

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

The Standard Bearer



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S. R. Crockett

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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 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.

CHAPTER I

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.

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 over-seas 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.

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 intercommuning¹ 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, 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 window-sill, 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 kened 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 and pastures as succulent as those of the valley-crofts from which my father had driven them a day or two before.

¹ Intercommuning —*i. e.*, entertaining, assisting, or sheltering any who were counted unfriendly to the Government, or had been reported by the curates for not attending church. Even the smallest converse with proscribed persons was thought deserving of the pains of death.

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-f!*” quoth Ashie protestingly, deep in his stomach so that the sound would carry no further than his master’s ear.

“*Gur-r-r!*” 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!”

“*Ouf-f!*” 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 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 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 Garry-horn,” 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 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 II

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 had 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 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 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 stony-hearted 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 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.

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 that made a lifelong Covenanter of Quintin MacClellan.

CHAPTER III

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.

“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 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 water-foot 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.

“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 to-day, 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.

“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 IV

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.

“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.”

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 burn-side 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.

“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 Bennan side.

“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 crumbings 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?”

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 chanced 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!”

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 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*,² which oftentimes made my heart cheerier, appeared to him but as the crackling of thorns under a pot.

² Gif-gaf, *i. e.*, give and take, the interchange of pleasantry, parry of wit, the cut-and-thrust encounter of tongues, innocent enough but often rough.

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 Crichton 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 Highlandmen 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.

CHAPTER V

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.

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.

"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.

"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, 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 "buchs" 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-buchs."

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 “buchs” 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 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 VI

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 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 every one 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.

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 her’s. 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.

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, 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.

“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 VII

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.

“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 screech 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.³

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-soundin’ 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; *pennae*, 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 outgate 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?

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.”

³ This was really the sweet and gentle youth James Renwick, though I knew not his name, till I saw them hang him in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh in the first year of my college-going.

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 VIII

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.⁴

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 bielly 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 Ayrs Moss.”

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 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.”

⁴ *I.e.*, those who by the Covenanters were supposed to have *malignantly* pursued and opposed their cause in the council or in the field.

“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 bidding by the house while my elders 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 befel 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.

“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 Kittle 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. Intent 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 IX

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 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,⁵ 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 words over and over to myself, and somehow they were exceedingly pleasing to me.

I had ever sneered at love and love-making 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

⁵ *I. e.*, the taxes for the support of the military establishments.

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 father.

“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.”

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 overmuch of such talk. I know to an ell how much it means. I 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.”

“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.”

“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 X

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 noways so wonderful.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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