ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

HUNTED AND HARRIED

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
On the Hunt

On a brilliant summer morning in the last quarter of the seventeenth century a small troop of horsemen crossed the ford of the river Cairn, in Dumfriesshire, not far from the spot where stands the little church of Irongray, and, gaining the road on the western bank of the stream, wended their way towards the moors and uplands which lie in the neighbourhood of Skeoch Hill.

The dragoons, for such they were, trotted rapidly along the road that led into the solitudes of the hills, with all the careless dash of men whose interests are centred chiefly on the excitements of the passing hour, yet with the unflagging perseverance of those who have a fixed purpose in view—their somewhat worn aspect and the mud with which they were bespattered, from jack-boot to iron headpiece, telling of a long ride over rugged ground.

The officer in command of the party rode a little in advance. Close behind him followed two troopers, one of whom was a burly middle-aged man with a stern, swarthy countenance; the other a youth whose tall frame was scarcely, if at all, less powerful than that of his comrade-in-arms, though much more elegant in form, while his youthful and ruddy, yet masculine, countenance suggested that he must at that time have been but a novice in the art of war.

This youth alone, of all the party, had a somewhat careworn and sad expression on his brow. It could hardly have been the result of fatigue, for there was more of ease and vigour in his carriage than in that of any of his companions.

"We should be near the river by this time, Glendinning," said the leader of the party, reining in and addressing the swarthy trooper.

"Ay, sir, the Cluden rins jist ayont the turn o' the road there," replied the man. "Ye'll hear the roar o' the fa' in a meenit or twa."

Even as he spoke the dull growl of a cataract was heard, and, a few minutes later, the party came upon the ford of the river.

It was situated not many yards below the picturesque waterfall, which is now spanned by the Routen Bridge, but which, at that time, was unbridged—at all events, if a bridge had previously existed, it had fallen in or been carried away—and the wild gorge was impassable.

The sound of the fall alone told of its vicinity, for a dense mass of foliage hid it completely from the troopers' view until they had surmounted the steep bank on the other side of the stream.

"Are you well acquainted with this man Black?" asked the leader of the party as they emerged from the thick belt of trees and shrubs by which the Cluden was shaded, and continued their journey on the more open ground beyond.

"I ken him weel, sir," answered the trooper. "Andrew Black was an auld freend o' mine, an' a big, stoot, angry man he is—kindly disposed, nae doot, when ye let him alane, but a perfe't deevil incarnate when he's roosed. He did me an ill turn ance that I've no paid him off for *yet*."

"I suppose, then," said the officer, "that your guiding us so willingly to his cottage is in part payment of this unsettled debt?"

"Maybe it is," replied the trooper grimly.

"They say," continued the other, "that there is some mystery about the man; that somehow nobody can catch him. Like an eel he has slipped through our fellows' fingers and disappeared more

than once, when they thought they had him quite safe. It is said that on one occasion he managed even to give the slip to Claverhouse himself, which, you know, is not easy."

"That may be, sir, but he'll no slip through my fingers gin I ance git a grup o' his thrapple," said the swarthy man, with a revengeful look.

"We must get a grip of him somehow," returned the officer, "for it is said that he is a sly helper of the rebels—though it is as difficult to convict as to catch him; and as this gathering, of which our spies have brought information, is to be in the neighbourhood of his house, he is sure to be mixed up with it."

"Nae doot o' that, sir, an' so we may manage to kill twa birds wi' ae stane. But I'm in a diffeeculty noo, sir, for ye ken I'm no acquaint wi' this country nae farer than the Cluden ford, an' here we hae come to a fork i' the road."

The party halted as he spoke, while the perplexed guide stroked his rather long nose and looked seriously at the two roads, or bridle-paths, into which their road had resolved itself, and each of which led into very divergent parts of the heathclad hills.

This guide, Glendinning, had become acquainted with Black at a time when the latter resided in Lanarkshire, and, as he had just said, was unacquainted with the region through which they now travelled beyond the river Cluden. After a short conference the officer in command decided to divide the party and explore both paths.

"You will take one man, Glendinning, and proceed along the path to the right," he said; "I will try the left. If you discover anything like a house or cot within a mile or two you will at once send your comrade back to let me know, while you take up your quarters in the cottage and await my coming. Choose whom you will for your companion."

"I choose Will Wallace, then," said Glendinning, with a nod to the young trooper whom we have already introduced.

The youth did not seem at all flattered by the selection, but of course obeyed orders with military promptitude, and followed his comrade for some time in silence, though with a clouded brow.

"It seems to me," said the swarthy trooper, as they drew rein and proceeded up a steep ascent at a walk, "that ye're no' sae pleased as ye might be wi' the wark we hae on hand."

"Pleased!" exclaimed the youth, whose tone and speech seemed to indicate him an Englishman, "how can I be pleased when all I have been called on to do since I enlisted has been to aid and abet in robbery, cruelty, and murder? I honour loyalty and detest rebellion as much as any man in the troop, but if I had known what I now know I would never have joined you."

Glendinning gazed at his companion in amazement. Having been absent on detached service when Will Wallace had joined—about three weeks previously—he was ignorant both as to his character and his recent experiences. He had chosen him on the present occasion simply on account of his youth and magnificent physique.

"I doot I've made a mistake in choosin' *you*," said Glendinning with some asperity, after a few moments, "but it's ower late noo to rectifee't. What ails ye, lad? What hae ye seen?"

"I have seen what I did not believe possible," answered the other with suppressed feeling. "I have seen a little boy tortured with the thumbscrews, pricked with bayonets, and otherwise inhumanly treated because he would not, or could not, tell where his father was. I have seen a man hung up to a beam by his thumbs because he would not give up money which perhaps he did not possess. I have seen a woman tortured by having lighted matches put between her fingers because she would not, or could not, tell where a conventicle was being held. I did not, indeed, see the last deed actually done, else would I have cut down the coward who did it. The poor thing had fainted and the torture was over when I came upon them. Only two days ago I was ordered out with a party who pillaged the house of a farmer because he refused to take an oath of allegiance, which seems to have been purposely so worded as to make those who take it virtually bondslaves to the King, and which makes

him master of the lives, properties, and consciences of his subjects—and all this done in the King's name and by the King's troops!"

"An' what pairt did *you* tak' in these doin's?" asked Glendinning with some curiosity.

"I did my best to restrain my comrades, and when they were burning the hayricks, throwing the meal on the dunghill, and wrecking the property of the farmer, I cut the cords with which they had bound the poor fellow to his chair and let him go free."

