

CHAPTER II--THE HIGHLAND WRITER

Mr. Charles Stewart the Writer dwelt at the top of the longest stair ever mason set a hand to; fifteen flights of it, no less; and when I had come to his door, and a clerk had opened it, and told me his master was within, I had scarce breath enough to send my porter packing.

"Awa' east and west wi' ye!" said I, took the money bag out of his hands, and followed the clerk in.

The outer room was an office with the clerk's chair at a table spread with law papers. In the inner chamber, which opened from it, a little brisk man sat poring on a deed, from which he scarce

raised his eyes on my entrance; indeed, he still kept his finger in the place, as though prepared to show me out and fall again to his studies. This pleased me little enough; and what pleased me less, I thought the clerk was in a good posture to overhear what should pass between us.

I asked if he was Mr. Charles Stewart the Writer.

"The same," says he; "and, if the question is equally fair, who may you be yourself?"

"You never heard tell of my name nor of me either," said I, "but I bring you a token from a friend that you know well. That you know well," I repeated, lowering my voice, "but maybe are not just so

keen to hear from at this present being. And the bits of business that I have to propone to you are rather in the nature of being confidential. In short, I would like to think we were quite private."

He rose without more words, casting down his paper like a man ill-pleased, sent forth his clerk of an errand, and shut to the house-door behind him.

"Now, sir," said he, returning, "speak out your mind and fear nothing; though before you begin," he cries out, "I tell you mine misgives me! I tell you beforehand, ye're either a Stewart or a Stewart sent ye. A good name it is, and one it would ill-become my father's son to lightly. But I begin to grue at the sound of it."

"My name is called Balfour," said I, "David Balfour of Shaws. As
for him that sent me, I will let his token speak." And I showed
the silver button.

"Put it in your pocket, sir!" cries he. "Ye need name no names.

The deevil's buckie, I ken the button of him! And de'il hae't!

Where is he now!"

I told him I knew not where Alan was, but he had some sure place

(or thought he had) about the north side, where he was to lie until

a ship was found for him; and how and where he had appointed to be

spoken with.

"It's been always my opinion that I would hang in a tow for this family of mine," he cried, "and, dod! I believe the day's come now! Get a ship for him, quot' he! And who's to pay for it? The man's daft!"

"That is my part of the affair, Mr. Stewart," said I. "Here is a bag of good money, and if more be wanted, more is to be had where it came from."

"I needn't ask your politics," said he.

"Ye need not," said I, smiling, "for I'm as big a Whig as grows."

"Stop a bit, stop a bit," says Mr. Stewart. "What's all this? A

Whig? Then why are you here with Alan's button? and what kind of a black-foot traffic is this that I find ye out in, Mr. Whig? Here is a forfeited rebel and an accused murderer, with two hundred pounds on his life, and ye ask me to meddle in his business, and then tell me ye're a Whig! I have no mind of any such Whigs before, though I've kent plenty of them."

"He's a forfeited rebel, the more's the pity," said I, "for the man's my friend. I can only wish he had been better guided. And an accused murderer, that he is too, for his misfortune; but wrongfully accused."

"I hear you say so," said Stewart.

"More than you are to hear me say so, before long," said I. "Alan

Breck is innocent, and so is James."

"Oh!" says he, "the two cases hang together. If Alan is out, James

can never be in."

Hereupon I told him briefly of my acquaintance with Alan, of the

accident that brought me present at the Appin murder, and the

various passages of our escape among the heather, and my recovery

of my estate. "So, sir, you have now the whole train of these

events," I went on, "and can see for yourself how I come to be so

much mingled up with the affairs of your family and friends, which

(for all of our sakes) I wish had been plainer and less bloody.

You can see for yourself, too, that I have certain pieces of

business depending, which were scarcely fit to lay before a lawyer

chosen at random. No more remains, but to ask if you will

undertake my service?"

"I have no great mind to it; but coming as you do with Alan's

button, the choice is scarcely left me," said he. "What are your

instructions?" he added, and took up his pen.

"The first point is to smuggle Alan forth of this country," said I,

"but I need not be repeating that."

"I am little likely to forget it," said Stewart.

"The next thing is the bit money I am owing to Cluny," I went on.

"It would be ill for me to find a conveyance, but that should be no stick to you. It was two pounds five shillings and three-halfpence farthing sterling."

He noted it.

"Then," said I, "there's a Mr. Henderland, a licensed preacher and missionary in Ardgour, that I would like well to get some snuff into the hands of; and, as I daresay you keep touch with your friends in Appin (so near by), it's a job you could doubtless overtake with the other."

"How much snuff are we to say?" he asked.

"I was thinking of two pounds," said I.

"Two," said he.

