Weak. I have striven to raise again the Banner of Blue. I have loved my people. But none of these hath this aching, weary heart loved as it has loved Mary

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Gordon. I have neither heart nor right to speak of my love, nor house nor home to offer. I can but go!’

‘Speak on,’ she said, a little breathlessly, but never once taking her eyes from my face.

‘There is no other word to tell, Mary,’ said I. ‘I have spoken the word, and now there remains but to turn about and set face forward as bravely as may be, to shut out the pleasant vision, seen for a moment, to leave behind for ever the heart's desire’

‘No! No! No!’ she interrupted, jerking her clasped hands quickly downward.

‘To lay aside the deep, unspoken hopes of a man who has never loved woman before...’

She came a little nearer to me, still exploring my face with her eyes, as I spoke the last words.

‘Did you not, Quintin? Are you sure?’

‘I have never loved before,’ said I, ‘because I have loved Mary Gordon from the beginning, yea, every day and every hour since I was a herd boy on the hills. Once I was filled with pride and the security of position. But of these the Lord hath stripped me. I am well-nigh as poor as when I came into the world. I have nothing now to offer you or any woman.’

‘Nay,’ she cried, speaking very quickly and suddenly, laying her clasped hands on my arm, ‘you are rich—rich, Quintin! Listen, lad! There is one that loves you now—who has loved you long. Do you not understand? Must I, that am a maid, speak for myself? Must I say, I love you Quintin.’

And then she smiled suddenly, gloriously, like the sun bursting through black and leaden clouds.

Oh, sweet and perilously sweet was her smile!

‘Mary,’ I cried, suddenly, ‘you are not playing with me? Ah, for God's dear sake, do not that! It would

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break my heart. You cannot love a man broken, penniless, outcast, one of a down-trodden and despised folk. You must not give yourself to one whose future path is lone and desolate!

'I love you, Quintin!'

'One who has nothing to offer, nothing to give, not even the shelter of a roof-tree—a wanderer, a beggar!'

'I love you, Quintin!'

And the hands that had been clasped on my arm of their own sweet accord stole upward and rested lovingly about my neck. The eyes that had looked so keenly into mine were satisfied at last, and with a long sobbing sigh of content Mary Gordon's head pillowed itself on my breast.

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

THE LAST ROARING OF THE BULL

‘Come,’ she said, after a while, ‘let us go to my father!’

And now, the rubicon being passed, there shone a quick and alert gladness upon her face. Her feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground. The mood of sedateness had passed away, and she hummed a gay tune as we went down the stairs.

Alexander Gordon was coming across the yard to speak with his wife as Mary and I appeared hand in hand at the stair foot.

He stopped as it had been suddenly aghast when he caught sight of us.

‘Mary!’ he cried.

She nodded and made him a little prim curtesy.

‘What means this?’ he said, sternly.

‘Just that Quintin and I love one another!’

And as she spoke I saw the frown gather ominously on Alexander Gordon's face. His wife came near and looked at him. I saw him flash a glance at her so quick, so stern, and full of meaning that the ready river of her speech froze on her lips.

‘This is rank foolishness, Mary!’ he cried; ‘go indoors this instant and get to your broidering. Let me hear no more of this!’

But the spirit of the Gordons was in the daughter as well as in the sire.

‘I will not,’ she said; ‘I am of age, and though in all else I have obeyed you, in this I will not.’

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Glance for glance their eyes encountered, nor could I see that either pair quailed.

The Laird of Earlstoun turned to me.

'And you, sir, whom I trusted as my friend, how came you here under pretext of amity, thus to lead away my daughter?'

The question was fiercely spoken, the tone sullenly angry. Yet somehow both rang hollow.

I was about to answer when Mary interrupted.

'Nay, father,' she cried, looking him fearlessly in the face; 'it was I that proffered my love. He would not ask me, though I tried to make him. I had to tell him that I loved him, and make him ask me to marry him!'

Was it fancy that the flicker of a smile passed at that moment over the grim countenance of the Bull?

His wife was again about to speak, but he turned fiercely on her and bade her be silent.

'And now,' he said, turning to his daughter, 'what do you propose to do with your man when ye have 'speered' him?'

He used the local country expression for a proposal of marriage. 'I will marry him here and now,' she said; adding hastily, 'that is, if he will have me.'

'Ye had better speer him that too!' said her father, grimly.

'I will do better,' cried Mary Gordon. 'I will acknowledge him!'

And holding up my hand in hers she cried aloud: 'I take you for my husband, Quintin MacClellan!' She looked up at me with a challenge in her eye.

'My wife!' was all that I could utter.

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'Well,' said Sandy, 'that is your bed made, my lassie. You have both said it before witnesses. You must take him now, whether ye will or not!'

'Hugh,' he cried, with a sudden roar towards the servants' quarters. And from the haymow in the barn where he had been making a pretence of work a retainer appeared with a scared expression on his face.

'Run over to the cot-house at the road-end and tell the minister lad that the Dumfries Presbytery deposed to come to the Earlstoun and that smartly, else I will come down and fetch him myself!'

The man was already on his way ere the sentence was ended, and when the Laird roared the last words after him he fairly seemed to jump.

He was out of sight among the trees a moment after.

'Now,' said Alexander Gordon, 'Mary and you have proclaimed yourselves man and wife. Ye shall be soundly married by a minister, and then ye shall go your ways forth. Think not that I will give you the worth of a boddle either in gear or land. Ye have asked me no permission. Ye have defied me. I say not that I will disown ye. But, at least, I owe you nothing.'

