

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

The Men of the Moss-Hags



Samuel Crockett

The Men of the Moss-Hags

«Public Domain»

Crockett S.

The Men of the Moss-Hags / S. Crockett — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFATORY NOTE	5
CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	9
CHAPTER III.	12
CHAPTER IV.	15
CHAPTER V.	18
CHAPTER VI.	21
CHAPTER VII.	23
CHAPTER VIII.	27
CHAPTER IX.	30
CHAPTER X.	34
CHAPTER XI.	37
CHAPTER XII.	40
CHAPTER XIII.	43
CHAPTER XIV.	47
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	49

Crockett S. R. Samuel Rutherford
The Men of the Moss-Hags / Being a history
of adventure taken from the papers of
William Gordon of Earlstoun in Galloway

PREFATORY NOTE

I desire to express grateful thanks to my researchers, Mr. James Nicholson of Kirkcudbright, who examined on my behalf all the local records bearing upon the period and upon the persons treated of in this book; and to the Reverend John Anderson of the Edinburgh University Library, who brought to light from among the Earlstoun Papers and from the long-lost records of the United Societies, many of the materials which I have used in the writing of this story.

I owe also much gratitude to the Library Committee of the University of Edinburgh, for permission to use the letters which are printed in the text, and for their larger permission to publish at some future time, for purposes more strictly historical, a selection from both the sets of manuscripts named above.

Most of all, I am indebted to my friend, Mr. John McMillan of Glenhead in Galloway, who has not only given me in this, as in former works, the benefit of his unrivalled local knowledge, but has travelled with me many a weary foot over those moors and moss-hags, where the wanderers of another time had their abiding places. Let him accept this word of thanks. He is not likely to forget our stay together in the wilds of Cove Macaterick. Nor I our journey home.

S. R. CROCKETT.

Penicuik, Aug. 5, 1895.

CHAPTER I. MY GOSSIP, MAISIE MAY

It was upon the fair green braes that look over the Black Water of Dee near by where it meets the clear Ken, that Maisie May and I played many a morning at Wanderers and King's men. I mind it as it were yesterday, for the dales and holms were pranked out with white hawthorn and broad gowans, and by our woodland hiding-places little frail wildflowers grew, nodding at us as we lay and held our breath.

Now Maisie Lennox (for that was her proper given name) was my cousin, and had been gossip of mine ever since we came to the age of five years; Sandy, my elder brother, making nothing of me because I was so much younger and he ever hot upon his own desires. Neither, if the truth must be told, did I wear great love upon him at any time. When we fell out, as we did often, he would pursue after me and beat me; but mostly I clodded him with pebble stones, whereat I had the advantage, being ever straight of eye and sure of aim. Whereas Sandy was gleyed¹ and threw stones like a girl, for all the stoutness of his arm.

But that is not to say like Maisie Lennox, who was Anthony Lennox's daughter, and could throw stones with any one. She lived at the Lesser Duchrae above the Black Water. As for me I lived at Earlstoun on the hillside above the Ken, which is a far step from the Duchrae. But our fathers were of the one way of thinking, and being cousins by some former alliance and friends of an ancient kindliness, it so happened, as I say, that Maisie Lennox and I played much together. Also my mother had great tenderness of heart for the bit lass that had no mother, and a father as often on the moors with the wildfowl, as at home with his one little maid.

For the times were very evil. How evil and contrary they were, we that had been born since 1660 and knew nothing else, could but dimly understand. For though fear and unrest abode in our homes as constant indwellers, with the fear of the troopers and plunderers, yet because it had always been so, it seemed not very hard to us. Indeed we bairns of these years played at Covenanting, as it had been the game of "Scots and English" on the hillside, even from the time when we first began to run alone.

Well do I mind that day when I pleaded and fleeced on my father to take me before him on Gay Garland, as he rode to the Duchrae. It was a brisk May day with an air vigorous as a draught of wine, yet cool, clear, and sweet as spring water is – a pearl of a day, such as hardly seems to come in these sullen later years.

So I cried out upon my father to take me. And as his manner was, he told me to inquire of my mother. But I desired rather that he should ask for me himself. So I lingered about the doors till he should ride forth upon his great black horse, that he might catch me up beside him on the cantle and cry in at the door, "Mother, I am taking William," as was his kindly wont. Never a man so brave and true and simple as my father.

While I bided there, Alexander my brother seeing me wait, called me to come with him to the hill. But because my heart was set to ride to the Duchrae with my father, I had no desire to go to the rabbit hunting. So when he saw that I would not company with him, he mocked me and called me "Lassie-boy!" Whereupon I smote him incontinent with a round pebble between the shoulder-blades, and he pursued me to the hallan door within which was my mother, looking to the maids and the ordering of the house.

From thence I mocked him, but under my breath, for fear that for ill-doing my mother would not permit me to go to the Duchrae.

¹ Could not see straight.

"Stable-boy!" I called him, for he loved to be ever among the lowns of the wisp and currying comb, and as my mother said, grew like them even in manners. "Faugh, keep wide from me, mixen-varlet!"

These were no more than our well-accustomed greetings.

"Wait till I catch you, little snipe, down by the water-side!" Sandy cried, shaking his fist at me from the barn-end.

"And that will be a good day for your skin," answered I, "for I shall make you wash your face thoroughly – ay, even behind your ears."

For Sandy, even when in after days he went a-courting, was noways partial to having many comings and goings with a basin of cold water.

So he departed unsatisfied, because that in words I had the better of him.

Then came my father, and as I expected, stooping from the saddle he swung me up before him, supposing that I had already advised my mother. But indeed I had not said so, and happily he asked me nothing.

"A good day and an easy mind, sweetheart," he cried up the stairs to my mother, "I ride to the Duchrae for Conference. William goes with me for company."

And my mother came down the steps to see us ride off. For my father and she were like lad and lass after their years together, though not so as to make a show before strangers.

"Watch warily for the dragoons as you come to the narrows of the Loch," she said, "and bide not at Kenmuir. For if there be mounted muskets in all the neighbourhood, it is at the Kenmuir that they will be found."

And she watched us out of sight with her hand to her brows, before turning inward to the maids – a bonny woman in these years, fair as a blowing rose, was my mother. Or at least, so the picture rises before me as I write.

Thus my father, William Gordon of Earlstoun, rode away through these sweet holms and winding paths south toward the Duchrae. Nowhere is the world to my thinking so gracious as between the green woodlands of Earlstoun and the grey Duchrae Craigs. For the pools of the water of Ken slept, now black, now silver, beneath us. They were deep set about with the feathers of the birches, and had the green firs standing bravely like men-at-arms on every rocky knoll. Then the strath opened out and we saw Ken flow silver-clear between the greenest and floweriest banks in the world. The Black Craig of Dee gloomed on our right side as we rode, sulky with last year's heather. And the great Kells range sank behind us, ridge behind ridge of hills whose very names make a storm of music – Millyea, Milldown, Millfire, Corscrine, and the haunted fastnesses of the Meaull of Garryhorn in the head end of Carsphairn. Not that my father saw any of this, for he minded only his riding and his prayers; but even then I was ever taken up with what I had better have let alone. However, I may be held excused if the memory rises unbidden now, before the dimmer eye of one that takes a cast back into his youth, telling the tale as best he may, choosing here and there like a dorty child, only that which liketh him best.

In a little we clattered through the well-thatched roofs of New Galloway and set Gay Garland's head to the southward along the water-side, where the levels of the Loch are wont to open out upon you blue and broad and bonny. All that go that way know the place. Gay Garland was the name of my father's black horse that many a time and oft had carried him in safety, and was loved like another child by my mother and all of us. I have heard it said that in the Praying Society of which he was a grave and consistent member, my father was once called in question because he gave so light a name to his beast.

"Ye have wives of your own," was all the answer he made them, "I suppose they have no freits and fancies, but such as you are ready to be answerable for this day."

When my mother heard of this she said, "Ay, William, thy excuse was but old and lame, even that of our first father Adam – 'The woman thou gavest me she called my horse Gay Garland.'"

I suppose that to-day Ken flashes as clear and the heather blooms as bonny on the Bennan side. But not for me, for I have laid away so many that I loved in the howe of the Glen since then, and seen so many places of this Scotland red with a crimson the bell heather never made. Ay me for the times that were, and for all that is come and gone, whereof it shall be mine to tell!

But we came at long and last to the Duchrae, which is a sweet bit house, sitting on a south-looking brae-face, though not a laird's castle like the tower of Earlstoun. Maisie Lennox met us at the loaning foot, whereat I begged that my father would put me down so that I might run barefoot with her. And I think my father was in nowise unwilling, for a twelve-year-old callant on the saddle before one is no comfort, though Gay Garland bore me like a feather.

So Maisie Lennox and I fell eagerly a-talking together after our first shy chill of silence, having many things to say. But as soon as ever we reached the Craigs we fell to our fantasy. It was an old game with us, like the sand houses we used to build in bairns' play. We drew lots, long stalk and short stalk, which of us should be the Wanderer. Maisie Lennox won the lot – as she always did, for I had no good fortune at the drawing of cuts. So she went to hide in some bosky bouroch or moss-hag, while I bode still among the hazels at the woodside, accoutring myself as a trooper with sword and pistol of tree.

Then I rode forth crying loud commands and sending my soldiers to seek out all the hidie-holes by the water-sides, and under all the tussocks of heather on the benty brows of the black mosses.

Soon Maisie Lennox began to cry after the manner of the hunted hill-folk – peeping like the nestlings of the muir-birds, craiking like the bird of the corn, laughing like the jack-snipe – and all with so clear a note and such brisk assurance that I declare she had imposed upon Tom Dalyell himself.

After seeking long in vain, I spied the fugitive hiding behind a peat-casting on the edge of the moss, and immediately cried on the men to shoot. So those that were men-at-arms of my command pursued after and cracked muskets, as the Wanderers jooked and fled before us. Yet cumbered with cavalry as I was on the soft bog land, the light-foot enemy easily escaped me.

Then when I saw well that catch her I could not, I sat me down on a heather bush and cried out to her that it was a silly game to play, and that we should begin something else. So she stopped and came back slowly over the heather. What I liked at all times about Maisie Lennox was that she never taunted back, but only took her own way when she wanted it – and she mostly did – silently and as if there were no other way in the world. For in all things she had an excellent humour of silence, which, though I knew it not then, is rarer and worthier than diamonds. Also she knew, what it seems to me that a woman but rarely knows, when it is worth while making a stand to gain her will.

CHAPTER II.

GAY GARLAND CARRIES DOUBLE

So after that we played yet another game, hiding together in the hags and crawling from bent bush to rush clump with mighty caution and discernment, making believe that the troopers sought us both. For this was the favourite bairns' play everywhere in the West and South.

Once when we came near to the house Gay Garland followed us, having been turned out on the Duchrae home park. He ran to me, as he ever did, for farings, and I fed him with crumbings out of my jacket pocket – "moolings" Maisie Lennox called them – which he ate out of my hand, a pretty thing to see in so noble a beast. Then he followed us about in our hidings, begging and sorning upon us for more. This made him not a little troublesome, till we would gladly have sent him back. But Gay Garland was a beast not easily turned.

After a while we came to the little wood of Mount Pleasant, where I saw some red rags fluttering on a bush. I was for going aside to see what they might be, but Maisie Lennox cried at me to turn back.

"There are people hereabouts that are not very chancy. My father saw the Marshalls go by this morning!"

Often and often I had heard of the tribe before, and they had a singular name for their ill-done deeds. Indeed the whole land was so overrun with beggars of the Strong Hand, and the times so unsettled, that nothing could be done to put a stop to their spoilings. For the King and his men were too busy riding down poor folk that carried Bibles and went to field-preachings, to pay attention to such as merely invaded homesteads and lifted gear.

As we set breast to the brae and came to the top of the little hill, I stumbled over something white and soft lying behind a heather bush. It was a sheep – dead, and with much of it rent and carried away. The ground about was all a-lapper with blood.

"A worrying dog has done this!" I said.

But Maisie Lennox came up, and as she caught sight of the carcase her face fell. She shook her head mighty seriously.

"Two-footed dogs," she said. "See here!" She lifted a piece of paper on which a bloody knife had been wiped. And she showed me, very wisely, how the best parts had been cut away by some one that had skill in dismemberment.

"'Tis Jock Marshall's band," she said; "an ill lot, but they shall not get off with this!"

And she went forward eagerly, keeping on the broad trail through the grass. We had not gone a hundred yards when we came upon another sheep in like case, and then by the ford of the Black Water we found yet another. I asked Maisie Lennox if we should not go home and lodge information.

"They'll get ower far away," was all she said.

"But you are not feared of them?" I asked, marvelling at the lassie. For even our Sandy that counted himself so bold, and could lift a bullock slung in a sheet with his teeth, would have thought twice before following up Jock Marshall and his band for the sake of an orra sheep or two.

But Maisie Lennox only turned to me in a curious way, in which there seemed mingled something of contempt.

"Feared!" she said. "What for should I be feared? The sheep are my faither's; but gang you back gin ye be feared."

So for very shame I answered that I was feared none – which was a great lie, for I had given a hundred pounds (Scots) to have been able to turn back with some credit. But we went along the broad trail boldly enough, and Gay Garland trotted loose-foot after us, sometimes stopping to crop the herbs by the way, and anon coming dancing to find us. At which I was glad, for it was at least some company besides the lassie.

Soon we came to a link of the path by the water-side, at a place that is called the Tinklers' Loup, where these sorners and limmers were mostly wont to congregate. There was blue smoke rising behind the knowe, and Maisie Lennox took a straight path over the heather toward it. I wondered to see the lass. She seemed indeed not to know fear.

"They are my faither's ain sheep," she said, as though that were sufficient explanation.

So to the top we came, and looked down. There was a whole camp beneath us. Dirty low reeky tans were set here and there amid a swarm of bairns and dogs. The children were running naked as they were born, and the dogs turning themselves into hoops to bite their tails. About a couple of fires with pots a-swing over them, bubbling and steaming, little clouds of wild-looking folk were gathered. Some had bones in their hands which they thrust into the fire for a minute and then took out again to gnaw at the burned portion. Tattered women looked within the pots. Once a man threw a knife at a boy, which struck him on the side. The boy cried out and the blood ran down, but none took any heed to his complaint or of the circumstance.

For a moment Maisie Lennox stood still and looked at me. Then she went a step or two forward, and her face was white and angered. I saw she was about to speak to them, yet for my life I could not keep her from it.

"Sheep stealers!" she cried; "vagabonds, ye shall hang for this! Not for naught shall ye harry an honest man's sheep. I ken you, Jock Marshall and all your crew. The Shirra shall hear of this before the morrow's morn!"

The encampment stood still at gaze looking up at us, fixed like a show painted on a screen, while one might slowly count a score. Then Babel brake loose.

With a wild rush, man, woman, child, and dog poured towards us. Of mere instinct I came up abreast of Maisie Lennox. Behind me came Gay Garland, and snuffed over my shoulder, scenting with some suspicion the tinklers' garrons² feeding in the hollow below.