"Did onybody see you do that?"

"I believe not; though I should not have cared if they had. I'm thoroughly disgusted with the service. I know little or nothing of the principles of these rebels—these fanatics, as you call them—but tyranny or injustice I cannot stand, whether practised by a king or a beggar, and I am resolved to have nothing more to do with such fiendish work."

"Young man," said the swarthy comrade in a voice of considerable solemnity, "ye hae obviously mista'en your callin'. If you werena new to thae pairts, ye would ken that the things ye objec' to are quite common. Punishin' an' harryin' the rebels and fanatics—*Covenanters*, they ca' theirsels—has been gaun on for years ower a' the land. In my opeenion it's weel deserved, an' naething that ye can do or say wull prevent it, though what ye do an' say is no' unlikely to cut short yer ain career by means o' a rope roond yer thrapple. But losh! man, I wonder ye haena heard about thae matters afore now."

"My having spent the last few years of my life in an out-of-the-way part of Ireland may account for that," said Wallace. "My father's recent death obliged my mother to give up her farm and return to her native town of Lanark, where she now lives with a brother. Poverty and the urgency of a cousin have induced me, unfortunately, to take service with the dragoons."

"After what ye've said, hoo am I to coont on yer helpin' me e'noo?" asked Glendinning.

"As long as I wear the King's uniform you may count on my obeying orders unless I am commanded to break the plainest laws of God," answered the young man. "As our present business is only to discover the cottage of Andrew Black, there seems likely to be no difficulty between us just now."

"H'm! I'm no' sure o' that; but if ye'll tak' my advice, lad, ye'll haud yer tongue aboot thae matters. If Clavers heard the half o' what ye've said to me, he'd send ye into the next warl' withoot gieing ye time to say yer prayers. Freedom of speech is no permitted at the present time in Scotland—unless it be the right kind of speech, and—"

He stopped, for at that moment two young girls suddenly appeared at a bend of the road in front of them. They gazed for a moment at the soldiers in evident surprise, and then turned as if to fly, but Glendinning put spurs to his horse and was beside them in a moment. Leaping to the ground, he seized the girls roughly by their arms as they clung together in alarm. One of the two was a dark-eyed little child. The other was fair, unusually pretty, and apparently about fifteen or sixteen years of age.

The trooper proceeded to question them sharply.

"Be gentle," said Will Wallace sternly, as he rode up, and, also dismounting, stood beside them. "No fear of their running away now."

The swarthy trooper pretended not to hear, but nevertheless relaxed his grip and merely rested his hand upon the fair girl's shoulder as he said to the other—

"Now, my wee doo, ye canna be far frae hame, I's be sworn. What's yer name?"

"Aggie Wilson," answered the child at once.

"And yours?"

"Jean Black," replied the blonde timidly.

"Oho! an' yer faither's name is Andrew, an' his hoose is close by, I'll be bound, so ye'll be guid eneuch to show us the way till't. But first, my bonny lass, ye'll gie me a—"

Slipping his arm round the waist of the terrified blonde, the trooper rudely attempted to terminate his sentence in a practical manner; but before his lips could touch her face he received a blow from his comrade that sent him staggering against a neighbouring tree.

Blazing with astonishment and wrath, Glendinning drew his sword and sprang at his companion, who, already full of indignation at the memory of what he had been so recently compelled to witness, could ill brook the indignity thus offered to the defenceless girl. His weapon flashed from its sheath on the instant, and for a few moments the two men cut and thrust at each other with savage ferocity. Wallace, however, was too young and unused to mortal strife to contemplate with indifference the possibility of shedding the blood of a comrade. Quickly recovering himself, he stood entirely on the defensive, which his vigorous activity enabled him easily to do. Burning under the insult he had received, Glendinning felt no such compunctions. He pushed his adversary fiercely, and made a lunge at last which not only passed the sword through the left sleeve of the youth's coat, but slightly wounded his arm. Roused to uncontrollable anger by this, Will Wallace fetched his opponent a blow so powerful that it beat down his guard, rang like a hammer on his iron headpiece, and fairly hurled the man into the ditch at the roadside.

Somewhat alarmed at this sudden result, the youth hastily pulled him out, and, kneeling beside him, anxiously examined his head. Much to his relief he found that there was no wound at all, and that the man was only stunned. After the examination, Wallace observed that the girls had taken advantage of the fray to make their escape.

Indignation and anger having by that time evaporated, and his judgment having become cool, Wallace began gradually to appreciate his true position, and to feel exceedingly uncomfortable. He had recklessly expressed opinions and confessed to actions which would of themselves ensure his being disgraced and cast into prison, if not worse; he had almost killed one of his own comrades, and had helped two girls to escape who could probably have assisted in the accomplishment of the duty on which they had been despatched. His case, he suddenly perceived, was hopeless, and he felt that he was a lost man.

Will Wallace was quick of thought and prompt in action. Carefully disposing the limbs of his fallen comrade, and resting his head comfortably on a grassy bank, he cast a hurried glance around him.

On his left hand and behind him lay the rich belt of woodland that marked the courses of the rivers Cluden and Cairn. In front stretched the moors and hills of the ancient district of Galloway, at that time given over to the tender mercies of Graham of Claverhouse. Beside him stood the two patient troop-horses, gazing quietly at the prostrate man, as if in mild surprise at his unusual stillness.

Beyond this he could not see with the physical eye; but with the mental orb he saw a dark vista of ruined character, blighted hopes, and dismal prospects. The vision sufficed to fix his decision. Quietly, like a warrior's wraith, he sheathed his sword and betook himself to the covert of the peat-morass and the heather hill.

He was not the first good man and true who had sought the same shelter.

At the time of which we write Scotland had for many years been in a woeful plight—with tyranny draining her life-blood, cupidity grasping her wealth, hypocrisy and bigotry misconstruing her motives and falsifying her character. Charles the Second filled the throne. Unprincipled men, alike in Church and State, made use of their position and power to gain their own ends and enslave the people. The King, determined to root out Presbytery from Scotland, as less subservient to his despotic aims, and forcibly to impose Prelacy on her as a stepping-stone to Popery, had no difficulty in finding ecclesiastical and courtly bravos to carry out his designs; and for a long series of dismal years persecution stalked red-handed through the land.

