JOHN BUCHAN

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Buchan J.

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Содержание

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BOOK I – TWEEDDALE

CHAPTER I
THE ADVENTURE WHICH BEFELL ME IN THE WOOD OF DAWYCK

I have taken in hand to write this, the history of my life, not without much misgiving of heart; for my memory at the best is a bad one, and of many things I have no clear remembrance. And the making of tales is an art unknown to me, so he who may read must not look for any great skill in the setting down. Yet I am emboldened to the work, for my life has been lived in stirring times and amid many strange scenes which may not wholly lack interest for those who live in quieter days. And above all, I am desirous that they of my family should read of my life and learn the qualities both good and bad which run in the race, and so the better be able to resist the evil and do the good.

My course, by the will of God, has had something of a method about it, which makes the telling the more easy. For, as I look back upon it from the vantage ground of time, all seems spread out plain and clear in an ordered path. And I would but seek to trace again some portion of the way with the light of a dim memory.

I will begin my tale with a certain June morning in the year 1678, when I, scarcely turned twelve years, set out from the house of Barns to the fishing in Tweed. I had escaped the watchful care of my tutor, Master Robert Porter, the curate of Lyne, who vexed my soul thrice a week with Cæsar and Cicero. I had no ill-will to the Latin, for I relished the battles in Cæsar well enough, and had some liking for poetry; but when I made a slip in grammar he would bring his great hand over my ears in a way which would make them tingle for hours. And all this, mind you, with the sun coming in at the window and whaups whistling over the fields and the great fish plashing in the river. On this morn I had escaped by hiding in the cheese-closet; then I had fetched my rod from the stable-loft, and borrowed tackle from Davie Lithgow, the stableman; and now I was creeping through the hazel bushes, casting, every now and then, a glance back at the house, where the huge figure of my teacher was looking for me disconsolately in every corner.

The year had been dry and sultry; and this day was warmer than any I remembered. The grass in the meadow was browned and crackling; all the foxgloves hung their bells with weariness; and the waters were shrunken in their beds. The mill-lade, which drives Manor Mill, had not a drop in it, and the small trout were gasping in the shallow pool, which in our usual weather was five feet deep. The cattle were *stertling*, as we called it in the countryside; that is, the sun was burning their backs, and, rushing with tails erect, they sought coolness from end to end of the field. Tweed was very low and clear. Small hope, I thought, for my fishing; I might as well have stayed with Master Porter and been thrashed, for I will have to stay out all day and go supperless at night.

I took my way up the river past the green slopes of Haswellsykes to the wood of Dawyck, for I knew well that there, if anywhere, the fish would take in the shady, black pools. The place was four weary miles off, and the day was growing hotter with each passing hour; so I stripped my coat and hid it in a hole among whins and stones. When I come home again, I said, I will recover it. Another half mile, and I had off my shoes and stockings and concealed them in a like place; so soon I plodded along with no other clothes on my body than shirt and ragged breeches.

In time I came to the great forest which stretches up Tweed nigh to Drummelzier, the greatest wood in our parts, unless it be Glentress, on the east side of Peebles. The trees were hazels and birches in the main, with a few rowans, and on the slopes of the hill a congregation of desolate pines. Nearer the house of Dawyck were beeches and oaks and the deeper shade, and it was thither I went. The top of my rod struck against the boughs, and I had some labour in steering a safe course between the Scylla of the trees and the Charybdis of the long brackens; for the rod was in two parts spliced together, and as I had little skill in splicing, Davie had done the thing for me before I started. Twice I roused a cock of the woods, which went screaming through the shadow. Herons from the great heronry at the other end were standing in nigh every pool, for the hot weather was a godsend to them, and the trout fared ill when the long thief-like bills flashed through the clear water. Now and then a shy deer leaped from the ground and sped up the hill. The desire of the chase was hot upon me when, after an hour's rough scramble, I came to the spot where I hoped for fish.

A stretch of green turf, shaded on all sides by high beeches, sloped down to the stream-side. The sun made a shining pathway down the middle, but the edges were in blackest shadow. At the foot a lone gnarled alder hung over the water, sending its long arms far over the river nigh to the farther side. Here Tweed was still and sunless, showing a level of placid black water, flecked in places with stray shafts of light. I prepared my tackle on the grass, making a casting-line of fine horse-hair which I had plucked from the tail of our own grey gelding. I had no such fine hooks as folk nowadays bring from Edinburgh, sharpened and barbed ready to their hand; but rough, homemade ones, which Tam Todd, the land-grieve, had fashioned out of old needles. My line was of thin, stout whipcord, to which I had made the casting firm with a knot of my own invention. I had out my bag of worms, and, choosing a fine red one, made it fast on the hook. Then I crept gently to the alder and climbed on the branch which hung far out over the stream. Here I sat like an owl in the shade, and dropped my line in the pool below me, where it caught a glint of the sun and looked like a shining cord let down, like Jacob's ladder, from heaven to the darkness of earth.

I had not sat many minutes before my rod was wrenched violently downwards, then athwart the stream, nearly swinging me from my perch. I have got a monstrous trout, I thought, and with a fluttering heart stood up on the branch to be more ready for the struggle. He ran up the water and down; then far below the tree roots, whence I had much difficulty in forcing him; then he thought to break my line by rapid jerks, but he did not know the strength of my horse-hair. By and by he grew wearied, and I landed him comfortably on a spit of land – a great red-spotted fellow with a black back. I made sure that he was two pounds weight if he was an ounce.

I hid him in a cool bed of leaves and rushes on the bank, and crawled back to my seat on the tree. I baited my hook as before, and dropped it in; and then leaned back lazily on the branches behind to meditate on the pleasantness of fishing and the hatefulness of Master Porter's teaching. In my shadowed place all was cool and fresh as a May morning, but beyond, in the gleam of the sun, I could see birds hopping sleepily on the trees, and the shrivelled dun look of the grass. A faint humming of bees reached me, and the flash of a white butterfly shot, now and then, like a star from the sunlight to the darkness, and back again to the sunlight. It was a lovely summer's day, though too warm for our sober country, and as I sat I thought of the lands I had read of and heard of, where it was always fiercely hot, and great fruits were to be had for the pulling. I thought of the oranges and olives and what not, and great silver and golden fishes with sparkling scales; and as I thought of them I began to loathe hazel-nuts and rowans and whortleberries, and the homely trout, which are all that is to be had in this land of ours. Then I thought of Barns and my kinsfolk, and all the tales of my forbears, and I loved again the old silent valley of Tweed – for a gallant tale is worth many fruits and fishes. Then as the day brightened my dreams grew accordingly. I came of a great old house; I, too, would ride to the wars, to the low countries, to Sweden, and I would do great deeds like the men in Virgil. And then I wished I had lived in Roman times. Ah, those were the days, when all the good things of life fell to brave men, and there was no other trade to be compared to war. Then I reflected that

they had no fishing, for I had come on nothing as yet in my studies about fish and the catching of them. And so, like the boy I was, I dreamed on, and my thoughts chased each other in a dance in my brain, and I fell fast asleep.

I wakened with a desperate shudder, and found myself floundering in seven feet of water. My eyes were still heavy with sleep, and I swallowed great gulps of the river as I sank. In a second I came to the surface and with a few strokes I was at the side, for I had early learned to swim. Stupid and angry, I scrambled up the bank to the green glade. Here a first surprise befell me. It was late afternoon; the sun had travelled three-fourths of the sky; it would be near five o'clock. What a great fool I had been to fall asleep and lose a day's fishing! I found my rod moored to the side with the line and half of the horse-hair; some huge fish had taken the hook. Then I looked around me to the water and the trees and the green sward, and surprise the second befell me; for there, not twelve paces from me, stood a little girl, watching me with every appearance of terror.

She was about two years younger than myself, I fancied. Her dress was some rich white stuff which looked eerie in the shade of the beeches, and her long hair fell over her shoulders in plentiful curls. She had wide, frightened blue eyes and a delicately-featured face, and as for the rest I know not how to describe her, so I will not try. I, with no more manners than a dog, stood staring at her, wholly forgetful of the appearance I must present, without shoes and stockings, coat or waistcoat, and dripping with Tweed water. She spoke first, in a soft southern tone, which I, accustomed only to the broad Scots of Jean Morran, who had been my nurse, fell in love with at once. Her whole face was filled with the extremest terror.

"Oh, sir, be you the water-kelpie?" she asked.

I could have laughed at her fright, though I must have been like enough to some evil spirit; but I answered her with my best gravity.

"No, I am no kelpie, but I had gone to sleep and fell into the stream. My coat and shoes are in a hole two miles down, and my name is John Burnet of Barns." All this I said in one breath, being anxious to right myself in her eyes; also with some pride in the last words.

It was pretty to see how recognition chased the fear from her face. "I know you," she said. "I have heard of you. But what do you in the dragon's hole, sir? This is my place. The dragon will get you without a doubt."

At this I took off my bonnet and made my best bow. "And who are you, pray, and what story is this of dragons? I have been here scores of times, and never have I seen or heard of them." This with the mock importance of a boy.

"Oh, I am Marjory," she said, "Marjory Veitch, and I live at the great house in the wood, and all this place is my father's and mine. And this is my dragon's den;" and straightway she wandered into a long tale of Fair Margot and the Seven Maidens, how Margot wed the Dragon and he turned forthwith into a prince, and I know not what else. "But no harm can come to me, for look, I have the charm," and she showed me a black stone in a silver locket. "My nurse Alison gave it me. She had it from a great fairy who came with it to my cradle when I was born."

"Who told you all this?" I asked in wonder, for this girl seemed to carry all the wisdom of the ages in her head.

"Alison and my father, and my brother Michael and old Adam Noble, and a great many more – " Then she broke off. "My mother is gone. The fairies came for her."

Then I remembered the story of the young English mistress of Dawyck, who had died before she had been two years in our country. And this child, with her fairy learning, was her daughter.

Now I know not what took me, for I had ever been shy of folk, and, above all, of womankind. But here I found my tongue, and talked to my new companion in a way which I could not sufficiently admire. There in the bright sun-setting I launched into the most miraculous account of my adventures of that day, in which dragons and witches were simply the commonest portents. Then I sat down and told her all the stories I had read out of Virgil and Cæsar, and all that I had heard of the wars in

England and abroad, and the tales of the countryside which the packmen had told me. Also I must tell the romances of the nettie-wives who come to our countryside from the north – the old sad tale of Morag of the Misty Days and Usnach's sons and the wiles of Angus. And she listened, and thanked me ever so prettily when I had done. Then she would enlighten my ignorance; so I heard of the Red Etin of Ireland, and the Wolf of Brakelin, and the Seven Bold Brothers. Then I showed her nests, and gave her small blue eggs to take home, and pulled great foxgloves for her, and made coronets of fern. We played at hide-and-go-seek among the beeches, and ran races, and fought visionary dragons. Then the sun went down over the trees, and she declared it was time to be going home. So I got my solitary fish from its bed of rushes and made her a present of it. She was pleased beyond measure, though she cried out at my hardness in taking its life.

So it came to pass that Mistress Marjory Veitch of Dawyck went home hugging a great two-pound trout, and I went off to Barns, heedless of Master Porter and his heavy hand, and, arriving late, escaped a thrashing, and made a good meal of the remnants of supper.

CHAPTER II
THE HOUSE OF BARNS

The house of Barns stands on a green knoll above the Tweed, half-way between the village of Stobo and the town of Peebles. Tweed here is no great rolling river, but a shallow, prattling stream, and just below the house it winds around a small islet, where I loved to go and fish; for it was an adventure to reach the place, since a treacherous pool lay not a yard below it. The dwelling was white and square, with a beacon tower on the top, which once flashed the light from Neidpath to Drochil when the English came over the Border. It had not been used for half a hundred years, but a brazier still stood there, and a pile of rotten logs, grim mementoes of elder feuds. This also was a haunt of mine, for jackdaws and owls built in the corners, and it was choice fun of a spring morning to search for eggs at the risk of my worthless life. The parks around stretched to Manor village on the one side, and nigh to the foot of the Lyne Water on the other. Manor Water as far as Posso belonged to us, and many a rare creel have I had out of its pleasant reaches. Behind, rose the long heathery hill of the Scrape, which is so great a hill that while one side looks down on us another overhangs the wood of Dawyck. Beyond that again came Dollar Law and the wild fells which give birth to the Tweed, the Yarrow, and the Annan.

Within the house, by the great hall-fire, my father, William Burnet, spent his days. I mind well his great figure in the armchair, a mere wreck of a man, but mighty in his very ruin. He wore a hat, though he seldom went out, to mind him of the old days when he was so busy at hunting and harrying that he had never his head uncovered. His beard was streaked with grey, and his long nose, with a break in the middle (which is a mark of our family), and bushy eyebrows gave him a fearsome look to a chance stranger. In his young days he had been extraordinarily handsome and active, and, if all tales be true, no better than he should have been. He was feared in those days for his great skill in night-foraying, so that he won the name of the "Howlet," which never left him. Those were the high days of our family, for my father was wont to ride to the Weaponshow with seven horsemen behind him; now we could scarce manage four. But in one of his night-rides his good fortune failed him; for being after no good on the hills above Megget one dark wintry night, he fell over the Bitch Craig, horse and all; and though he escaped with his life, he was lamed in both legs and condemned to the house for the rest of his days. Of a summer night he would come out to the lawn with two mighty sticks to support him, and looking to the Manor Water hills, would shake his fist at them as old enemies. In his later days he took kindly to theology and learning, both of which, in the person of Master Porter, dined at his table every day. I know not how my father, who was a man of much penetration, could have been deceived by this man, who had as much religion as an ox. As for learning, he had some rag-tag scraps of Latin which were visited on me for my sins; but in eating he had no rival, and would consume beef and pasty and ale like a famished army. He preached every Sabbath in the little kirk of Lyne, below the Roman camp, and a woful service it was. I went regularly by my father's orders, but I was the only one from the household of Barns. I fear that not even my attendance at his church brought me Master Porter's love; for I had acquired nearly as much Latin as he possessed himself, and vexed his spirit at lesson-hours with unanswerable questions. At other times, too, I would rouse him to the wildest anger by singing a profane song of my own making:

"O ken ye his Reverence Minister Tam,
Wi' a heid like a stot and a face like a ram?"

To me my father was more than kind. He was never tired of making plans for my future. "John," he would say, "you shall go to Glasgow College, for you have the makings of a scholar in you. Ay, and we'll make you a soldier, John, and a good honest gentleman to fight for your king, as your forbears

did before you." (This was scarce true, for there never yet was a Burnet who fought for anything but his own hand.) "No damned Whig for me. Gad, how I wish I were hale in the legs to be off to the hills with the Johnstones and Keiths. There wouldna be one of the breed left from Tweedwell to the Brig o' Peebles." Then he would be anxious about my martial training, and get down the foils to teach me a lesson. From this he would pass to tales of his own deeds till the past would live before him, and his eyes would glow with their old fire. Then he would forget his condition, and seek to show me how some parry was effected. There was but one result; his poor weak legs would give way beneath him. Then I had to carry him to his bed, swearing deeply at his infirmities and lamenting the changes of life.