We stood so still on the knowe-top that, I think, we must have feared them a little. We were by a gap in the bushes, and the ill-doers, seeing no more of us thought, no doubt, that there must be more behind, or two bairns had never been so bold. I think, too, that the very want of arms daunted them, for they drew back and seemed to consult together as though uncertain what to do.

Then a great scant-bearded unkempt man with long swinging arms, whom I took to be Jock Marshall, the chief tinkler and captain of their gang, pointed to them to scatter round the little knoll, no doubt with the purpose of making observations and cutting us off.

"Who may you be?" he cried, looking up at us.

"Right well you know," Maisie said, very loud and clear, speaking out like a minister in the tent at a field-preaching; "I am Anton Lennox of the Duchrae's daughter, whose sheep ye have boiling in your pots – and that after being well served with meal at the door, and louting low for thankfulness. And this is your thanks, ye robbers-behind-backs, gallow's thieves of Kelton Hill."

On my part I thought it was not good judgment so to anger the wild crew. But Maisie was not to be spoken to at such a time; so perforce I held my tongue.

"But ye shall all streek a tow for this," she said; "this day's wark shall be heard tell o' yet!"

By this time the word had been passed round the hill to Jock the tinkler that there were but two of us, and we unarmed. At which the loon became at once very bold.

"Have at them! Blood their throats! Bring the basin!" he cried. And the words were no vain things, for that was their well-accustomed way of killing – to let their victim's blood run into a basin, so that there might be no tell-tale stains upon the grass.

So from all sides they came speeling and clambering up the hill, loons yelling, dogs barking, till I thought my latest hour was come, and wished I had learned my Catechism better – especially the proofs. Gay Garland stood by with a raised look upon him, lifting his feet a little, as though going

² Shaggy ponies.

daintily over a bridge whose strength he was not sure of, and drawing all the while the wind upward through his nostrils.

Then though Maisie had been very bold, I can lay claim on this occasion to having been the wiser, for I caught her by the arm, taking Gay Garland's mane firmly with the other hand the while, lest he should startle and flee.

"Up with you," I cried, bending to take her foot in my hand, and she went up like a bird.

In a moment I was beside her, riding bare-back, with Maisie clasping my waist, as indeed we had often ridden before – though never so perilously, nor yet with such a currish retinue yowling at our tail.

I wore no weapon upon me – no, not so much as a bodkin. But stuck in my leather belt I had the two crooked sticks, which I had blackened with soot for pistols at our play of Troopers and Wanderers. I put my heels into Gay Garland's sides, and he started down-hill, making the turf fly from his hoofs as he gathered way and began to feel his legs under him.

The gang scattered and rounded to close us in, but when Gay Garland came to his stride, few there were who could overtake him. Only Jock Marshall himself was in time to meet us face to face, a great knife in either hand. And I think he might have done us an injury too, had it not been for the nature of the ground where we met.

It was just at the spring of a little hill and the good horse was gathering himself for the upstretch. I held the two curved sticks at the tinkler's head, as though they had been pistols, at which I think he was a little daunted. Jock Marshall stopped in his rush, uncertain whether to leap aside; and in that very moment, Gay Garland spread his fore-feet for the spring, throwing up his head as if to clear the way. One of his iron-shod heels took the tinkler chief fair on the chest, and the breast-bone gave inwards with a crunch like the breaking of many farles of cake-bread. He fell down on the moss like one dead, and Gay Garland went over the moor with the whole tribe of whooping savages after him, spurning their fallen chief with his hoof as he passed.

Well it was for us that the noble horse carried us with such ease and that his feet were so sure. For a stumble in a rabbit hole and our throats were as good as slit.

But by the blessing of Providence and also by my good guiding of Gay Garland's mane, we passed the ford of the Black Water without hurt. Then was I very croose at the manner of our coming off, and minded not that the hardest bluff of downcome is ever gotten at the doorstep.

We were passing by the path that goes linking along the water-side, and talking to one another very cantily, when without warning a musket barked from the woodside, and as it were a red-hot gaud of iron ran into my thigh behind my knee. The world swayed round me and the green trees ran withershins about. I had fallen among the horse's feet, but that Maisie Lennox caught me, meeting Gay Garland's swerve with the grip of her knee – for she ever rode across and acrop like a King's horseman, till it was time for her to ride side-saddle and grow mim and prudent.

Haply just by the turn we met my father and old Anthony Lennox coming running at the sound of the shot. But as for me I never saw or heard them, for they ran past, hot to find the man who had fired at me. While as for me I came up the loaning of the Duchrae upon Gay Garland, with my head leaning back upon the young lassie's shoulder and the red blood staining her white skirt.

And this was the beginning of my lameness and sometime lack of vigour – the beginning also of my life friendship with Maisie Lennox, who was to me from that day as my brother and my comrade, though she had been but a bairn's playmate aforetime.

CHAPTER III.

GAY GARLAND COMES HOME SADDLE EMPTY

The night of the twenty-second of June, 1679, shall never be forgotten among us while Earlstoun House stands. It was the eve of the day whereon befell the weary leaguer of Bothwell when the enemy beset the Brig, and the good Blue Banner gat fyled and reddened with other dye-stuff than the brown moss-water. I mind it well, for I had grown to be man-muckle since the day on the Tinklers' Loup. After a day of heat there fell a night like pitch. A souging wind went round the house and round the house, whispering and groping, like a forlorn ghost trying to find his way within.

If there was a shut eye in the great House of Earlstoun that night, it was neither mine nor my mother's. We lay and thought of them that were over the hill, striving for the Other King and the good cause. And our thoughts were prayers, though there was none to "take the Book" in Earlstoun that night, for I was never gifted that way. So we bedded without sound of singing or voice of prayer, though I think Jean Hamilton had done it for the asking.

I lay in my naked bed and listened all the night with unshut eye. I could hear in my mother's room the boards creak as she rose every quarter hour and looked out into the rayless dark. Maisie Lennox of the Duchrae, old Anton's daughter, now a well grown lass, lay with her. And Sandy's young wife, Jean Hamilton, with her sucking bairn, was in the little angled chamber that opens off the turret stair near by.

It befell at the back of one, or mayhap betwixt that and two, that there came a sound at the nether door that affrighted us all.

"Rise, William! Haste ye," cried my mother with great eagerness in her voice, coming to my door in the dark. "Your father is at the nether door, new lichted doon from off Gay Garland. Rise an' let him in!"

And as I sat up on my elbow and hearkened, I heard as clearly as now I hear the clock strike, the knocking of my father's riding-boots on the step of the outer door. For it was ever his wont, when he came that way, to knap his toes on the edge of the step, that the room floorings might not be defiled with the black peat soil which is commonest about the Earlstoun. I have heard my father tell it a thousand times in his pleasantry, how it was when my mother was a bride but newly come home and notionate, that she learned him these tricks. For otherwise his ways were not dainty, but rather careless – and it might be, even rough.

So, as I listened, I heard very clear outside the house the knocking of my father's feet, and the little hoast he always gave before he tirmed at the pin to be let in, when he rode home late from Kirkcudbright. Hearing which we were greatly rejoiced, and I hastened to draw on my knee-breeks, crying "Bide a wee, faither, an' briskly I'll be wi' ye to let ye in!"

For I was a little lame, halting on one foot ever since the affair of Tinkler Marshall, though I think not to any noticeable extent.

My mother at the door of her chamber cried, "Haste ye, William, or I must run mysel'!"

For my father had made her promise that she would not go out of her chamber to meet him at the return, being easily touched in her breast with the night air.

So I hastened and ran down as I was, with my points all untied, and set wide open the door.

"Faither!" I cried as I undid the bolt and pushed the leaves of the door abroad, "Faither, ye are welcome hame!" And I could hear my mother listening above, for his foot over the threshold. Yet he came not within, which was a wonder to me. So I went out upon the step of the nether door, but my father was not there. Only the same strange chill wind went round the house, souging and moaning blindly as before, and a smoor of white fog blew like muirburn past the door.

Then my hair rose upon my head and the skin of my brow pricked, because I knew that strange portents were abroad that night.

"What for does your faither no come ben the hoose to me?" cried my mother impatiently from the stairhead. I could hear her clasping and unclasping her hands, for my ears are quick at taking sounds.

"I think he must be gone to the stable with Gay Garland, to stall him beside Philiphaugh," I answered, for so my father's old white horse was named, because in his young days my father had been at that place on the day when Montrose and his Highlandmen got their settling. This is what I said to my mother, but indeed my thought was far other.

I lifted a loaded pistol that lay ever in the aumrie by the door-cheek and went off in the direction of the stable. The door was shut, but I undid the pin and went within. *My father was not there.* The horses were moving restlessly and lifting their feet uneasily as they do on ice or other kittle footing. Then of a truth I knew there was something more than canny abroad about Earlstoun that night, and that we should hear ill news or the morning. And when a bundle of reins slipped from the shelf and fell on my shoulder like a man's hand clapping on me unaware, I cried out like a frightened fowl and dropped almost to the ground. Yet though I am delicate and not overly well grown in my body, I do not count myself a coward; even though my brother Sandy's courage be not mine. "Blind-eye, hard-head" was ever his sort, but I love to take my danger open-eyed and standing up – and as little of it as possible.

As I went back – which I did instantly, leaving the stable door swinging open – I heard my mother's voice again. She was calling aloud and the sound of her voice was yearning and full like that of a young woman.

"William!" she called, and again "William!"

Now though that is my name I knew full well that it was not to me, her son, that she called. For that is the voice a woman only uses to him who has been her man, and with her has drunk of the fountain of the joy of youth. Once on a time I shot an eagle on the Millyea, and his mate came and called him even thus, with a voice that was as soft as that of a cushie dove crooning in the tall trees in the early summer, till I could have wept for sorrow at my deed.

Then as I went in, I came upon my mother a step or two from the open door, groping with her arms wide in the darkness.

"Oh," she cried, "William, my William, the Lord be thankit!" and she clasped me to her heart. But in a moment she flung me from her.

"Oh! it's you," she said bitterly, and went within without another word, her harshness jangling on my heart.

Yet I understood, for my mother was always greatly set on my father. And once when in jest we teased her to try her, telling her the story of the pious Æneas, and asking her to prophesy to us which one of us she would lift, if so it was that the house of Earlstoun were in a lowe.

"Faith," said my mother, "I wad tak' your faither on my back, gin a' the lave o' ye had to bide and burn!"

So it was ever with my mother. She was my father's sweetheart to her latest hour.

But when I went in I found her sitting, sheet-white and trembling on the settle.

"What's ta'en ye, mither?" I said to her, putting a shawl about her.

"O my man, my bonny man," she said, "there's nane to steek your e'en the nicht! An' Mary Gordon maun lie her leesome lane for evermair!"

"Hoot, mither," I said, "speak not so. My faither will come his ways hame i' the mornin' nae doot, wi' a' the lads o' the Kenside clatterin' ahint him. Sandy is wi' him, ye ken."

"Na," she said calmly enough, but as one who has other informations, "Sandy is no wi' him. Sandy gaed through the battle wi' his heid doon and his sword rinnin' reed. I see them a' broken – a' the pride o' the West, an' the dragoons are riding here an' there amang them, an' haggin' them doon. But your faither I canna see – I canna see my man –"

"Mither," I said, mostly, I think, for something to say, "Mind the Guid Cause!"

She flung her hands abroad with a fine gesture as of scorn. "What cause is guid that twines a woman frae her ain man – an' we had been thegither three-an'-thirty year!"

In a little I got her to lie down, but the most simple may understand how much more sleep there was in Earlstoun that night. Yet though we listened with all our ears, we heard no other sound than just that blind and unkindly wind reestling and sougling about the house, groping at the doors and trying the lattices. Not a footstep went across the courtyard, not the cry of a bird came over the moors, till behind the barren ridges of the east the morning broke.

Then when in the grey and growing light I went down and again opened the door, lo! there with his nose against the latchet hasp was Gay Garland, my father's war-horse. He stood and trembled in every limb. He was covered with the lair of the moss-hags, wherein he had sunk to the girths. But on his saddle leather, towards the left side, there was a broad splash of blood which had run down to the stirrup iron; and in the holster on that side, where the great pistol ought to have been, a thing yet more fearsome – a man's bloody forefinger, taken off above the second joint with a clean drawing cut.

My mother came down the turret stair, fully dressed, and with her company gown upon her. Yet when she saw Gay Garland standing there at the door with his head between his knees, she did not seem to be astonished or afraid, as she had been during the night. She came near to him and laid a hand on his neck.

"Puir beast," she said, "ye have had sore travel. Take him to the stable for water and corn, and bid Jock o' the Garpel rise."

The dark shades of the night were flown away, and my mother now spoke quietly and firmly as was her wont. Much in times bygone had we spoken about sufferings in the House of Earlstoun, and, lo! now they were come home to our own door.

CHAPTER IV. SANDY GORDON COMES OVER THE HILL ALL ALONE

The House of Earlstoun sits bonny above the water-side, and there are few fairer waters in this land than the Ken water. Also it looks its bonniest in the early morning when the dew is on all sides, and a stillness like the peace of God lies on the place. I do not expect the Kingdom of Heaven very much to surpass Earlstoun on a Sabbath morning in June when the bees are in the roses. And, indeed, I shall be well content with that.

But there was no peace in Earlstoun that morning – no, nor for many a morning to come. I was at the door watching for their coming, before ever a grouse cock stirred among the short brown heather on the side of Ardoch Hill. I told my mother over and over that without doubt Sandy was bringing father home.

"Gay Garland was aye a reesty beast!" I said. "Doubtless he started when my faither had his foot in the stirrup, and has come hame by himsel'!"

But I said nothing about the finger in the holster.

"Anither beast nicht," said my mother, looking wistfully from the little window on the stair, from which she did not stir, "but never Gay Garland!"

And right well I knew she spake the truth. Gay Garland had carried my father over long to reest with him at the hinderend.

"Can ye no see them?" cried my mother again, from the room where ordinarily she sat.

Even Jean Hamilton, who had been but three years a wife, was not as restless that fair morning of midsummer as my mother, for she had her babe at her breast. In which she was the happier, because when he cried, at least she had something to think about.

Three weeks before, in the midst of the sunny days of that noble June, my father, William Gordon of Airds and Earlstoun, and my elder brother Alexander had ridden away to fight against King Charles. It took a long arm in those days to strive with the Stuarts. And as I saw them ride over the brae with thirty Glenkens blue bonnets at their tail, I knew that I was looking upon the beginning of the ruin of our house. Yet I went and hid my face and raged, because I was not permitted to ride along with them, nor to carry the Banner of Blue which my mother the Lady of Earlstoun, and Jean Hamilton, Sandy's wife, had broidered for them – with words that stirred the heart lettered fair upon it in threads of gold, and an Andrew's cross of white laid on the bonny blue of its folds.

My mother would have added an open Bible on the division beneath, but my father forbade.

"A sword, gin ye like, but no Bible!" he said.