Happily for the well-being of future generations, our covenanting forefathers stood their ground with Christian heroism, for both civil and religious liberty were involved in the struggle. Their so-called fanaticism consisted in a refusal to give up the worship of God after the manner dictated by conscience and practised by their forefathers; in declining to attend the ministry of the ignorant, and too often vicious, curates forced upon them; and in refusing to take the oath of allegiance just referred to by Will Wallace.

Conventicles, as they were called—or the gathering together of Christians in houses and barns, or on the hillsides, to worship God—were illegally pronounced illegal by the King and Council; and disobedience to the tyrannous law was punished with imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, and death. To enforce these penalties the greater part of Scotland—especially the south and west —was overrun by troops, and treated as if it were a conquered country. The people—holding that in some matters it is incumbent to "obey God rather than man," and that they were bound "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together"—resolved to set the intolerable law at defiance, and went armed to the hill-meetings.

They took up arms at first, however, chiefly, if not solely, to protect themselves from a licentious soldiery, who went about devastating the land, not scrupling to rob and insult helpless women and children, and to shed innocent blood. Our Scottish forefathers, believing—in common with the lower animals and lowest savages—that it was a duty to defend their females and little ones, naturally availed themselves of the best means of doing so.

About this time a meeting, or conventicle, of considerable importance was appointed to be held among the secluded hills in the neighbourhood of Irongray; and Andrew Black, the farmer, was chosen to select the particular spot, and make the preliminary arrangements.

Now this man Black is not easily described, for his was a curiously compound character. To a heart saturated with the milk of human kindness was united a will more inflexible, if possible, than that of a Mexican mule; a frame of Herculean mould, and a spirit in which profound gravity and reverence waged incessant warfare with a keen appreciation of the ludicrous. Peacefully inclined in disposition, with a tendency to believe well of all men, and somewhat free and easy in the formation of his opinions, he was very unwilling to resist authority; but the love of truth and justice was stronger within him than the love of peace.

In company with his shepherd, Quentin Dick—a man of nearly his own size and build—Andrew Black proceeded to a secluded hollow in Skeoch Hill to gather and place in order the masses of rock which were to form the seats of the communicants at the contemplated religious gathering—which seats remain to this day in the position they occupied at that time, and are familiarly known in the district as "the Communion stones of Irongray."

Chapter Two.
The "Fanatic" and the "Spy."

The night was dark and threatening when Andrew Black and his shepherd left their cottage, and quickly but quietly made for the neighbouring hill. The weather was well suited for deeds of secrecy, for gusts of wind, with an occasional spattering of rain, swept along the hill-face, and driving clouds obscured the moon, which was then in its first quarter.

At first the two men were obliged to walk with care, for the light was barely sufficient to enable them to distinguish the sheep-track which they followed, and the few words they found it necessary to speak were uttered in subdued tones. Jean Black and her cousin Aggie Wilson had reported their *rencontre* with the two dragoons, and Quentin Dick had himself seen the main body of the troops from behind a heather bush on his way back to the farm, therefore caution was advisable. But as they climbed Skeoch Hill, and the moon shed a few feeble rays on their path, they began to converse more freely. For a few minutes their intercourse related chiefly to sheep and the work of the farm, for both Andrew and his man were of that sedate, imperturbable nature which is not easily thrown off its balance by excitement or danger. Then their thoughts turned to the business in hand.

"Nae fear o' the sodgers comin' here on a nicht like this," remarked Andrew, as a squall nearly swept the blue bonnet off his head.

"Maybe no," growled Quentin Dick sternly, "but I've heard frae Tam Chanter that servants o' that Papist Earl o' Nithsdale, an' o' the scoondrel Sir Robert Dalziel, hae been seen pokin' their noses aboot at Irongray. If they git wund o' the place, we're no likely to hae a quiet time o't. Did ye say that the sodgers ill-used the bairns?"

"Na!—ane o' them was inclined to be impident, but the ither, a guid-lookin' young felly, accordin' to Jean, took their pairt an' quarrelled wi' his comrade, sae that they cam to loggerheeds at last, but what was the upshot naebody kens, for the bairns took to their heels an' left them fechtin'."

"An' what if they sud fin' yer hoose an' the bairns unproteckit?" asked the shepherd.

"They're no likely to fin' the hoose in a nicht like this, man; an' if they do, they'll fin' naebody but Ramblin' Peter there, for I gied the lassies an' the women strick orders to tak' to the hidy-hole at the first soond o' horses' feet."

By this time the men had reached a secluded hollow in the hill, so completely enclosed as to be screened from observation on all sides. They halted here a few moments, for two dark forms were seen in the uncertain light to be moving about just in front of them.

"It's them," whispered Andrew.

"Whae?" asked the shepherd.

"Alexander McCubine an' Edward Gordon."

"Guid an' safe men baith," responded Quentin; "ye better gie them a cry."

Andrew did so by imitating the cry of a plover. It was replied to at once.

"The stanes are big, ye see," explained Andrew, while the two men were approaching. "It'll tak' the strength o' the fowr o' us to lift some o' them."

"We've got the cairn aboot finished," said McCubine as he came up. He spoke in a low voice, for although there was no probability of any one being near, they were so accustomed to expect danger because of the innumerable enemies who swarmed about the country, that caution had almost become a second nature.

Without further converse the four men set to work in silence. They completed a circular heap, or cairn, of stones three or four feet high, and levelled the top thereof to serve as a table or a pulpit at the approaching assembly. In front of this, and stretching towards a sloping brae, they arranged four rows of very large stones to serve as seats for the communicants, with a few larger stones between

them, as if for the support of rude tables of plank. It took several hours to complete the work. When it was done Andrew Black surveyed it with complacency, and gave it as his opinion that it was a "braw kirk, capable o' accommodatin' a congregation o' some thoosands, mair or less." Then the two men, Gordon and McCubine, bidding him and the shepherd good-night, went away into the darkness from which they had emerged.

"Whar'll they be sleepin' the nicht?" asked the shepherd, as he and Andrew turned homeward.

"I' the peat-bog, I doot, for I daurna tak' them hame whan the dragoons is likely to gie us a ca'; besides, the hidy-hole wull be ower fu' soon. Noo, lad," he added, as they surmounted a hillock, from which they had a dim view of the surrounding country, "gang ye doon an' see if ye can fin' oot onything mair aboot thae sodgers. I'll awa' hame an see that a's right there."