In those days the Burnets were a poor family – a poor and a proud. My grandfather had added much to the lands by rapine and extortion – ill-gotten gains which could not last. He had been a man of a violent nature, famed over all the South for his feats of horsemanship and swordsmanship. He died suddenly, of overdrinking, at the age of fifty-five, and now lies in the kirk of Lyne beneath an effigy representing the Angel Gabriel coming for his soul. His last words are recorded: "O Lord, I dinna want to dee, I dinna want to dee. If ye'll let me live, I'll run up the sklidders o' Cademuir to a' eternity." The folk of the place seldom spoke of him, though my father upheld him as a man of true spirit who had an eye to the improvement of his house. Of the family before him I had the history at my finger-ends. This was a subject of which my father never tired, for he held that the genealogy of the Burnets was a thing of vastly greater importance than that of the kings of Rome or Judah. From the old days when we held Burnetland, in the parish of Broughton, and called ourselves of that ilk, I had the unbroken history of the family in my memory. Ay, and also of the great house of Traquair, for my mother had been a Stewart, and, as my father said often, this was the only family in the country bide which could hope to rival us in antiquity or valour.

My father's brother, Gilbert, had married the heiress of a westland family, and with her had got the lands of Eaglesham, about the headwaters of Cart. His son Gilbert, my cousin, was a tall lad some four years my senior, who on several occasions rode to visit us at Barns. He was of a handsome, soldierly appearance, and looked for an early commission in a Scots company. At first I admired him mightily, for he was skilful at all sports, rode like a moss-trooper, and could use his sword in an incomparable fashion. My father could never abide him, for he could not cease to tell of his own prowess, and my father was used to say that he loved no virtue better than modesty. Also, he angered every servant about the place by his hectoring, and one day so offended old Tam Todd that Tam flung a bucket at him, and threatened to duck him in the Tweed; which he doubtless would have done, old as he was, for he was a very Hercules of a man. This presented a nice problem to all concerned, and I know not which was the more put out, Tam or my father. Finally it ended in the latter reading Gilbert a long and severe lecture, and then bidding Tam ask his pardon, seeing that the dignity of the family had to be sustained at any cost.

One other relative, though in a distant way, I must not omit to mention, for the day came when every man of our name was proud to claim the kinship. This was Gilbert Burnet, of Edinburgh, afterwards Divinity Professor in Glasgow, Bishop of Salisbury, and the author of the famous "Bishop Burnet's History of his Own Times." I met him often in after days, and once in London he had me to his house and entertained me during my stay. Of him I shall have to tell hereafter, but now he was no more than a name to me, a name which my father was fond of repeating when he wished to recall me to gravity.

Tam Todd, my father's grieve, who managed the lands about the house, deserves more than a passing word. He was about sixty years of age, stooped in the back, but with long arms and the strength of a giant. At one time he had fought for Gustavus, and might have risen high in the ranks, had not a desperate desire to see his native land come upon him and driven him to slip off one night and take ship for Leith. He had come to Peebles, where my father met him, and admiring his goodly stature, took him into his service, in which Tam soon became as expert at the breeding of sheep as

ever he had been at the handling of a pike or musket. He was the best story-teller and the cunningest fisher in the place, full of quaint foreign words, French, and Swedish, and High Dutch, for the army of Gustavus had been made up of the riddlings of Europe. From him I learned to fence with the rapier, and a past-master he was, for my father told how, in his best days, he could never so much as look at Tam. *Bon pied bon oeil* was ever his watchword, and I have proved it a good one; for, short though it be, if a man but follow it he may fear nothing. Also, he taught me a thing which has been most useful to me, and which I will speak of again – the art of using the broadsword or claymore, as the wild Highlanders call it. My school was on a strip of green grass beside Tweed, and here I have had many a tough encounter in the long summer nights. He made me stand with my back to the deep pool, that I might fear to step back; and thus I learned to keep my ground, a thing which he held to be of the essence of swordsmanship.

My nurse, Jean Morran, was the only woman body about the place. She and Tam did the cooking between them, for that worthy had learned the art gastronomical from a Frenchman whose life he saved, and who, in gratitude, taught him many excellent secrets for dishes, and stole ten crowns. She had minded me and mended my clothes and seen to my behaviour ever since my mother died of a fever when I was scarce two years old. Of my mother I remember nothing, but if one may judge from my father's long grief and her portrait in the dining-hall, she had been a good and a gentle as well as a most beautiful woman. Jean, with her uncouth tongue and stern face, is still a clear figure in my memory. She was a kind nurse in the main, and if her temper was doubtful from many sore trials, her cakes and sugar were excellent salves to my wronged heart. She was, above all things, a famous housewife, keeping the place spotless and clean, so that when one entered the house of Barns there was always something fresh and cool in the very air.

But here I am at the end of my little gallery, for the place was bare of folk, and the life a lonely one. Here I grew up amid the woods and hills and the clean air, with a great zest for all the little excellencies of my lot, and a tolerance of its drawbacks. By the time I had come to sixteen years I had swam in every pool in Tweed for miles up and down, climbed every hill, fished in every burn, and ridden and fallen from every horse in my father's stable. I had been as far west as Tintock Hill and as far south as the Loch o' the Lowes. Nay, I had once been taken to Edinburgh in company with Tam, who bought me a noble fishing-rod, and showed me all the wondrous things to be seen. A band of soldiers passed down the High Street from the Castle with a great clanking and jingling, and I saw my guide straighten up his back and keep time with his feet to their tread. All the way home, as I sat before him on the broad back of Maisie, he told me tales of his campaigns, some of them none too fit for a boy's ear; but he was carried away and knew not what he was saying. This first put a taste for the profession of arms into my mind, which was assiduously fostered by my fencing lessons and the many martial tales I read. I found among my father's books the chronicles of Froissart and a history of the Norman Kings, both in the English, which I devoured by night and day. Then I had Tacitus and Livy, and in my fourteenth year I began the study of Greek with a master at Peebles. So that soon I had read most of the "Iliad" and all the "Odyssey," and would go about repeating the long, swinging lines. I think that story of the man who, at the siege of some French town, shouted a Homeric battle-piece most likely to be true, for with me the Greek had a like effect, and made me tramp many miles over the hills or ride the horses more hard than my father permitted.

But this book-work was, after all, but half of my life, and that the less memorable. All the sights and sounds of that green upland vale are linked for me with memories of boyish fantasies. I used to climb up the ridge of Scrape when the sun set and dream that the serried ranks of hills were a new country where all was strange, though I knew well that an hour of the morning would dispel the fancy. Then I would descend from the heights, and for weeks be so fiercely set on the sports of the time of year that I had scarcely time for a grave thought. I have often gone forth to the lambing with the shepherds, toiled all day in the brown moors, and at night dropped straight off to sleep as I sat in my chair at meat. Then there was the salmon-fishing in the late spring, when the blood ran hot at the

flare of the torches and the shimmer of the spears, and I, a forlorn young fool, shivered in my skin as the keen wind blew down the water. There was the swing and crackle of the stones in winter when the haughlands of Manor were flooded, and a dozen brown-faced men came to the curling and the air rang with shouts and laughter. I have mind, too, of fierce days of snow when men looked solemn and the world was so quiet that I whistled to keep me from despondency, and the kitchen at Barns was like a place in an inn with famishing men and dripping garments. Then Tweed would be buried under some great drift and its kindly flow sorely missed by man and beast. But best I remember the loosening of winter, when the rains from the moors sent down the river roaring-red, and the vale was one pageant of delicate greenery and turbid brown torrent.

Often I would take my books and go into the heart of the hills for days and nights. This, my father scarce liked, but he never hindered me. It was glorious to kindle your fire in the neuk of a glen, broil your trout, and make your supper under the vault of the pure sky. Sweet, too, at noonday to lie beside the wellhead of some lonely burn, and think of many things that can never be set down and are scarce remembered. But these were but dreams, and this is not their chronicle; so it behooves me to shut my ear to vagrom memories.

To Dawyck I went the more often the older I grew. For Marjory Veitch had grown into a beautiful, lissom girl, with the same old litheness of body and gaiety of spirit. She was my comrade in countless escapades, and though I have travelled the world since then I have never found a readier or a braver. But with the years she grew more maidenly, and I dared less to lead her into mad ventures. Nay, I who had played with her in the woods and fished and raced with her as with some other lad, began to feel a foolish awe in her presence, and worshipped her from afar. The fairy learning of her childhood was but the index of a wistfulness and delicacy of nature which, to my grosser spirit, seemed something to uncover one's head before. I have loved her dearly all my life, but I have never more than half understood her; which is a good gift of God to most men, for the confounding of vanity.

To her a great sorrow had come. For when she was scarce thirteen, her father, the laird of Dawyck, who had been ever of a home-keeping nature, died from a fall while hunting on the brow of Scrape. He had been her childhood's companion, and she mourned for him as sorely as ever human being mourned for another. Michael, her only brother, was far abroad in a regiment of the Scots French Guards, so she was left alone in the great house with no other company than the servants and a cross-grained aunt who heard but one word in twenty. For this reason I rode over the oftener to comfort her loneliness.

CHAPTER III
THE SPATE IN TWEED

The year 1683 was with us the driest year in any man's memory. From the end of April to the end of July we had scarce a shower. The hay-harvest was ruined beyond repair, and man and beast were sick with the sultry days. It was on the last Monday of July that I, wearied with wandering listlessly about the house, bethought myself of riding to Peebles to see the great match at bowls which is played every year for the silver horn. I had no expectation of a keen game, for the green was sure to be well-nigh ruined with the sun, and men had lost spirit in such weather. But the faintest interest is better than purposeless idleness, so I roused myself from languor and set out.

I saddled Maisie the younger, for this is a family name among our horses, and rode down by the Tweed side to the town. The river ran in the midst of a great bed of sun-baked gravel – a little trickle that a man might step across. I do not know where the fish had gone, but they, too, seemed scared by the heat, for not a trout plashed to relieve the hot silence. When I came to the Manor pool I stood still in wonder, for there for the first time in my life I saw the stream dry. Manor, which is in winter a roaring torrent and at other times a clear, full stream, had not a drop of running water in its bed; naught but a few stagnant pools green with slime. It was a grateful change to escape from the sun into the coolness of the Neidpath woods; but even there a change was seen, for the ferns hung their fronds wearily and the moss had lost all its greenness. When once more I came out to the sun, its beating on my face was so fierce that it almost burned, and I was glad when I came to the town, and the shade of tree and dwelling.

The bowling-green of Peebles, which is one of the best in the country, lies at the west end of the High Street at the back of the Castle Hill. It looks down on Tweed and Peebles Water, where they meet at the Cuddie's Pool, and thence over a wide stretch of landscape to the high hills. The turf had been kept with constant waterings, but, notwithstanding, it looked grey and withered. Here I found half the men-folk of Peebles assembled and many from the villages near, to see the match which is the greatest event of the month. Each player wore a ribband of a special colour. Most of them had stripped off their coats and jerkins to give their arms free play, and some of the best were busied in taking counsel with their friends as to the lie of the green. The landlord of the Crosskeys was there with a great red favour stuck in his hat, looking, as I thought, too fat and rubicund a man to have a steady eye. Near him was Peter Crustcrackit the tailor, a little wiry man with legs bent from sitting cross-legged, thin active hands, and keen eyes well used to the sewing of fine work. Then there were carters and shepherds, stout fellows with bronzed faces and great brawny chests, and the miller of the Wauk-mill, who was reported the best bowl-player in the town. Some of the folk had come down like myself merely to watch; and among them I saw Andrew Greenlees, the surgeon, who had tended me what time I went over the cauld. A motley crowd of the odds and ends of the place hung around or sat on the low wall – poachers and black-fishers and all the riff-raff of the town.

The jack was set, the order of the game arranged, and the play commenced. A long man from the Quair Water began, and sent his bowl curling up the green not four inches from the mark.

"Weel dune for Quair Water," said one. "They're nane sae blind thereaways."

Then a flesher's lad came and sent a shot close on the heels of the other and lay by his side.

At this, there were loud cries of "Weel dune, Coo's Blether," which was a name they had for him; and the fellow grew red and withdrew to the back.

Next came a little nervous man, who looked entreatingly at the bystanders as if to bespeak their consideration. "Jock Look-up, my dear," said a man solemnly, "compose your anxious mind, for thae auld wizened airms o' yours 'll no send it half-road." The little man sighed and played his bowl: it was even as the other had said, for his shot was adjudged a *hogg* and put off the green.

Then many others played till the green was crowded at one end with the balls. They played in rinks, and interest fell off for some little time till it came to the turn of the two acknowledged champions, Master Crustcrackit and the miller, to play against one another. Then the onlookers crowded round once more.

The miller sent a long swinging shot which touched the jack and carried it some inches onward. Then a bowl from the tailor curled round and lay between them and the former mark. Now arose a great dispute (for the players of Peebles had a way of their own, and to understand their rules required no ordinary share of brains) as to the propriety of Master Crustcrackit's shot, some alleging that he had played off the cloth, others defending. The miller grew furiously warm.

"Ye wee, sneck-drawin' tailor-body, wad ye set up your bit feckless face against a man o' place and siller?"

"Haud your tongue, miller," cried one. "Ye've nae cause to speak ill o' the way God made a man."

Master Crustcrackit, however, needed no defender. He was ready in a second.

"And what dae ye ca' yoursel' but a great, God-forsaken dad o' a man, wi' a wame like Braid Law and a mouth like the bottomless pit for yill and beef and a' manner o' carnal bakemeats. You to speak abune your breath to me," and he hopped round his antagonist like an enraged fighting-cock.

What the miller would have said no one may guess, had not a middle-aged man, who had been sitting on a settle placidly smoking a long white pipe, come up to see what was the dispute. He was dressed in a long black coat, with small-clothes of black, and broad silver-buckled shoon. The plain white cravat around his neck marked him for a minister.

"William Laverlaw and you, Peter Crustcrackit, as the minister of this parish, I command ye to be silent. I will have no disturbance on this public green. Nay, for I will adjudge your difference myself."

All were silent in a second, and a hush of interest fell on the place.

"But that canna be," grumbled the miller, "for ye're nae great hand at the bowls."

The minister stared sternly at the speaker, who sank at once into an aggrieved quiet. "As God has appointed me the spiritual guide of this unworthy town, so also has He made me your master in secular affairs. I will settle your disputes and none other. And, sir, if you or any other dare gainsay me, then I shall feel justified in leaving argument for force, and the man who offends I shall fling into the Cuddie's Pool for the clearing of his brain and the benefit of his soul." He spoke in a slow, methodical tone, rolling the words over his tongue. Then I remembered the many stories I had heard of this man's autocratic rule over the folk of the good town of Peebles; how he, alien like to whig and prelatist, went on his steadfast path caring for no man and snapping his fingers at the mandates of authority. And indeed in the quiet fierce face and weighty jaws there was something which debarred men from meddling with their owner.