"Then there's the lass Alison Hastie, in Lime Kilns," said I. "Her that helped Alan and me across the Forth. I was thinking if I could get her a good Sunday gown, such as she could wear with decency in her degree, it would be an ease to my conscience; for the mere truth is, we owe her our two lives."

"I am glad so see you are thrifty, Mr. Balfour," says he, making his notes.

"I would think shame to be otherwise the first day of my fortune,"

said I. "And now, if you will compute the outlay and your own proper charges, I would be glad to know if I could get some spending-money back. It's not that I grudge the whole of it to get Alan safe; it's not that I lack more; but having drawn so much the one day, I think it would have a very ill appearance if I was back again seeking, the next. Only be sure you have enough," I added, "for I am very undesirous to meet with you again."

"Well, and I'm pleased to see you're cautious, too," said the Writer. "But I think ye take a risk to lay so considerable a sum at my discretion."

He said this with a plain sneer.

"I'll have to run the hazard," I replied. "O, and there's another service I would ask, and that's to direct me to a lodging, for I have no roof to my head. But it must be a lodging I may seem to have hit upon by accident, for it would never do if the Lord Advocate were to get any jealousy of our acquaintance."

"Ye may set your weary spirit at rest," said he. "I will never name your name, sir; and it's my belief the Advocate is still so much to be sympathised with that he doesnae ken of your existence."

I saw I had got to the wrong side of the man.

"There's a braw day coming for him, then," said I, "for he'll have to learn of it on the deaf side of his head no later than to-

morrow, when I call on him."

"When ye CALL on him!" repeated Mr. Stewart. "Am I daft, or are

you! What takes ye near the Advocate!"

"O, just to give myself up," said I.

"Mr. Balfour," he cried, "are ye making a mock of me?"

"No, sir," said I, "though I think you have allowed yourself some

such freedom with myself. But I give you to understand once and

for all that I am in no jesting spirit."

"Nor yet me," says Stewart. "And I give yon to understand (if

that's to be the word) that I like the looks of your behaviour less
and less. You come here to me with all sorts of propositions,
which will put me in a train of very doubtful acts and bring me
among very undesirable persons this many a day to come. And then
you tell me you're going straight out of my office to make your
peace with the Advocate! Alan's button here or Alan's button
there, the four quarters of Alan wouldnae bribe me further in."

"I would take it with a little more temper," said I, "and perhaps
we can avoid what you object to. I can see no way for it but to
give myself up, but perhaps you can see another; and if you could,
I could never deny but what I would be rather relieved. For I
think my traffic with his lordship is little likely to agree with
my health. There's just the one thing clear, that I have to give

my evidence; for I hope it'll save Alan's character (what's left of it), and James's neck, which is the more immediate."

He was silent for a breathing-space, and then, "My man," said he, "you'll never be allowed to give such evidence."

"We'll have to see about that," said I; "I'm stiff-necked when I like."

"Ye muckle ass!" cried Stewart, "it's James they want; James has got to hang--Alan, too, if they could catch him--but James whatever! Go near the Advocate with any such business, and you'll see! he'll find a way to muzzle, ye."

"I think better of the Advocate than that," said I.

"The Advocate be dammed!" cries he. "It's the Campbells, man!

You'll have the whole clanjamfry of them on your back; and so will

the Advocate too, poor body! It's extraordinary ye cannot see where

ye stand! If there's no fair way to stop your gab, there's a foul

one gaping. They can put ye in the dock, do ye no see that?" he

cried, and stabbed me with one finger in the leg.

"Ay," said I, "I was told that same no further back than this

morning by another lawyer."

"And who was he?" asked Stewart, "He spoke sense at least."

I told I must be excused from naming him, for he was a decent stout

old Whig, and had little mind to be mixed up in such affairs.

"I think all the world seems to be mixed up in it!" cries Stewart.

"But what said you?"

"I told him what had passed between Rankeillor and myself before

the house of Shaws.

"Well, and so ye will hang!" said he. "Ye'll hang beside James

Stewart. There's your fortune told."

"I hope better of it yet than that," said I; "but I could never

deny there was a risk."

"Risk!" says he, and then sat silent again. "I ought to thank you for your staunchness to my friends, to whom you show a very good spirit," he says, "if you have the strength to stand by it. But I warn you that you're wading deep. I wouldn't put myself in your place (me that's a Stewart born!) for all the Stewarts that ever there were since Noah. Risk? ay, I take over-many; but to be tried in court before a Campbell jury and a Campbell judge, and that in a Campbell country and upon a Campbell quarrel--think what you like of me, Balfour, it's beyond me."

"It's a different way of thinking, I suppose," said I; "I was brought up to this one by my father before me."