They parted, the shepherd turning sharp off to the right, while the farmer descended towards his cottage. He had not advanced above half the distance when an object a little to the left of his path induced him to stop. It resembled a round stone, and was too small to have attracted the attention of any eye save one which was familiar with every bush and stone on the ground. Grasping a stout thorn stick which he carried, Andrew advanced towards the object in question with catlike caution until quite close to it, when he discovered that it was the head of a man who was sleeping soundly under a whin-bush. A closer inspection showed that the man wore an iron headpiece, a soldier's coat, and huge jack-boots.

"A dragoon and a spy!" thought Andrew, while he raised his cudgel, the only weapon he carried, and frowned. But Andrew was a merciful man; he could not bring himself to strike a sleeping man, even though waking him might entail a doubtful conflict, for he could see that the trooper's hand grasped the hilt of his naked sword. For a few moments he surveyed the sleeper, as if calculating his chances, then he quietly dropped his plaid, took off his coat, and untying his neckcloth, laid it carefully on one side over a bush. Having made these preparations, he knelt beside Will Wallace—for it was he—and grasped him firmly by the throat with both hands.

As might have been expected, the young trooper attempted to spring up, and tried to use his weapon; but, finding this to be impossible at such close quarters, he dropped it, and grappled the farmer with all his might; but Andrew, holding on to him like a vice, placed his knee upon his chest and held him firmly down.

"It's o' nae manner o' use to strive, ye see," said Andrew, relaxing his grip a little; "I've gotten ye, an' if ye like to do my biddin' I'll no be hard on ye."

"If you will let me rise and stand before me in fair fight, I'll do your business if not your bidding," returned Wallace in a tone of what may be termed stern sulkiness.

"Div ye think it's likely I'll staund before you in fair fecht, as you ca'd—you wi' a swurd, and me wi' a bit stick, my lad? Na, na, ye'll hae to submit, little though ye like it."

"Give me the stick, then, and take you the sword, I shall be content," said the indignant trooper, making another violent but unsuccessful effort to free himself.

"It's a fair offer," said Andrew, when he had subdued the poor youth a second time, "an' reflec's favourably on yer courage, but I'm a man o' peace, an' have no thirst for bloodshed—whilk is more than ye can say, young man; but if ye'll let me tie yer hands thegither, an' gang peaceably hame wi' me, I's promise that nae mischief'll befa' ye."

"No man shall ever tie my hands together as long as there is life in my body," replied the youth.

"Stop, stop, callant!" exclaimed Andrew, as Will was about to renew the struggle. "The pride o' youth is awful. Hear what I've gotten to say to ye, man, or I'll hae to throttle ye ootright. It'll come to the same thing if ye'll alloo me to tie ane o' *my* hands to ane o' yours. Ye canna objec' to that, surely, for I'll be your prisoner as muckle as you'll be mine—and that'll be fair play, for we'll leave the swurd lyin' on the brae to keep the bit stick company."

"Well, I agree to that," said Wallace, in a tone that indicated surprise with a dash of amusement.

"An' ye promise no' to try to get away when you're tied to—when *I'm* tied to *you*?"

"I promise."

Hereupon the farmer, reaching out his hand, picked up the black silk neckcloth which he had laid aside, and with it firmly bound his own left wrist to the right wrist of his captive, talking in a grave, subdued tone as he did so.

"Nae doot the promise o' a spy is hardly to be lippened to, but if I find that ye're a dishonourable man, ye'll find that I'm an uncomfortable prisoner to be tied to. Noo, git up, lad, an' we'll gang hame thegither."

On rising, the first thing the trooper did was to turn and take a steady look at the man who had captured him in this singular manner.

"Weel, what d'ye think o' me?" asked Andrew, with what may be termed a grave smile.

"If you want to know my true opinion," returned Wallace, "I should say that I would not have thought, from the look of you, that you could have taken mean advantage of a sleeping foe."

"Ay—an' I would not have thought, from the look o' *you*," retorted Andrew, "that ye could hae sell't yersel' to gang skulkin' aboot the hills as a spy upon the puir craters that are only seekin' to worship their Maker in peace."

Without further remark Andrew Black, leaving his coat and plaid to keep company with the sword and stick, led his prisoner down the hill.

Andrew's cottage occupied a slight hollow on the hillside, which concealed it from every point of the compass save the high ground above it. Leading the trooper up to the door, he tapped gently, and was promptly admitted by some one whom Wallace could not discern, as the interior was dark.

"Oh, Uncle Andrew! I'm glad ye've come, for Peter hasna come back yet, an' I'm feared somethin' has come ower him."

"Strike a light, lassie. I've gotten haud o' a spy here, an' canna weel do't mysel'."

When a light was procured and held up, it revealed the pretty face of Jean Black, which underwent a wondrous change when she beheld the face of the prisoner.

"Uncle Andrew!" she exclaimed, "this is nae spy. He's the man that cam' to the help o' Aggie an' me against the dragoon."

"Is that sae?" said Black, turning a look of surprise on his prisoner.

"It is true, indeed, that I had the good fortune to protect Jean and her friend from an insolent comrade," answered Wallace; "and it is also true that that act has been partly the cause of my deserting to the hills, being starved for a day and a night, and taken prisoner now as a spy."

"Sir," said Andrew, hastily untying the kerchief that bound them together, "I humbly ask your pardon. Moreover, it's my opeenion that if ye hadna been starvin' ye wadna have been here 'e noo, for ye're uncommon teuch. Rin, lassie, an' fetch some breed an' cheese. Whar's Marion an' Is'b'l?"

"They went out to seek for Peter," said Jean, as she hastened to obey her uncle's mandate.

At that moment a loud knocking was heard at the door, and the voice of Marion, one of the maid-servants, was heard outside. On the door being opened, she and her companion Isabel burst in with excited looks and the information, pantingly given, that the "sodgers were comin'."

"Haud yer noise, lassie, an' licht the fire—pit on the parritch pat. Come, Peter, let's hear a' aboot it."

Ramblin' Peter, who had been thus named because of his inveterate tendency to range over the neighbouring hills, was a quiet, undersized, said-to-be weak-minded boy of sixteen years, though he looked little more than fourteen. No excitement whatever ruffled his placid countenance as he gave his report—to the effect that a party of dragoons had been seen by him not half an hour before, searching evidently for his master's cottage.

"They'll soon find it," said the farmer, turning quickly to his domestics— "Away wi' ye, lassies, and hide."

The two servant-girls, with Jean and her cousin Aggie Wilson, ran at once into an inner room and shut the door. Ramblin' Peter sat stolidly down beside the fire and calmly stirred the porridge-pot, which was nearly full of the substantial Scottish fare.