Such was his influence on the people that none dared oppose him, and he gave his decision, which seemed to me to be a just and fair one. After this they fell to their play once more.

Meantime I had been looking on at the sport from the vantage-ground of the low wall which looked down on the river. I had debated a question of farriery with the surgeon, who was also something of a horse-doctor; and called out greetings to the different players, according as I favoured their colours. Then when the game no longer amused me, I had fallen to looking over the country, down to the edge of the water where the small thatched cottages were yellow in the heat, and away up the broad empty channel of Tweed. The cauld, where salmon leap in the spring and autumn, and which is the greatest cauld on the river unless it be the one at Melrose, might have been crossed dryshod. I began to hate the weariful, everlasting glare and sigh for the clouds once more, and the soft moist turf and the hazy skyline. Now it was so heavily oppressive that a man could scarce draw a free breath. The players dripped with sweat and looked nigh exhausted, and for myself the sulphurous air weighed on me like a mount of lead and confused such wits as I had.

Even as I looked I saw a strange thing on the river bank which chained my languid curiosity. For down the haugh, swinging along at a great pace, came a man, the like of whom I had seldom seen. He ran at a steady trot more like a horse than a human creature, with his arms set close by his sides and without bonnet or shoes. His head swung from side to side as with excessive weariness, and even at that distance I could see how he panted. In a trice he was over Peebles Water and had ascended the bank to the bowling-green, cleared the low dyke, and stood gaping before us. Now I saw him plainer, and I have rarely seen a stranger sight. He seemed to have come a great distance, but no sweat stood on his brow; only a dun copper colour marking the effect of the hot sun. His breeches were utterly ragged and in places showed his long supple limbs. A shock of black hair covered his head and shaded his swarthy face. His eyes were wild and keen as a hawk's, and his tongue hung out of his mouth like a dog's in a chase. Every man stopped his play and looked at the queer newcomer. A whisper went round the place that it was that "fule callant frae Brochtoun," but this brought no news to me.

The man stood still for maybe three minutes with his eyes fixed on the ground as if to recover breath. Then he got up with dazed glances, like one wakening from sleep. He stared at me, then at the players, and burst into his tale, speaking in a high, excited voice.

"I hae run frae Drummeller to bring ye word. Quick and get the folk out o' the waterside hooses or the feck o' the toun 'll be soomin' to Berwick in an 'oor."

No one spoke, but all stared as if they took him for a madman.

"There's been an awfu' storm up i' the muirs," he went on, panting, "and Tweed's com in' doun like a mill-race. The herd o' Powmood tellt me, and I got twae 'oors start o't and cam off here what I could rin. Get the folk out o' the waterside hooses when I bid ye, wi' a' their gear and plenishing, or there'll no be sae muckle as a groat's worth left by nicht. Up wi' ye and haste, for there's nae time to lose. I heard the roar o' the water miles off, louder than ony thunderstorm and mair terrible than an army wi' banners. Quick, ye auld doited bodies, if ye dinna want to hae mourning and lamentation i' the toun o' Peebles."

At this, as you may believe, a great change passed over all. Some made no words about it, but rushed into the town to give the alarm; others stared stupidly as if waiting for more news; while some were disposed to treat the whole matter as a hoax. This enraged the newsbearer beyond telling. Springing up, he pointed to the western sky, and far off we saw a thick blackness creeping up the skyline. "If ye'll no believe me," said he, "will ye believe the finger of God?" The word and the sight convinced the most distrusting.

Now Tweed, unlike all other rivers of my knowledge, rises terribly at the first rain and travels slowly, so that Tweedsmuir may be under five feet of water and Peebles high and dry. This makes the whole valley a place of exceeding danger in sultry weather, for no man knows when a thunderstorm may break in the hills and send the stream down a raging torrent. This, too, makes it possible to hear word of a flood before it comes, and by God's grace to provide against it.

The green was soon deserted. I rushed down to the waterside houses, which were in the nearest peril, and in shorter time than it takes to tell, we had the people out and as much of their belongings as were worth the saving; then we hastened to the low-lying cottages on Tweed Green and did likewise. Some of the folk seemed willing to resist, because, as they said, "Whae kenned but that the body micht be a leear and they werena to hae a' this wark for naething?" For the great floods were but a tradition, and only the old men had seen the ruin which the spate could work. Nevertheless, even these were convinced by a threatening sky and a few words from the newsbearer's trenchant tongue. Soon the High Street and the wynds were thick with household belongings, and the Castle Hill was crowded with folk to see the coming of the flood.

By this time the grim line of black had grown over half the sky, and down fell great drops of rain into the white, sun-baked channel. It was strange to watch these mighty splashes falling into the little stagnant pools and the runlets of flowing water. And still the close, thick heat hung over all, and men looked at the dawnings of the storm with sweat running over their brows. With the rain came a

mist – a white ghastly haze which obliterated the hills and came down nigh to the stream. A sound, too, grew upon our ears, at first far away and dim, but increasing till it became a dull hollow thunder, varied with a strange crackling, swishing noise which made a man eery to listen to. Then all of a sudden the full blast of the thing came upon us. Men held their breaths as the wind and rain choked them and drove them back. It was scarce possible to see far before, but the outlines of the gorge of Neidpath fleeted through the drift, whence the river issued. Every man turned his eyes thither and strained them to pierce the gloom.

Suddenly round the corner of the hill appeared a great yellow wave crested with white foam and filling the whole space. Down it came roaring and hissing, mowing the pines by the waterside as a reaper mows down hay with a scythe. Then with a mighty bound it broke from the hill-barriers and spread over the haugh. Now, the sound was like the bubbling of a pot ere it boils. We watched it in terror and admiration, as it swept on its awful course. In a trice it was at the cauld, and the cauld disappeared under a whirl of foam; now it was on the houses, and the walls went in like nutshells and the rubble was borne onward. A cry got up of "the bridge," and all hung in wonder as it neared the old stonework, the first barrier to the torrent's course, the brave bridge of Peebles. It flung itself on it with fiendish violence, but the stout masonwork stood firm, and the boiling tide went on through the narrow arches, leaving the bridge standing unshaken, as it had stood against many a flood. As we looked, we one and all broke into a cheer in honour of the old masons who had made so trusty a piece of stone.

I found myself in the crowd of spectators standing next to the man who had brought the tidings. He had recovered his breath and was watching the sight with a look half of interest and half of vexation. When all was past and only the turbid river remained, he shook himself like a dog and made to elbow his way out. "I maun be awa'," he said, speaking to himself, "and a sair job I'll hae gettin' ower Lyne Water." When I heard him I turned round and confronted him. There was something so pleasing about his face, his keen eyes and alert head, that I could not forbear from offering him my hand, and telling him of my admiration for his deed. I was still but a boy and he was clearly some years my elder, so I made the advance, I doubt not, with a certain shyness and hesitancy. He looked at me sharply and smiled.

"Ye're the young laird o' Barns," said he; "I ken ye weel though ye maybe are no aquaint wi' me. I'm muckle honoured, sir, and gin ye'll come Brochtoun-ways sometime and speir for Nicol Plenderleith, he'll tak ye to burns that were never fished afore and hills that never heard the sound o' a shot."

I thanked him, and watched him slipping through the crowd till he was lost to view. This was my first meeting with Nicol Plenderleith, of whose ways and doings this tale shall have much to say. The glamour of the strange fellow was still upon me as I set myself to make my road home. I am almost ashamed to tell of my misfortunes; for after crossing the bridge and riding to Manor Water, I found that this stream likewise had risen and had not left a bridge in its whole course. So I had to go up as far as St. Gordians' Cross before I could win over it, and did not reach Barns till after midnight, where I found my father half-crazy with concern for me and Tam Todd making ready to go and seek me.

CHAPTER IV
I GO TO THE COLLEGE AT GLASGOW

By this time I had grown a great stalwart lad, little above the middle height, but broad and sinewy. I had made progress in all manly sports and could fling the hammer almost as far as the Manor blacksmith, while in leaping and running I had few rivals among lads of my age. Also I was no bad swordsman, but could stand my own against all the wiles of Tam Todd, and once even disarmed him to his own unspeakable disgust. In my studies, which I pursued as diligently as I could with no teachers and not over-many books, I had made some little advance, having read through most of the Greek tragedians and advanced some distance in the study of Plato; while in the Latin tongue I had become such an adept that I could both read and write it with ease.

When I had reached the mature age of eighteen, who should come up into our parts but my famous relative, Master Gilbert Burnet, the preacher at St. Clement's in London, of whom I have already spoken. He was making a journey to Edinburgh and had turned out of his way to revive an old acquaintance. My father was overjoyed to see him and treated him to the best the house could produce. He stayed with us two days, and I remember him still as he sat in a great armchair opposite my father, with his broad velvet cap and grey, peaked beard, and weighty brows. Yet when he willed, though for ordinary a silent man, he could talk as gaily and wittily as any town gallant; so much indeed that my father, who was somewhat hard to please, declared him the best companion he ever remembered.

Before he left, Master Burnet examined me on my progress in polite learning, and finding me well advanced, he would have it that I should be sent forthwith to Glasgow College. He exacted a promise from my father to see to this, and left behind him, when he departed, letters of introduction to many of the folk there, for he himself had, at one time, been professor of divinity in the place. As for myself, I was nothing loth to go, and see places beyond Tweeddale and add to my stock of learning; for about this time a great enthusiasm for letters had seized me (which I suppose happens at some time or other to most men), and I conceived my proper vocation in life to be that of the scholar. I have found in an old manuscript book a list of the titles of imaginary works, editions, poems, treatises, all with my unworthy name subscribed as the author. So it was settled that I should ride to Glasgow and take lodgings in the town for the sake of the college classes.

I set out one November morning, riding Maisie alone, for no student was allowed to have a servant, nor any one below the degree of Master of Arts. The air was keen and frosty, and I rode in high fettle by the towns of Biggar and Lanark to the valley of the Clyde. I lay all night at Crossford in the house of a distant relative. Thence the next day I rode to Hamilton and in the evening came to the bridge of the Clyde at Glasgow. Then I presented myself to the Principal and Regents of the college and was duly admitted, putting on the red gown, the badge of the student class, than which I believe there is no more hideous habiliment.

The college in those days was poor enough, having been well-nigh ruined by the extortions of Lord Middleton and his drunken crew; and it had not yet benefited by the rich donations of the Reverend Zachary Boyd of the Barony Kirk. Still, the standard of learning in the place was extraordinarily high, especially in dialectic and philosophy – a standard which had been set by the famous Andrew Melville when he was a professor in the place. I have heard disputations there in the evenings between the schoolmen and the new philosophers, the like of which could scarcely be got from the length and breadth of the land.

Across the High Street were the college gardens and green pleasant orchards where the professors were wont to walk and the scholars to have their games. Through the middle ran the clear Molendinar Burn, so called by the old Romans, and here I loved to watch the trout and young salmon leaping. There was a severe rule against scholars fishing in the stream, so I was fain to content myself

with the sight. For soon a violent fit of home-sickness seized me, and I longed for the rush of Tweed and the pleasant sweep of Manor; so it was one of my greatest consolations to look at this water and fancy myself far away from the town. One other lad who came from Perthshire used to come and stand with me and tell me great tales of his fishing exploits; and I did likewise with him till we became great companions. Many afternoons I spent here, sometimes with a book and sometimes without one; in the fine weather I would lie on the grass and dream, and in rough, boisterous winter days I loved to watch the Molendinar, flooded and angry, fling its red waters against the old stones of the bridge.

No one of us was permitted to carry arms of any kind, so I had to sell my sword on my first coming to the town. This was a great hardship to me, for whereas when I carried a weapon I had some sense of my own importance, now I felt no better than the rest of the unarmed crowd about me. Yet it was a wise precaution, for in other places where scholars are allowed to strut like cavaliers there are fights and duels all the day long, so that the place looks less like an abode of the Muses than a disorderly tavern. Nevertheless, there were many manly exercises to be had, for in the greens in the garden we had trials of skill at archery and golf and many other games of the kind. At the first mentioned I soon became a great master, for I had a keen eye from much living among woods and hills, and soon there was no one who could come near me at the game. As for golf, I utterly failed to excel; and indeed it seems to me that golf is like the divine art of poetry, the gift for which is implanted in man at his birth or not at all. Be that as it may, I never struck a golf-ball fairly in my life, and I misdoubt I never shall.

As for my studies, for which I came to the place, I think I made great progress. For after my first fit of home-sickness was over, I fell in with the ways of the college, and acquired such a vast liking for the pursuit of learning that I felt more convinced than ever that Providence had made me for a scholar. In my classes I won the commendation of both professors; especially in the class of dialectic, where an analysis of Aristotle's method was highly praised by Master Sandeman, the professor. This fine scholar and accomplished gentleman helped me in many ways, and for nigh two months, when he was sick of the fever, I lectured to his class in his stead. We were all obliged to talk in the Latin tongue and at first my speech was stiff and awkward enough, but by and by I fell into the way of it and learned to patter it as glibly as a Spanish monk.

It may be of interest to those of my house that I should give some account of my progress in the several studies, to show that our family is not wholly a soldiering one. In Greek I studied above others the works of Plato, delighting especially in his Phaedo, which I had almost by heart; Aristotle likewise, though I read but little of him in his own tongue. I completed a translation of the first part of Plato's Republic into Latin, which Master Sandeman was pleased to say was nigh as elegant as George Buchanan's. Also I was privileged to discover certain notable emendations in the text of this work, which I sent in manuscript to the famous Schookius of Groningen, who incorporated them in his edition then in preparation, but after the fashion of Dutchmen sent me no thanks.

As regards philosophy, which I hold the most divine of all studies, I was in my first year a most earnest Platonic; nay, I went farther than the master himself, as is the way of all little minds when they seek to comprehend a great one. In those days I went about in sober attire and strove in all things to order my life according to the rules of philosophy, seeking to free myself from all disturbing outside powers and live the life of pure contemplation. I looked back with unutterable contempt on my past as a turbid and confused medley, nor did I seek anything better in life than quiet and leisure for thought and study. In such a condition I spent the first month of my stay at Glasgow.

Then the Platonic fit left me and I was all for Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Here, at last, thought I, have I got the *siccum lumen*, which Heraclitus spoke of: and his distinct and subtle reasoning seemed to me to be above doubt. And indeed I have never wondered at the schoolmen and others who looked upon Aristotle as having reached the height of human wisdom, for his method is so all-embracing and satisfying that it breeds wonder in the heart of any man; and it affords so sure a bottom for thought that men become Aristotelians.

