

## **CHAPTER VI. - IN WHICH THE SOLDIERS MEET THE AMAZONS OF THRUMS**

Dow looked shamefacedly at the minister, and then set off up the square.

"Where are you going, Rob?"

"To gie myself up. I maun do something to let you see there's one man in Thrums that has mair faith in you than in a fliskmahoy."

"And only one, Rob. But I don't know that they want to arrest you."

"Ay, I had a hand in tying the polissman to the--"

"I want to hear nothing about that," Gavin said, quickly.

"Will I hide, then?"

"I dare not advise you to do that. It would be wrong."

Half a score of fugitives tore past the town-house, and were out of sight without a cry. There was a tread of heavier feet, and a dozen soldiers, with several policemen and two prisoners, appeared suddenly on the north side of the square.

"Rob," cried the minister in desperation, "run!"

When the soldiers reached the town-house, where they locked up their prisoners, Dow was skulking east-ward, and Gavin running down the brae.

"They're fechting," he was told, "they're fechting on the brae, the sojers is firing, a man's killed!"

But this was an exaggeration.

The brae, though short, is very steep. There is a hedge on one side of it, from which the land falls away, and on the other side a hillock. Gavin reached the scene to see the soldiers marching down the brae, guarding a small body of policemen. The armed weavers were retreating before them. A hundred women or more were on the hillock, shrieking and gesticulating. Gavin joined them, calling on them not to fling the stones they had begun to gather.

The armed men broke into a rabble, flung down their weapons, and fled back towards the town-house. Here they almost ran against the soldiers in

the square, who again forced them into the brae. Finding themselves about to be wedged between the two forces, some crawled through the hedge, where they were instantly seized by policemen. Others sought to climb up the hillock and then escape into the country. The policemen clambered after them. The men were too frightened to fight, but a woman seized a policeman by the waist and flung him head foremost among the soldiers. One of these shouted "Fire!" but the captain cried "No." Then came showers of missiles from the women. They stood their ground and defended the retreat of the scared men.

Who flung the first stone is not known, but it is believed to have been the Egyptian. The policemen were recalled, and the whole body ordered to advance down the brae. Thus the weavers who had not escaped at once were driven before them, and soon hemmed in between the two bodies of soldiers, when they were easily captured. But for two minutes there was a thick shower of stones and clods of earth.

It was ever afterwards painful to Gavin to recall this scene, but less on account of the shower of stones than because of the flight of one divit in it. He had been watching the handsome young captain, Halliwell, riding with his men; admiring him, too, for his coolness. This coolness exasperated the gypsy, who twice flung at Halliwell and missed him. He rode on smiling contemptuously.

"Oh, if I could only fling straight!" the Egyptian moaned.

Then she saw the minister by her side, and in the tick of a clock something happened that can never be explained. For the moment Gavin was so lost in misery over the probable effect of the night's rioting that he had forgotten where he was. Suddenly the Egyptian's beautiful face was close to his, and she pressed a divit into his hand, at the same time pointing at the officer, and whispering "Hit him."

Gavin flung the clod of earth, and hit Halliwell on the head.

I say I cannot explain this. I tell what happened, and add with thankfulness that only the Egyptian witnessed the deed. Gavin, I suppose, had flung the divit before he could stay his hand. Then he shrank in horror.

"Woman!" he cried again.

"You are a dear," she said, and vanished.

By the time Gavin was breathing freely again the lock-up was crammed with prisoners, and the Riot Act had been read from the town-house stair. It is still remembered that the baron-bailie, to whom this duty fell, had got no further than, "Victoria, by the Grace of God," when the paper was struck out of his hands.