So they rode away, and I, that was called William Gordon for my father, clenched hands and wept because that I was not counted worthy to ride with them. But I was never strong, ever since Maisie Lennox and I rode home from the Tinklers' Loup; and my mother said always that she had more trouble at the rearing of me than with all her cleckin'. By which she meant, as one might say, her brood of chickens.

To me my father cried out as he rode out of the yard:

"Abide, William, and look to your mother – and see that the beasts get their fodder, for you are the master of Earlstoun till I return."

"An' ye can help Jean to sew her bairn-clouts!" cried my brother Sandy, whom we called the Bull, in that great voice of his which could cry from Ardoch to Lochinvar over leagues of heather.

And I, who heard him with the water standing in my eyes because they were going out in their war-gear while I had to bide at home, – could have clouted him with a stone as he sat his horse, smiling and shaving the back of his hand with his Andrea Ferrara to try its edge.

O well ken I that he was a great fighter and Covenant man, and did ten times greater things than I, an ill-grown cowl, can ever lay my name to. But nevertheless, such was the hatred I felt at the time towards him, being my brother and thus flouting me.

But with us, as I have said, there abode our cousin Maisie Lennox from the Duchrae, grown now into a douce and sonsy lass, with hair that was like spun gold when the sun shone upon it. For the rest, her face rather wanted colour, not having in it – by reason of her anxiety for her father, and it may be also by the nature of her complexion – so much of red as the faces of Jean Hamilton and other of our country lasses. But because she was my comrade, I saw naught awanting, nor thought of red or pale, since she was indeed Maisie Lennox and my friend and gossip of these many years.

Also in some sort she had become a companion for my mother, for she had a sedate and dependable way with her, solate and wise beyond her years.

"She is not like a flichty young body aboot a hoose," said my mother.

But in this I differed, yet said nothing. For no one could have been to me what young Maisie of the Duchrae was.

After Sandy and my father had ridden away, and I that was left to keep the house, went about with a hanging head because I had not ridden also, Maisie Lennox grew more than ordinarily kind. Never had a feckless lad like me, such a friend as Maisie of the Duchrae. It was far beyond that love which the maids chatter about, and run out to the stackyard in the gloaming to find – oft to their sorrow, poor silly hempies.

Yet Maisie May and I greeted in the morning without observance, but rather as brothers whom night has not parted. In the day we spoke but seldom, save to ask what might be needful, as the day's darg and duty drifted us together. But at even, standing silent, we watched the light fade from the hills of the west and gather behind those of the east. And I knew that without speech her heart was trying to comfort mine, because I had not been judged worthy to ride for the Covenants with her father and mine, and in especial because Sandy had openly flouted me before her. This was very precious to me and kept up my manhood in mine own eyes – a service far above rubies.

Thus they rode away and left the house of the Earlstoun as empty and unfriendly as a barn in hay harvest. From that day forward we spent as much time looking out over the moor from the house, as we did at our appointed tasks. I have already told of the happenings of the night of the twenty-second of June, and of my mother's strange behaviour – which, indeed, was very far from her wont. For she seldom showed her heart to my father, but rather faulted him and kept him at a stick's end, especially when he came heedlessly into her clean-swept rooms with his great moss-splashed riding-boots.

Of this time I have one thing more to tell. It was between the hours of ten and eleven of the day following this strange night, that my mother, having set all her house maidens to their tasks with her ordinary care and discretion, took down the bake-board and hung the girdle above a clear red fire of peat. Sometimes she did this herself, especially when my father was from home. For she was a master baker, and my father often vowed that he would have her made the deacon of the trade in Dumfries, where he had a house. He was indeed mortally fond of her girdle-cakes, and had wheaten flour ground fine at a distant mill for the purpose of making them.

"Mary Hope," he used to say to her in his daffing way, "your scones are better than your father's law. I wonder wha learned ye to bake aboot Craigieha' – tho', I grant, mony's the puir man the faither o' ye has keepit braw and het on a girdle, while he stirred him aboot wi' his tongue."

This he said because my mother was a daughter of my Lord Hope of Craigiehall, who had been President of the Court of Session in his time, and a very notable greatman in the State.

So, as I say, this day she set to the baking early, and it went to my heart when I saw she was making the wheaten cakes raised with sour buttermilk that were my father's favourites.

She had not been at it long before in came Jock o' the Garpel, hot-foot from the hill.

"Maister Alexander!" he cried, panting and broken-winded with haste, "Maister Alexander is comin' ower the Brae!"

There was silence in the wide kitchen for a moment, only the sound of my mother's roller being heard, "dunt-dunting" on the dough.

"Is he by his lane?" asked my mother without raising her head from the bake-board.

"Ay," said Jock o' the Garpel, "a' by his lane. No a man rides ahint him."

And again there was silence in the wide house of Earlstoun.

My mother went to the girdle to turn the wheaten cakes that were my father's favourites, and as she bent over the fire, there was a sound as if rain-drops were falling and birsling upon the hot girdle. But it was only the water running down my mother's cheeks for the love of her youth, because now her last hope was fairly gone.

Then in the middle of her turning she drew the girdle off the fire, not hastily, but with care and composedness.

"I'll bake nae mair," she cried, "Sandy has come ower the hill his lane!"

And I caught my mother in my arms.

CHAPTER V. THE CLASH OF WORDS

A doubtful dawn had grown into a chosen day when I saddled in Earlstoun courtyard, to ride past the house of our kinswoman at Lochinvar on a sad and heavy errand. Sandy has betaken himself to his great oak on the border of the policies, where with his skill in forest craft he had built himself a platform among the solidest masses of the leaves. There he abode during the day, with a watch set on the Tod Hill and another on the White Hill above the wood of Barskeoch. Only at the even, when all things were quiet, would he venture to slip down and mix with us about the fire. But he swung himself swiftly back again to his tree by a rope, if any of the dragoons were to be heard of in the neighbourhood.

During all this time it comes back to me how much we grew to depend on Maisie Lennox. From being but "Anton Lennox's dochter" she came to be "Meysie, lass" to my mother, and indeed almost a daughter to her. Once, going to the chamber-door at night to cry ben some message to my mother, I was startled and afraid to hear the sound of sobbing within – as of one crying like a young lass or a bairn, exceedingly painful to hear. I thought that it had been Maisie speaking of her sorrow, and my mother comforting her. But when I listened, though indeed that was not my custom, I perceived that it was my mother who grat and refused to be comforted.

"O my William!" she cried, moaning like a child that would sob itself to sleep, "I ken, O I ken, I shall never see him mair. He's lyin' cauld and still at the dyke back that yince my airms keepit fast. O thae weary Covenants, thae weary, weary Covenants!"

"Hush thee, my dawtie, say not so!" I heard the voice of my cousin Maisie – I could not help but hear it, "The Lord calls us to do little for Him oursels, for we are feckless women, an' what can we do? But He bids us gie Him our men-folk, the desire o' our hearts. Brithers hae I gie'n, twa and three, and my last is my father that lies noo amang the moss-hags, as ye ken!"

But again I heard my mother's voice breaking through in a querulous anger.

"What ken ye, lassie? Brithers and faither, guid's and gear, they arena muckle to loose. Ye never lost the man for wha's sake ye left faither an' mither, only just to follow him through the warl'!"

And in the darkness I could hear my mother wail, and Maisie the young lass hushing and clapping her. So, shamed and shaken at heart, I stole away a-tiptoe lest any should hear me, for it was like a crime to listen to what I had heard. But I am forgetting to tell of our riding away.

It was a morning so buoyant that we seemed verily up-borne by the flood of sunlight, like the small birds that glided and sang in our Earlstoun woods. Yet I had small time to think of the beauty of the summer tide, when our father lay unburied at a dyke back, and some one must ride and lay him reverently in the earth.

Sandy could not go – that was plain. He was now head of the house and name. Besides the pursuit was hot upon him. So at my mother's word, I took a pair of decent serving men and wended my way over the hill. And as I went my heart was sore for my mother, who stood at the door to see us go. She had supplied with her own hands all the decent wrappings wherewith to bury my father. Sandy further judged it not prudent to attempt to bring him home. He had gotten a staw of the red soldiers, he said, and wished for that time to see no more of them.

But I that had seen none of them, was hot upon bringing my father to the door to lie among his kin.

"The driving is like to be brisk enough without that!" said Sandy.

And my mother never said a word, for now Sandy was the laird, and the head of the house. She even offered to give up the keys to Jean Hamilton, my brother's wife. But for all her peevishness Jean Hamilton knew her place, and put aside her hand kindly.

"No, mother," she said. "These be yours so long as it pleases God to keep you in the House of Earlstoun."

For which I shall ever owe Jean Hamilton a good word and kindly thought.

The names of the two men that went with me were Hugh Kerr and John Meiklewood. They were both decent men with families of their own, and had been excused from following my father and brother on that account.

Now as we went up the hill a sound followed us that made us turn and listen. It was a sweet and charming noise of singing. There, at the door of Earlstoun were my mother and her maidens, gathered to bid us farewell upon our sad journey. It made a solemn melody on the caller morning air, for it was the sound of the burying psalm, and they sang it sweetly. So up the Deuch Water we rode, the little birds making a choir about us, and young tailless thrushes of the year's nesting pulling at reluctant worms on the short dewy knowes. All this I saw and more. For the Lord that made me weak of arm, at least, did not stint me as to glegness of eye.

When we came to where the burn wimples down from Garryhorn, we found a picket of the King's dragoons drawn across the road, who challenged us and made us to stand. Their commander was one Cornet Inglis, a rough and roystering blade. They were in hold at Garryhorn, a hill farm-town belonging to Grier of Lag, whence they could command all the headend of the Kells.

"Where away so briskly?" the Cornet cried, as we came riding up the road. "Where away, Whigs, without the leave of the King and Peter Inglis?"

I told him civilly that I rode to Carsphairn to do my needs.

"And what need may you have in Carsphairn, that you cannot fit in Saint John's Clachan of Dalry as well, and a deal nearer to your hand?"

I told him that I went to bury my father.

"Ay," he said, cocking his head quickly aslant like a questing cat that listens at a mouse-hole; "and of what quick complaint do fathers die under every green tree on the road to Bothwell? Who might the father of you be, if ye happen to be so wise as to ken?"

"My father's name was Gordon," I said, with much quietness of manner – for, circumstanced as I was, I could none other.

Cornet Inglis laughed a loud vacant laugh when I told him my father's name, which indeed was no name to laugh at when he that owned it was alive. Neither Peter Inglis not yet his uncle had laughed in the face of William Gordon of Earlstoun – ay, though they had been riding forth with a troop behind them.

"Gordon," quoth he, "Gordon – a man canna spit in the Glenkens without sploiting on a Gordon – and every Jack o' them a cantin' rebel!"

"You lie, Peter Inglis – lie in your throat!" cried a voice from the hillside, quick as an echo. Inglis, who had been hectoring it hand on hip, turned at the word. His black brows drew together and his hand fell slowly till it rested on his sword-hilt. He who spoke so boldly was a lad of twenty, straight as a lance shaft is straight, who rode slowly down from the Garryhorn to join us on the main road where the picket was posted.

It was my cousin and kinsman, Wat Gordon of Lochinvar – a spark of mettle, who in the hour of choosing paths had stood for the King and the mother of him (who was a Douglas of Morton) against the sterner way of his father and forebears.

The Wildcat of Lochinvar they called him, and the name fitted him like his laced coat.

For Wulcat Wat of Lochinvar was the gayest, brightest, most reckless blade in the world. And even in days before his father's capture and execution, he had divided the house with him. He had rallied half the retainers, and ridden to Morton Castle to back his uncle there when the King's interest was at its slackest, and when it looked as if the days of little Davie Crookback were coming back again. At Wat Gordon's back there rode always his man-at-arms, John Scarlet, who had been a soldier in France and also in Brandenburg – and who was said to be the greatest master of fence and cunning

man of weapons in all broad Scotland. But it was rumoured that now John Scarlet had so instructed his young master that with any weapon, save perhaps the small sword the young cock could crawl crouser than the old upon the same middenstead.

"I said you lied, Peter Inglis," cried Wulcat Wat, turning back the lace ruffle of his silken cuff, for he was as gay and glancing in his apparel as a crested jay-piet. "Are ye deaf as well as man-sworn?"

Inglis stood a moment silent; then he understood who his enemy was. For indeed it was no Maypole dance to quarrel with Wat of Lochinvar with John Scarlet swaggering behind him.

"Did you not hear? I said you lied, man – lied in your throat. Have you aught to say to it, or shall I tell it to Clavers at the table to-night that ye have within you no throat and no man's heart, but only the gullet of a guzzling trencherman?"

"I said that the Gordons of the Glenkens were traitors. 'Tis a kenned thing," answered Inglis, at last mustering up his resolution, "but I have no quarrel with you, Wat Gordon, for I know your favour up at Garryhorn – and its cause."

"Cause – " said Wulcat Wat, bending a little forward in his saddle and stripping one long gauntlet glove lightly through the palm of the other hand, "cause – what knows Peter Inglis of causes? This youth is my cousin of Earlstoun. I answer for him with my life. Let him pass. That is enough of cause for an Inglis to know, when he chances to meet men of an honest name."

"He is a rebel and a traitor!" cried Inglis, "and I shall hold him till I get better authority than yours for letting him go. Hear ye that, Wat of Lochinvar!"

CHAPTER VI. THE CLASH OF SWORDS

The two sat fronting one another on their horses. Inglis was the older and more firmly set man. But Wat of Lochinvar was slender and lithe as a bow that has not been often bent and quivers to the straight. It was a curious sight to see them passaging with little airs and graces, like fighting cocks matched in a pit.

The soldiers stood indifferently around. A pair of dragoons patrolled, turning and crossing as if on parade, within earshot of the quarrel of their officers. It was the first time I had ever seen what discipline meant. And in a moment I learned why they had broken us at Bothwell and Rullion Green. For I have heard my brother Sandy say that at any time in the Covenanting host, had three drawn together and spoken like men that are hot in questioning, the whole army would have run from their posts to hear and to take part in the controversy. But all the while these dragoons kept their noses pointing in the straight of their necks, and fronted and wheeled like machines. It was, in fact, none of their business if their officers cut each others' throats. But they knew that one John Graham would assuredly make it his business if they omitted their military service.

"Cornet Inglis," said Lochinvar, doffing lightly his feathered hat that had the King's colours in it, "hearken ye well. This is my cousin Will of Earlstoun, who took no part with his kin in the late rebellion, as I took no part with mine, but instead abode at home in peace. I require you to let him go upon his errand. I myself will be answerable for him to Colonel Graham of Claverhouse. After that we can arrange our little matter as to favour and its causes."

There was a keen leaping light in my cousin Wat's blue eyes, the light that I afterwards grew to know as the delight of battle. He was waxing coldly angry. For me I grow dourly silent as I become angered. My brother Sandy grows red and hot, but Wulcat Wat was of those more dangerous men to whom deadly anger, when it comes, at once quickens the pulses and stills the nerves.