In the midsummer months I went down to Tweeddale again, where I astonished my father and all in the place with my new learning, and also grieved them. For I had no love for fishing or shooting; I would scarce ride two miles for the pleasure of it; my father's tales, in which I delighted before, had grown tiresome; and I had no liking for anything save bending over books. When I went to Dawyck to see Marjory, she knew not what had come over me, I was so full of whims and fancies. "O John," she said, "your face is as white as a woman's, and you have such a horrible cloak. Go and get another at once, you silly boy, and not shame your friends." Yet even Marjory had little power over me, for I heeded her not, though aforetime I would have ridden posthaste to Peebles and got me a new suit, and painted my face if I had thought that thereby I would pleasure her.

When the autumn came again I returned to college more inclined than ever for the life of a scholar. I fell to my studies with renewed zeal, and would doubtless have killed myself with work had I not been nearly killed with the fever, which made me more careful of my health. And now, like the weathercock I was, my beliefs shifted yet again. For studying the schoolmen, who were the great upholders of Aristotle, I found in them so many contradictions and phantasies which they fathered on their master that, after reading the diatribes of Peter Ramus and others against him, I was almost persuaded that I had been grievously misled. Then, at last, I saw hat the fault lay not in Aristotle but in his followers, who sought to find in him things that were beyond the compass of his thought. So by degrees I came round toward the new philosophy, which a party in the college upheld. They swore by the great names of Bacon and Galileo and the other natural philosophers, but I hesitated to follow them, for they seemed to me to disdain all mental philosophy, which I hold is the greater study. I was of this way of thinking when I fell in one day with an English book, a translation of a work by a Frenchman, one Renatus Descartes, published in London in the year 1649. It gave an account of the progress in philosophy of this man, who followed no school, but, clearing his mind of all presuppositions, instituted a method for himself. This marked for me the turning point; for I gave in my allegiance without hesitation to this philosopher, and ever since I have held by his system with some modifications. It is needless for me to enter further into my philosophy, for I have by me a written exposition of the works of this Descartes with my own additions, which I intend, if God so please, to give soon to the world.

For two years I abode at the college, thinking that I was destined by nature for a studious life, and harbouring thoughts of going to the university of Saumur to complete my studies. I thought that my spirit was chastened to a fit degree, and so no doubt it was, for those who had feared me at first on account of my heavy fist and straightforward ways, now openly scoffed at me without fear of punishment. Indeed, one went so far one day as to jostle me off the causeway, and I made no return, but went on as if nothing had happened, deeming it beneath a wise man to be distracted by mundane trifles. Yet, mind you, in all this there was nothing Christian or like unto the meekness of our Master, as I have seen in some men; but rather an absurd attempt to imitate those who would have lived very differently had their lot been cast in our hot and turbid days.

How all this was changed and I veered round of a sudden to the opposite I must hasten to tell. One April day, towards the close of my second year, I was going up the High Street toward the Cathedral with a great parcel of books beneath my arm, when I heard a shouting and a jingling, and a troop of horse came down the street. I stood back into the shelter of a doorway, for soldiers were wont to bear little love to scholars, and I did not care to risk their rough jests. From this place I watched their progress, and a gallant sight it was. Some twenty men in buff jerkins and steel headpieces rode with a fine clatter of bridles and clank of swords. I marked their fierce sun-brown faces and their daredevil eyes as they looked haughtily down on the crowd as on lower beings. And especially I marked their leader. He sat a fine bay horse with ease and grace; his plumed hat set off his high-coloured face and long brown curls worn in the fashion of the day; and as he rode he bowed to the people with large condescension. He was past in a second, but not before I had recognized the face and figure of my cousin Gilbert.

I stood for some minutes staring before me, while the echoes of the horses' hooves died away down the street. This, I thought, is the destiny of my cousin, only two years my elder, a soldier, a gentleman, a great man in his place; while I am but a nameless scholar, dreaming away my manhood in the pursuits of a dotard. I was so overwhelmed with confusion that I stood gaping with a legion of thoughts and opposing feelings running through my brain. Then all the old fighting spirit of my house rose within me. By Heaven, I would make an end of this; I would get me home without delay; I would fling my books into the Clyde; I would go to the wars; I would be a great cavalier, and, by the Lord, I would keep up the name of the house! I was astonished myself at the sudden change in my feelings, for in the space of some ten minutes a whole age had passed for me, and I had grown from a boy to some measure of manhood. I came out from the close-mouth with my head in the air and defiance against all the world in my eye.

Before I had gone five spaces I met the lad who had jostled me aforetime, a big fellow of a raw-boned Ayrshire house, and before he could speak I had him by the arm and had pulled him across the way into the college gardens. There I found a quiet green place, and plucking off my coat I said, "Now, Master Dalrymple, you and I have a small account to settle." With that we fell to with our fists, and in the space of a quarter of an hour I had beaten him so grievously that he was fain to cry for mercy. I let him go, and with much whimpering he slunk away in disgust.

Then I went into the town and bought myself a new blade and a fine suit of clothes – all with the greatest gusto and lightness of heart. I went to the inn where Maisie was stabled and bade them have her ready for me at the college gate in an hour. Then I bade good-bye to all my friends, but especially to Master Sandeman, from whom I was loth to part. I did not fling my books into the Clyde as at first I proposed, but left injunctions that they were to be sent by the carrier. So, having paid all my debts, for my father had kept me well appointed with money, I waved a long farewell and set out for my own country.

CHAPTER V
COUSINLY AFFECTION

It was near midday before I started, so that night I got no farther than the town of Hamilton, but lay at the inn there. The next morning I left betimes, thinking to reach Barns in the afternoon. As I rode along the green sward by the side of Clyde, the larks were singing in the sky and the trout were plashing in the waters, and all the world was gay. The apple orchards sent their blossom across the road, and my hat brushed it down in showers on my horse and myself, so that soon we rode in a mail of pink and white. I plucked a little branch and set it in my hat, and sang all the songs I knew as I cantered along. I cried good-day to every man, and flung money to the little children who shouted as I passed, so that I believe if there had been many more boys on the road I would have reached Tweeddale a beggar. At Crossford, where the Nethan meets the Clyde, I met a man who had been to the salmon-fishing and had caught a big salmon-trout; and as I looked, my old love for the sport awoke within me, and I longed to feel a rod in my hand. It was good to be alive, to taste the fresh air, to feel the sun and wind, and I cried a plague on all close lecture-rooms and musty books.

At Lanark I had a rare dinner at the hostel there. The grey old inn had excellent fare, as I knew of old, so I rode up to the door and demanded its best. It was blessed to see a man obey your words after for many months being a servant of others. I had a dish of well-fed trout and a piece of prime mutton and as good claret, I think, as I have ever tasted. Then I rode over Lanark Moor to Hyndford and through the moor of Carmichael and under the great shadow of Tintock. Here the smell of burning heather came to my nostrils, and so dear and homelike did it seem that I could have wept for very pleasure. The whaups and snipe were making a fine to-do on the bent, and the black-faced sheep grazed in peace. At the top of the knowe above Symington I halted, for there before my eyes were the blue hills of Tweeddale. There was Trehenna and the hills above Broughton, and Drummelzier Law and Glenstivon Dod, and nearer, the great Caerdon; and beyond all a long blue back which I knew could be none other than the hill of Scrape which shadowed Dawyck and my lady.

I came to Barns at three o'clock in the afternoon, somewhat stiff from my ride, but elated with my home-coming. It was with strange feelings that I rode up the long avenue of beeches, every one of which I could have told blindfold. The cattle looked over the palings at me as if glad to see me return. Maisie cocked up her ears at the hares in the grass, and sniffed the hill air as if she had been in a prison for many days. And when I came to the bend of the road and saw the old weatherbeaten tower, my heart gave a great leap within me, for we Tweeddale men dearly love our own countryside, doubtless by reason of its exceeding beauty.

As I rode up Tam Todd came out from the back, and seeing me, let fall the water which he was carrying and ran to my side.

"Eh, Maister John," said he, "I'm blithe to see ye back, sae braw and genty-like. My airm's fair like timmer wi' stiffness for want o' the backsword play, and the troots in Tweed are turned as thick as peas for want o' you to haul them oot; and twae mornings last week there were deer keekin' in at the front-door as tame as kittlins. There's muckle need o' ye at hame."

He would have gone on in this strain for an hour, had I not cut him short by asking for my father.

"Middlin', just middlin'. He misses ye sair. He'll scarce gang out-doors noo, but he'll be a' richt gin he sees ye again. Oh, and I've something mair to tell ye. That wanchancy cousin o' yours, Maister Gilbert, cam yestreen, and he'll be bidin' till the deil kens when. I'se warrant he's at meat wi' the auld maister the noo, for he cam in frae the hills geyan hungry."

Now at this intelligence I was not over-pleased. My cousin was a great man and a gentleman, but never at any time over-friendly to me, and I knew that to my father he was like salt in the mouth. I blamed the ill-luck which had sent him to Barns on the very day of my home-coming. I needs must be on my dignity in his company, for he was quick to find matter for laughter, and it was hard that

he should come at the time when I longed so eagerly for the free ways of the house. However, there was no help for it, I reflected, and went in.

In the passage I met Jean Morran, my old nurse, who had heard the sound of voices, and come out to see who the newcomer might be. "Maister John, Maister John, and is't yoursel'? It's a glad day for the house o' Barns when you come back"; and when I gave her the shawl-pin I had brought her from Glasgow, she had scarce any words to thank me with. So, knowing that my father would be in the dining-hall with his guest, I opened the door and walked in unbidden.

My father sat at the head of the long oak table which had been scoured to a light-brown and shone like polished stone. Claret, his favourite drink, was in a tankard by his elbow, and many wines decked the board. Lower down sat my cousin, gallantly dressed in the fashion of the times, with a coat of fine Spanish leather and small-clothes of some rich dark stuff. His plumed hat and riding cloak of purple velvet lay on the settle at his side. His brown hair fell over his collar and shoulders and well set off his strong, brown face. He sat after the fashion of a soldier, on the side of his chair half-turned away from the table, and every now and then he would cast a piece of meat to Pierce, my old hound, who lay stretched by the fireplace.

My father turned round as I entered, and when he saw me his face glowed with pleasure. Had we been alone we should have met otherwise, but it is not meet to show one's feelings before a stranger, even though that stranger be one of the family. He contented himself with looking eagerly upon me and bidding me welcome in a shaking voice. I marked with grief that his eye did not seem so keen and brave as before, and that he was scarce able to rise from his chair.

My cousin half arose and made me a grand bow in his courtly fashion.

"Welcome, my dear cousin," said he. "I am glad to see that your studies have had little effect on your face." (I was flushed with hard riding.) "You look as if you had just come from a campaign. But fall to. Here are prime fish which I can commend; and venison, also good, though I have had better. Here, too, is wine, and I drink to your success, my learned cousin"; and he filled his glass and drank it at a gulp. He spoke in a half-bantering tone, though his words were kindly. I answered him briskly.

"I had little thought to find you here, Gilbert, but I am right glad to see you. You are prospering mightily, I hear, and will soon be forgetting your poor cousins of Barns"; and after a few more words I set myself to give my father a history of my doings at Glasgow College. Again, had we been alone, I should have told him my causes for leaving and my wishes for my after life, but since my cousin was present, who had ever a sharp tongue, I judged it better to say nothing.

I told my father all that I could think of, and then asked how he had fared in my absence, for I had had but few letters, and what of note had happened at Barns.

"Ay, John," he said, "I'm an old man. I fear that my life here will be short. I scarce can get outside without Tam Todd to lean on, and I have little sleep o' nights. And John, I could wish that you would bide at home now, for I like to see you beside me, and you'll have learned all the folk of Glasgow have to teach you. I once wished you a soldier, but I am glad now that I let the thing blow by, for I would have cared little to have you coming here but once in the six months, for a flying visit."

"Nay, uncle," said my cousin, "you do not put the matter fairly. For myself, I believe there is none busier in Scotland than I, but, Gad, I have always time to slip home to Eaglesham for a day or more. But my father would care little though he never saw me but once in the year, for each time I go back I get a long sermon on my conduct, with my expenses for the year as a text, till I am fairly driven out of the house for peace."

At this my father laughed. "Ay, ay," said he, "that's like my brother Gilbert. He was always a hard man at the siller. Man, I mind when we were both the terrors o' the place, but all the while not a thing would he do, if it meant the loss of a bodle. Pity but I had taken after him in that, and John would have been better supplied to-day."

"Oh," I answered, "I have all I need and more."

Hereupon my cousin spoke with a sneer in his voice. "A groat is enough for a scholar, but the soldier must have a crown. Your scholar, as doubtless John can tell, is content if he have a sad-coloured suit, some musty books, and a stoup of bad wine; but your fine gentleman must have his horses and servants, and dress himself like his quality for all the maids to stare at, and have plenty of loose silver to fling to the gaping crowd; and he is a poor fellow indeed if he do not eat and drink the best that each tavern can give. As for me, I would as soon be a clown in the fields as a scholar, with apologies to my cousin"; and he made me another of his mocking bows.

I answered as gently as I could that gentrice did not consist in daintiness of eating and drinking or boisterous display, and that in my opinion nothing gave so fine a flavour to gentility as a tincture of letters; but my father changed the conversation by asking Gilbert what he had been after that day.

"'Faith, it would be hard to say," said he. "I got a gun from that long-legged, sour-faced groom and went up the big hill above the trees to have a shot at something. I killed a couple of hares and sprung an old muirfowl; but the day grew warm and I thought that the wood would make a pleasant shade, so I e'en turned my steps there and went to sleep below a great oak, and dreamed that I ran a man through the bowels for challenging my courage. It was an ill-omened dream, and I expected to meet with some mishap to account for it ere I got back, but I saw nothing except a lovely girl plucking primroses by the water side. Zounds, Jock, what a fool you must be never to have found out this beauty! She had hair like gold and eyes like sapphires. I've seen many a good-looking wench, but never one like her."

"And what did you do?" I asked, with my heart beating wildly.

"Do," he laughed. "Your scholar would have passed in silence and written odes to her as Venus or Helen for months; whereas I took off my bonnet and made haste to enter into polite conversation. But this girl would have none of me; she's a rose, I warrant, with a pretty setting of thorns. She tripped away, and when I made to follow her, became Madam Fine-airs at once, and declared that her servants were within easy reach, so I had better have a care of my conduct."

My father shot a sharp glance at me, and addressed my cousin. "The maid would be Marjory Veitch, old Sir John's daughter, at Dawyck. He, poor man, has gone to his account, and her brother is abroad, so the poor girl is lonely enough in that great house. John and she have been friends from the time they were children. She has come here, too, and a pretty, modest lass she is, though she favours her mother rather than her father's folk."

At this intelligence my cousin whistled long and low. "So, so," said he, "my scholar has an eye in his head, has he? And Dawyck is not far off, and – well, no wonder you do not care for the military profession. Though, let me tell you, it is as well for the course of true love that there are few cavaliers in this countryside, else Mistress Marjory might have higher notions."

I answered nothing, for, though I loved Marjory well, and thought that she loved me, I had never spoken to her on the matter; for from childhood we had been comrades and friends. So I did not care to reply on a matter which I regarded as so delicate and uncertain.