"Glory to his bones! he has left a decent son to his name," says he. "Yet I would not have you judge me over-sorely. My case is dooms hard. See, sir, ye tell me ye're a Whig: I wonder what I am. No Whig to be sure; I couldnae be just that. But--laigh in your ear, man--I'm maybe no very keen on the other side."

"Is that a fact?" cried I. "It's what I would think of a man of your intelligence."

"Hut! none of your whillywhas!" {4} cries he. "There's intelligence upon both sides. But for my private part I have no particular desire to harm King George; and as for King James, God bless him! he does very well for me across the water. I'm a lawyer, ye see: fond of my books and my bottle, a good plea, a

well-drawn deed, a crack in the Parliament House with other lawyer

bodies, and perhaps a turn at the golf on a Saturday at e'en.

Where do ye come in with your Hieland plaids and claymores?"

"Well," said I, "it's a fact ye have little of the wild

Highlandman."

"Little?" quoth he. "Nothing, man! And yet I'm Hieland born, and

when the clan pipes, who but me has to dance! The clan and the

name, that goes by all. It's just what you said yourself; my

father learned it to me, and a bonny trade I have of it. Treason

and traitors, and the smuggling of them out and in; and the French

recruiting, weary fall it! and the smuggling through of the

recruits; and their pleas--a sorrow of their pleas! Here have I

been moving one for young Ardsheil, my cousin; claimed the estate
under the marriage contract--a forfeited estate! I told them it
was nonsense: muckle they cared! And there was I cocking behind a
yadvocate that liked the business as little as myself, for it was
fair ruin to the pair of us--a black mark, DISAFFECTED, branded on
our hurdies, like folk's names upon their kye! And what can I do?
I'm a Stewart, ye see, and must fend for my clan and family. Then
no later by than yesterday there was one of our Stewart lads
carried to the Castle. What for? I ken fine: Act of 1736:
recruiting for King Lewie. And you'll see, he'll whistle me in to
be his lawyer, and there'll be another black mark on my chara'ter!
I tell you fair: if I but kent the heid of a Hebrew word from the
hurdies of it, be dammed but I would fling the whole thing up and
turn minister!"

"It's rather a hard position," said I.

"Dooms hard!" cries he. "And that's what makes me think so much of ye--you that's no Stewart--to stick your head so deep in Stewart business. And for what, I do not know: unless it was the sense of duty."

"I hope it will be that," said I.

"Well," says he, "it's a grand quality. But here is my clerk back; and, by your leave, we'll pick a bit of dinner, all the three of us. When that's done, I'll give you the direction of a very decent man, that'll be very fain to have you for a lodger. And I'll fill

your pockets to ye, forbye, out of your ain bag. For this

business'll not be near as dear as ye suppose--not even the ship

part of it."

I made him a sign that his clerk was within hearing.

"Hoot, ye neednae mind for Robbie," cries he. "A Stewart, too,

puir deevil! and has smuggled out more French recruits and

trafficking Papists than what he has hairs upon his face. Why,

it's Robin that manages that branch of my affairs. Who will we

have now, Rob, for across the water!"

"There'll be Andie Scougal, in the Thistle," replied Rob. "I saw

Hoseason the other day, but it seems he's wanting the ship. Then

there'll be Tam Stobo; but I'm none so sure of Tam. I've seen him
colloguing with some gey queer acquaintances; and if was anybody
important, I would give Tam the go-by."

"The head's worth two hundred pounds, Robin," said Stewart.

"Gosh, that'll no be Alan Breck!" cried the clerk.

"Just Alan," said his master.

"Weary winds! that's sayrious," cried Robin. "I'll try Andie,
then; Andie'll be the best."

"It seems it's quite a big business," I observed.

"Mr. Balfour, there's no end to it," said Stewart.

"There was a name your clerk mentioned," I went on: "Hoseason.

That must be my man, I think: Hoseason, of the brig Covenant.

Would you set your trust on him?"

"He didnae behave very well to you and Alan," said Mr. Stewart;

"but my mind of the man in general is rather otherwise. If he had

taken Alan on board his ship on an agreement, it's my notion he

would have proved a just dealer. How say ye, Rob?"

"No more honest skipper in the trade than Eli," said the clerk. "I

would lippen to {5} Eli's word--ay, if it was the Chevalier, or

Appin himsel'," he added.

"And it was him that brought the doctor, wasnae't?" asked the
master.

"He was the very man," said the clerk.

"And I think he took the doctor back?" says Stewart.

"Ay, with his sporran full!" cried Robin. "And Eli kent of that!"

{6}

"Well, it seems it's hard to ken folk rightly," said I.

"That was just what I forgot when ye came in, Mr. Balfour!" says

the Writer.