"Think not I am afraid of a traitor's son, or of any of the name of Lochinvar," quoth Inglis, who was indeed no coward when once he had taken up a quarrel; "after all, ye are all no better than a bow-o'-meal-Gordon!"

It was the gage of battle. After that there was no more to be said. To call a man of our name "a-bow-o'-meal-Gordon" is equal to saying that he has no right to the name he bears. For it is said that a certain Lochinvar, wanting retainers to ride at his back, offered a snug holding and so many bolls of meal yearly to any lusty youth who would marry on his land, take his name, and set himself like a worthy sworder to breed well-boned loons to carry in their turns the leathern jack.

At the taunt, swift as flame Wat of Lochinvar rode nearer to his enemy on his quick-turning well-mouthed horse, and drawing the leather gauntlet through his fingers till the fingers were striped narrow like whip lashes, he struck Inglis with it upon the cheek.

"My father's head," he cried, "may be on the Netherbow. He had his way of thinking and died for it. I have mine and may die for it in my time. But in the meantime Lochinvar's son is not to be flouted by the son of a man who cried with all parties and hunted with none."

Two swords flashed into the air together, the relieved scabbards jingling back against the horses' sides. The basket hilt of that of Cornet Inglis had the cavalry tassel swinging to it, while the crossbar and simple Italian guard of Wat Gordon's lighter weapon seemed as if it must instantly be beaten down by the starker weapon of the dragoon. But as they wheeled their horses on guard with a touch of the bridle hand, I saw John Scarlet, Wat's master of fence, flash a look at his scholar's guard-sword. Wat used an old-fashioned shearing-sword, an ancient blade which, with various hilt devices, many a Gordon of Lochinvar had carried when he ruffled it in court and hall. I caught John Scarlet's look of satisfaction, and judged that he anticipated no danger to one whom he had trained, from a fighter

at haphazard like Cornet Peter Inglis. But yet the dragoon was no tyro, for he had proved himself in many a hard-stricken fray.

So without a word they fell to it. And, by my faith, it made a strange picture on the grassy track which wound itself through these wilds, to see the glossy black of Wat Gordon's charger front the heavier weight of the King's man's grey.

At the first crossing of the swords, the style of the two men was made evident. That of Inglis was the simpler. He fought most like a practical soldier, with the single purpose of making his adversary feel the edge of his weapon; while Wat, lighter and lither, had all the parade and pomp of the schools.

Lochinvar depended on a low tierce guard with a sloping point, and reined his horse near, that his enemy might be prevented from closing with him on his left, or side of disadvantage. The dragoon used the simpler hanging guard and pressed upon his adversary with plain dour weight of steel.

At the first clash of the iron the horses heaved their heads, and down from the hillside above there came a faint crying as of shepherds to their flocks. But the combatants were too intent to take notice. John Scarlet reined his horse at the side, his head a little low set between his shoulders, and his eyes following every thrust and parry with a glance like a rapier.

For the first five minutes Inglis tried all his powers of battering upon Wat Gordon's lighter guard, his heavy cavalry sword beating and disengaging with the fellest intent. He fought with a still and lip-biting fury. He struck to kill, hammering with strong threshing blows; Wat, more like a duellist of the schools – rather, as it seemed, to show his mastery of the weapon. But nevertheless the thin supple blade of the young laird followed every beat and lunge of the heavier iron with speed and certainty. Each moment it seemed as if Wat must certainly be cut down. But his black obeyed the rein at the moment of danger, and his sword twisted round that of his adversary as an adder winds itself about a stick.

More and more angry grew the dragoon, and a grim smile sat intent and watchful on the face of John Scarlet. But he spoke never a word, and the red sentries paced placidly to and fro along the burnside of Garryhorn. More and more wildly Cornet Inglis struck, urging his horse forward to force Lochinvar's black down the hill. But feately and gracefully the lad wheeled and turned, keeping ever his hand in tierce and his blade across his body, slipping and parrying with the utmost calm and ease.

"Click, click!" came the noise of the clashing sword-blades, flickering so swiftly that the eye could not follow them. In time Lochinvar found out his opponent's disadvantage, which was in the slower movement of his horse, but to this Inglis responded like a man. He kept his beast turning about within his own length, so that come where he would Wat had no advantage. Yet gradually and surely the dragoon was being tired out. From attacking he fell to guarding, and at last even his parry grew lifeless and feeble. Wat, on the other hand, kept his enemy's blade constantly engaged. He struck with certainty and parried with a light hammering movement that was pretty to watch, even to one who had no skill of the weapon.

At last, wearied with continual check, Inglis leaned too far over his horse's head in a fierce thrust. The beast slipped with the sudden weight, and the dragoon's steel cap went nearly to his charger's neck.

In a moment, seeing his disadvantage, Inglis attempted to recover; but Wat's lighter weapon slid under his guard as he threw his sword hand involuntarily up. It pierced his shoulder, and a darker red followed the steel upon his horseman's coat, as Wat withdrew his blade to be ready for the return. But of this there was no need, for Inglis instantly dropped his hand to his side and another sword suddenly struck up that of Wat Gordon, as the dragoon's heavy weapon clattered upon the stones.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIELD OF BOTHWELL BRIG

"Gentlemen," cried a stern, calm voice, "gentlemen, is it thus that ye amuse yourselves when ye are upon the King's service?"

I turned about, and lo! it was the voice of John Graham of Claverhouse, high-pitched to the carrying note of command – of the man whom all the South and West knew then as the great persecutor, and all the North afterwards as the great captain who stood for his master when all the others forsook him and fled. I admit that my heart beat suddenly feeble before him, and as for my lads who were with me, I think they gave themselves up for dead men. Though slender and not tall, Clavers nevertheless looked noble upon the black horse which had carried him at a gallop down the burnside from Garryhorn. His eyes were full of fire, his bearing of gallantry. Yet methought there was something relentless about the man – something that friend might one day feel the bite of as well as foe. For this was the man who, at his master's word, was now driving Scotland before him as sheep are driven into buchts on the hillside. But Scotland did not easily take to praying according to Act of Parliament, and I minded the witty old gentlewoman's word to Claverhouse himself, "Knox didna win his will without clavers, an' aiblins Clavers winna get his withoot knocks." It was a witty saying and a true, and many a day I lay in the moss-hags and wished that I had said it.

Yet I think we of the Ancient Province never felt so keenly the bitterness of his oppression, though mostly it was without bowels of mercy, as we did the riding and driving of Robert Grier of Lag, of Douglas of Morton, of Queensberry and Drumlanrig, that were of ourselves – familiar at our tables, and oftentimes near kinsmen as well.

What John Graham did in the way of cess and exaction, and even of shooting and taking, was in some measure what we had taken our count and reckoning with. But that men who knew our outgoings and incomings, our strengths and fastnesses, who had companied with us at kirk and market, should harry us like thieves, made our hearts wondrously hot and angry within us. For years I never prayed without making it a petition that I might get a fair chance at Robert Grier – if it were the Lord's will. And indeed it is not yet too late.

But it was Claverhouse that had come across us now.

"You would kill more King's men!" he cried to Wat Gordon; "you that have come hither to do your best to undo the treason of your forebears. My lad, that is the way to get your head set on the Netherbow beside your father's. Are there no man-sworn Whigs in the West that true men must fall to hacking one another?"

He turned upon Inglis as fiercely:

"Cornet, are you upon duty? By what right do you fall to brawling with an ally of the country? Have we overly many of them in this accursed land, where there are more elephants and crocodiles in Whig-ridden Galloway than true men on whom the King may rely?"

But Inglis said never a word, being pale from the draining of his wound. I looked for him to denounce me as a rebel and a spy; but he was wholly silent, for the man after all was a man.

"How began ye this brawling?" quoth Claverhouse, looking from one to the other of them, minding me no more than I had been a tripping hedge-sparrow.

"We had a difference, and cast up our fathers to one another," at last said Inglis, half sullenly.

"It were best to let fathers a-be when you ride on his Majesty's outpost duty, Cornet Inglis. But you are wounded. Fall out and have your hurt examined."

"It is a flea-bite," quoth Peter Inglis, stoutly.

"A man this!" thought I. For I loved courage.

Yet nevertheless, he dismounted, and John Scarlet helped him off with his coat upon the short heather of the brae-face.

"And whom may we have here?" cried Claverhouse, as Inglis went stumblingly to the hillside upon the arm of John Scarlet. He turned his fine dark eyes full upon me as he spoke, and I thought that I had never seen any man look so handsome. Yet, for all that, fear of the great enemy of our house and cause sat cold in my vitals. Though I deny not that his surpassing beauty of person took my eye as though I had been a woman – the more perhaps because I had little enough of my own.

But my kinsman Wat Gordon was no whit dismayed. He dusted his silken doublet front, swept his white-feathered hat in the air in reverence, and introduced me to the formidable captain as one that has good standing and knows it well:

"My cousin, William Gordon, younger son of the House of Earlstoun!"

"Ah," said Claverhouse, smiling upon me not so ill-pleased, "I have heard of him – the home stayer, the nest-egg. He that rode not to Bothwell with 'the Earl'³ and 'the Bull.' Whither rides he now thus early?"

"He rides, Colonel Graham, to bury his father."

I thought my cousin was too bold thus to blurt out my mission, to the chief of them that had killed him whom I went to seek, but he was wiser than I in this matter.

Claverhouse smiled, and looked from the one to the other of us.

"You Gordons have your own troubles to get your fathers buried," he said. "I suppose you will claim that this cub also is a good King's man?"

"He is well affected, colonel," said Lochinvar gaily; "and there are none too many likeminded with him in these parts!"

"Even the affectation does him monstrous credit," quoth Clavers, clapping Walter on the shoulder; "it is much for a Gordon in this country to affect such a virtue as loyalty. I wonder," he went on, apparently to himself, "if it would be possible to transplant you Gordons, that are such arrant rebels here and so loyal in the North. It were well for the land if this could be done. In the North a few dozen Whigs would do small harm; here ten score King's men melled and married would settle the land and keep the King's peace."

Then he looked at my cousin with a certain uncommon gracious affection that sat well on him – all the more that he showed such a thing but rarely.

"Well, Wat, for your sake let young Earlstoun go bury his father in peace, an it likes him. The more Whigs buried the better pleased will John Graham be. If he will only bury his brother also when he is about it, he will rid the earth of a very pestilent fellow!"

"There is no great harm in Sandy," returned Lochinvar briskly and easily. From his whole demeanour I saw that he was in good estimation with Colonel Graham, and was accustomed to talk familiarly with him.

Perhaps the reason was that Claverhouse found himself much alone in Galloway. When he ordered a muster of the lairds and the well affected, only Grier of Lag and Fergusson of Craigdarroch came in, and even they brought but few at their back. Then again these rough-riding, hard drinkers of Nithside had little in common with John Graham. But Lochinvar was well trained by his mother, and had been some time about the court. It was, doubtless, a relief to the high-bred soldier to speak to him after the foul oaths and scurril jests of the country cavaliers.

"Why," said Claverhouse, "as you say, there is no great harm in Sandy; but yet Sandy hath a stout arm and can lay well about him when it comes to the dunts. Sandy's arm is stronger than Sandy's wit."

All this time I had not spoken, for so with a look my cousin Lochinvar had warned me to let him speak for me; but now I broke the silence.

³ The laird of Earlstoun was often called in jest "the Earl."

"I am obliged to you, Colonel Graham," I said, "for your permission to go and bury my dead."

"Ay," said Claverhouse, with a certain courteous disdain that was natural to him, but which he dropped when he spoke to the young Lochinvar, "ay, you are no doubt greatly obliged to me; but your father, though a rebel, fought us fairly and deserves clean burial. A Whig is aye best buried at any rate," he continued, gathering up his reins as one that prepares to ride away.

"Lochinvar," he cried, in his voice of command, "take Cornet Inglis's post and duty, since you have disabled him. But mark me well, let there be no more tullying and brawling, or I shall send you all to bridewell. Hark you, young Wulcat of Lochinvar, I cannot have my officers cut up when they should be hunting Whigs – and" (looking at me) "preparing them for burial."

I think he saw the hatred in my eyes, when he spoke thus of my father lying stiff at a dyke back, for he lifted his hat to me quaintly as he went.

"A good journey to you, and a fair return, young Castle Keeper!" he said with a scorning of his haughty lip.

Yet I think that he had been greater and worthier had he denied himself that word to a lad on my errand.

Of our further progress what need that I tell? Hour after hour I heard the horses' feet ring on the road dully, as though I had been deep under ground myself, and they trampling over me with a rush. It irked me that it was a fine day and that my men, Hugh Kerr and John Meiklewood, would not cease to speak with me. But all things wear round, and in time we came to the place, where one had told Sandy as he fled that he had seen William Gordon of Earlstoun lie stark and still.

There indeed we found my father lying where he had fallen in the angle of a great wall, a mile or two south of the field of Bothwell. He had no fewer than six wounds from musket balls upon him. As I looked I could see the story of his end written plain for the dullest to read. He had been beset by a party of dragoons in the angle of a great seven-foot march dyke in which there was no break. They summoned him to surrender. He refused, as I knew he would; and, as his manner was, he had risked all upon a single-handed charge.

As we heard afterwards, he had come at the troopers with such fury that he killed three and wounded another, besides slaying the horse that lay beside him, before, with a storm of bullets, they stopped him in his charge. Thus died, not unworthily, even while I was bringing in the kye in the evening at Earlstoun, William Gordon, a father of whom, in life and death, no son need be ashamed.

And where we found him, there we buried him, wrapping him just as he was, in the shrouds my mother had sent for her well-beloved. Hugh Kerr was for taking his sword out of his hand to keep at home as an heirloom. But I thought no. For his hand was stiffened upon it where the blood had run down his wrist. And besides, it had been his friend while he lived and when he died, and it was hard to part him with that which had been to him as the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. So we buried his sword and him together, laying the little red Bible, stained and spotted with his blood, open upon his breast. Then we happed him up, and I, who could at that time fight but little, put up a short prayer over him – though not, of course, like a minister, or one bred to the trade. And I thought as I rode away that it was better to leave him the sword, than that Sandy should get it to prate about at his general meetings. Even as it was he could not let him be, but in the after days of quiet he must have him up to coffin him, and bury in the kirkyard of Glassford. Yet to do Sandy justice, he had the grace to leave him the sword in his hand.

Now my father had not fallen on the battlefield itself, but rather when hastening thither, for indeed he never saw the bridge, nor had hand in the guiding of the host, whose blood Robert Hamilton poured out as one that pours good wine upon the ground.

Yet because we were so near, we risked the matter and rode over to see the narrow passage of the Bridge where they had fought it so stoutly all day long. Here and there lay dead men yet unburied; but the countrymen were gradually putting the poor bodies in the earth. Some of them lay singly, but more in little clusters where they set their backs desperately to one another, and had it out with their

pursuers that they might die fighting and not running. Still the pursuit had not been unmerciful, for there were few that had fallen beyond the long avenues of the Palace oaks.