My cousin was a man who grew sorely vexed by receiving no answer from the object of his wit; and, perhaps on this account, he went further than he meant in his irritation. "Nay, John," he went on, "you're but a sorry fellow at the best, with your tags from the Latin, and your poor spirit. I am one of the meanest of His Majesty's soldiers, but I can outride you, I can beat you at sword-play, at mark-shooting, at all manly sports. I can hold my head before the highest in the land; I can make the vulgar bow before me to the ground. There are no parts of a gentleman's equipment in which I am not your better."

Now, had we been alone, I should not have scrupled to fling the lie in his teeth, and offer to settle the matter on the spot. But I did not wish to excite my father in his feeble health, so I made no reply beyond saying that events would show the better man. My father, however, took it upon himself to defend me. "Peace, Gilbert," he said. "I will not have my son spoken thus of in my own house. He has as much spirit as you, I'll warrant, though he is less fond of blowing his own trumpet." I saw with

annoyance that my father plainly thought my conduct cowardly, and would have been better pleased had I struck my cousin then and there. But I knew how cruelly excited he would be by the matter, and, in his weakness, I feared the result. Also, the man was our guest, and my cousin.

When we rose from supper I assisted my father in walking to his chair by the fire; for, though the weather was mild and spring-like, his blood was so impoverished that he felt the cold keenly. Then my cousin and myself strolled out of doors to the green lawn, below which Tweed ran low and silvery clear. I felt anger against him, yet not so much as I would have felt towards another man, had he used the same words; for I knew Gilbert to be of an absurd boasting nature, which made him do more evil than he had in his heart. Still my honour, or pride (call it what you please), was wounded, and I cast about me for some way to heal it.

"Gilbert," I said, "we have both done much work to-day, so we are both about equally wearied."

"Maybe," said he.

"But your horse is fresh, and a good one, as I know; and you are a good horseman, as you say yourself. You had much to say about my poor horsemanship at supper. Will you try a race with me?"

He looked at me scornfully for a minute. "Nay, there is little honour to be got from that. You knew the ground, and your horse, for all I know, may be swifter than mine. It was not of horses I spoke, but of the riders."

"In the race which I offer you," I answered, "we will both start fair. Do you see yon rift in the hill beyond Scrape? It is the Red Syke, a long dark hole in the side of the hill. I have never ridden there, for the ground is rough and boggy, and I have never heard of a horseman there since Montrose's rising. Will you dare to ride with me to yonder place and back?"

At this my cousin's face changed a little, for he had no liking for breaking his neck on the wild hills. And now, when I look back on the proposal, it seems a mad, foolhardy one in very truth. But then we were both young and spirited, and reckless of our lives.

"Mount and ride," said he. "I'll be there and back before you are half-road, unless, indeed, I have to carry you home."

Together we went round to the stables, and I saddled a black horse of my father's, for Maisie had already travelled far that day. The Weasel, we called him, for he was long and thin in the flanks, with a small head, and a pointed muzzle. He was viciously ill-tempered, and would allow no groom to saddle him; but before I had gone to Glasgow I had mounted and ridden him bareback up and down the channel of Tweed till he was dead-beat, and I half-drowned and shaken almost to pieces. Ever since this escapade he had allowed me to do what I liked with him; and, though I did not find him as pleasant to ride as the incomparable Maisie, yet I knew his great strength and alertness. My cousin's horse was a good cavalry charger, strong, but, as I thought, somewhat too heavy in the legs for great endurance.

We mounted and rode together out among the trees to the fields which bordered on the hills. I was sore in the back when I started, but, after the first half-mile, my sprightliness returned, and I felt fit to ride over Broad Law. My cousin was in an ill mood, for the sport was not to his taste, though he felt bound in honour to justify his words.

The spur of Scrape, which we came to, was called, by the country people, the Deid Wife, for there an Irish woman, the wife of one of Montrose's camp followers, had been killed by the folk of the place after the rout at Philiphaugh. We had much ado to keep our horses from slipping back, for the loose stones which covered the face of the hill gave a feeble foothold. The Weasel took the brae like a deer, but my cousin's heavy horse laboured and panted sorely before it reached the top. Before us stretched the long upland moors, boggy, and cleft with deep ravines, with Scrape on the right, and straight in front, six miles beyond, the great broad crest of Dollar Law. Here we separated, my cousin riding forward, while I thought the road to the left would be the surer. Clear before us lay the Red Syke, an ugly gash, into which the setting sun was beginning to cast his beams.

And now I found myself in a most perilous position. The Weasel's feet were light and touchy, and he stumbled among the stones and tall heather till I had sore work to keep my seat. My cousin's horse was of a heavier make, and I could see it galloping gallantly over the broken ground. I cheered my steed with words, and patted his neck, and kept a tight hand on the rein. Sometimes we slipped among the shingle, and sometimes stumbled over rocks half-hid in brackens. Then we passed into a surer place among short, burned heather. The dry twigs gave forth a strange, creaking sound as the horse's feet trod on them, and puffs of grey dust and ashes, the sign of the burning, rose at every step. Then, beyond this, we went to a long stretch of crisp mountain grass, pleasant for both horse and rider. We splashed through little tumbling burns, and waded through pools left by the spring rains. But, of a sudden, the ground grew softer, and even the Weasel's light weight could not pass in safety. At one time, indeed, I reined him back just on the brink of a treacherous well-eye, from which neither of us would have returned. I cast a glance at my cousin, who was still ahead; his heavy charger was floundering wearily, and he lashed it as if his life were at stake. Then we passed the green bog and came to a great peat-moss, full of hags, where the shepherds had been casting peats. Here the riding was more difficult, for the holes whence the peats had come were often some five feet deep, and it was no easy matter to get a horse out of that treacherous black mud. The Weasel did gallantly, and only once did I dismount, when his hind feet were too deeply sunk to permit him to leap. Beyond me I saw my cousin, riding swiftly, for the middle of the moss, as it chanced, was the firmest and evenest place. We were now scarce a hundred yards from the ravine of the Red Syke, and, even as I looked, I saw him reach it, rest a second to give his horse breathing-space, and then turn on his homeward way.

I came to the place a minute after, and having compassion on my brave horse, I dismounted, and eased him of my weight for a little. Then I got on his back again and set off. Gilbert I saw before me, riding, as I thought, in the worst part, and with a fury that must tell sooner or later on his heavy steed. I had scarce been a moment in the saddle, when, so strange are the ways of horses, the Weasel became aware, for the first time, of the other in front. Before, it had been a toil for him, now it became a pleasure, a race, which it lay with his honour to win. He cocked up his wicked, black ears, put down his head, and I felt the long legs gathering beneath me. I cried aloud with delight, for now I knew that no horse in Tweeddale could hope to match him when the mood was on him. He flew over the hags as if he had been in a paddock; he leaped among the hard parts of the green bog, from tussock to tussock, as skilfully as if he had known nothing but mosses all his days. We came up with Gilbert at the edge of the rough ground, lashing on his horse, with his face flushed and his teeth set. We passed him like the wind, and were galloping among the rocks and brackens, while he was painfully picking his steps. A merciful providence must have watched over the Weasel's path that day, for never horse ran so recklessly. Among slippery boulders and cruel jagged rocks and treacherous shingle he ran like a hare. I grew exultant, laughed, and patted his neck. The sun was setting behind us, and we rode in a broad patch of yellow light. In a trice we were on the brow of the Deid Wife. Down we went, slipping yards at a time, now doubling along the side; sometimes I was almost over the horse's head, sometimes all but off the tail; there was never, since the two daft lairds rode down Horsehope Craig, such a madcap ride. I scarce know how I reached the foot in safety: but reach it I did, and rode merrily among the trees till I came to the green meadowlands about the house of Barns. Here I dismounted and waited for my cousin, for I did not care to have the serving-men laugh at him riding in after me.

I waited a good half-hour before he appeared. A sorry sight he presented. His breeches and jerkin had more than one rent in them; his hat was gone; and his face was flushed almost crimson with effort. His horse had bleeding knees, and its shoulders shook pitifully.

"Pardon me, Gilbert," I said in a fit of repentance; "it was a foolish thing in me to lead you such a senseless road. I might have known that your horse was too heavy for the work. It was no fault of yours that you did not come home before me. I trust that we may forget our quarrels, and live in friendship, as kinsmen should."

"Friendship be damned," he cried in a mighty rage.

CHAPTER VI
HOW MASTER GILBERT BURNET PLAYED A GAME AND WAS CHECKMATED

That night I was too wearied and sore in body to sleep. My mind also was troubled, for I had made an enemy of my cousin, who, as I knew, was not of a nature to forgive readily. His words about Marjory had put me into a ferment of anxiety. Here was my love, bound to me by no promise, at the mercy of all the gallants of the countryside. Who was I, to call myself her lover, when, as yet, no word of love had passed between us? Yet, in my inmost heart, I knew that I might get the promise any day I chose. Then thoughts of my cousin came to trouble me. I feared him no more than a fly in matters betwixt man and man; but might he not take it into his head to make love to the mistress of Dawyck? and all maids dearly love a dashing cavalier. At length, after much stormy indecision, I made up my mind. I would ride to Dawyck next morn and get my lady's word, and so forestall Gilbert, or any other.

I woke about six o'clock; and, looking out from the narrow window, for Barns had been built three hundred years before, I saw that the sky was cloudless and blue, and the morning as clear as could be seen in spring. I hastily dressed, and, getting some slight breakfast from Jean Morran, saddled Maisie, who was now as active as ever, and rode out among the trees. I feared to come to Dawyck too early, so I forded Tweed below the island, and took the road up the further bank by Lyne and Stobo. All the world was bright; an early lark sang high in the heaven; merles and thrushes were making fine music among the low trees by the river. The haze was lifting off the great Manor Water hills; the Red Syke, the scene of the last night's escapade, looked very distant in the morning light; and far beyond all Dollar Law and the high hills about Manorhead were flushed with sunlight on their broad foreheads. A great gladness rose in me when I looked at the hills, for they were the hills of my own country; I knew every glen and corrie, every water and little burn. Before me the Lyne Water hills were green as grass with no patch of heather, and to the left, the mighty form of Scrape, half-clothed in forest, lay quiet and sunlit. I know of no fairer sight on earth; and this I say, after having travelled in other countries, and seen something of their wonders; for, to my mind, there is a grace, a wild loveliness in Tweedside, like a flower-garden on the edge of a moorland, which is wholly its own.

I crossed Lyne Water by the new bridge, just finished in the year before, and entered the wood of Dawyck. For this great forest stretches on both sides of Tweed, though it is greater on the side on which stands the house. In the place where I rode it was thinner, and the trees smaller, and, indeed, around the little village of Stobo, there lies an open part of some fields' width. At the little inn there, I had a morning's draught of ale, for I was somewhat cold with riding in the spring air. Then I forded Tweed at a place called the Cow Ford, and, riding through a wide avenue of lime-trees, came in sight of the grey towers of Dawyck.

I kept well round to the back, for I did not care that the serving-folk should see me and spread tales over all the countryside. I knew that Marjory's window looked sharp down on a patch of green lawn, bordered by lime-trees, so I rode into the shadow and dismounted. I whistled thrice in a way which I had, and which Marjory had learned to know long before, when we were children, and I used to come and beguile her out for long trampings among the hills. To-day it had no effect, for the singing of birds drowned my notes, so I had nothing left but to throw bits of bark against her window. This rude expedient met with more success than it deserved, for in a minute I saw her face behind the glass. She smiled gladly when she saw me, and disappeared, only to appear again in the little door beside the lilacs. She had no hat, so her bright hair hung loose over her neck and was blown about by the morning winds. Her cheeks were pink and white, like apple-blossom, and her lithe form was clad in a dress of blue velvet, plainly adorned as for a country maiden. A spray of lilac was in her breast, and she carried a bunch of sweet-smelling stuff in her hands.

She came gladly towards me, her eyes dancing with pleasure. "How soon you have returned! And how brave you look," said she, with many more pretty and undeserved compliments.

"Ay, Marjory," I answered, "I have come back to Tweeddale, for I have had enough of Glasgow College and books, and I was wearying for the hills and Tweed and a sight of your face. There are no maidens who come near to you with all their finery. You are as fair as the spring lilies in the garden at Barns."

"Oh, John," she laughed, "where did you learn to pay fine compliments? You will soon be as expert at the trade as any of them. I met a man yesterday in the woods who spoke like you, though with a more practised air; but I bade him keep his fine words for his fine ladies, for they suited ill with the hills and a plain country maid."

At this, I must suppose that my brows grew dark, for she went on laughingly.

"Nay, you are not jealous? It ill becomes a scholar and a philosopher as you are, Master John, to think so much of an idle word. Confess, sir, that you are jealous. Why, you are as bad as a lady in a play."

I could not make out her mood, which was a new one to me – a mocking pleasant raillery, which I took for the rightful punishment of my past follies.

"I am not jealous," I said, "for jealousy is a feeling which needs an object ere it can exist. No man may be jealous, unless he has something to be jealous about."

"John, John," she cried, and shook her head prettily, "you are incorrigible. I had thought you had learned manners in the town, and behold, you are worse than when you went away. You come here, and your first word to me is that I am nothing."

"God knows," I said, "I would fain be jealous, and yet – " I became awkward and nervous, for I felt that my mission was not prospering, and that I was becoming entangled in a maze of meaningless speech. The shortest and plainest way is still the best in love as in all things.

But I was not to be let off, and she finished my sentence for me. "If only you could find a worthy object for your feeling, you mean," she said. "Very well, sir, since I am so little valued in your eyes, we will speak no more on the matter."

"Marjory," I said, coming to the matter at once, "you and I have been old comrades. We have fished and walked together, we have climbed the hills and ridden in the meadows. I have done your bidding for many years."

"True, John," she said with an accent of grudging reminiscence, "you have dragged me into many a pretty pickle. I have torn my dress on rough rocks and soaked my shoes in bogs, all in your company. Surely we have had a brave time together."

"You met a man in the wood yesterday who would fain have made love to you. That man was my cousin Gilbert."

"Oh," she replied in a tone of mock solemnity and amused wonder, for I had blurted out my last words like the last dying confession of some prisoner. "Verily you are honoured in your cousinship, John."

"It is against him and such as him that I would protect you," I said.

"Nay," she cried, with an affected remonstrance. "I will have no fighting between cousins on my account. I will even defend myself, as Alison did when the miller made love to her."

"O Marjory," I burst out, "will you not give me this right to defend you? We have been old companions, but it was only yesterday that I knew how dearly I loved you. I have had more cares since yester-night than ever in my life. We have been comrades in childhood; let us be comrades on the rough paths of the world."

I spoke earnestly, and her face, which had been filled with mockery, changed gently to something akin to tenderness.

"How little you know of women!" she cried. "I have loved you for years, thinking of you at all times, and now you come to-day, speaking as if you had scarce seen me before. Surely I will bear you company in life, as I have been your comrade at its beginning."