When a stirring event occurs up here we smack our lips over it for months, and so I could still write a history of that memorable night in Thrums. I could tell how the doctor, a man whose shoulders often looked as if they had been caught in a shower of tobacco ash, brought me the news to the school-house, and now, when I crossed the fields to dumfounder Waster Lunny with it, I found Birse, the post, reeling off the story to him as fast as a fisher could let out line. I know who was the first woman on the Marywell brae to hear the horn, and how she woke her husband, and who heard it first at the Denhead and the Tenements, with what they immediately said and did. I had from Dite Deuchar's own lips the curious story of his sleeping placidly throughout the whole disturbance, and on waking in the morning yoking to his loom as usual; and also his statement that such ill-luck was enough to shake a man's faith in religion. The police had knowledge that enabled them to go straight to the houses of the weavers wanted, but they sometimes brought away the wrong man, for such of the people as did not escape from the town had swapped houses for the night--a trick that served them better than all their drilling on the hill. Old Yuill's son escaped by burying himself in a peat-rick, and Snecky Hobart by pretending that he was a sack of potatoes. Less fortunate was Sanders Webster, the mole-catcher already mentioned. Sanders was really an innocent man. He had not even been in Thrums on the night of the rising against the manufacturers, but thinking that the outbreak was to be left unpunished, he wanted his share in the glory of it. So he had boasted of being a ringleader until many believed him, including the authorities. His braggadocio undid him. He was run to earth in a pig-sty, and got nine months. With the other arrests I need not concern myself, for they have no part in the story of the little minister.

While Gavin was with the families whose bread-winners were now in the lock-up, a cell that was usually crammed on fair nights and empty for the rest of the year, the sheriff and Halliwell were in the round-room of the town-house, not in a good temper. They spoke loudly, and some of their words sank into the cell below.

"The whole thing has been a fiasco," the sheriff was heard saying, "owing to our failing to take them by surprise. Why, three-fourths of those taken will

have to be liberated, and we have let the worst offenders slip through our hands."

"Well," answered Halliwell, who was wearing a heavy cloak, "I have brought your policemen into the place, and that is all I undertook to do."

"You brought them, but at the expense of alarming the country-side. I wish we had come without you."

"Nonsense! My men advanced like ghosts. Could your police have come down that brae alone to-night?"

"Yes, because it would have been deserted. Your soldiers, I tell you, have done the mischief. This woman, who, so many of our prisoners admit, brought the news of our coming, must either have got it from one of your men or have seen them on the march."

"The men did not know their destination. True, she might have seen us despite our precautions, but you forget that she told them how we were to act in the event of our being seen. That is what perplexes me."

"Yes, and me too, for it was a close secret between you and me and Lord Rintoul and not half-a-dozen others."

"Well, find the woman, and we shall get the explanation. If she is still in the town she cannot escape, for my men are everywhere."

"She was seen ten minutes ago."

"Then she is ours. I say, Riach, if I were you I would set all my prisoners free and take away a cartload of their wives instead. I have only seen the backs of the men of Thrums, but, on my word, I very nearly ran away from the women. Hallo! I believe one of your police has caught our virago single-handed."

So Halliwell exclaimed, hearing some one shout, "This is the rascal!" But it was not the Egyptian who was then thrust into the round-room. It was John Dunwoodie, looking very sly. Probably there was not, even in Thrums, a cannier man than Dunwoodie. His religious views were those of Cruickshanks, but he went regularly to church "on the off-chance of there being a God after all; so I'm safe, whatever side may be wrong."

"This is the man," explained a policeman, "who brought the alarm. He admits himself having been in Tilliedrum just before we started."

"Your name, my man?" the sheriff demanded.

"It might be John Dunwoodie," the tinsmith answered cautiously.

"But is it?"

"I dinna say it's no."

"You were in Tilliedrum this evening?"

"I might hae been."

"Were you?"

"I'll swear to nothing."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a canny man."

"Into the cell with him," Halliwell cried, losing patience.

"Leave him to me," said the sheriff. "I understand the sort of man. Now, Dunwoodie, what were you doing in Tilliedrum?"

"I was taking my laddie down to be prenticed to a writer there," answered Dunwoodie, falling into the sheriff's net.

"What are you yourself?"

"I might be a tinsmith to trade."

"And you, a mere tinsmith, dare to tell me that a lawyer was willing to take your son into his office? Be cautious, Dunwoodie."

"Weel, then, the laddie's highly edicated and I hae siller, and that's how the writer was to take him and make a gentleman o' him."