But when we came to the banks of the river, and looked down upon the bridge-head we saw the very grass dyed red, where the men had been shot down. And on the brae-sides where Hamilton had drawn them up when he called them from the bridge-end, they had fallen in swathes like barley. But it was not a heartsome sight, and we turned our rein and rode away, weary and sad within.

CHAPTER VIII. THE CURATE OF DALRY

When I returned to Earlstoun I found the house in sad disorder. Maisie Lennox I found not, for she had ridden to the Duchrae to meet her father and to keep the house, which had had some unwonted immunity lately because of the friendship of the McGhies of Balmaghie. For old Roger McGhie was a King's man and in good favour, though he never went far from home. But only patrolled his properties, lundering such Whigs as came his way with a great staff, but tenderly withal and mostly for show. His daughter Kate, going the way of most women folk, was the bitterest Whig and most determined hearer of the field-preachers in the parish. Concerning which her father full well knew, but could neither alter nor mend, even as Duke Rothes himself could not change his lady's liking. Yet for Kate McGhie's sake the hunt waxed easier in all the headend of Balmaghie. And during this lown blink, old Anton came home from the hills to take the comforts of the bien and comfortable house of the Duchrae, for it promised to be a bitter and unkindly season. So the Earlstoun looked a little bare without Maisie Lennox, and I was glad that I was to be but a short time in it.

For another thing, the soldiers had been before me, and by order of the Council had turned the whole gear and plenishing over to find my brother Alexander – which indeed seeing what he had done at Bothwell, we can hardly wonder at. Even the intervention of our well-affected cousin of Lochinvar could not prevent this. The horses were driven away, the cattle lifted to be provender for the King's forces in the parish of Carsphairn and elsewhere. And it would go hard with us – if indeed we should even be permitted to keep the place that had been ours for generations.

My mother was strongly advised that, as I had not been mixed with the outbreaks, it was just scant possible that I might make something of an appeal to the Privy Council for the continuing of the properties, and the substituting of a fine. I was therefore to ride to Edinburgh with what attendance I could muster, and with Wat Gordon of Lochinvar to lead me as a bairn by the hand.

But it was with a sad heart and without much pleasure, save in having my father's silver mounted pistols (for I counted myself no mean marksman), that John Meiklewood, Hughie and I rode off from the arched door of the Earlstoun. My mother stood on the step and waved me off with no tear in her eye; and even poor Jean Hamilton, from the window whence she could see the great oak where my brother, her husband, was in hiding, caused a kerchief to show white against the grey wall of Earlstoun. I think the poor feckless bit thing had a sort of kindness for me. But when there was hardly the thickness of an eggshell between her man and death, it was perhaps small wonder that she cherished some jealousy of me, riding whither I listed over the wide, pleasant moors where the bumble bees droned and the stooping wild birds cried all the livelong day.

At St. John's Clachan of Dalry we were to meet with Wildcat Wat, who was waiting to ride forth with us to Edinburgh upon his own ploys. We dismounted at the inn where John Barbour, honest man, had put out the sign of his profession. It was a low, well-thatched change-house, sitting with its end to the road in the upper part of the village, with good offices and accommodation for man and horse about it – the same hostel indeed in which the matter of Rullion Green took its beginning. Wat came down the street with his rapier swinging at his side, his feathered Cavalier hat on his head, and he walked with a grace that became him well. I liked the lad, and sometimes it almost seemed to me that I might be his father, though indeed our years were pretty equal. For being lame and not a fighter, neither craving ladies' favours, I was the older man, for the years of them that suffer score the lines deeper on a man's brow – and on his heart also.

When Wat Gordon mounted into the saddle with an easy spring his horse bent back its head and curveted, biting at his foot. So that I rejoiced to see the brave lad sitting like a dart, holding his reins as I hold my pen, and resting his other hand easily on his thigh. John Scarlet, his man-at-arms,

mounted and rode behind him; and when I saw them up, methought there was not a pair that could match them in Scotland. Yet I knew that with the pistolets at paces ten or twenty, I was the master of both. And perhaps it was this little scrap of consolation that made me feel so entirely glad to see my cousin look so bright and bonny. Indeed had I been his lass – or one of them, for if all tales be true he had routh of such – I could not have loved better to see him shine in the company of men like the young god Apollo among the immortals, as the heathens feign.

At the far end of the village there came one out of a white house and saluted us. I knew him well, though I had never before seen him so near. It was Peter McCaskill, the curate of the parish. But, as we of the strict Covenant did not hear even the Indulged ministers, it was not likely that we would see much of the curate. Nevertheless I had heard many tales of his sayings and his humours, for our curate was not as most others – dull and truculent knaves many of them, according to my thinking – the scourings of the North. Peter was, on the other hand, a most humorous varlet and excellent company on a wet day. Sandy and he used often to take a bottle together when they foregathered at John's in the Clachan; but even the Bull of Earlstoun could not keep steeks or count mutchkins with Peter McCaskill, the curate of Dalry.

On this occasion he stopped and greeted us. He had on him a black coat of formal enough cut, turned green with age and exposure to the weather. I warrant it had never been brushed since he had put it on his back, and there seemed good evidence upon it that he had slept in it for a month at least.

"Whaur gang ye screeving to, young sirs, so brave?" he cried. "Be canny on the puir Whiggies. Draw your stick across their hurdies when ye come on them, an' tell them to come to the Clachan o' Dalry, where they will hear a better sermon than ever they gat on the muirs, or my name's no Peter McCaskill."

"How now, Curate," began my cousin, reining in his black and sitting at ease, "are you going to take to the hill and put Peden's nose out of joint?"

"Faith, an' it's my mither's ain son that could fettle that," said the curate. "I'm wae for the puir Whiggies, that winna hear honest doctrine an' flee to the hills and hags – nesty, uncanny, cauldride places that the very muir-fowl winna clock on. Ken ye what I was tellin' them the ither day? Na, ye'll no hae heard – it's little desire ye hae for either kirk or Covenant, up aboot the Garryhorn wi' red-wud Lag and headstrong John Graham. Ye need as muckle to come and hear Mess John pray as the blackest Whig o' them a'!"

"Indeed, we do not trouble you much, Curate," laughed my cousin; "but here is my cousin Will of Earlstoun," he said, waving his hand to me, "and he is nearly as good as a parson himself, and can pray by screeds."

Which was hardly a just thing to say, for though I could pray and read my Bible too when I listed, I did not trouble him or any other with the matter. Cain, indeed, had something to say for himself – for it is a hard thing to be made one's brother's keeper. There are many ways that may take me to the devil. But, I thank God, officiousness in other men's matters shall not be one of them.

"He prays, does he?" quoth McCaskill, turning his shaggy eyebrows on me. "Aweel, I'll pray him ony day for a glass o' John's best. Peter McCaskill needs neither read sermon nor service-book. He leaves sic-like at hame, and the service ye get at his kirk is as guid and godly as gin auld Sandy himsel' were stelled up in a preaching tent an' thretty wizzened plaided wives makkin' a whine in the heather aneath!"

"How do you and the other Peter up the way draw together?" asked my cousin.

The curate snapped his fingers.

"Peter Pearson o' Carsphairn – puir craitur, he's juist fair daft wi' his ridin' an' his schemin'. He will hear a pluff o' pouter gang blaff at his oxter some fine day, that he'll be the waur o'! An' sae I hae telled him mony's the time. But Margate McCaskill's son is neither a Whig hunter nor yet as this daft Peter Pearson. He bides at hame an' minds his glebe. But for a' that I canna control the silly fowk. I was fearin' them the ither day," he went on. "I gied it oot plain frae the pulpit that gin

they didna come as far as the kirkyaird at ony rate, I wad tak' no more lees on my conscience for their sakes. I hae plenty o' my ain to gar me fry. 'But,' says I, 'I'll report ye as attendin' the kirk, gin ye walk frae yae door o' the kirk to the ither withoot rinnin'. Nae man can say fairer nor that.'"

"An' what said ye next, Curate?" asked my cousin, for his talk amused us much, and indeed there were few merry things in these sad days.

"Ow," said Peter McCaskill, "I juist e'en said to them, 'Black be your fa'. Ye are a' off to the hills thegither. Hardly a tyke or messan but's awa' to Peden to get her whaulpies named at the Holy Linn! But I declare to ye a', what will happen in this parish. Sorra gin I dinna inform on ye, an' then ye'll be a' eyther shot or hangit before Yule!' That's what I said to them!"

Wat Gordon laughed, and I was fain to follow suit, for it was a common complaint that the curate of Dalry was half a Whig himself. And, indeed, had he not been ever ready to drink a dozen of Clavers's officers under the table, and clout the head of the starkest carle in his troop, it might have gone ill with him more than once.

"But I hae a bit sma' request to make of ye, Walter Gordon o' Lochinvar an' Gordiestoun," said the curate.

"Haste ye," said Wat, "for ye hae taigled us overly long already."

"An' it's this," said the curate, "I hae to ride to Edinburgh toon, there to tell mair lees than I am likely to be sained o' till I am a bishop an' can lee wi' a leecence. But it's the Privy Council's wull, an' sae I maun e'en lee. That tearin' blackguard, Bob Grier, has written to them that I am better affected to the Whigs than to the troopers of Garryhorn, and I am behoved to gang and answer for it."

"Haste ye, then, and ride with us," cried Walter, whose horse had stood long enough. "We ride toward the Nith with Colonel Graham, and after that to Edinburgh."

So in a little the curate was riding stoutly by our side. We were to travel by Dumfries and Lockerbie into Eskdale, whither Claverhouse had preceded us, obeying an urgent call from his acquaintance, Sir James Johnstone of Westerhall, who was still more eager to do the King's will than he – though, to begin with, he had been a Covenant man, and that of some mark too. But the fear of fines, and the bad example of his neighbours ever before his eyes, had brought out the hidden cruelty of the man. So now he rode at Claverhouse's bridle-rein, and the pair of them held black counsel on the state of the country. But the mood of Claverhouse was, at worst, only that of military severity, without heart of ruth or bowels of mercy indeed; but that of Westerhall was rather of roystering and jubilant brutality, both of action and intent.

So we rode and we better rode till we came to Eskdale, where we found Westerhall in his own country. Now I could see by the behaviour of the soldiers as we went, that some of them had small good will to the kind of life they led, for many of them were of the country-side and, as it seemed, were compelled to drive and harry their own kith and kin. This they covered with a mighty affectation of ease, crying oaths and curses hither and thither tempestuously behind their leaders – save only when John Graham rode near by, a thing which more than anything made them hold their peace, lest for discipline's sake he should bid them be silent, with a look that would chill their marrows.

CHAPTER IX. THROUGH DEATH'S DARK VALE

Now this Eskdale was the Johnstone's own country, and one in which I was noways at home – a country of wide green holms and deep blind "hopes" or hollows among the mountains, where the cloud shadows bide and linger, and whence they come out again to scud swiftly over the hips of the hills. I had been trained to be pleasant and prudent in my conversation, and there was little to take me out of myself in the company I had perforce to keep. Yet I dared not withdraw myself from their train, lest the jealousy of our band, which was latent among the more scurril of them, should break out. So I rode mostly silent, but with a pleased countenance which belied my heart.

Indeed, had it not been for the good liking which everywhere pursued my cousin Lochinvar, I cannot tell what might have come out of the dislike for us "Glenkens Whiggies," which was their mildest word for us. Yet my man Hugh never said a word, for he was a prudent lad and slow of speech; while I, being no man of war, also looked well to my words, and let a wary tongue keep my head. As for John Meiklewood, honest man, he took suddenly one morning what he termed a "sair income in his wame," and leave being scantily asked, he hied him home to his wife and weans at the Mains of Earlstoun.

Now this was the manner of our march. Claverhouse sent his horse scouring up on the tops of the hills and along the higher grounds, while his foot quartered the lower districts, bringing all such as were in any way suspicious to the kirkyards to be examined. Old and young, men and women alike, were taken; and often – chiefly, it is true, behind Claverhouse's back – the soldiers were most cruel at the business, making my blood boil, till I thought that I must fly out and strike some of them. I wondered not any longer that my father had taken to the hill, sick to death of the black terror which Charles's men caused daily to fall upon all around them, wherever in Scotland men cared enough about their religion to suffer for it.

How my cousin Lochinvar stood it I cannot tell. Indeed I think that but for the teaching of his mother, and the presence of John Scarlet, who at this time was a great King's man and of much influence with Wat Gordon, he had been as much incensed as I.

One morning in especial I mind well. It was a Tuesday, and our company was under the command of this Johnstone of Westerha', who of all the clan, being a turncoat, was the cruellest and the worst. For the man was in his own country, and among his own kenneled faces, his holders and cottiers – so that the slaughter of them was as easy as killing chickens reared by hand.

And even Claverhouse rather suffered, and shut his eyes to it, than took part in the hard driving.

"Draw your reins here," the Johnstone would say, as we came to the loaning foot of some little white lime-washed house with a reeking lum. "There are some Bible folk here that wad be none the worse o' a bit ca'!"

So he rode up to the poor muirland housie sitting by itself all alone among the red heather. Mostly the folk had marked us come, and often there was no one to be seen, but, as it might be, a bairn or two playing about the green.

Then he would have these poor bits of things gathered up and begin to fear them, or contrariwise to offer them fair things if only they would tell where their parents were, and who were used to come about the house.

There is a place, Shieldhill by name, that sits blithely on the brae-face at the entering in of Annandale. The country thereabouts is not very wild, and there are many cotter houses set about the holms and dotted among the knowes. Westerha' enclosed the whole with a ring of his men, and came upon them as he thought unawares, for he said the place was like a conventicle, and rife with psalm-singers. But he was a wild man when he found the men and women all fled, and only the

bairns, as before, feared mostly out of their lives, sitting cowering together by the ingle, or hiding about the byres.

"I'll fear them waur," said Westerha', as he came to the third house and found as before only two-three weans, "or my name is no James Johnstone."

So what did this ill-set Johnstone do, but gather them all up into a knot by a great thorn-tree that grows on the slope. This Tuesday morn was clear and sunny – not bright, but with a kind of diffused light, warm and without shadows, as if the whole arch of the lift were but one sun, yet not so bright as the sun we mostly have.

There were some thirty bairns by the tree, mostly of Westerha's own name, save those that were Jardines, Grahams, and Charterises, for those are the common names of that country-side. The children stood together, huddled in a cloud, too frightened to speak or even to cry aloud. And one thing I noticed, that the lassie bairns were stiller and grat not so much as the boys – all save one, who was a laddie of about ten years. He stood with his hands behind his back, and his face was very white; but he threw back his head and looked the dragoons and Annandale's wild riders fair in the face as one that has conquered fear.

Then Westerha' rode forward almost to the midst of the cloud of bairns, "gollering" and roaring at the bit things to frighten them, as was his custom with such. They were mostly from six to ten years of their age; and when I saw them thus with their feared white faces, I wished that I had been six foot of my inches, and with twenty good men of the Glen at my back. But I minded that I was but a boy – "stay-at-home John," as Sandy called me – and worth nothing with my hands. So I could only fret and be silent. I looked for my cousin Lochinvar, but he was riding at the Graham's bridle rein, and that day I saw nothing of him. But I wondered how this matter of the bairns liked him.