What followed I need scarce tell, since it is but part of the old comedy of life, which our grandfathers and grandmothers played before us, and mayhap our grand-children will be playing even now when our back is turned. Under the spring sky among the lilies we plighted our troth for the years, and I entered from careless youth into the dim and resolute region of manhood.

With a great joy in my heart I rode home. I took the high way over the shoulder of Scrape, for I knew that few folk ever went that road, and I wished to be alone. The birds were singing, the fresh clean air was blowing on my face, and the primroses and wind-flowers made a gay carpet under my horse's feet. All the earth seemed to partake in my gladness. It was a good world, I thought, full of true hearts, fair faces, and much good; and though I have seen much wickedness and sorrow in my day, I am still of the same way of thinking. It is a brave world; a royal world for brave-hearted men.

When I came to Barns I found that my cousin had gone out an hour since and left my father greatly wondering at my absence. He sat in the chair by the fireplace, looking more withered and old than I had ever seen him. My heart smote me for not staying at his side, and so I sat down by him and told him many things of my doings in Glasgow, and how I desired above all things to see the world, having had my fill of books and colleges. Then I told him what he had long guessed, of my love for Marjory Veitch and the promise which she had given me. He heard me in silence, but when he spoke, his words were cheerful, for he had long liked the lass. He made no refusal, too, to the rest of my plans. "You shall go and see the world, John," he said, "and take my blessing with you. It ill becomes a young mettlesome lad in these stirring times to lounge at home, when he might be wearing a steel breastplate in the King's Guards, or trying the manners of twenty nations. Though I could wish you to bide at home, for I am an old broken man with few pleasures, and I love the sight of your face."

"Nay, I will never leave you," I said, "an you wish it. I am young yet and a boy's road is a long road. Time enough for all."

After this I went out to see if the Weasel had come to any mishap in the last night's ride. I found him as stout as ever, so I saddled him and rode away by the green haughlands up the valley of the Manor, for I longed for motion and air to relieve my spirit: and coming home in the afternoon, I found my cousin returned and sitting with my father in the dining-hall.

He glanced sharply at me when I entered, and I saw by his looks that he was in no good temper. His heavy face was flushed and his shaggy eyebrows were lowered more than their wont.

"Where have you been, Gilbert?" I asked. "I found you gone when I came back in the morning."

"I took my horse down to Peebles to the farrier. Its knees were sorely hurt last night on your infernal hills."

Now I knew that this was a lie, for I had looked at his horse before I went out in the morning, and its wounds were so slight that it would have been mere folly to take him to a farrier; and Gilbert, I well knew, was not the man to be in error where horses were concerned. So I judged that he had ridden in the contrary direction, and gone to Dawyck, and, as I inferred from his sour looks, met with no good reception there. I could afford to be generous; I felt a sort of half-pity for his discomfiture, and forbore to ask him any further questions.

We sat down to supper, he and I and my father, in a sober frame of mind. I was full of my own thoughts, which were of the pleasantest; my cousin was plainly angry with something or other; and my father, in his weakness dimly perceiving that all was not right, set himself to mend matters by engaging him in talk.

"You're a good shot with the musket, they tell me, Gibbie," he said, using the old name which he had called him by when he first came to Barns as a boy, "and I was thinking that it would be a rare ploy for you and John to go down the water to Traquair, where Captain Keith's horse are lying.

He is an old friend of mine, and would be blithe to see any of my kin. They tell me he has great trials of skill in all exercises, and that he has gathered half the gentry in the place about him."

"John," said my cousin in a scornful voice, "John is too busily employed at Dawyck to care much for anything else. A flighty maid is a sore burden on any man."

"I would have you learn, Master Gilbert," I said angrily, "to speak in a better way of myself and my friends. You may be a very great gentleman elsewhere, but you seem to leave your gentility behind when you come here."

Now my cousin and I were of such opposite natures that I took most things seriously, while he found matter for a jest in all – yet not in full good-nature, but with a touch of acrid satire.

"Even a barn-door cock will defend his own roost. How one sees the truth of proverbs!"

And then he added that which I will not set down, but which brought my father and myself to our feet with flashing eyes and quivering lips. I would have spoken, but my father motioned me to be silent.

"Gilbert," he said, his voice shaking with age and anger, "you will leave this house the morn. I will have no scoundrelly fellow of your kidney here. You are no true nephew of mine, and God pity the father that begat you."

My cousin smiled disdainfully and rose from his chair. "Surely I will go and at once when my hospitable uncle bids me. The entertainment in this damned hole is not so good as to keep me long. As for you, Cousin John," and he eyed me malignantly, "you and I will meet some day, where there are no dotards and wenches to come between us. Then I promise you some sport. Till then, farewell. I will down to Peebles to-night and trouble you no more." With a wave of his hand he was gone, and five minutes later we heard his horse's hooves clatter over the stones of the yard.

When he was gone his conduct came back to my father with a rush, and he fell to upbraiding himself for his breach of hospitality and family honour. He would have me call Gilbert back, and when I showed him how futile it was, fell into low spirits and repented in great bitterness.

Now the worst of this day's business remains to be told. For when I looked at my father some time after I found him sunk in his chair with his face as pale as death. With the help of Jean Morran and Tam Todd I got him to bed, from which he never rose, but passed peacefully away in the fear of God two days later. The heat into which he had been thrown was the direct cause, and though I could not very well lay the thing to my cousin's charge when the man was already so far down the vale of years, yet in my heart I set it against him. Indeed from this day I date my antagonism to the man, which before had been a mere boyish rivalry.

I stayed with my father to the end. Just before he died he bade me come near and gave me his blessing, bidding me be a better gentleman than he had been. We did not bury him in the Kirk of Lyne, for he had always said he never could abide to lie within walls. but on a green flat above Tweed, where the echo of the river and the crying of moorbirds are never absent from his grave.

CHAPTER VII
THE PEGASUS INN AT PEEBLES AND HOW A STRANGER RETURNED FROM THE WARS

Of my doings for some months after my father's death I must tell hastily. I fell heir to the lands of Barns, and being of age entered at once into my possession. The place remained the same as in my father's time, the same servants and the same ways about the house. I lived simply as I had always lived, spending my days in seeing to the land, in field sports, and some little study, for I had not altogether forsaken the Muses. But all the time I felt as one who is kept at home against his will, being conscious of a restlessness and an inclination to travel which was new to me, but which I doubt not is common to all young men at this time of life. I talked much with Tam Todd of the lands which he had visited, and heard of the Dutch towns with their strange shipping, their canals and orderly houses, and of the rough Norlanders, clad in the skins of wild animals, who came down to the Swedish markets to trade; of the soldiery of Germany and France and the Scots who had gone over there to push their fortunes with their swords; and what I loved best, of the salt sea with its boundless waste of waters and wild tales of shipwreck. Formerly I had been wont often to bid Tam sharply to hold his peace when he entered on one of his interminable narrations; but now I sat and drank in every word like a thirsty man. It was the winter-time, when the roads were often snowed up and all the folk of the place gathered in the great kitchen at nights round the fire; so it was the time for stories and we had our fill of them.

One blustering day, the first Monday, I think, after the New Year, when the ice was beginning to melt from the burns and a wet, cold wind from the north-west was blowing, I rode down to Peebles to settle some matters about money with Saunders Blackett, who had managed my father's affairs and was now intrusted with mine. All things were done to my satisfaction; so bethinking myself that the way to Barns was cold and long and that it was yet early in the afternoon, being scarce four o'clock, I found myself thinking pleasantly of the warm inn-parlour of the *Pegasus*, so thither I went.

The *Pegasus* or "Peg" Inn stands at the corner of the Northgate and the High Street, a black-gabled building, once the town-house of the Govans of Cardrona, and still retaining marks of its gentility in the arms carved above the door. A great sign flapped in the wind, bearing on a white ground a gorgeous representation of a winged horse soaring through clouds. The landlord at this time was one Horsbrock, a portly, well-looking man, who claimed to be kin to the Horsbrocks of that ilk and held his chin two inches higher in consequence. The place was famed in all the country round for good wine and comfort.

I stabled my horse and, bidding the host bring me a bottle of Rhenish (so fine a thing it is to have succeeded to lands and money), I went into the low-ceilinged room where the company sat. It was panelled in a darkish wood, and hung round with old weapons, halberds and falchions and what not, which glimmered brightly in the firelight. A narrow window gave it light, but now it sufficed only to show the grey winter dusk coming swiftly on. Around the fire sat some few of the men of Peebles, warming themselves and discussing the landlord's ale and the characters of their neighbours.

They rose to give me welcome when I entered, for my name and family were well known in the countryside.

"It's awfu' weather for man and beast, Laird," said an old man with a bent back, but still hale and hearty in the face. "A snawy winter I can abide, and a wet yin, but drizzlin', dreepin', seepin' weather wi' a wind that taks the heart out o' ye is mair than my patience can stand."

"You have little need to speak, you folk," I said, "living in a well-paved town with stones beneath your feet and nothing more to do than go round a street corner all day. Up at Barns, with Tweed

swirling in at the yard gate, and the stables flowing like a linn, and the wind playing cantrips day and night in and out of the windows, you might talk."

"Ay, but, good sir," put in a thin voice which came from a little man I had seen at the bowling-green, "ye may thank the Lord for a roof abune your heids and dry claes to put on, when sae many godly folks are hiding like pelicans in the wilderness among the high hills and deep mosses. I bless the Lord that my faither, that sant o' the Kirk, is not living in thae evil times. He was a man o' a truly great spirit, and had he been alive, I'se warrant he wad hae been awa to join them. He was aye strong on his conscience. 'John Look-up' so the godless called him. 'John Look-up,' said my mother, 'ye'll never be pleased till we're a' joltin' in a cairt to the Grassmarket o' Edinburgh. And a braw sicht ye'll be, hanging there like a hoodie-craw wi' a' your bairns aside ye.' Ay, these were often her words, for she had a sarcastic tongue."

"Jock Look-up, my man," said another, "I kenned your faither a' his days, and he was na the man to hang. He lookit up and he lookit a' ways. He was yin whae could baith watch and pray. Gin ye were mair like him, ye wad be a mair thrivin' man."

"Aboot the hill-folk," said the old man who had first spoken, drinking his ale and turning up the measure to see that no more was left, "did ye ever hear o' my son Francie and what happened to him when he gaed awa to Moffat wi' 'oo'? He gaed ower by Traquair and keepit the road till he got to Moffat, for he had a horse that wasna ower sure o' its feet on the hills. But when he had it a' sellt, whae does he meet in wi' but Wull Hislop the travelling packman, whae's sair needing a beast. So Francie sells him his horse and comes aff hame walking ower the muirs. He gaed up Moffat Water and ower the muckle hill they ca' Corriefragauns, and got on nane sae bad till he cam to the awfu' craigs abune Loch Skene. He was walking briskly, thinking o' hame and the siller in his pouch and how he wad win to Peebles that nicht, when he saw afore him the awfu'est sicht that ever he had seen. It was a man o' maybe the same heicht as himsel, wi' a heid of red hair, and nae claes to speak o', but just a kind o' clout about his middle. He began to speak in an outlandish voice and Francie kenned at yince that he maun be yin o' thae Hieland deevils brocht doun to hunt up the Whigs. He was for Francie's money, and he oot wi' a big knife and flashed it up and doun. But this was no to Francie's liking. 'Put that doun, ye ill-looking deevil,' says he, 'ye'll find I'm nane o' your hill-folk, but an honest man frae Peebles wi' a nieve as hard as your heid's saft, and if ye dinna let me by, I'll put ye in the loch as sure as my name's Francie Trummle.' The body understood him brawly, and wi' a grunt slunk aff among the heather, and Francie had nae mair bother wi' him. But O! it's an awfu' thing to think o' men o' your ain blood hunted and killed wi' thae foreign craturs. It maks me half-mindit to turn Whig mysel."

"Dinna fash yoursel, Maister Trummle," said a younger man, a farmer by his looks, "ye're better bidin' in peace and quiet at hame. The Lord never meant folk to gang among hills and peat-bogs, unless after sheep. It's clean against the order o' things. But there's yae thing that reconciles me to this Whig-hunting. They're maistly wast-country folk, and wast-country folk are an ill lot, aye shoving their nebs where they're no want it. There's no mony Whigs in Tweeddale. Na, na, they're ower canny."

Master Turnbull made as if he would have answered, when a clatter of feet was heard in the passage, and the door opened. Two men entered, one a great swarthy fellow well known for his poaching escapades when the salmon came up the water, and the other, Peter Crustcrackit the tailor. They did not enter in company, for Peter swaggered in with as gallant an air as two bent legs and a small body could permit, while the other slunk in with a half-apologetic look, glancing keenly round to see who were the other occupants of the room.

"The 'Peg' is honoured with your company tonight, I see," said Peter, making a bow to me. "'Tis the finest gathering that I remember: the Laird o' Barns, worthy Maister Trumbull, myself, and my honoured freend, Maister Simon Doolittle."

The black fisher lifted his face from the ale which the landlord had brought. "Your guid health, gentlemen. I'm prood o' your company, though I'm no just fit for't, since I'm no half an 'oor oot o' the Dookit Pool."

All eyes were turned to the speaker, and we saw that his clothes hung limp and wet.

"And pray, how did you get there, Maister Doolittle? Was't by the working o' Providence, or the wiles o' sinfu' man?"

"A mixture o' baith. I took a bit daunder up Tweed to the Castle Rock to see how the water was rinnin'. It's been raither grimily for fishin' o' late. Ye a' ken the rocks that they're no exactly the sort o' place that a man wad choose for dancin' a reel in tackety boots. Weel, I was admiring the works o' God as manifested in a big, deep, swirlin' hole, when afore ever I kenned I was admirin' the hole frae the middle o't. I was gey near chokit wi' Tweed water, but I wabbled a bit, and syne grippit a birk and held on."

There was a pause and he took a draught of ale.

"Weel, I roared as loud as I could, and the auld runt whae bides i' the Castle heard me. He cam doun and askit me what was wrang. 'Wrang,' says I. 'If ye dinna ca' ten feet o' water and you no able to soom, wrang, I just wis ye were here yoursel.' So he gangs cannily back and brings anither man to look at me; and the twae thocht for a while, and then each grippit an airm and after a gey wammlin' I got oot. I was angry at their delay, for I couldna hae held on muckle langer, so I kickit them baith an' cam aff here. I've muckle need o' yill, fur I feel as if I had eaten ten pund o' snaw."

"Come nearer the fire, Simon," said one. "Ye're a muckle tried man."

"I'm a' that," said the brown-faced poacher, and relapsed into silence.

The lights were now lit in the streets of Peebles, as we could see by the glimmer through the windows; but in our room no lamp was needed, for the bright firelight was sufficient for a man to read a little book by. The great shadows danced on the wall, bent and crooked into a thousand phantasies; and the men by the fire nodded and spoke little. Then the old man Turnbull began an argument with the tailor about some clothes in which he said he had been cheated; and Peter Crustcrackit, never a quiet-tempered man, was rejoining with vigour. I heard only fragments of their talk, being taken up in dreaming of my future course, and when I should go to see the world.