"Noo, sir," said Black, turning to Will Wallace, who had stood quietly watching the various actors in the scene just described, "yer comrades'll be here in a wee while. May I ask what ye expect?"

"I expect to be imprisoned at the least, more probably shot."

"Hm! pleasant expectations for a young man, nae doot. I'm sorry that it's oot o' my power to stop an' see the fun, for the sodgers have strange suspicions aboot me, so I'm forced to mak' mysel' scarce an' leave Ramblin' Peter to do the hospitalities o' the hoose. But before I gang awa' I wad fain repay ye for the guid turn ye did to my bairns. If ye are willin' to shut yer eyes an' do what I tell ye, I'll put you in a place o' safety."

"Thank you, Mr Black," returned Wallace; "of course I shall only be too glad to escape from the consequences of my unfortunate position; but do not misunderstand me: although neither a spy nor a Covenantor I am a loyal subject, and would not now be a deserter if that character had not been forced upon me, first by the brutality of the soldiers with whom I was banded, and then by the insolence of my comrade-in-arms to your daughter—"

"Niece; niece," interrupted Black; "I wish she *was* my dauchter, bless her bonny face! Niver fear, sir, I've nae doot o' yer loyalty, though you an' yer freends misdoot mine. I claim to be as loyal as the best o' ye, but there's nae dictionary in *this* warld that defines loyalty to be slavish submission o' body an' sowl to a tyrant that fears naether God nor man. The quastion noo is, Div ye want to escape and wull ye trust me?"

The sound of horses galloping in the distance tended to quicken the young trooper's decision. He submitted to be blindfolded by his captor.

"Noo, Peter," said Andrew, as he was about to lead Wallace away, "ye ken what to dae. Gie them plenty to eat; show them the rum bottle, let them hae the rin o' the hoose, an' say that I bade ye treat them weel."

"Ay," was Ramblin' Peter's laconic reply.

Leading his captive out at the door, round the house, and re-entering by a back door, apparently with no other end in view than to bewilder him, Andrew went into a dark room, opened some sort of door—to enter which the trooper had to stoop low—and conducted him down a steep, narrow staircase.

The horsemen meanwhile had found the cottage and were heard at that moment tramping about in front, and thundering on the door for admittance.

Wallace fancied that the door which closed behind him must be of amazing thickness, for it shut out almost completely the sounds referred to.

On reaching the foot of the staircase, and having the napkin removed from his eyes, he found himself in a long, low, vaulted chamber. There was no one in it save his guide and a venerable man who sat beside a deal table, reading a document by the light of a tallow candle stuck in the mouth of a black bottle.

The soldiers, meanwhile, having been admitted by Ramblin' Peter, proceeded to question that worthy as to Andrew Black and his household. Not being satisfied of the truth of his replies they proceeded to apply torture in order to extract confession. It was the first time that this mode of obtaining information had been used in Black's cottage, and it failed entirely, for Ramblin' Peter was staunch, and, although inhumanly thrashed and probed with sword-points, the poor lad remained dumb, insomuch that the soldiers at length set him down as an idiot, for he did not even cry out in his agonies—excepting in a curious, half-stifled manner—because he knew well that if his master were made aware by his cries of what was going on he would be sure to hasten to the rescue at the risk of his life.

Having devoured the porridge, drunk the rum, and destroyed a considerable amount of the farmer's produce, the lawless troopers, who seemed to be hurried in their proceedings at that time, finally left the place.

About the time that these events were taking place in and around Black's cottage, bands of armed men with women and even children were hastening towards the same locality to attend the great "conventicle," for which the preparations already described were being made.

The immediate occasion of the meeting was the desire of the parishioners of the Reverend John Welsh, a great-grandson of John Knox, to make public avowal, at the Communion Table, of their fidelity to Christ and their attachment to the minister who had been expelled from the church of Irongray; but strong sympathy induced many others to attend, not only from all parts of Galloway and Nithsdale, but from the distant Clyde, the shores of the Forth, and elsewhere; so that the roads were crowded with people making for the rendezvous—some on foot, others on horseback. Many of the latter were gentlemen of means and position, who, as well as their retainers, were more or less well armed and mounted. The Reverend John Blackadder, the "auld" minister of Troqueer—a noted hero of the Covenant, who afterwards died a prisoner on the Bass Rock—travelled with his party all the way from Edinburgh, and a company of eighty horse proceeded to the meeting from Clydesdale.

Preliminary services, conducted by Mr Blackadder and Mr Welsh, were held near Dumfries on the Saturday, but at these the place of meeting on the Sabbath was only vaguely announced as "a hillside in Irongray," so anxious were they to escape being disturbed by their enemies, and the secret was kept so well that when the Sabbath arrived a congregation of above three thousand had assembled round the Communion stones in the hollow of Skeoch Hill.

Sentinels were posted on all the surrounding heights. One of these sentinels was the farmer Andrew Black, with a cavalry sword belted to his waist, and a rusty musket on his shoulder. Beside him stood a tall stalwart youth in shepherd's costume.

"Yer ain mother wadna ken ye," remarked Andrew with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I doubt that," replied the youth; "a mother's eyes are keen. I should not like to encounter even Glendinning in my present guise."

As he spoke the rich melody of the opening psalm burst from the great congregation and rolled in softened cadence towards the sentinels.

Chapter Three.
The True and the False at Work

The face of nature did not seem propitious to the great gathering on Skeoch Hill. Inky clouds rolled athwart the leaden sky, threatening a deluge of rain, and fitful gusts of wind seemed to indicate the approach of a tempest. Nevertheless the elements were held in check by the God of nature, so that the solemn services of the day were conducted to a close without discomfort, though not altogether without interruption.

Several of the most eminent ministers, who had been expelled from their charges, were present on this occasion. Besides John Welsh of Irongray, there were Arnot of Tongland, Blackadder of Troqueer, and Dickson of Rutherglen—godly men who had for many years suffered persecution and imprisonment, and were ready to lay down their lives in defence of religious liberty. The price set upon the head of that "notour traitor, Mr John Welsh," dead or alive, was 9000 merks. Mr Arnot was valued at 3000!

These preached and assisted at different parts of the services, while the vast multitude sat on the sloping hillside, and the mounted men drew up on the outskirts of the congregation, so as to be within sound of the preachers' voices, and, at the same time, be ready for action on the defensive if enemies should appear.