"I learn from the neighbours," the policeman explained, "that this is partly true, but what makes us suspect him is this. He left the laddie at Tilliedrum, and yet when he came home the first person he sees at the fireside is the laddie himself. The laddie had run home, and the reason plainly was that he had heard of our preparations and wanted to alarm the town."

"There seems something in this, Dunwoodie," the sheriff said, "and if you cannot explain it I must keep you in custody."

"I'll make a clean breast o't," Dunwoodie replied, seeing that in this matter truth was best. "The laddie was terrible against being made a gentleman,

and when he saw the kind o' life he would hae to lead, clean hands, clean dickies, and no gutters on his breeks, his heart took mair scunner at genteelity than ever, and he ran hame. Ay, I was mad when I saw him at the fireside, but he says to me, 'How would you like to be a gentleman yoursel', father?' he says, and that so affected me 'at I'm to gie him his ain way."

Another prisoner, Dave Langlands, was confronted with Dunwoodie.

"John Dunwoodie's as innocent as I am mysel," Dave said, "and I'm most mighty innocent. It wasna John but the Egyptian that gave the alarm. I tell you what, sheriff, if it'll make me innocenter-like I'll picture the Egyptian to you just as I saw her, and syne you'll be able to catch her easier."

"You are an honest fellow," said the sheriff.

"I only wish I had the whipping of him," growled Halliwell, who was of a generous nature.

"For what business had she," continued Dave righteously, "to meddle in other folks' business? She's no a Thrums lassie, and so I say, 'Let the law take its course on her.'"

"Will you listen to such a cur, Riach?" asked Halliwell.

"Certainly. Speak out, Langlands."

"Weel, then, I was in the windmill the nicht."

"You were a watcher?"

"I happened to be in the windmill wi' another man," Dave went on, avoiding the officer's question.

"What was his name?" demanded Halliwell.

"It was the Egyptian I was to tell you about," Dave said, looking to the sheriff.

"Ah, yes, you only tell tales about women," said Halliwell.

"Strange women," corrected Dave. "Weel, we was there, and it would maybe be twal o'clock, and we was speaking (but about lawful things) when we heard some ane running yont the road. I keeked through a hole in the door, and I saw it was an Egyptian lassie 'at I had never clapped een on afore. She saw the licht in the window, and she cried, 'Hie, you billies in the windmill, the sojers is coming!' I fell in a fricht, but the other man opened

the door, and again she cries, 'The sojers is coming; quick, or you'll be ta'en.' At that the other man up wi' his bonnet and ran, but I didna make off so smart."

"You had to pick yourself up first," suggested the officer.

"Sal, it was the lassie picked me up; ay, and she picked up a horn at the same time."

"'Blaw on that,' she cried, 'and alarm the town.' But, sheriff, I didna do't. Na, I had ower muckle respect for the law."

"In other words," said Halliwell, "you also bolted, and left the gypsy to blow the horn herself."

"I dinna deny but what I made my feet my friend, but it wasna her that blew the horn. I ken that, for I looked back and saw her trying to do't, but she couldna, she didna ken the way."

"Then who did blow it?"

"The first man she met, I suppose. We a' kent that the horn was to be the signal except Wearywarld. He's police, so we kept it frae him."

"That is all you saw of the woman?"

"Ay, for I ran straucht to my garret, and there your men took me. Can I gae hame now, sheriff?"

"No. you cannot. Describe the woman's appearance."

"She had a heap o' rowan berries stuck in her hair, and, I think, she had on a green wrapper and a red shawl. She had a most extraordinary face. I canna exact describe it, for she would be lauchin' one second and syne solemn the next. I tell you her face changed as quick as you could turn the pages o' a book. Ay, here comes Wearywarld to speak up for me."

Wearyworld entered cheerfully.

"This is the local policeman," a Tilliedrum officer said; "we have been searching for him everywhere, and only found him now."

"Where have you been?" asked the sheriff, wrathfully.

"Whaur maist honest men is at this hour," replied Wearyworld; "in my bed."