The mild-mannered man, him they called John Look-up, was sleeping in his chair, and his jug of ale which he had emptied hung limply in his hand. In a little it fell to the floor and rolled beneath his chair; but the sleeper never stirred. The poacher sat shrouded in vapour, which the heat of the fire had brought out of his wet garments, and a mingled smell of damp cloth and burning wood filled the room. The discordant voices of the tailor and his antagonist rose and fell, now sinking to a mumbled whisper, and now rising to sharp recrimination. By and by they came to an end of their dispute, and silence reigned undisturbed; and I verily believe that in five minutes we should all have been sound asleep, had not something occurred to rouse us.

This was no less than the entrance of another guest. The door was flung open and a man entered, swaggering with a great air and bearing into the slumbrous place a breath of the outer world. He was the finest man I had ever seen, two inches and more taller than myself, who am not short, and clean made as a greyhound. His face was tanned a deep brown, and bare save for a yellow moustachio on his upper lip. His hair hung long and fine over his shoulders, setting off the erect poise of his head. He had removed his cloak and hat, and showed a dress of the height of fashion; his cravat was of delicate foreign lace and the sash around his middle of the finest silk. But what I marked especially were his features, the thin, straight nose, the well-bred chin, and the clear eyes; but for a certain weakness in the jaw I should have called it the handsomest face I had ever seen. More, it was a face that wis familiar to me. I had seen the like of it before; but where I could not tell, and I cudgelled my brains to think of it.

"Ah, my faith," said the stranger, speaking with a foreign accent, "what have we here? A room-full of sleepy citizens. Or drunk, egad, drunk, I believe."

And he walked over to where Peter Crustcrackit sat nodding, and stared in his face. Now the noise wakened the rest; and Peter also, who sitting up with a stupid air thought that he was still in the shop, and cried hurriedly, "What d'ye lack, sir? Silks or satins or plain kersey," and ran into a recital of his wares.

The newcomer looked at him with an amused smile. "It is not difficult to tell your profession, my friend. The ninth of a man."

Then he surveyed the rest of us in turn with his restless eyes, until his look fell upon me. He must have marked something about my appearance distinct from the others, for he bowed and addressed me politely.

"You are not one of these fellows, I think. May I ask the favour of your name? I have been long absent from this country and have forgot faces."

"You are welcome to it," said I. "They call me John Burnet – of Barns," I added, for the first time using my new-found title.

He crossed to my side in an instant and held out his hand. "Your hand, Master Burnet. You and I should be well known to each other, for we shall be near neighbours. You may have heard of Michael Veitch of Dawyck, him that was soldiering abroad. I am that same, returned like the prodigal from far countries."

Now I knew where I had seen the face before. It was but a coarse and manly counterpart of Marjory's, though I fancied that hers was still the braver and stronger, if all were told.

"I have often heard of you," I said, "and I am glad to be the first to bid you welcome to your own countryside. These are some men of the town, honest fellows, who come here for their evening ale."

"Your health, gentlemen," he cried, bowing to the company. "Landlord, bring ale and a bottle of your best Burgundy till I pledge these honest fellows."

"Eh, sirs," I heard Peter Crustcrackit mutter under his breath, "sic an invasion o' gentles. The Northgate o' Peebles micht be the High Street o' Embro', for a' the braw folk that are coming tae't. I maun think aboot shifting my shop."

It would be well on for eight o'clock ere Master Veitch and I left the *Pegasus* to ride homeward. The night was quieter and milder, and overhead a patch of clear sky showed the stars. He had with him two serving-men who carried his belongings, but they rode some little distance behind. He was full of questions about Dawyck and his kinsfolk there and the countryside around; so I must needs tell him something of what had passed between Marjory and myself. He seemed not ill-pleased. "What," he cried, "little Marjory, who was scarce higher than my knee when I left! To think that she should have grown into a woman already! And you say she is pretty?"

Which question gave me much opportunity for such talk as one must use when he feels the littleness of words.

Then he must ask me about myself, of my father, of whose death he was ignorant, and what I purposed to do. "For I doubt," said he, "that you will have but a dull time of it at Barns in that great desolate house. It little befits an active man to pine at home like a mouse in a cell."

So from one thing to another, he had me to tell him of all my desires, of how I longed above all things to travel and see the world; and he spoke to me in such a fashion that ere we had come to the ford of Tweed my intention was fixed to ride out like the Spanish Don to see what might befall me.

CHAPTER VIII
I TAKE LEAVE OF MY FRIENDS

The next month was, I think, the busiest in my life. For from the evening of my meeting with Michael Veitch my mind was firmly made up to go to travel abroad, and with this determination came all the countless troubles which a man must meet before he can leave his home. I was busy night and day, now down at Peebles, now riding up Manor and all over the Barns lands, seeing that all things were in right order ere my departure. I got together all the money I desired, and with drafts on the Dutch bankers, which the lawyer folk in Edinburgh got for me, I was in no danger of falling into poverty abroad.

On Tam Todd I laid the management of all things in my absence; and Tam, much impressed by his responsibility, though it was a task which he had really undertaken long before in the later years of my father's life, went about his work with a serious, preoccupied air, as of Atlas with the world on his shoulders. I had much ado in getting ready my baggage for the journey, for I wished to take little, being confident that I could buy all things needful abroad. Jean Morran, on the other hand, would have had me take half the plenishing of the house of Barns, from linen sheets to fresh-kirned butter, for I could not persuade her to think otherwise than that I was going into a desolate land among heathen savages.

Then I had to visit many folk up and down Tweed to take farewell; and I had so many letters given me to men of standing abroad, that, if I had delivered them all, I should have had to spend more time than I cared. One I valued more than any other – a letter written by Master Gilbert Burnet, of London, to a professor in the university of Leyden – which I hoped would bring me into the company of scholars. For I had changed my original intention of going to the wars, first, because I found on examination that, in my inmost heart, I had that hankering after learning which would never be sated save by a life with some facilities for study; second, because, now that I was the sole member of the house, it behooved me to bide on the land and see to it, and any such thing as soldiering would keep me away for too great a time. I sent, too, to the College Library at Glasgow, for all the books on the Low Countries to be had, and spent much profitable time reading of the history of the place, and how the land lay.

During these days I was much in the company of the new master of Dawyck, and a most delectable comrade I found him. He had a vast stock of tales and jests, collected in his travels, with which he would amuse his friends; he was something of a scholar, and could talk learnedly when he chose; and he was expert at all outdoor sports, pressing me hard at the sword-play, in which I prided myself on my skill. He was of a free, generous nature, and singularly courteous to all, high and low, rich and poor alike. Yet, with all these excellencies, there was much that I liked ill about him, for he was over-fond of resorting to the taverns at Peebles, where he would muddle his wits in the company of his inferiors. His life at Dawyck was none of the most regular, though, indeed, I have little cause to blame him, being none so good myself; though the vice of over-indulging in wine was one that Providence always mercifully kept me from.

He came perhaps every third day to Barns to ride with me in the haugh, and he would abide to supper-time, or even over night, making me fear for Marjory's peace of mind. To his sister he was most dutiful and kind, and I was glad to think that now the days might be more pleasant for her with her brother in the house. And it pleased me to think that when I went abroad, my lady would be left in no bad keeping.

The days, the short January days, passed quickly over my head, and, almost ere I knew, the time had come for my departure. And now, when the hour came so nigh, I felt some pain at the thought of leaving home and my beloved countryside for unknown places; though, to tell the truth,

such thoughts were not ill to dispel by the contemplation of the pleasures in prospect. Yet it was with mingled feelings that I rode over to Dawyck on a sharp Monday afternoon to bid Marjory farewell.

I found her in the low, dim room, looking to the west, where she was wont to sit in winter. A great fire crackled cheerily on the hearth, and many little devices about the place showed a woman's hand. Holly, with scarlet berries, put colour into the sombre walls, and Marjory herself, brighter than any flower, made the firelight dull in the contrast; so fair she looked, as she greeted me, with her bright hair and unfathomable eyes.

"I have come to see you for the last time, Marjory," I said; "to-morrow I set out on my travels."

"I am vexed that you are going away," and she looked at me sadly; "it will be lonely in Tweeddale without you."

"My dear lass, I will not be long. Two years at the longest, and then I will be home to you, and travel no more. What say you, Marjory?"

"Your will be done, John. Yet I would I could have gone with you."

"I would you could, my dear," I said. "But that might scarce be. You would not like, I think, to sail on rough seas, or bide among towns and colleges. You love the woods too well."

"Wherever you were," said she, with her eyes drooped, "I would be content to be."

"But Marjory, lass," I spoke up cheerfully, for I feared to make her sad, "you would not like me to stay at home, when the world is so wide, and so many brave things to be seen."

"No, no. I have no love for folks who bide in the house like children. I would have you go and do gallantly, and come home full of fine tales. But where do you mean to go, and how will you pass your time?"

"Oh," said I, "I go first to Rotterdam, where I may reside for a while. Then I purpose to visit the college at Leyden, to study; for I would fain spend some portion of my time profitably. After that I know not what I will do, but be sure that I will be home within the two years. For, though I am blithe to set out, I doubt not that I will be blither to come back again."

"I trust you may not learn in those far-away places to look down on Tweeddale and the simple folks here. I doubt you may, John; for you are not a steadfast man," and, at this, she laughed and I blushed, for I thought of my conduct at Glasgow.

"Nay, nay," I answered; "I love you all too well for that. Though the Emperor of Cathay were to offer me all his treasure to bide away, I would come back. I would rather be a shepherd in Tweeddale than a noble in Spain."

"Brave words, John," she cried, "brave words! See you hold to them."

Then after that we fell to discussing Michael, and his ways of amusing himself; and I bade Marjory tell her brother to look in now and then at Barns to see how Tam Todd fared. Also I bade her tell him that it was my wish that he should hunt and fish over my lands as much as he pleased. "And see you keep him in order," I added, laughing, "lest he slip off to the wars again."

"Oh, John," she said, with a frightened look, "do not speak so. That is what I fear above all things, for he is restless, even here, and must ever be wandering from one place to another."

"Tut, my dear," I said; "Michael, be sure, is too honest a man to leave you again, when I am off, once I have left you in his care. Have no fear for him. But we are getting as dull as owls, and it is many days since I heard your voice. I pray you sing me a song, as you used to do in the old days. 'Twill be long ere I hear another."

She rose and went without a word to her harpsichord and struck a few notes. Now Marjory had a most wonderful voice, more like a linnet's than aught else, and she sang the old ballads very sweetly. But to-day she took none of them, but a brisk martial song, which pleased me marvellously well. I will set down the words as she sang them, for I have hummed them many a time to myself:

"Oh, if my love were sailor-bred
And fared afar from home,

In perilous lands, by shoal and sands,
If he were sworn to roam,
Then, O, I'd hie me to a ship,
And sail upon the sea,
And keep his side in wind and tide
To bear him company.

"And if he were a soldier gay,
And tarried from the town,
And sought in wars, through death and scars,
To win for him renown,
I'd place his colours in my breast,
And ride by moor and lea,
And win his side, there to abide,
And bear him company.

"For sooth a maid, all unafraid,
Should by her lover be,
With wile and art to cheer his heart,
And bear him company."

"A fine promise, Marjory," I cried, "and some day I may claim its fulfilment. But who taught you the song?"

"Who but the Travelling Packman, or, maybe, the Wandering Jew?" she said, laughingly; and I knew this was the way of answer she used when she would not tell me anything. So, to this day, I know not whence she got the catch.

Then we parted, not without tears on her part, and blank misgivings on my own. For the vexed question came to disturb me, whether it was not mere self-gratification on my part thus to travel, and whether my more honourable place was not at home. But I banished the thoughts, for I knew how futile they were, and comforted my brave lass as best I could.

"Fare thee well, my love," I cried, as I mounted my horse, "and God defend you till I come again"; and, whenever I looked back, till I had passed the great avenue, I saw the glimmer of Marjory's dress, and felt pricked in the conscience for leaving her.

CHAPTER IX
I RIDE OUT ON MY TRAVELS AND FIND A COMPANION

It was on a fine sharp morning, early in February, that I finally bade good-bye to the folk at Barns and forded Tweed and rode out into the world. There was a snell feel in the air which fired my blood, and made me fit for anything which Providence might send. I was to ride Maisie as far as Leith, where I was to leave her with a man at the Harbour-Walk, who would send her back to Tweeddale; for I knew it would be a hard thing to get passage for a horse in the small ships which sailed between our land and the Low Countries at that time of year.

At the Lyne Water ford, Michael Veitch was waiting for me. He waved his hat cheerfully, and cried, "Good luck to you, John, and see that you bide not too long away." I told him of a few things which I wished him to see to, and then left him, riding up the little burn which comes down between the Meldon hills, and whither lies the road to Eddleston Water. When I was out of sight of him, I seemed to have left all my home behind me, and I grew almost sorrowful. At the top of the ridge I halted and looked back. There was Barns among its bare trees and frosted meadows, with Tweed winding past, and beyond, a silvery glint of the Manor coming down from its blue, cold hills. There was Scrape, with its long slopes clad in firs, and the grey house of Dawyck nestling at its foot. I saw the thin smoke curling up from the little village of Lyne, and Lyne Kirk standing on its whin-covered brae, and the bonny holms of Lyne Water, where I had often taken great baskets of trout. I must have stayed there, gazing, for half an hour; and, whenever I looked on the brown moors and woods, where I had wandered from boyhood, I felt sorrowful, whether I would or no.

"But away with such thoughts," I said, steeling my heart. "There's many a fine thing awaiting me, and, after all, I will be back in a year or two to the place and the folk that I love." So I went down to the village of Eddleston whistling the "Cavalier's Rant," and firmly shutting my mind against thoughts of home. I scarce delayed in Eddleston, but pushed on up the valley, expecting to get dinner at the inn at Leadburn, which stands at the watershed, just where the county of Edinburgh touches our shire of Tweeddale. The way, which is a paradise in summer, was rugged and cold at this season. The banks of the stream were crusted with ice, and every now and then, as I passed, I raised a string of wild duck, who fled noisily to the high wildernesses.

I came to Leadburn about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, somewhat cold in body, but brisk and comforted in spirit. I had Maisie stabled, and myself went into the hostel and bade them get ready dinner. The inn is the most villainous, bleak place that I have ever seen, and I who write this have seen many. The rooms are damp and mouldy, and the chimney-stacks threaten hourly to come down about the heads of the inmates. It stands in the middle of a black peat-bog, which stretches nigh to the Pentland Hills; and if there be a more forsaken countryside on earth, I do not know it. The landlord, nevertheless, was an active, civil man, not spoiled by his surroundings; and he fetched me an excellent dinner – a brace of wild-fowl and a piece of salted beef, washed down with very tolerable wine.