Andrew Black and his companion stood for some time listening, with bowed heads, to the slow sweet music that floated towards them. They were too far distant to hear the words of prayer that followed, yet they continued to stand in reverent silence for some time, listening to the sound—Black with his eyes closed, his young companion gazing wistfully at the distant landscape, which, from the elevated position on which they stood, lay like a magnificent panorama spread out before them. On the left the level lands bordering the rivers Cairn and Nith stretched away to the Solway, with the Cumberland mountains in the extreme distance; in front and on the right lay the wild, romantic hill-country of which, in after years, it was so beautifully written:—

> "O bonnie hills of Galloway oft have I stood to see,
> At sunset hour, your shadows fall, all darkening on the lea;
> While visions of the buried years came o'er me in their might—
> As phantoms of the sepulchre—instinct with inward light!
> The years, the years when Scotland groaned beneath her tyrant's hand!
> And 'twas not for the heather she was called 'the purple land.'
> And 'twas not for her *loveliness* her children blessed their God—
> *But for secret places of the hills, and the mountain heights untrod*."

"Who was the old man I found in what you call your hidy-hole?" asked Wallace, turning suddenly to his companion.

"I'm no' sure that I have a right to answer that," said Black, regarding Will with a half-serious, half-amused look. "Hooever, noo that ye've ta'en service wi' me, and ken about my hidy-hole, I suppose I may trust ye wi' a' my secrets."

"I would not press you to reveal any secrets, Mr Black, yet I think you are safe to trust me, seeing that you know enough about my own secrets to bring me to the gallows if so disposed."

"Ay, I hae ye there, lad! But I'll trust ye on better grunds than that. I believe ye to be an honest man, and that's enough for me. Weel, ye maun ken, it's saxteen year since I howkit the hidy-hole below my hoose, an' wad ye believe it?—they've no fund it oot yet! Not even had a suspeecion o't, though the sodgers hae been sair puzzled, mony a time, aboot hoo I managed to gie them the slip. An'

mony's the puir body, baith gentle and simple, that I've gien food an' shelter to whae was very likely to hae perished o' cauld an' hunger, but for the hidy-hole. Among ithers I've often had the persecuited ministers doon there, readin' their Bibles or sleepin' as comfortable as ye like when the dragoons was drinkin', roarin', an' singin' like deevils ower their heids. My certies! if Clavers, or Sherp, or Lauderdale had an inklin' o' the hunderd pairt o' the law-brekin' that I've done, it's a gallows in the Gressmarkit as high as Haman's wad be ereckit for me, an' my heed an' hauns, may be, would be bleachin' on the Nether Bow. Humph! but they've no' gotten me yet!"

"And I sincerely hope they never will," remarked Wallace; "but you have not yet told me the name of the old man."

"I was comin' to him," continued Black; "but wheniver I wander to the doin's o' that black-hearted Cooncil, I'm like to lose the threed o' my discoorse. Yon is a great man i' the Kirk o' Scotland. They ca' him Donald Cargill. The adventures that puir man has had in the coorse o' mair nor quarter o' a century wad mak' a grand story-buik. He has no fear o' man, an' he's an awfu' stickler for justice. I'se warrant he gied ye some strang condemnations o' the poors that be."

"Indeed he did not," said Wallace. "Surely you misjudge his character. His converse with me was entirely religious, and his chief anxiety seemed to be to impress on me the love of God in sending Jesus Christ to redeem a wicked world from sin. I tried to turn the conversation on the state of the times, but he gently turned it round again to the importance of being at peace with God, and giving heed to the condition of my own soul. He became at last so personal that I did not quite like it. Yet he was so earnest and kind that I could not take offence."

"Ay, ay," said Black in a musing tone, "I see. He clearly thinks that yer he'rt needs mair instruction than yer heed. Hm! maybe he's right. Hooever, he's a wonderfu' man; gangs aboot the country preachin' everywhere altho' he kens that the sodgers are aye on the look-oot for him, an' that if they catch him it's certain death. He wad have been at this communion nae doot, if he hadna engaged to preach somewhere near Sanquhar this vera day."

"Then he has left the hidy-hole by this time, I suppose?"

"Ye may be sure o' that, for when there is work to be done for the Master, Donal' Cargill doesna let the gress grow under his feet."

"I'm sorry that I shall not see him again," returned the ex-trooper in a tone of regret, "for I like him much."

Now, while this conversation was going on, a portion of the troop of dragoons which had been out in search of Andrew Black was sent under Glendinning (now a sergeant) in quest of an aged couple named Mitchell, who were reported to have entertained intercommuned, i.e. outlawed, persons; attended conventicles in the fields; ventured to have family worship in their cottages while a few neighbours were present, and to have otherwise broken the laws of the Secret Council.

This Council, which was ruled by two monsters in human form, namely, Archbishop Sharp of Saint Andrews and the Duke of Lauderdale, having obtained full powers from King Charles the Second to put down conventicles and enforce the laws against the fanatics with the utmost possible rigour, had proceeded to carry out their mission by inviting a host of half, if not quite, savage Highlanders to assist them in quelling the people. This host, numbering, with 2000 regulars and militia, about 10,000 men, eagerly accepted the invitation, and was let loose on the south and western districts of Scotland about the beginning of the year, and for some time ravaged and pillaged the land as if it had been an enemy's country. They were thanked by the King for so readily agreeing to assist in reducing the Covenanters to obedience to "Us and Our laws," and were told to take up free quarters among the disaffected, to disarm such persons as they should suspect, to carry with them instruments of torture wherewith to subdue the refractory, and in short to act very much in accordance with the promptings of their own desires. Evidently the mission suited these men admirably, for they treated all parties as disaffected, with great impartiality, and plundered, tortured, and insulted to such an extent that after about three months of unresisted depredation, the shame of the thing became so

obvious that Government was compelled to send them home again. They had accomplished nothing in the way of bringing the Covenanters to reason; but they had desolated a fair region of Scotland, spilt much innocent blood, ruined many families, and returned to their native hills heavily laden with booty of every kind like a victorious army. It is said that the losses caused by them in the county of Ayr alone amounted to over 11,000 pounds sterling.

The failure of this horde did not in the least check the proceedings of Sharp or Lauderdale or their like-minded colleagues. They kept the regular troops and militia moving about the land, enforcing their idiotical and wicked laws at the point of the sword. We say idiotical advisedly, for what could give stronger evidence of mental incapacity than the attempt to enforce a bond upon all landed proprietors, obliging themselves and their wives, children, and servants, as well as all their tenants and cottars, with their wives, children, and servants, to abstain from conventicles, and not to receive, assist, or even speak to, any forfeited persons, intercommuned ministers, or vagrant preachers, but to use their utmost endeavours to apprehend all such? Those who took this bond were to receive an assurance that the troops should not be quartered on their lands—a matter of considerable importance —for this quartering involved great expense and much destruction of property in most cases, and absolute ruin in some.

