

### CHAPTER III--I GO TO PILRIG

The next morning, I was no sooner awake in my new lodging than I was up and into my new clothes; and no sooner the breakfast swallowed, than I was forth on my adventures. Alan, I could hope, was fended for; James was like to be a more difficult affair, and I could not but think that enterprise might cost me dear, even as everybody said to whom I had opened my opinion. It seemed I was come to the top of the mountain only to cast myself down; that I had clambered up, through so many and hard trials, to be rich, to be recognised, to wear city clothes and a sword to my side, all to commit mere suicide at the last end of it, and the worst kind of suicide, besides, which is to get hanged at the King's charges.

What was I doing it for? I asked, as I went down the high Street and out north by Leith Wynd. First I said it was to save James Stewart; and no doubt the memory of his distress, and his wife's cries, and a word or so I had let drop on that occasion worked upon me strongly. At the same time I reflected that it was (or ought to be) the most indifferent matter to my father's son, whether James died in his bed or from a scaffold. He was Alan's cousin, to be sure; but so far as regarded Alan, the best thing would be to lie low, and let the King, and his Grace of Argyll, and the corbie crows, pick the bones of his kinsman their own way. Nor could I forget that, while we were all in the pot together, James had shown no such particular anxiety whether for Alan or me.

Next it came upon me I was acting for the sake of justice: and I

thought that a fine word, and reasoned it out that (since we dwelt in politics, at some discomfort to each one of us) the main thing of all must still be justice, and the death of any innocent man a wound upon the whole community. Next, again, it was the Accuser of the Brethren that gave me a turn of his argument; bade me think shame for pretending myself concerned in these high matters, and told me I was but a prating vain child, who had spoken big words to Rankeillor and to Stewart, and held myself bound upon my vanity to make good that boastfulness. Nay, and he hit me with the other end of the stick; for he accused me of a kind of artful cowardice, going about at the expense of a little risk to purchase greater safety. No doubt, until I had declared and cleared myself, I might any day encounter Mungo Campbell or the sheriff's officer, and be recognised, and dragged into the Appin murder by the heels; and, no

doubt, in case I could manage my declaration with success, I should breathe more free for ever after. But when I looked this argument full in the face I could see nothing to be ashamed of. As for the rest, "Here are the two roads," I thought, "and both go to the same place. It's unjust that James should hang if I can save him; and it would be ridiculous in me to have talked so much and then do nothing. It's lucky for James of the Glens that I have boasted beforehand; and none so unlucky for myself, because now I'm committed to do right. I have the name of a gentleman and the means of one; it would be a poor duty that I was wanting in the essence." And then I thought this was a Pagan spirit, and said a prayer in to myself, asking for what courage I might lack, and that I might go straight to my duty like a soldier to battle, and come off again scatheless, as so many do.

This train of reasoning brought me to a more resolved complexion; though it was far from closing up my sense of the dangers that surrounded me, nor of how very apt I was (if I went on) to stumble on the ladder of the gallows. It was a plain, fair morning, but the wind in the east. The little chill of it sang in my blood, and gave me a feeling of the autumn, and the dead leaves, and dead folks' bodies in their graves. It seemed the devil was in it, if I was to die in that tide of my fortunes and for other folks' affairs. On the top of the Calton Hill, though it was not the customary time of year for that diversion, some children were crying and running with their kites. These toys appeared very plain against the sky; I remarked a great one soar on the wind to a high altitude and then plump among the whins; and I thought to

myself at sight of it, "There goes Davie."