I had just finished, and was resting a little before ordering my horse, when the most discordant noise arose in the inn-yard; and, going to the window, I beheld two great, strong serving-men pulling a collie by a rope tied around the animal's neck. It was a fine, shaggy black-and-white dog, and I know not what it could have done to merit such treatment. But its captors had not an easy task, for it struggled and thrawed at the rope, and snarled savagely, and every now and then made desperate sallies upon the hinder-parts of its leaders. They cursed it, not unnaturally, for an ill-conditioned whelp, and some of the idlers, who are usually found about an inn, flung stones or beat it with sticks from behind. Now I hate, above all things, to see a beast suffer, no matter how it may have deserved it; so I had it in my mind to go down and put a stop to the cruelty, when some one else came before me.

This was a very long, thin man, with a shock of black hair, and a sunburnt face, attired in a disorder of different clothes – a fine, though tarnished coat, stout, serviceable small-clothes, and the

coarsest of shoes and stockings. He darted forward like a hawk from a corner of the yard, and, ere I could guess his intentions, had caught the rope and let the dog go free. The beast ran howling to seek shelter, and its preserver stood up to face the disappointed rascals. They glared at him fiercely, and were on the point of rushing on him, had not something in his demeanour deterred them.

"Oh," said he, in a scornful voice, "ye're fine folk, you Leidburn folk. Braw and kindly folk. Graund at hangin' dowgs and tormentin' dumb beasts, but like a wheen skelpit puppies when ye see a man."

"Ye meddlin' deevil," said one, "whae askit ye to come here? The dowg was an ill, useless beast, and it was time it was hangit."

"And what d'ye ca' yoursel?" said the stranger. "I ken ye fine, Tam Tiddup, for a thievin', idle vaigabond, and if every useless beast was hangit, there wadna be yin o' ye here."

This made them grumble, and a stone was thrown, but still something in the easy, dauntless air of their enemy kept them back.

"But I'm no the man to let a dowg gang free wi'oot giein' some kind o' return. Ye're a' brave men, dour warlike men, and I've nae doot unco keen o' a fecht. Is there no some kind o' green bit hereaways whaur I could hae a fling wi' yin o' ye? I'll try ye a' in turn, but no to mak ill-feelin', I'll tak the biggest yin first. Will ye come, ye muckle hash?" he said suddenly, addressing the tallest of the number.

Now the man addressed had clearly no stomach for fight, but he was tall and stout, and stood in fear of the ridicule of his companions, and further, he doubtless thought that he would have an easy victory over the lean stranger, so he accepted with as good a show of readiness as he could muster.

"Come on, ye flee-up-i'-the-air, and I'll see if I canna pit thae fushionless airms o' yours oot o' joint."

I heard them appoint a flat place beside the burn, just on the edge of the bog, and watched them trooping out of the yard. The rabble went first, with a great semblance of valour, and the brown-faced stranger, with a sardonic grin on his countenance, stepped jauntily behind. Now I dearly love a fight, but yet I scarce thought fit to go and look on with the rest; so I had Maisie saddled, and rode after them, that I might look like some chance passer-by stopping to witness the encounter.

When I came up to the place, there were already some thirty men collected. It was a green spot by the side of the Hawes burn, with the frost not lifted from the grass; and in the burn itself the ice lay thick, for it flows sluggishly like all bogland waters, The place was beaten down as if folk were used to go there, and here the men made a ring about their champion, some helping him to unbuckle his belt, some giving advice about how to close with his adversary. The adversary himself stood waiting their pleasure with the most unconcerned air, whistling "The Green Holms o' Linton," and stamping his feet on the ground to keep himself warm.

In a little the two were ready, and stood facing each other on the cold moor. A whistling wind came in short blasts from the hills, and made their ears tingle, and mine also, till I wished that I were one of the two to have some chance of warming my blood. But when once the fight began, I thought little more of the cold.

The countryman gripped the stranger round the middle and tugged desperately to throw him. Up and down, backwards and forwards they went, kicking up in their struggle pieces of turf and little stones. Once they were all but in the water, but the stranger, seeing his peril, made a bold leap back and dragged the other with him. And now I feared that it was going to go hard with the succourer of distressed dogs; for his unwieldy opponent was pressing so heavily upon him that I expected every moment to see him go down. Once I caught sight of his face, and, to my surprise, it was calm as ever; the very straw he had been chewing before being still between his teeth.

Now the fight took another turn; for my friend, by an adroit movement, slipped below the other's arms, flung himself backwards, just as I have seen a tumbler do at a fair at Peebles, and before the other knew his design, stood smiling before him. The man's astonishment was so great that he

stood staring, and if the stranger had used his advantage, he might have thrown him there and then. By and by he recovered and came on, swearing and wrathful. "Ye've slippit awa' yince, ye ether, but I'll see that ye'll no dae't again;" and with his sluggish blood roused to some heat, he flung himself on his foe, who received him much as a complacent maid receives the caresses of a traveller. The fellow thought his victory certain, and put out all his strength; but now, of a sudden, my friend woke up. He twisted his long arms round his adversary, and a mighty struggle began. The great, fat-bellied man was swaying to and fro like a basket on a pack-horse; his face grew purple and pale at the lips, and his body grew limper and weaker. I expected to see a good fight, but I was disappointed; for before I knew, they were on the edge of the pool, tottered a second, and then, with a mighty crunching and splashing, bounded through the thin ice into the frosty water.

A great brown face, with draggled, black hair, followed closely by a red and round one, appeared above the surface, and two dripping human beings dragged themselves to the bank. The teeth of both chattered like a smith's shop, but in the mouth of one I espied a yellowish thing, sorely bitten and crumbled. It was the piece of straw. A loud shout greeted their appearance, and much laughter. The one slunk away with his comrades, in no very high fettle, leaving the other shaking himself like a water-dog on the grass.

I found the stranger looking up at me, as I sat my horse, with a glance half-quizzical and half-deprecatory. The water ran down his odd clothes and formed in pools in the bare places of the ground. He shivered in the cold wind, and removed little fragments of ice from his coat. Then he spoke.

"Ye'll be the Laird o' Barns settin' oot on your traivels?"

"Good Lord! What do you know of my business?" I asked, and, as I looked at him, I knew that I had seen the face before. Of a sudden he lifted his arm to rub his eyebrows, and the motion brought back to me at once a vision of excited players and a dry, parched land, and a man perplexedly seeking to convince them of something; and I remembered him for the man who had brought the news to Peebles of the rising of Tweed.

"I know you," I said. "You are the man who came down with news of the great flood. But what do you here?"

"Bide a wee and I'll tell ye. Ye'll mind that ye tellt me if ever I was in need o' onything, to come your way. Weel, I've been up Tweed, and doun Tweed, and ower the hills, and up the hills, till there's nae mair places left for me to gang. So I heard o' your gaun ower the seas, and I took it into my heid that I wad like to gang tae. So here I am, at your service."

The fellow's boldness all but took my breath away. "What, in Heaven's name, would I take you with me for?" I asked. "I doubt we would suit each other ill."

"Na, na, you and me wad gree fine. I've heard tell o' ye, Laird, though ye've heard little o' me, and by a' accoonts we're just made for each ither."

Now if any other one had spoken to me in this tone I should have made short work of him; but I was pleased with this man's conduct in the affair just past, and, besides, I felt I owed something to my promise.

"But," said I, "going to Holland is not like going to Peebles fair, and who is to pay your passage, man?"

"Oh," said he, "I maun e'en be your body-servant, so to speak."

"I have little need of a body-servant. I am used to shifting for myself. But to speak to the purpose, what use could you be to me?"

"What use?" the man repeated. "Eh, sir, ye ken little o' Nicol Plenderleith to talk that gait. A' the folk o' Brochtoun and Tweedsmuir, and awa' ower by Clyde Water ken that there's no his match for rinnin' and speelin' and shootin' wi' the musket; I'll find my way oot o' a hole when a' body else 'ill bide in't. But fie on me to be blawin' my ain trumpet at siccan a speed. But tak me wi' ye, and if I'm no a' I say, ye can cry me for a gowk at the Cross o' Peebles."

Now I know not what possessed me, who am usually of a sober, prudent nature, to listen to this man; but something in his brown, eager face held me captive, and his powerful make filled me with admiration. He was honest and kindly; I had had good evidence of both; and his bravery was beyond doubting. I thought how such a man might be of use to me in a foreign land, both as company and protection. I had taken a liking to the fellow, and, with our family, such likings go for much. Nevertheless, I was almost surprised at myself when I said:

"I like the look of you, Nicol Plenderleith, and am half-minded to take you with me as my servant."

"I thank ye kindly, Laird. I kenned ye wad dae't. I cam to meet ye here wi' my best claes for that very reason."

"You rascal," I cried, half laughing at his confidence, and half angry at his audacity. "I've a good mind to leave you behind after all. You talk as if you were master of all the countryside. But come along; we will see if the landlord has not a more decent suit of clothes for your back if you are going into my service. I will have no coughing, catarrhy fellows about me."

"Hech," muttered my attendant, following, "ye micht as weel expect a heron to get the cauld frae wadin' in the water, as Nicol Plenderleith. Howbeit, your will be done, sir."

From the landlord at the inn I bought a suit of homespun clothes which, by good fortune, fitted Nicol; and left his soaked garments as part payment. Clad decently, he looked a great, stalwart man, though somewhat bent in the back, and with a strange craning forward of the neck, acquired, I think, from much wandering among hills. I hired a horse to take him to Edinburgh, and the two of us rode out of the yard, followed by the parting courtesies of the host.

Of our journey to Edinburgh, I have little else to tell. We came to the town in the afternoon, and went through the streets to the port of Leith, after leaving our horses at the place arranged for. I was grieved to part from Maisie, for I had ridden her from boyhood, and she had come to know my ways wondrous well. We found a vessel to sail the next morn for Rotterdam, and bargained with the captain for our passage. When all had been settled, and we had looked our fill upon the harbour and the craft, and felt the salt of the sea on our lips, we betook ourselves to an inn, *The Three Herrings*, which fronted the quay, and there abode for the night.

BOOK II – THE LOW COUNTRIES

CHAPTER I
OF MY VOYAGE TO THE LOW COUNTRIES

We were aboard on the next morning by a little after daybreak, for the captain had forewarned me, the night before, that he purposed to catch the morning tide. To one inland-bred, the harbour of Leith was a sight to whet the curiosity, There were vessels of all kinds and sizes, little fishing smacks with brown, home-made sails, from Fife or the Lothian coast towns, great sea-going ships, many with strange, foreign names on their sides, and full of a great bustle of lading and unlading. There was such a concourse of men, too, as made the place like a continuous horse-fair. Half a dozen different tongues jabbered in my ear, of which I knew not one word, save of the French, which I could make a fair shape to speak, having learned it from Tam Todd, along with much else of good and bad. There were men in red cowls like Ayrshire weavers, and men in fur hats from the North, and dark-skinned fellows, too, from the Indies, and all this motley crew would be running up and down jabbering and shrilling like a pack of hounds. And every now and then across the uproar would come the deep voice of a Scots skipper, swearing and hectoring as if the world and all that is in it were his peculiar possession.

But when we had cleared the Roads of Leith and were making fair way down the firth, with a good north-westerly breeze behind us, then there was a sight worth the seeing. For behind lay Leith, with its black masts and tall houses, and at the back again, Edinburgh, with its castle looming up grim and solemn, and further still, the Pentlands, ridged like a saw, running far to the westward. In front I marked the low shore of Fife, with the twin Lomonds, which you can see by climbing Caerdon, or Dollar Law, or any one of the high Tweedside hills. The channel was as blue as a summer sky, with a wintry clearness and a swell which was scarce great enough to break into billows. The Kern, for so the vessel was called, had all her sail set, and bounded gallantly on her way. It was a cheerful sight, what with the sails filling to the wind, and men passing hither and thither at work with the cordage, and the running seas keeping pace with the vessel. The morning fires were being lit in the little villages of Fife, and I could see the smoke curling upwards in a haze from every bay and neuk.

But soon the firth was behind us, and we passed between the Bass rock and the May, out into the open sea. This I scarcely found so much to my liking. I was inland-bred, and somewhat delicate in my senses, so, soon I came to loathe the odour of fish and cookery and sea-water, which was everywhere in the vessel. Then the breeze increased to a stiff wind, and the Kern leaped and rocked among great rolling billows. At first the movement was almost pleasing, being like the motion of a horse's gallop in a smooth field. And this leads me to think that if a boat were but small enough, so as to be more proportionate to the body of man, the rocking of it would be as pleasing as the rise and fall of a horse's stride. But in a great, cumbrous ship, where man is but a little creature, it soon grows wearisome. We stood well out to sea, so I could but mark the bolder features of the land. Even these I soon lost sight of, for the whole earth and air began to dance wofully before my eyes. I felt a dreadful sinking, and a cold sweat began to break on my brow. I had heard of the sea-sickness, but I could not believe that it was this. This was something ten times worse, some deadly plague which Heaven had sent to stay me on my wanderings.

I leaned over the side of the ship in a very disconsolate frame of mind. If this was all I was to get on my journey, I had better have stayed at home. I was landward-bred, and knew naught of boats, save one which Tam Todd had made as a ferry across the Tweed, and which was indeed more like a meal-

chest than aught else. In it we were wont to paddle across when we were fearful of wetting our shoon. But this rolling, boisterous ship and turgid seas were strange to me, and I fear I fell monstrous sick.

Nicol Plenderleith had disappeared almost as soon as he came aboard, and I saw him deep in converse with the sailors. When we had cleared the Forth he came back to me, as I leaned disconsolately against the bulwarks, and asked me how I did. His lean, brown face was not a whit changed by the rocking of the ship; indeed, if he had been astraddle the Saddleback in a gale he would not have been perturbed. When he saw my plight he ran below and brought brandy.

"Here, sir, tak some o' this. It's tasty at a' times, but it's mair than tasty the noo, it's halesome."

"Nicol," I groaned, "if I never gee home again, I look to you to tell the folk in Tweeddale. It's terrible to die here of this villainous sickness, for I shall certainly die if it continues. Will it never cease?"

"I've been speirin' at the captain and by a' accounts we're no at the warst o't. He says it's juist like the backs o' Leith. If ye win by the Fisherraw ye'll meet your death i' the Kettle Wynd, and, if by any chance ye're no killed there, ye'll be dune for i' the Walk. He was speaking o' the stinks o' the place and no the folk, for they're peaceable eneuch, puir bodies. 'Weel,' says he, 'it's the same here. It's ill for some folk to win by the Forth, but it's waur i' the open sea, and when it comes to the Dutch waters, it's fair awfu'.' I wis, Laird, ye maunna dee."

This was poor consolation, and had I not formed some guess of my servant's manners, I should have been downhearted enough; but there was a roguish twinkle in his eye, and, even as he spoke, his mouth broadened to a grin. I heard him humming the lines of an old ditty which I supposed to have some reference to my state:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.