After the battle of the Pentland Hills (in 1666), in which the Covenanters, driven to desperation, made an unsuccessful effort to throw off the tyrannical yoke, severer laws were enacted against them. Their wily persecutor, also being well aware of the evil influence of disagreement among men, threw a bone of contention among them in the shape of royal acts of *Indulgence*, as they were styled, by which a certain number of the ejected ministers were permitted to preach on certain conditions, but only within their own parishes. To preach at a separate meeting in a private house subjected the minister to a fine of 5000 merks (about 278 pounds). To preach in the fields was to incur the penalty of death and confiscation of property. And these arbitrary laws were not merely enacted for intimidation. They were rigorously enforced. The curates in many cases became mere spies and Government informers. Many of the best men in the land laid down their lives rather than cease to proclaim the Gospel of love and peace and goodwill in Jesus Christ. Of course their enemies set them down as self-willed and turbulent fanatics. It has ever been, and ever will be, thus with men who are indifferent to principle. They will not, as well as cannot, understand those who are ready to fight, and, if need be, die for truth! Their unspoken argument seems to be: “You profess to preach peace, love, submission to authority, etcetera; very good, stand to your principles. Leave all sorts of carnal fighting to us. Obey us. Conform humbly to our arrangements, whatever they are, and all will be well; but dare to show the slightest symptom of restiveness under what you style our injustice, tyranny, cruelty, etcetera, and we will teach you the submission which you preach but fail to practise by means of fire and sword and torture and death!”

Many good men and true, with gentle spirits, and it may be somewhat exalted ideas about the rights of Royalty, accepted the Indulgence as being better than nothing, or better than civil war. No doubt, also, there were a few—neither good men nor true—who accepted it because it afforded them a loophole of escape from persecution. Similarly, on the other side, there were good men and true, who, with bolder hearts, perhaps, and clearer brains, it may be, refused the Indulgence as a presumptuous enactment, which cut at the roots of both civil and religious liberty, as implying a right to withhold while it professed to give, and which, if acquiesced in, would indicate a degree of abject slavery to man and unfaithfulness to God that might sink Scotland into a condition little better than that of some eastern nations at the present day. Thus was the camp of the Covenanters divided. There were also more subtle divisions, which it is not necessary to mention here, and in both camps, of course there was an infusion, especially amongst the young men, of that powerful element—love of excitement and danger for their own sake, with little if any regard to principle, which goes far in all ages to neutralise the efforts and hamper the energies of the wise.

Besides the acts of Indulgence, another and most tyrannical measure, already mentioned, had been introduced to crush if possible the Presbyterians. *Letters of intercommuning* were issued against a great number of the most distinguished Presbyterians, including several ladies of note, by which they were proscribed as rebels and cut off from all society. A price, amounting in some instances to 500 pounbds sterling, was fixed on their heads, and every person, not excepting their nearest of kin, was prohibited from conversing with or writing to them, or of aiding with food, clothes, or any other necessary of life, on pain of being found guilty of the same crimes as the intercommuned persons.

The natural result of such inhuman laws was that men and women in hundreds had to flee from their homes and seek refuge among the dens and caves of the mountains, where many were caught, carried off to prison, tried, tortured, and executed; while of those who escaped their foes, numbers perished from cold and hunger, and disease brought on by lying in damp caves and clefts of the rocks without food or fire in all weathers. The fines which were exacted for so-called offences tempted the avarice of the persecutors and tended to keep the torch of persecution aflame. For example, Sir George Maxwell of Newark was fined a sum amounting to nearly 8000 pounds sterling for absence from his Parish Church, attendance at conventicles, and disorderly baptisms—i.e. for preferring his own minister to the curate in the baptizing of his children! Hundreds of somewhat similar instances might be given. Up to the time of which we write (1678) no fewer than 17,000 persons had suffered for attending field meetings, either by fine, imprisonment, or death.

Such was the state of matters when the party of dragoons under command of Sergeant Glendinning rode towards the Mitchells' cottage, which was not far from Black's farm. The body of soldiers being too small to venture to interrupt the communion on Skeoch Hill, Glendinning had been told to wait in the neighbourhood and gather information while his officer, Captain Houston, went off in search of reinforcements.

"There's the auld sinner himsel'," cried the Sergeant as the party came in sight of an old, whitehaired man seated on a knoll by the side of the road. "Hallo! Jock Mitchell, is that you? Come doon here directly, I want to speak t'ye."

The old man, being stone deaf, and having his back to the road, was not aware of the presence of the dragoons, and of course took no notice of the summons.

"D'ye hear!" shouted the Sergeant savagely, for he was ignorant of the old man's condition.

Still Mitchell did not move. Glendinning, whose disposition seemed to have been rendered more brutal since his encounter with Wallace, drew a pistol from his holster and presented it at Mitchell.

"Answer me," he shouted again, "or ye're a deed man."

Mitchell did not move… There was a loud report, and next moment the poor old man fell dead upon the ground.

It chanced that Ramblin' Peter heard the report, though he did not witness the terrible result, for he was returning home from the Mitchells' cottage at the time, after escorting Jean Black and Aggie Wilson thither. The two girls, having been forbidden to attend the gathering on Skeoch Hill, had resolved to visit the Mitchells and spend the Sabbath with them. Peter had accompanied them and spent the greater part of the day with them, but, feeling the responsibility of his position as the representative of Andrew Black during his absence, had at last started for home.

A glance over a rising ground sufficed to make the boy turn sharp round and take to his heels. He was remarkably swift of foot. A few minutes brought him to the cottage door, which he burst open.

"The sodgers is comin', grannie!" (He so styled the old woman, though she was no relation.)

"Did ye see my auld man?"

"No."

"Away wi' ye, bairns," said Mrs Mitchell quickly but quietly. "Oot by the back door an' doon the burnside; they'll niver see ye for the busses."

"But, grannie, we canna leave you here alone," remonstrated Jean with an anxious look.

"An' I can fecht!" remarked Peter in a low voice, that betrayed neither fear nor excitement.

"The sodgers can do nae harm to *me*," returned the old woman firmly. "Do my bidding, bairns. Be aff, I say!"