So Westerha' rode nearer to them, shouting like a shepherd crying down the wind tempestuously, when his dogs are working sourly.

"Hark ye," he cried, "ill bairns that ye are, ye are all to dee, and that quickly, unless ye answer me what I shall ask of you."

Then I saw something that I had never seen but among the sheep, and it was a most pitiful and heart-wringing thing to see, though now in the telling it seems no great matter. There is a time of the year when it is fitting that the lambs should be separated from the ewes; and it ever touches me nearly to see the flock of poor lammies when first the dogs come near to them to begin the work, and wear them in the direction in which they are to depart. All their little lives the lambs had run to their mothers at the first hint of danger. Now they have no mothers to flee to, and you can see them huddle and pack in a frightened solid bunch, quivering with apprehension, all with their sweet little winsome faces turned one way. Then as the dogs run nearer to start them, there comes from them a little low broken-hearted bleating, as if terror were driving the cry out of them against their wills. Thus it is with the lambs on the hill, and so also it was with the bairns that clung together in a cluster on the brae-face.

A party of soldiers was now drawn out before them, and the young things were bid look into the black muzzles of the muskets. They were indeed loaded only with powder, but the children were not to know that.

"Now," cried Westerha', "tell me who comes to your houses at night, and who goes away early in the morning!"

The children crept closer to one another, but none of them answered. Whereupon Westerha' indicated one with his finger – the lad who stood up so straightly and held his head back.

"You, young Cock-of-the-heather, what might be your black Whig's name?"

"Juist the same as your honour's – James Johnstone!" replied the boy, in no way abashed.

Methought there ran a titter of laughter among the soldiers, for Westerha' was noways so well liked among the soldiers as Claverhouse or even roaring Grier of Lag.

"And what is your father's name?" continued Westerha', bending just one black look upon the lad.

"James Johnstone!" yet again replied the boy.

Back in the ranks some one laughed.

Westerhall flung an oath over his shoulder.

"Who was the man who laughed? I shall teach you to laugh at the Johnstone in his own country!"

"It was Jeems Johnstone of Wanphray that laughed, your honour," replied the calm voice of a troop-sergeant.

Then Westerha' set himself without another word to the work of examination, which suited him well.

"You will not answer, young rebels," he cried, "ken you what they get that will not speak when the King bids them?"

"Are you the King?" said the lad of ten who had called himself James Johnstone.

At this Westerhall waxed perfectly furious, with a pale and shaking fury that I liked not to see. But indeed the whole was so distasteful to me that sometimes I could but turn my head away.

"Now, ill bairns," said Westerha', "and you, my young rebel-namesake, hearken ye. The King's command is not to be made light of. And I tell you plainly that as you will not answer, I am resolved that you shall all be shot dead on the spot!"

With that he sent men to set them out in rows, and make them kneel down with kerchiefs over their eyes.

Now when the soldiers came near to the huddled cluster of bairns, that same little heart-broken bleating which I have heard the lambs make, broke again from them. It made my heart bleed and the nerves tingle in my palms. And this was King Charles Stuart making war! It had not been his father's way.

But the soldiers, though some few were smiling a little as at an excellent play, were mostly black ashamed. Nevertheless they took the bairns and made them kneel, for that was the order, and without mutiny they could not better it.

"Sodger-man, wull ye let me tak' my wee brither by the hand and dee that way? I think he wad thole it better!" said a little maid of eight, looking up.

And the soldier let go a great oath and looked at Westerha' as though he could have slain him.

"Bonny wark," he cried, "deil burn me gin I listed for this!"

But the little lass had already taken her brother by the hand.

"Bend doon bonny, Alec my man, doon on your knees!" said she.

The boy glanced up at her. He had long yellow hair like Jean Hamilton's little Alec.

"Wull it be sair?" he asked. "Think ye, Maggie? I houp it'll no be awfu' sair!"

"Na, Alec," his sister made answer, "it'll no be either lang or sair."

But the boy of ten, whose name was James Johnstone, neither bent nor knelt.

"I hae dune nae wrang. I'll juist dee this way," he said; and he stood up like one that straightens himself at drill.

Then Westerha' bid fire over the bairns' heads, which was cruel, cruel work, and only some of the soldiers did it. But even the few pieces that went off made a great noise in that lonely place. At the sound of the muskets some of the bairns fell forward on their faces as if they had been really shot. Some leapt in the air, but the most part knelt quietly and composedly.

The little boy Alec, whose sister had his hand clasped in hers, made as if he would rise.

"Bide ye doon, Alec," she said, very quietly, "it's no oor turn yet!"

At this the heart within me gave way, and I roared out in my helpless pain a perfect "gowl" of anger and grief.

"Bonny Whigs ye are," cried Westerha', "to dee withoot even a prayer. Put up a prayer this minute, for ye shall all dee, every one of you."

And the boy James Johnstone made answer to him:

"Sir, we cannot pray, for we be too young to pray."

"You are not too young to rebel, nor yet to die for it!" was the brute-beast's answer.

Then with that the little girl held up a hand as if she were answering a dominie in a class.

"An it please ye, sir," she said, "me an' Alec canna pray, but we can sing 'The Lord's my Shepherd,' gin that wull do! My mither learned it us afore she gaed awa'."

And before any one could stop her, she stood up like one that leads the singing in a kirk. "Stan' up, Alec, my wee mannie," she said.

Then all the bairns stood up. I declare it minded me of Bethlehem and the night when Herod's troopers rode down to look for Mary's bonny Bairn.

Then from the lips of the babes and sucklings arose the quavering strains:

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

As they sang I gripped out my pistols and began to sort and prime them, hardly knowing what I did. For I was resolved to make a break for it, and, at the least, to blow a hole in James Johnstone of Westerha' that would mar him for life before I suffered any more of it.

But as they sang I saw trooper after trooper turn away his head, for, being Scots bairns, they had all learned that psalm. The ranks shook. Man after man fell out, and I saw the tears happing down their cheeks. But it was Douglas of Morton, that stark persecutor, who first broke down.

"Curse it, Westerha'," he cried, "I canna thole this langer. I'll war nae mair wi' bairns for a' the earldom i' the North."

And at last even Westerha' turned his bridle rein, and rode away from off the bonny holms of Shieldhill, for the victory was to the bairns. I wonder what his thoughts were, for he too had learned that psalm at the knees of his mother. And as the troopers rode loosely up hill and down brae, broken and ashamed, the sound of these bairns' singing followed after them, and souging across the fells came the words:

"Yea, though I walk in Death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill:
For Thou art with me; and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still."

Then Westerha' swore a great oath and put the spurs in his horse to get clear of the sweet singing.

CHAPTER X.

THE GRAVE IN THE WILDERNESS

But on the morrow I, who desired to see the ways of the Compellers, learned a lesson that ended my scholarship days with them. James Johnstone seemed somewhat moved by the matter of the bairns, but by the morning light he had again hardened his heart, like Pharaoh, more bitterly than before. For he was now on his own land, and because his thought was that the King would hold him answerable for the behaviour and repute of his people, he became more than ordinarily severe. This he did, being a runnagate from the wholesome ways of the Covenant; and, therefore, the more bitter against all who remained of that way.

He drove into the yards of the farm-towns, raging like a tiger of the Indies, now calling on the names of the goodman of the house, and now upon other suspected persons. And if they did not run out to him at the first cry, he would strike them on the face with the basket hilt of his shable till the blood gushed out. It was a sick and sorry thing to see, and I think his Majesty's troopers were ashamed; all saving the Johnstone's own following, who laughed as at rare sport.

But I come now to tell what I saw with my own eyes of the famous matter of Andrew Herries, which was the cause of my cousin of Lochinvar leaving their company and riding with me and Hugh Kerr all the way to Edinburgh. As, indeed, you shall presently hear. And the manner of its happening was as follows. We were riding full slowly along the edge of a boggy loch in the parish of Hutton, and, as usual, quartering the ground for Whig refugees, of whom it was suspected that there were many lurking in the neighbourhood. We had obtained no success in our sport, and Westerhall was a wild man. He ran about crying "Blood and wounds!" which was a favourite oath of his, and telling what he would do to those who dared to rebel, and harbour preachers and preachers' brats on his estate. For we had heard that the lass who had bearded us on the brae-face by the school, with her little brother Alec in her hand, was the daughter of Roger Allison, a great preacher of the hill-folk who had come to them over from Holland, to draw them together into some of their ancient unity and power.

Westerhall, then, knew not as yet in whose house she was dwelling, but only that she had been received by one of his people. But this, if it should come to Claverhouse's ears, was enough to cause him to set a fine upon the Johnstone – so strict as against landlords were the laws concerning intercommuning with rebels or rebels' children on their estates. This was indeed the cause of so many of the lairds, who at first were all on the side of the Covenant, turning out Malignants and persecutors. And more so in the shire of Dumfries than in Galloway, where the muirs are broader, the King's arm not so long, and men more desperately dour to drive.

All of a sudden, as we went along the edge of a morass, we came upon something that stayed us. It was, as I say, in Hutton parish, a very pleasant place, where there is the crying of many muir-fowl, and the tinkle of running water everywhere. All at once a questing dragoon held up his arm, and cried aloud. It was the signal that he had found something worthy of note. We all rode thither – I, for one, praying that it might not be a poor wanderer, too wearied to run from before the face of the troopers' wide-spreading advance.

However, it was but a newly-made grave in the wilderness, hastily dug, and most pitifully covered with green fresh-cut turves, in order to give it the look of the surrounding morass. It had very evidently been made during the darkness of the night, and it might have passed without notice then. But now, in the broad equal glare of the noon-tide, it lay confessed for what it was – a poor wandering hill-man's grave in the wild.

"Who made this?" cried Westerhall. "Burn me on the deil's brander, but I'll find him out!"

"Hoot," said Clavers, who was not sharp set that day, perhaps having had enough of Westerhall's dealing with the bairns yesterday, "come away, Johnstone; 'tis but another of your Eskdale saints.

Ye have no lack of them on your properties, as the King will no doubt remember. What signifies a Whig Johnstone the less? There's more behind every dyke, and then their chief is aye here, able and willing to pay for them!"

This taunt, uttered by the insolent scorning mouth of Claverhouse, made Westerhall neither to hold nor bind. Indeed the fear of mulct and fine rode him like the hag of dreams.

"Truth of God!" cried he; for he was a wild and blasphemous man, very reckless in his words; "do so to me, and more also, if I rack not their limbs, that gied the clouts to wrap him in. I'll burn the bed he lay in, bring doon the rafter and roof-tree that sheltered him – aye, though it were the bonny hoose o' St. Johnstone itsel', an' lay the harbourer of the dead Whig cauld i' the clay, gin it were the mither that bore me! Deil reestle me gin I keep not this vow."

Now, the most of the men there were upon occasion bonny swearers, not taking lessons in the art from any man; but to the Johnstone they were as children. For, being a runnagate Covenanter, and not accustomed in his youth to swear, he had been at some pains to learn the habit with care, thinking it a necessary accomplishment and ornament to such as did the King's business, especially to a captain of horse. Which, indeed, it hath ever been held, but in moderation and with discretion. Westerhall had neither, being the man he was.

"Fetch the Whig dog up!" he commanded.

The men hesitated, for it was a job not at all to their stomachs, as well it might not be that hot day, with the sun fierce upon them overhead.

"Tut, man," said Clavers, "let him lie. What more can ye do but smell him? Is he not where you and I would gladly see all his clan? Let the ill-favoured Whig be, I say!"

"I shall find out who sheltered him on my land. Howk him up!" cried Westerhall, more than ever set in his mad cruelty at Colonel Graham's words. So to the light of the merciless day they opened out the loose and shallow grave, and came on one wrapped in a new plaid, with winding sheets of pure linen underneath. These were all stained and soaked with the black brew of the moss, for the man had been buried, as was usual at the time, hastily and without a coffin. But the sleuthhound instinct of the Johnstone held good. "Annandale for the hunt, Nithsdale for the market, and Gallowa' for the fecht!" is ever a true proverb.

"Let me see wha's aucht the sheet?" he said.

So with that, Westerhall unwound the corner and held it up to the light.

"Isobel Allison!" he exclaimed, holding the fine linen up to the light, and reading the name inwoven, as was then the custom when a bride did her providing. "The widow Herries, the verra woman – ain dam's sister to the Whig preacher – sant amang the hill-folk. Weel ken I the kind o' her. To the hill, lads, and we will burn the randy oot, even as I said. I'll learn the Hutton folk to play wi' the beard o' St. Johnstone."

"Foul Annandale thief!" said I, but stilly to myself, for who was I to stand against all of them? Yet I could see that, save and except the chief's own ragged tail, there were none of the soldiers that thought this kind of work becoming.

Ere he mounted, Westerhall took the poor, pitiful body, and with his foot despitefully tumbled it into a moss-hole.

"I'll show them what it is to streek dead Whigs like honest men, and row them dainty in seventeen hunder linen on my land!" cried Westerhall.

And indeed it seemed a strange and marvellous Providence to me, that young Isobel Allison, when she wove in that name with many hopes and prayers, the blood of her body flushing her cheek with a maiden's shy expectation, should have been weaving in the ruin of her house and the breaking of her heart.

Now the cot of the widow Herries was a bonny place. So I believe, but of its beauty I will not speak. For I never was back that way again – and what is more, I never mean to be.

We came to the gavel end of the house. Westerhall struck it with his sword.

"We'll sune hae this doon!" he said to us that followed. Then louder he cried, "Mistress, are ye within?" as the custom of the country is.

A decent woman with a white widow's cap on her head was scraping out a dish of hen's meat as we rode to the door. When she saw us on our horses about the close, the wooden bowl fell from her hands and played clash on the floor.

"Aye, my bonny woman," quoth Westerhall, "this comes o' keeping Whigs about your farm-toon. Whatna Whig rebel was it ye harboured? Oot wi't, Bell Allison! Was it the brither o' ye, that cursed spawn o' the low country? Doon on your knees an' tell me, else it is your last hour on the earth."

The poor woman fell on her knees and clasped her hands.

"O Westerha'!" she stammered, "I'll no lee till ye. It was but a puir Westland man that we kenned not the name o'. We fand him i' the fields, and for very God's pity brocht him hame to our door and laid him on the bed. He never spak' 'yea' or 'nay' to us all the time he abode in our hoose-place, and so passed without a word late yestreen."

"Lying Whig!" cried Westerhall, "who was it that found him? Whatna yin o' your rebel sons – chasing up hill and doon dale after your blackguard brither, was it that brocht him hame?"

"I kenna wha it was that brocht him. It was a wee bit lass that fand him when she was playin' i' the moss wi' her brither."

"I ken your wee bit lasses," said Westerhall; "she's a bonny sprig o' that braw plant o' grace, Roger Allison, wha's heid shall yet look blythe on the West Port o' Edinburgh, wi' yin o' his cantin' thief's hands on ilka side o't."