My way lay over Mouter's Hill, and through an end of a clachan on the braeside among fields. There was a whirr of looms in it went from house to house; bees bummed in the gardens; the neighbours that I saw at the doorsteps talked in a strange tongue; and I found out later that this was Picardy, a village where the French weavers wrought for the Linen Company. Here I got a fresh direction for Pilrig, my destination; and a little beyond, on the wayside, came by a gibbet and two men hanged in chains. They were dipped in tar, as the manner is; the wind span them, the chains clattered, and the birds hung about the uncanny jumping-jacks and cried. The sight coming on me suddenly, like an illustration of my fears, I could scarce be done with examining it and drinking in discomfort. And,

as I thus turned and turned about the gibbet, what should I strike  
on, but a weird old wife, that sat behind a leg of it, and nodded,  
and talked aloud to herself with becks and courtesies.

"Who are these two, mother?" I asked, and pointed to the corpses.

"A blessing on your precious face!" she cried. "Twa joes {7}

o'mine: just two o' my old joes, my hinny dear."

"What did they suffer for?" I asked.

"Ou, just for the guid cause," said she. "Aften I spaed to them

the way that it would end. Twa shillin' Scots: no pickle mair;

and there are twa bonny callants hingin' for 't! They took it frae

a wean {8} belanged to Brouchton."

"Ay!" said I to myself, and not to the daft limmer, "and did they

come to such a figure for so poor a business? This is to lose all

indeed."

"Gie's your loof, {9} hinny," says she, "and let me spae your weird

to ye."

"No, mother," said I, "I see far enough the way I am. It's an unco

thing to see too far in front."

"I read it in your bree," she said. "There's a bonnie lassie that

has bricht een, and there's a wee man in a brow coat, and a big man



in a pouthered wig, and there's the shadow of the wuddy, {10} joe,

that lies braid across your path. Gie's your loof, hinny, and let

Auld Merren spae it to ye bonny."

The two chance shots that seemed to point at Alan and the daughter

of James More struck me hard; and I fled from the eldritch

creature, casting her a baubee, which she continued to sit and play

with under the moving shadows of the hanged.

My way down the causeway of Leith Walk would have been more

pleasant to me but for this encounter. The old rampart ran among

fields, the like of them I had never seen for artfulness of

agriculture; I was pleased, besides, to be so far in the still

countryside; but the shackles of the gibbet clattered in my head;

and the mope and mows of the old witch, and the thought of the dead men, hag-rode my spirits. To hang on a gallows, that seemed a hard case; and whether a man came to hang there for two shillings Scots, or (as Mr. Stewart had it) from the sense of duty, once he was tarred and shackled and hung up, the difference seemed small.

There might David Balfour hang, and other lads pass on their errands and think light of him; and old daft limmers sit at a leg-foot and spae their fortunes; and the clean genty maids go by, and look to the other aide, and hold a nose. I saw them plain, and they had grey eyes, and their screens upon their heads were of the Drummed colours.

I was thus in the poorest of spirits, though still pretty resolved, when I came in view of Pilrig, a pleasant gabled house set by the

walkside among some brave young woods. The laird's horse was standing saddled at the door as I came up, but himself was in the study, where he received me in the midst of learned works and musical instruments, for he was not only a deep philosopher but much of a musician. He greeted me at first pretty well, and when he had read Rankeillor's letter, placed himself obligingly at my disposal.

"And what is it, cousin David!" said he--"since it appears that we are cousins--what is this that I can do for you! A word to Prestongrange! Doubtless that is easily given. But what should be the word?"

"Mr. Balfour," said I, "if I were to tell you my whole story the

way it fell out, it's my opinion (and it was Rankeillor's before me) that you would be very little made up with it."

"I am sorry to hear this of you, kinsman," says he.

"I must not take that at your hands, Mr. Balfour," said I; "I have nothing to my charge to make me sorry, or you for me, but just the common infirmities of mankind. 'The guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of my whole nature,' so much I must answer for, and I hope I have been taught where to look for help," I said; for I judged from the look of the man he would think the better of me if I knew my questions. {11}

"But in the way of worldly honour I have no great stumble to reproach myself with; and my difficulties have befallen me very

much against my will and (by all that I can see) without my fault.