There was no resisting Mrs Mitchell's word of command. Hastening out by the back door just as the troopers came in sight, Peter and his companions, diving into the shrubbery of the neighbouring streamlet, made their way to Black's farm by a circuitous route. There the girls took shelter in the house, locking the door and barring the windows, while Peter, diverging to the left, made for the hills like a hunted hare.

Andrew was standing alone at his post when the lithe runner came in sight. Will Wallace had left him by that time, and was listening entranced to the fervid exhortations of Dickson of Rutherglen.

"The sodgers!" gasped Peter, as he flung himself down to rest.

"Comin' this way, lad?"

"Na. They're at the Mitchells."

"A' safe at the ferm?" asked Andrew quickly.

"Ay, I saw the lasses into the hoose."

"Rin to the meetin' an' gie the alarm. Tell them to send Wallace an' Quentin here wi' sax stoot men—weel airmed—an' anither sentry, for I'm gaun awa'."

Almost before the sentence was finished Ramblin' Peter was up and away, and soon the alarming cry arose from the assembly, "The dragoons are upon us!"

Instantly the Clydesdale men mounted and formed to meet the expected onset. The men of Nithsdale were not slow to follow their example, and Gordon of Earlstoun, a tried and skilful soldier, put himself at the head of a large troop of Galloway horse. Four or five companies of foot, also well armed, got ready for action, and videttes and single horsemen were sent out to reconnoitre. Thus, in a moment, was this assembly of worshippers transformed into a band of Christian warriors, ready to fight and die for their families and liberties.

But the alarm, as it turned out, was a false one. Glendinning, informed by spies of the nature of the gathering, was much too sagacious a warrior to oppose his small force to such overwhelming odds. He contented himself for the present with smaller game.

After continuing in the posture of defence for a considerable time, the assembly dispersed, those who were defenceless being escorted by armed parties to the barns and cottages around. As they retired from the scene the windows of heaven were opened, and the rain, which had been restrained all day, came down in torrents, and sent the Cairn and Cluden red and roaring to the sea.

But long before this dispersion took place, Andrew Black, with Quentin Dick, Will Wallace, Ramblin' Peter, and six sturdy young men, armed with sword, gun, and pistol, had hurried down the hill to succour the Mitchells, if need be, and see to the welfare of those who had been left behind in the farm.

Chapter Four.
The Hunting and Harrying Displayed

Being ignorant, as we have said, of the cruel murder of old Mitchell, Ramblin' Peter's report had not seriously alarmed Black. He concluded that the worst the troopers would do would be to rob the poor old couple of what money they found in their possession, oblige them to take the Oath of Supremacy, drink the health of King and bishops, and otherwise insult and plunder them. Knowing the Mitchells intimately, he had no fear that their opposition would invite severity. Being very fond of them, however, he resolved, at the risk of his life, to prevent as far as possible the threatened indignity and plunder.

"They're a douce auld pair," he remarked to Will Wallace as they strode down the hillside together, "quiet an' peaceable, wi' naething to speak o' in the way of opeenions—somethin' like mysel'—an' willin' to let-be for let-be. But since the country has been ower-run by thae Hielanders an' sodgers, they've had little peace, and the auld man has gie'n them a heap o' trouble, for he's as deaf as a post. Peter says the pairty o' dragoons is a sma' ane, so I expect the sight o' us'll scare them away an' prevent fechtin'."

"It may be so," said Wallace, "and of course I shall not fail you in this attempt to protect your old friends; but, to tell you the truth, I don't quite like this readiness on the part of you Covenanters to defy the laws, however bad they may be, and to attack the King's troops. The Bible, which you so often quote, inculcates longsuffering and patience."

"Hm! there speaks yer ignorance," returned the farmer with a dash of cynicism in his tone. "Hoo mony years, think ye, are folk to submit to tyranny an' wrang an' fierce oppression for nae sin whatever against the laws o' God or the land? Are twunty, thretty, or forty years no' enough to warrant oor claim to lang-sufferin'? Does submission to law-brekin' on the pairt o' Government, an' lang-continued, high-handed oppression frae King, courtier, an' prelate, accompanied wi' barefaced plunder and murder—does *that* no' justifiee oor claim to patience? To a' this the Covenanters hae submitted for mony weary years withoot rebellion, except maybe in the metter o' the Pentlands, when a wheen o' us were driven to desperation. But I understand your feelin's, lad, for I'm a man o' peace by natur', an' would gladly submit to injustice to keep things quiet—*if possable*; but some things are *no'* possable, an' the Bible itsel' says we're to live peaceably wi' a' men only 'as much as in us lies.'"

The ex-trooper was silent. Although ignorant of the full extent of maddening persecution to which not merely the Covenanters but the people of Scotland generally had been subjected, his own limited experience told him that there was much truth in what his companion said; still, like all loyal-hearted men, he shrank from the position of antagonism to Government.

"I agree with you," he said, after a few minutes' thought, "but I have been born, I suppose, with a profound respect for law and legally constituted authority."

"Div ye think, lad," returned Black, impressively, "that naebody's been born wi' a high respec' for law but yersel'? I suppose ye admit that the King is bound to respec' the law as weel as the people?"

"Of course I do. I am no advocate of despotism."

"Weel then," continued the farmer with energy, "in the year saxteen forty-ane, an' at ither times, kings an' parliaments hae stamped the Covenants o' Scotland as bein' pairt o' the law o' this land—whereby freedom o' conscience an' Presbyterian worship are secured to us a'. An' here comes Chairles the Second an' breks the law by sendin' that scoondrel the Duke o' Lauderdale here wi' full poors to dae what he likes—an' Middleton, a man wi' nae heart an' less conscience, that was raised up frae naething to be a noble, nae less! My word, nobles are easy made, but they're no' sae easy unmade! An' this Lauderdale maks a cooncil wi' Airchbishop Sherp—a traiter and a turncoat—an' a wheen mair like himsel', and they send sodgers oot ower the land to eat us up an' cram Prelacy doon oor

throats, an' curates into oor poo'pits whether we wull or no'. An' that though Chairles himsel' signed the Covenant at the time he was crooned! Ca' ye *that* law or legally constituted authority?"

Although deeply excited by this brief recital of his country's wrongs, Black maintained the quiet expression of feature and tone of voice that were habitual to him. Further converse on the subject was interrupted by their arrival at the farm, where they found all right save that Jean and Aggie were in a state of tearful anxiety about their poor neighbours.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.