'Father,' said Mary, 'did I ask you for aught, or did Quintin?'

'Nay,' said he, grimly, 'not even for my daughter.'

'Then,' said she, 'do not refuse that for which you have not been asked!'

'And how may you propose to live?' her father went on triumphantly. 'Ye would not look at him when he had kirk and glebe, manse and stipend. And now ye take him by force when he is no better

than a beggar at the dyke-back. That it is to be a woman!

She kindled at the words.

'And what a thing to be a man! Ye think that a woman's love consists in goods and gear, comfortable beds and fine apparelling!'

'Comfortable beds are not to be lightlied,' said her father; 'as ye will find, my lass, or I'll be done.'

She did not heed him, but flashed on with her defiance.

You, and those like you, think that the way to win a woman is to bide till ye have made all smooth, so that there be not a curl on the rose-leaves, nor yet a bitter drop in the cup. Even Quintin there thought thus, till he learned better.'

She did not so much as pause to smile, though I think her father did— but covertly.

'No!' she cried, 'I love, and because I love I will (as you say floutingly) be ready to lie at a dykeback like a tinkler's wench. I will follow my man through the world because he is my man— yes, all the more because he is injured, despised, one who has had little happiness and no satisfaction in life. And now I will give him these things. I—I only will make it all up to him. With my love I can do it, and I will!'

Her father nodded menacingly.

'Ye shall try the dykebacks this very nicht, my lass! And ye shall e'en see how ye like them, after the fine linen sheets and panelled chambers of the Earlstoun.'

But her mother broke out at last.

'No, my bairn!' she cried. 'Married or single ye shall not go forth from us thus!'

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'Hold your tongue, woman!' roared the Bull, shaking the very firmament with his voice.

'Be not feared, my lass; ye shall have your mother's countenance, though your father cast you off,' said Janet Gordon, nodding at us with unexpected graciousness.

'Hold your peace, I tell you!'

'Aye, Sandy, when I have done.'

'Though he turn you to the doorstep I will pray for you,' she went on; 'and for company on the way I will give you a copy of my meditations, which are most meet and precious.'

Her husband laughed a quick, mocking laugh.

'A bundle of clean sarks wad fit them better— but here comes the minister.'

I turned about somewhat shamefacedly, and there, bowing to the Laird of Earlstoun, was young Gilchrist of Dunscore, whom the Presbytery of Dumfries had lately deposed. He was about to begin a speech of congratulation but the Bull broke through.

'Marry these two!' he commanded.

And with his finger he pointed at Mary and myself, as if he had been ordering us for immediate execution.

'But...' began the minister.

Instantly an astonishing volume of sound filled the house.

'But me no buts! Tie them up this moment! Or, by the Lord, I will eviscerate you with my sword!'

And with that he snatched his great basketilted blade from the scabbard, where it swung on a pin by the side of the door.

THE STANDARD BEARER

So, with a quaking minister, my own head dazed and uncertain with the whirl of events, and Mary Gordon giving her father back defiant glance for glance, we were married decently and in order.

'Now,' said Alexander Gordon, so soon as the 'Amen' was out, 'go to your chamber with your mother, Mistress Mary! Take whatever ye can carry, but no more, and get you gone out of this house with the man you have chosen. I will teach you to be fond of dykebacks and of throwing yourself away upon beggarly, broken men!'

And he frowned down upon her, as with head erect and scornful carriage she swept past him—her mother trotting behind like a frightened child.

I think Alexander Gordon greatly desired to say something to me while he and I stood waiting for her return. For he kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other, now turning to the window, anon humming half a tune and breaking off short in the midst. But ever as he came towards me with obvious intent to speak, he checked himself, shaking his head sagely, and so resumed again his restless marching to and fro.

Presently my lass came down with a proud high look on her face, her mother following after, all beblubbered with tears and wringing her hands silently.

'I bid you farewell, father!' Mary said; 'till now you have ever been a kind father to me. And some day you will forgive this seeming disobedience!'

Then it was that her father made a strange speech.

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‘Quintin MacClellan has muckle to thank me for. For had it not been for the roaring of the Bull, he had not so easily gotten away the dainty quey!’

So side by side, and presently when we got to the wood's edge hand in hand, Mary Gordon and I went out into the world together.

[Final Addition and Conclusion by Hob MacClellan.]

Thus my brother left the writing which has fallen into my hand. In a word I must finish what I cannot alter or amend.

His marriage with Mary Gordon was most happy and gracious, though I have ever heard that she retained throughout her life her high proud nature and hasty speech.

Her father relented his anger after the great renovation of the Covenants at Auchensaugh. Indeed, I question whether in driving them forth from Earlstoun, as hath been told, Alexander Gordon was not acting a part. For when he came to see my wife, Alexander-Jonita, after our little Quintin was born, he said, ‘Heard ye aught of your brother and his wife?’

I told him that they were well and hearty, full of honour, work, and the happiness of children.

‘Aye,’ said he, after a pause of reflection, ‘Quintin has indeed muckle to thank me for. I took the only way with our Mary, to make her ten times fonder o’ him than she was.’

And he chuckled a little deep laugh in his throat.

THE STANDARD BEARER

'But,' he said, 'I wad gie a year's rent to ken how she liked the dykeback the night she left the Earlstoun.'

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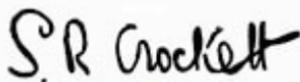
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www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway
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*'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved
by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be
loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the
many.'*



S. R. Crockett