The poor woman said no word, but out from the chamber door came our little lass of yesterday and stood beside her.

"Wha's plaidie is this?" again quoth Westerhall, holding up the plaid in which the dead man had been wrapped, like an accusation in his hand; "to the hill, boys, and lay hand on this honest woman's honest sons. King Charles wull hae something to say to them, I'm thinkin'."

With that he leapt from his horse, throwing the reins to the widow.

"Hae, haud my horse," he said, "an' gin ye stir an inch, ye'll get an ounce o' lead in you, ye auld shakin' limb o' Sawtan."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

With that, like a loch broken loose, Johnstone's tail of Annandale thieves rushed within the house and dang all things here and there at their liking. Some came forth carrying good house gear, some table furniture, and some the plenishing of bed and wardrobe. They turned all that they could not carry into the midst of the floor to burn at their leisure. They drove away the cattle from off the brae-face. They gathered the widow's poor head of sheep off the hill. And all the time Isobel Herries stood trembling for her lads and holding the chief's horse. As the men passed, one after another, they flung words at her that will not bear writing down. And I was glad that the little maid who stood by with her brother in her hand, understood not their import.

When all was done, Westerhall set to work and pulled down the whole house, for the rigging and walls were but of baked clay and crumbled before them. Yet the poor woman wailed for them bitterly, as they had been a palace.

"The bonny bit, O the bonny bit!" she cried. "Where I had sic a sweet bairn-time. I was that happy wi' a' my tottlin' weans aboot my hand. But I kenned it couldna last – it was ower sweet to last."

So they turned her out to the bare hillside with the bairns in her hand. It did not, to my thinking, make the case any better that her brother was a rebel. But in those days it was treason to succour the living or honour the dead – ay, even if they had lain in your bed and stirred in your side. It was forbidden on pain of death to give them so much as a bed or a meal of meat. For such was the decree of just and pious Charles, King at Whitehall, who alone had the right to say in what fashion the poor ignorant folk of Scotland should worship the God of their fathers.

We had not ridden far after leaving the house a heap of ruins, before we met Claverhouse and his troop, riding slow, with a prisoner in the midst of them.

"What luck!" cried he; "good sport in your ain coverts, Westerha'?"

He had a delicately insolent contempt for the Johnstone that set well on him, though as I knew well he could be as cold and bloody as any of them when the humour drove him. Yet mostly he killed like a gentleman after all, and not like a border horse thief – save only in the case of honest John Brown of Priesthill.

But Westerhall had caught sight of Clavers's prisoner. He rode up to him and struck him a buffet in the face, though the lad's hands were tied before him. He was a youth of eighteen, as near as one might guess, a boy of a pleasant and ruddy countenance, such as one may chance to see on any brae-face in Scotland where there are sheep feeding, with a staff in his hand and a dog at his heels.

"My Whiggie, I have you now," he cried. "I'll e'en learn you to row dead rebels in your plaidie, and harbour hill preachers on my land. Could I get at your brothers, I declare I wadna leave a Herries birkie on the lands o' Westerha'. Have him down, men," he cried, "and shoot him here."

But Clavers interposed.

"No," he said, "he is now my prisoner. Ride ye on to Westerha'; and there, Johnstone, I shall give ye a present of him to make a kirk or a mill of. It'll be you that will have to pay the harbourage cess for this day's work at ony gate!"

So to Westerhall Johnstone rode, very gloomy and ill at ease – for the black dog was sitting heavy on him at the thought of the fine anent harbourers of rebels being found on his land. Again and again he broke out on the poor youth Andrew Herries, threatening what he would do with him when he got him to Westerhall. But the youth never so much as answered back, only cast down his head and looked on the moss before him. Yet he walked carefully and without stumbling as one that takes heed to his going.

Now at a bonny spot where there is much green grass, it so happened that we halted. You will find the place readily if ever you pass that way. It is just on that tongue of land where the Rig Burn meets the Esk Water and close by the house of Westerhall. There, where the Great Hill of Stennies Water pushes down a spur to the water-side, was our halting place. Here, as soon as we alighted down, Westerhall passed sentence on Andrew Herries, saying that he had due authority from the Council as King's Justicer for the parts about the Esk and Annan.

Claverhouse was noways keen for the lad's shooting, and strove to put him off. Yet he was not over-earnest in the matter, for (as he often said) to John Graham a dead Whig was always greatly better than a living.

But for all that, he waved his hand and cried aloud:

"The blood of this poor man, Westerha', be upon you. I am free from it."

Nevertheless, since Westerhall had given the sentence and for example's sake it could not be departed from, Claverhouse ordered a Highland gentleman, the captain of a free company that was traversing the country with him, to shoot the lad and get it over. But Donald Dhu cocked his bonnet till the eagle's feather in it stood erect, and in high dudgeon drew off his clansmen.

"Hursel cam' frae the Heelants to fecht men, and no to be pluff-pluffin' poother at poor lads that are no lang frae the mither's milk."

This was the statement of Donald Dhu, and I that had no love for Highlandmen, nor any cause to love them, remembering the hand they made of my father's house of Earlstoun, could have cheered him where I stood. But I remembered the errand I was on, and for my mother's sake forbore.

"What!" cried Westerhall, glowering at him and riding up close, as if to strike him, "would you disobey the General's orders!"

"Donald Dhu has no General but his King," cried the bold Highlandman. "Call up your row-footed messans, and bid them do your nain dirty work."

Then Claverhouse, who of all things loved not to be outfaced, ordered him peremptorily to obey.

"Indeed, John Graham, hursel will fecht ye first – you and a' your troop."

Then seeing that Clavers was about to raise his hand in command, as though to take him unawares —

"Claymores!" suddenly cried Donald Dhu, and behind him fifty Highland brands flashed in air as the wild clansmen threw back their plaids to clear the sword-arm.

"This I shall report to the Privy Council," said Clavers very gravely, turning on him a black and angry countenance.

But the brave Highlander was noways affected.

"Hooch!" he said, giving his fingers a snap, "a fig for your Preevies – Donald Dhu wull hae small notion o' Preevy Cooncils on Ben Muick. Gin Preevies come to veesit Donald Dhu on Spey side, it's just hursel that wull be the prood man to see the Preevies – aye, or you yersel' either, John Graham!"

Thus much Donald Dhu, and he was a good man and died linking down the brae with his men true, behind John Graham at Killiecrankie in the fulness of time – which was better work than, as he said, "pluff-pluffin' poother at puir lawlan tykes."

But when Westerhall saw that the Highland birses were up, and that he would in no wise obey orders, he ordered some of his own scoundrels to do the thing. For his black heart was set on the shooting of the lad.

Then I could endure no longer, but ran forward as if to save him, crying out to them that he was innocent, and but a lad at any rate, which mightily angered Westerhall.

"Stell up the yae rebel whelp beside the other!" he said; and I believe that had we been alone with the Annandale men, they would have done it.

But Clavers said: "Let be! Take away young Earlstoun to the knowe-tap!"

So they led me off, fairly girning with anger and impotence. For once I longed for Sandy's brute strength to charge at them like a bull with the head down.

"Lochinvar!" I cried, as they forced me away. "To me, Lochinvar!"

But, alas! my cousin was off on some of his own ploys, and came not till too late. As you shall hear.

Then when the men were in rank to fire, Westerhall bid Andrew Herries draw down his blue bonnet over his eyes. But he was a lad of most undaunted courage, and though he had come so meekly to the slaughter, now he spoke out boldly enough.

"I wad raither dee," he said, "in the face o' a' men and the plain licht o' God. I hae dune nocht to make me shamed afore my death-bringers. Though, being but young, I hae but little testimony to gie, an' nae great experience o' religion to speak aboot. The end has come ower quick on me for that!"

Then they asked him, as was their custom, if he had aught to say before sentence should take effect upon him.

"Nocht in particular," he said, "but there's a book here (and he pulled a little Bible out of his breast) that you an' me will be judged by. I wish I had read mair earnestly in it an' profited better by it. But at ony rate I aye carried it to read at the herdin', and my time has been cut short."

"Make haste," they said, "we haena time to taigle wi' ye."

"And I hae as little desire to taigle you," he said, "but I am glad that I didna grudge the puir Westland man my best plaid for his last covering, though there be none to do as muckle for me."

The fire rang out. The blue wreaths of smoke rose level, and there on the green sward, with his face to the sky, and his Bible yet in his hand, lay the widow's son, Andrew Herries, very still.

"So perish all the King's rebels," cried Westerhall loudly, as it were, to give the black deed a colour of law.

But John Graham said never a word, only lifted his hat and then rode away with a countenance like the granite stone of the mountain.

CHAPTER XII. WE RIDE TO EDINBURGH

When my cousin Lochinvar heard what had been done in the matter of the lad, Andrew Herries, his anger burned fiercely within him. He sought Westerhall on the instant.

"Foul Annandale thief!" he cried, "come out and try the length of thy sword on the heather. Down with thee and see if thou canst stand up to a man, thou great stirk. 'Tis easy putting thy wolf's spite on helpless bairns, but this sword-arm shall tickle thy midriff to an unkenne'd tune."

But Colonel Graham would not let them fight.

"Aroint thee," he said to Lochinvar, "for a young ruffler and spit-fire. Well may they call thee Wulcat. But you shall not decimate my troop, or I must put you in irons, for all those bright eyes which the ladies love."

Lochinvar turned to him.

"Colonel Graham, did you yourself not say, 'I am guiltless of this poor man's life!' So, at least, I have been informed."

Claverhouse nodded grimly. It was not a weakness he often showed.

"Then why not let me have it out with this bairn-slayer? I had e'en garred the guard o' my sword dirl again his ribs."

In another the boast had seemed like presumption, but so noble a sworder was Wat Gordon that he but stated a truth. And all that were present knew it for such.

"Westerhall will be the more grateful to me, in that case," said Clavers, "but hark ye, Lochinvar! there must be no more of this. Ye would reduce the number of his Majesty's forces effective in one way. The Reverend Richard Cameron (with whom Providence send me a good and swift meeting) in another. But in the end it comes to the same thing. Now I opine, it will fit you well to hie to Edinburgh with despatches. And I prithee take your noble and peaceful cousin of Earlstoun with thee. Gin thou canst exchange him there for his brother Sandy, I shall be the more glad to see thee back."

So in a little Wat Gordon and I (Hugh Kerr and John Scarlet being with us) were riding with Claverhouse's despatches to the Privy Council.

Northward we travelled through infinite rough and unkindly places, vexed ever with a bitter wind in our faces. As we passed many of the little cot houses on the opposite hillsides, we would see a head look suddenly out upon us. Then the door fell open, and with a rush like wild things breaking from their dens, a father and a son, or such-like, would take the heather. And once, even, we saw the black coat of a preacher. But with never a halt we went on our way, sharp-set to reach Edinburgh.

As we went, Wat Gordon spoke to me of the great ones of the town, and especially of the Duchess of Wellwood, with whom, as it appeared, he was high in favour. But whether honestly or no, I had no means of judging. It was passing strange for me, who indeed was too young for such love, even had I been fitted by nature for it – to hear Wat speak of the gallantry of the great ladies of the Court, and of the amorous doings at Whitehall. For I had been strictly brought up – a thing which to this day I do not regret, for it gives even ill-doing a better relish. But in these times when there are many new-fangled notions about the upbringing of children and the manner of teaching them, I ever declare I do not know any better way than that which my father used. Its heads and particulars were three – the Shorter Catechism for the soul, good oatmeal porridge for the inward man – and for the outward, some twigs of the bonny birk, properly applied and that upon the appointed place.

So that to hear of the gay French doings at the Court, which by Wat's telling were greatly copied in Edinburgh, was to me like beholding the jiggling and coupling of puggy monkeys in a cage to make sport for the vulgar.

"The Lord keep me from the like of that!" I cried, when he had told me of a ploy that my Lady Castlemaine and my pretty Mistress Stuart had carried through together – the point of which was that these two quipsome dames were wedded, like man and wife, and eke bedded before the Court.

And at this Wat Gordon, who had not much humour at the most of times, turned on me with a quizzical look on his face, saying, "I think you are in no great danger, Cousin William."

Which I took not ill, for at that time I cared not a jot about the appearance of my body, nor for any lady's favour in the land.

When we reached Edinburgh, I went immediately to decent lodgings in the West Bow, to which I had been directed by my mother; but Walter, saying that the West Bow was no fit lodging for a gentleman, went on to settle himself in one of the fashionable closes off the Lawnmarket.

As soon as we were by ourselves, my man, Hugh Kerr, came to me, and began to ask if I knew anything of John Scarlet, the serving man that accompanied my cousin.

I replied that I knew nothing of him, save that my cousin had past all endurance cried him up to me as a mighty sworder.

"Weel," said Hugh Kerr, "it may be, but it's my opeenion that he is a most mighty leer, an' a great scoundrel forbye."

I asked him why, and at the first go-off he would give me no better answer than that he opined that his name was not John Scarlet but John Varlet, as better denoting a gentleman of his kidney.

But when I pressed him, he told me that this serving man had told him that he had committed at least half-a-dozen murders – which he called slaughters and justified, that he had been at nigh half a hundred killings in the fields, yet that he could pray like Mr. Kid himself at a Societies' Meeting, and be a leader among the hill-folk when it seemed good to him.

"An' the awesome thing o't a' is that the ill deil declared that he had half-a-dizzen wives, and that he could mainteen the richts o' that too. So I reasoned with him, but faith! the scoundrel had the assurance to turn my flank wi' Abraham and the patriarchs. He said that he wadna cast up Solomon to me, for he wasna just prepared to uphaud the lengths that Solomon gaed to i' the maitter o' wives."

But I told Hugh to give his mind no concern about the sayings or doings of Master John Scarlet or Varlet, for that it was all most likely lies; and if not, neither he nor I was the man's master, to whom alone he stood or fell.

But for all that I could see that Hughie was much dashed by his encounter with my cousin's follower, for Hughie accounted himself a great hand at the Scripture. We heard afterwards that John Scarlet had been a sometime follower of Muckle John Gib, and that it was in his company that he learned notions, which is a thing exceedingly likely. But this was before Anton Lennox of the Duchrae took John in hand and sorted him to rights, that day in the moss of the Deer-Slunk between Lowthian and Lanark.

Then with my cousin's interest to back me, and especially that which he made with the Duchess of Wellwood, I wore out the winter of the year 1679 in petitions and embassies, praying that the estates should not be taken from us, and biding all the time in my lodging in the West Bow. I had James Stewart, then in hiding, to make out my pleas, and right ably he drew them. It was a strong point in our favour that my father had not been killed at Bothwell, but only when advancing in the direction of the combatants. And besides, I myself had bidden at home, and not ridden out with the others. As for Sandy, he had not the chance of a lamb in the wolf's maw, having been on the field itself with a troop; so I stood for my own claim, meaning with all my very heart to do right by my elder brother when the time came – though, indeed, I had but small reason to love him for his treatment of me. Yet for all that, I shall never say but what he was a stupid, honest lown enough.