My trouble is to have become dipped in a political complication,

which it is judged you would be blythe to avoid a knowledge of."

"Why, very well, Mr. David," he replied, "I am pleased to see you

are all that Rankeillor represented. And for what you say of

political complications, you do me no more than justice. It is my

study to be beyond suspicion, and indeed outside the field of it.

The question is," says he, "how, if I am to know nothing of the

matter, I can very well assist you?"

"Why sir," said I, "I propose you should write to his lordship,

that I am a young man of reasonable good family and of good means:

both of which I believe to be the case."

"I have Rankeillor's word for it," said Mr. Balfour, "and I count that a warran-dice against all deadly."

"To which you might add (if you will take my word for so much) that I am a good churchman, loyal to King George, and so brought up," I went on.

"None of which will do you any harm," said Mr. Balfour.

"Then you might go on to say that I sought his lordship on a matter of great moment, connected with His Majesty's service and the administration of justice," I suggested.

"As I am not to hear the matter," says the laird, "I will not take upon myself to qualify its weight. 'Great moment' therefore falls, and 'moment' along with it. For the rest I might express myself much as you propose."

"And then, sir," said I, and rubbed my neck a little with my thumb, "then I would be very desirous if you could slip in a word that might perhaps tell for my protection."

"Protection?" says he, "for your protection! Here is a phrase that somewhat dampens me. If the matter be so dangerous, I own I would be a little loath to move in it blindfold."

"I believe I could indicate in two words where the thing sticks,"

said I.

"Perhaps that would be the best," said he.

"Well, it's the Appin murder," said I.

He held up both his hands. "Sirs! sirs!" cried he.

I thought by the expression of his face and voice that I had lost

my helper.

"Let me explain. . ." I began.

"I thank you kindly, I will hear no more of it," says he. "I



decline in toto to hear more of it. For your name's sake and Rankeillor's, and perhaps a little for your own, I will do what I can to help you; but I will hear no more upon the facts. And it is my first clear duty to warn you. These are deep waters, Mr. David, and you are a young man. Be cautious and think twice."

"It is to be supposed I will have thought oftener than that, Mr. Balfour," said I, "and I will direct your attention again to Rankeillor's letter, where (I hope and believe) he has registered his approval of that which I design."

"Well, well," said he; and then again, "Well, well! I will do what I can for you." There with he took a pen and paper, sat a while in thought, and began to write with much consideration. "I understand

that Rankeillor approved of what you have in mind?" he asked

presently.

"After some discussion, sir, he bade me to go forward in God's

name," said I.

"That is the name to go in," said Mr. Balfour, and resumed his

writing. Presently, he signed, re-read what he had written, and

addressed me again. "Now here, Mr. David," said he, "is a letter

of introduction, which I will seal without closing, and give into

your hands open, as the form requires. But, since I am acting in

the dark, I will just read it to you, so that you may see if it

will secure your end -

"PILRIG, August 26th, 1751.

"My Lord,--This is to bring to your notice my namesake and cousin,

David Balfour Esquire of Shaws, a young gentleman of unblemished

descent and good estate. He has enjoyed, besides, the more

valuable advantages of a godly training, and his political

principles are all that your lordship can desire. I am not in Mr.

Balfour's confidence, but I understand him to have a matter to

declare, touching His Majesty's service and the administration of

justice; purposes for which your Lordship's zeal is known. I

should add that the young gentleman's intention is known to and

approved by some of his friends, who will watch with hopeful

anxiety the event of his success or failure.

"Whereupon," continued Mr. Balfour, "I have subscribed myself with the usual compliments. You observe I have said 'some of your friends'; I hope you can justify my plural?"

"Perfectly, sir; my purpose is known and approved by more than one," said I. "And your letter, which I take a pleasure to thank you for, is all I could have hoped."

"It was all I could squeeze out," said he; "and from what I know of the matter you design to meddle in, I can only pray God that it may prove sufficient."