"How dared yon ignore your duty at such a time?"

"It's a long story," the policeman answered, pleasantly, in anticipation of a talk at last.

"Answer me in a word."

"In a word!" cried the policeman, quite crestfallen. "It canna be done. You'll need to cross-examine me, too. It's my lawful richt."

"I'll take you to the Tilliedrum gaol for your share in this night's work if you do not speak to the purpose. Why did you not hasten to our assistance?"

"As sure as death I never kent you was here. I was up the Roods on my rounds when I heard an awfu' din down in the square, and thinks I, there's rough characters about, and the place for honest folk is their bed. So to my bed I gaed, and I was in't when your men gripped me." "We must see into this before we leave. In the meantime you will act as a guide to my searchers. Stop! Do you know anything of this Egyptian?"

"What Egyptian? Is't a lassie wi' rowans in her hair?"

"The same. Have you seen her?"

"That I have. There's nothing agin her, is there? Whatever it is, I'll uphaud she didna do't, for a simpler, franker-spoken crittur couldna be."

"Never mind what I want her for. When did you see her?"

"It would be about twal o'clock," began Wearyworld unctuously, "when I was in the Roods, ay, no lang afore I heard the disturbance in the square. I was standing in the middle o' the road, wondering how the door o' the windmill was swinging open, when she came up to me.

"A fine nicht for the time o' year,' I says to her, for nobody but the minister had spoken to me a' day.

"A very fine nicht,' says she, very frank, though she was breathing quick like as if she had been running, 'You'll be police?' says she.

"I am,' says I, 'and wha be you?'

"I'm just a puir gypsy lassie,' she says.

"And what's that in your hand?' says I.

"It's a horn I found in the wood,' says she, 'but it's rusty and winna blaw.'

"I laughed at her ignorance, and says I, 'I warrant I could blaw it,'



"I dinna believe you,' says she.

"Gie me haud o't,' says I, and she gae it to me, and I blew some bonny blasts on't. Ay, you see she didna ken the way o't. 'Thank you kindly,' says she, and she ran awa without even minding to take the horn back again."

"You incredible idiot!" cried the sheriff. "Then it was you who gave the alarm?"

"What hae I done to madden you?" honest Wearyworld asked in perplexity.

"Get out of my sight, sir!" roared the sheriff.

But the captain laughed.

"I like your doughty policeman, Riach," he said. "Hie, obliging friend, let us hear how this gypsy struck you. How was she dressed?"

"She was snod, but no unca snod," replied Weary. world, stiffly.

"I don't understand you."

"I mean she was couthie, but no sair in order."

"What on earth is that?"

"Weel, a tasty stocky, but gey orra put on."

"What language are you speaking, you enigma?"

"I'm saying she was naturally a bonny bit kimmer rather than happit up to the nines."

"Oh, go away," cried Halliwell; whereupon Weary-world descended the stair haughtily, declaring that the sheriff was an unreasonable man, and that he was a queer captain who did not understand the English language.

"Can I gae hame now, sheriff?" asked Langlands, hopefully.

"Take this fellow back to his cell," Riach directed shortly, "and whatever else you do, see that you capture this woman. Halliwell, I am going out to look for her myself. Confound it, what are you laughing at?"

"At the way this vixen has slipped through your fingers."

"Not quite that, sir, not quite that. She is in Thrums still, and I swear I'll have her before day breaks. See to it, Halliwell, that if she is brought here in my absence she does not slip through your fingers."

"If she is brought here," said Halliwell, mocking him, "you must return and protect me. It would be cruelty to leave a poor soldier in the hands of a woman of Thrums."

"She is not a Thrums woman. You have been told so a dozen times."

"Then I am not afraid."

In the round-room (which is oblong) there is a throne on which the bailie sits when he dispenses justice. It is swathed in red cloths that give it the appearance of a pulpit. Left to himself, Halliwell flung off his cloak and taking a chair near this dais rested his legs on the bare wooden table, one on each side of the lamp. He was still in this position when the door opened, and two policemen thrust the Egyptian into the room.