Mayhap if he had been other than my brother, I had loved him better; but he tortured me as thoughtlessly when I was a weakly lad as if I had been a paddock or a fly, till the instinct of dislike infected my blood. And after that there could be no hope of liking, hardly of tolerance. This is the reason of most of the feuds among brothers the world over. For it is the fact, though there are few

fathers that suspect it, that many elder brothers make the lives of the youngers a burden too heavy to be borne – which thing, together with marrying of wives, in after years certainly works bitterness.

More than anything, it struck me as strange that my cousin Lochinvar could make merry in the very city – where but a few months before his father had been executed and done to death. But Hughie Kerr told me one evening, when we were going over Glenkens things, how Wat's father had used him – keeping him at the strap's end. For Wat was ever his mother's boy, who constantly took his part as he needed it, and made a great cavalier and King's man of him. This his father tried to prevent and drive out of him with blows, till the lad fairly hated him and his Covenants. And so it was as it was. For true religion comes not by violence, but chiefly, I think, from being brought up with good men, reverencing their ways and words.

CHAPTER XIII.

WULLCAT WAT DARES HEAVEN AND HELL

It was about the end of February, when the days are beginning to creep out quickly from their shortest, that my aunt, the Lady Lochinvar, came to town. I, that asked only meat and house-room, accompanied not much with the braver folk who sought the society of my cousin of Lochinvar. Wat glanced here and there in some new bravery every day, and I saw him but seldom. However, my lady aunt came to see me when she had been but three days in town. For she was punctilious about the claims of blood and kinship, which, indeed, women mostly think much more of than do men.

"A good morning, cousin," said she, "and how speeds the suit?"

Then I told her somewhat of the law's delays and how I had an excellent lawyer, albeit choleric and stormy in demeanour, – one of mine own name, Mr. William Gordon, though his pleas were drawn by James Stewart, presently in hiding. What Gordon said went down well with my Lords of the Council meeting in Holyrood, for he was a great swearer and damned freely in his speech. But Hugh Wallace, that was the King's cash-keeper, claimed the fine because that my father was a heritor – conform to the Acts of Parliament made against these delinquencies and conventicles in 1670 and 1672, appointing the fines of heritors being transgressors to come into the treasury. But Sir George Mackenzie said, "If this plea be not James Stewart's drawing I have no skill of law. Tell me, Gordon, gin ye drew this yoursel' or is James Stewart in Scotland?"

Then my lady of Lochinvar asked of me when I thought my matters might be brought to an end.

"That I know not," said I; "it seems slow enough."

"All law is slow, save that which my man and your father got," said she.

I was astonished that she should mention her man, with that courage and countenance, and the story not six months old; indeed, his very head sticking on the Netherbow, not a mile from us as we talked. But she saw some part of this in my face, and quickly began to say on.

"You Gordons never think you die honest unless you die in arms against the King. But ye stand well together, though your hand is against every other man. And that is why I, that am but a tacked-on Gordon, come to help you if so be I can; though I and my boy stand for the King, and you and your rebel brother Sandy for the Covenants. Weary fa' them – that took my man from me – for he was a good man to me, though we agreed but ill together concerning kings and politics."

"Speak for my brother Sandy," I said, "I am no strong sufferer, and so shall get me, I fear me, no golden garments."

Thus I spoke in my ignorance, for the witty lown-warm air of Edinburgh in spiritual things had for the time being infected me with opinions like those of the Laodicians.

Now this was a favourite overword of my mother's, that suffering was the Christian's golden garment. But to my aunt, to whom religion was mostly family tradition (or so I thought), I might as well have spoken of fried fish.

"But concerning Walter," she went on, as one that comes to a real subject after beating about the bush, "tell me of him. You have been here with him in this city the best part of three months."

Now indeed I saw plainly enough what it was that had procured me the honour of a visit so early from my lady of Lochinvar.

"In this city I have indeed been, my aunt," I replied, "but not with Walter. For I am not Lord of Lochinvar, but only the poor suitor of the King's mercy. And I spent not that which I have not, nor yet can I afford further to burden the estate which may never be mine."

She waved her hand as at a Whig scruple, which good King's folk made light of.

"But what of Walter – you have seen – is it well with the lad?"

She spoke eagerly and laid her hand on my arm.

But after all the business was not mine, and besides, a Gordon – Covenant or no Covenant – is no tale-piet, as my lady might well have known.

"Wat Gordon," said I, "is the gayest and brightest young spark in town, like a Damascus blade for mettle, and there are none that love not his coming, and grieve not at his going."

"Ay – ladies, that I ken," said my aunt. "What of my Lady Wellwood?"

Now I had a very clear opinion of my Lady Wellwood, though I knew her not; for indeed she would not have waved the back of her lily hand to me in the street. But she was a handsome woman, and I admired her greatly for the fairness of her countenance as she went by. Besides, the business of Wat and my Lady Wellwood was none of mine.

"My lady is in truth a fine woman," I said calmly, looking up as if I were saying what must please my visitor.

The Lady Lochinvar struck one hand on the other hastily and rose.

"Attend me home," she said; "I see after all that you are a man, and so must defend all men and admire all women."

"The last, for your ladyship's sake, I do," I made answer. For in those days we were taught to be courteous to the elder ladies, and to make them becoming compliments, which is in danger of being a forgotten art in these pettifogging times.

"What takes you to the Covenant side?" asked Lady Lochinvar, "Certes, the Falkland dominie had not made that speech."

"The same that took your husband, Lady Lochinvar," I returned, somewhat nettled. For she spake as if the many honest folk in Scotland were but dirt beneath the feet of the few. But that was ever the way of her kind.

"Kenned ye ever a Gordon that would be driven with whips of scorpions, or one that could not be drawn with the light of ladies' eyes?"

She sighed, and gathered up her skirts.

"Ay, the last all too readily," she said, thinking, I doubt not, of Walter Gordon and my lady of Wellwood.

It was dusking when we stepped out. My aunt took my arm and desired that we should walk home, though already I had called a chair for her. So we went up the narrow, dirty street and came slowly to her lodgings. Walter met us on the stair of the turnpike. He was shining in silk and velvet as was recently his constant wont. Lace ruffles were at his wrists. He had a gold chain about his neck, and a jewelled rapier flashed and swung in a gold-brodered velvet sheath at his side.

He seemed no little dashed by our coming in together. I quickly understood that he had thought his mother safely out of the way, and wondered how I should keep the peace between them. For by the tremble of her hand on my arm I felt that the storm was nigh the breaking.

Yet for all that he stopped and kissed her dutifully, standing on the step with his hat in his hand, to let her pass within. The flickering light of the cruise lamp in the stairhead fell on him, and I thought he had the noblest figure of a youth that ever my eyes had rested upon.

But his mother would not let him go.

"Attend me to my chamber, Walter," she said. "I have that concerning which I would speak with you."

So we went upward, turning and twisting up the long stairs, till we came to the door where my lady lodged. She tirmed fretfully at the pin, the servant-maid opened, and we went within. The window stood wide to give a draft to the fire of wood that burned on the firegrate. I went over to close it, and, as I did so, a broad flake of snow swirled down, and lay melting on my wrist. It told me that it was to be a wild night – the last snowstorm of the year, belike.

My lady came back from her own bed-chamber in a moment. She had merely laid aside her plaid, waiting not to change her gown lest her son should be gone.

Walter Gordon stood discontentedly enough at the side of the firegrate, touching the glowing embers with his French shoe, careless of how he burnt it.

"Walter," said my aunt, "will you not pleasure us with your company to-night?"

"I cannot, my lady," said Lochinvar, without looking up; "I have made an engagement elsewhere."

He spoke baldly and harshly, as one that puts a restraint on himself.

His mother looked at him with her eyes like coals from which the leaping flame has just died out. For a moment she said nothing, but the soul within her flamed out of the windows of her house of clay, fiery and passionate. It had come to the close and deadly pinch with her, and it was on the dice's throw whether she would lose or keep her son.

"Walter Gordon," she said at last, "has your mother journeyed thus far to so little purpose, that now she is here, you will not do her the honour to spend a single night in her company? Since when has she become so distasteful to you?"

"Mother," said Wat, moved in spite of himself, "you do not yourself justice when you speak so. I would spend many nights with you, for all my love and service are yours; but to-night I cannot fail to go whither I have promised without being man-sworn and tryst-breaker. And you have taught me that the Gordons are neither."

"Wat," she said, hearing but not heeding his words, "bide you by me to-night. There be sweet maids a many that will give their lives for you. You are too young for such questing and companionry. Go not to my Lady Wellwood to-night. O do not, my son! 'Tis your mother that makes herself a beggar to you!"

At the name of my Lady Wellwood Walter Gordon started from his place as though he had been stung and glanced over at me with a sudden and fiery anger.

"If my cousin –"

But I kept my eyes clear upon him, as full of fire mayhap as his own. And even in that moment I saw the thought pass out of his mind in the uncertain firelight.

"Your cousin has told me nothing, though I deny not that I asked him," said my lady curtly. "Young men hang together, like adder's eggs. But Wat, dear Wat, will you not put off your gay apparelling and take a night at the cartes with us at home. See, the fire is bright and the lamp ready. It will be a wild night without presently!"

"To-morrow, mother, to-morrow at e'en shall be the night of my waiting upon you. To-night, believe me, I cannot – though, because you ask me, with all my heart I would that I could."

Then his mother rose up from her seat by the fire, and went up to him. She laid her hand on his arm and looked into his eyes.

"O Walter, my boy, go not forth to-night" – (here I declare to God the proud woman knelt to her own son) – "See, I have put off my pride, and I pray you not to go for my sake – for your mother's sake, that never denied you anything. There is evil boding in the air."

She shuddered and, in rising, threw an arm over his shoulder, as though she had been his sweetheart and were fleeching with him.

For a moment I saw Wat Gordon waver. Then he took her hand gently and drew it down from his shoulder.

"Mother, for you I would do all, save set a stain upon my honour. But this thing I cannot, for I have plighted my word deep and fast, and go I must to-night."

"Tell me," said my aunt, "is it a matter of treason to the King?"

Her eyes were eager, expectant. And for very pity of her I hoped that Walter could give her satisfaction on the point. But it was not as I thought, for who can track a woman's heart?

"God forbid," said Wat Gordon heartily, as one that is most mightily relieved.

But his mother fell back and her hands dropped to her side.

"Then," she said, "it is my Lady Wellwood! – I had rather a thousand times it had been treason and rebellion – aye, though it had set your head on high beside your father's."

"Lady Wellwood or another!" cried Wat, "nor heaven nor hell shall gar me break my tryst this nicht!"

And without another word Walter Gordon went down the stairs as one that runs defiantly to death, daring both God and man – and, alas! the mother also that bore him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE THING THAT FELL FROM TRAITOR'S GATE

The Lady Lochinvar stood a moment still by the fire, listening, her hand raised as if to command silence. Then she ran to the door like a young lass, with a light foot and her hand on her heart. The steps came fainter up the stair, and in another moment we heard the clang of the outer door.

My lady turned to me.

"Have you your pistols by you?" she whispered in a hoarse and angry voice, clutching me by the lapels of my coat. "Go, man! Go, follow him! He rushes to his death. And he is all that I have. Go and save him!"

She that had fleeced with her son, like a dove succouring its young, laid harshly her commands upon me.

"I am no fighter, aunt," I said. "What protection can I be to Walter Gordon, the best sworder in Edinburgh town this night from Holyrood to the Castle?"

My lady looked about her as one that sees a stealthy enemy approach. Her hand trembled as she laid it on my arm.

"What avails good swordsmanship, when one comes behind and one before, as in my dream I saw them do upon my Walter, out of the house of my Lord Wellwood. They came upon him and left him lying on the snow. – Ah, go, dear cousin William!" she said, breaking into a sharp cry of entreaty lest I should fail her. "It is you that can save him. But let him not see you follow, or it will make him more bitter against me. For if you cannot play with the sword, you can shoot with the pistol; so I have heard, and they tell me that no one can shoot so truly as thou. They would not let thee shoot at Kirkcudbright for the Siller Gun though thou art a burges, because it were no fair game. Is it not true?"

And so she stroked and cuitled me with flattery till I declare I purred like our Gib cat. I had begun there and then to tell her of my prowess, but that she interrupted me.

"He goes toward the High Street. Hasten up the South Wynd, and you will overtake him yet ere he comes out upon the open road."

She thrust two pistols into my belt, which I laid aside again, having mine own more carefully primed with me, to the firing of which my hand was more accustomed – and that to a marksman is more than half the battle.

When I reached the street the wildness of the night justified my prophecy. The snow was falling athwart the town in broad wet flakes, driving flat against the face with a splash, before a gusty westerly wind that roared among the tall lums of the steep-gabled houses – a most uncomfortable night to run the risk of getting a dirk in one's ribs.

I saw my cousin before me, linking on carelessly through the snow with his cloak about his ears and his black-scabbard rapier swinging at his heels.

But I had to slink behind backs like a Holyrood *dyvour* – a bankrupt going to the Sanctuary, jooking and cowering craftily in the lee-side shadow of the houses. For though so wild a night, it was not very dark. There was a moon up there somewhere among the smother, though she could not get so much as her nose through the wrack of banked snow-cloud which was driving up from the west. Yet Wat could have seen me very black on the narrow strip of snow, had he ever once thought of looking over his shoulder.

But Wat the Wulcat of Lochinvar was not the one to look behind him when he strode on to keep tryst. I minded his bitter reckless words to his mother, "Heaven and hell shall not make me break my tryst to-night!" Now Heaven was shut out by the storm and the tall close-built houses, and Walter Gordon had an excellent chance of standing a bout with the other place.

No doubt my Lady Wellwood bided at the window and looked out for him to come to her through the snow. And I that had for common no thought of lass or lady, cannot say that I was without my own envying that the love of woman was not for me. Or so at least I thought at that time, even as I shielded my eyes under my bonnet and drave through the snow with the pistols loose in my belt. But Wat of Lochinvar walked defiantly through the black storm with a saucy swing in his carriage, light and careless, which I vouch drew my heart to him as if I had been a young girl. I had given ten years of my life if just so I could have taken the eyes of women.

As clear as if I had listened to the words, I could hear him saying over within himself the last sentence he had used in the controversy with his mother – "Heaven and hell shall not cause me to break my tryst to-night!"

Alack! poor lad, little understood he the resources of either. For he had yet to pass beneath Traitor's' Gate.

For once the narrow High Street of Edinburgh was clean and white – sheeted down in the clinging snow that would neither melt nor freeze, but only clung to every joint, jut, stoop, and step of the house-fronts, and clogged in lumps on the crockets of the roof. The wind wrestled and roared in great gusts overhead in the black, uncertain, tumultuous night. Then a calm would come, sudden as a curtain-drop in the play-house, and in the hush you could hear the snow sliddering down off the high-pitched roofs of tile. The light of the moon also came in varying wafts and flickers, as the wind blew the clouds alternately thicker and thinner across her face.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.