

CHAPTER V--IN THE ADVOCATE'S HOUSE

The next day, Sabbath, August 27th, I had the occasion I had long looked forward to, to hear some of the famous Edinburgh preachers, all well known to me already by the report of Mr Campbell. Alas! and I might just as well have been at Essendean, and sitting under Mr. Campbell's worthy self! the turmoil of my thoughts, which dwelt continually on the interview with Prestongrange, inhibiting me from all attention. I was indeed much less impressed by the reasoning of the divines than by the spectacle of the thronged congregation in the churches, like what I imagined of a theatre or (in my then disposition) of an assize of trial; above all at the West Kirk, with its three tiers of galleries, where I went in the vain hope that I might see Miss Drummond.

On the Monday I betook me for the first time to a barber's, and was very well pleased with the result. Thence to the Advocate's, where the red coats of the soldiers showed again about his door, making a bright place in the close. I looked about for the young lady and her gillies: there was never a sign of them. But I was no sooner shown into the cabinet or antechamber where I had spent so wearyful a time upon the Saturday, than I was aware of the tall figure of James More in a corner. He seemed a prey to a painful uneasiness, reaching forth his feet and hands, and his eyes speeding here and there without rest about the walls of the small chamber, which recalled to me with a sense of pity the man's wretched situation. I suppose it was partly this, and partly my strong continuing interest in his daughter, that moved me to accost him.

"Give you a good-morning, sir," said I.

"And a good-morning to you, sir," said he.

"You bide tryst with Prestongrange?" I asked.

"I do, sir, and I pray your business with that gentleman be more agreeable than mine," was his reply.

"I hope at least that yours will be brief, for I suppose you pass before me," said I.

"All pass before me," he said, with a shrug and a gesture upward of

the open hands. "It was not always so, sir, but times change. It was not so when the sword was in the scale, young gentleman, and the virtues of the soldier might sustain themselves."

There came a kind of Highland snuffle out of the man that raised my dander strangely.

"Well, Mr. Macgregor," said I, "I understand the main thing for a soldier is to be silent, and the first of his virtues never to complain."

"You have my name, I perceive"--he bowed to me with his arms crossed--"though it's one I must not use myself. Well, there is a publicity--I have shown my face and told my name too often in the

beards of my enemies. I must not wonder if both should be known to many that I know not."

"That you know not in the least, sir," said I, "nor yet anybody else; but the name I am called, if you care to hear it, is Balfour."

"It is a good name," he replied, civilly; "there are many decent folk that use it. And now that I call to mind, there was a young gentleman, your namesake, that marched surgeon in the year '45 with my battalion."

"I believe that would be a brother to Balfour of Baith," said I, for I was ready for the surgeon now.

"The same, sir," said James More. "And since I have been fellow-soldier with your kinsman, you must suffer me to grasp your hand."

He shook hands with me long and tenderly, beaming on me the while as though he had found a brother.

"Ah!" says he, "these are changed days since your cousin and I heard the balls whistle in our lugs."

"I think he was a very far-away cousin," said I, drily, "and I ought to tell you that I never clapped eyes upon the man."

"Well, well," said he, "it makes no change. And you--I do not

think you were out yourself, sir--I have no clear mind of your face, which is one not probable to be forgotten."

"In the year you refer to, Mr. Macgregor, I was getting skelped in the parish school," said I.

"So young!" cries he. "Ah, then, you will never be able to think what this meeting is to me. In the hour of my adversity, and here in the house of my enemy, to meet in with the blood of an old brother-in-arms--it heartens me, Mr. Balfour, like the skirting of the highland pipes! Sir, this is a sad look back that many of us have to make: some with falling tears. I have lived in my own country like a king; my sword, my mountains, and the faith of my friends and kinsmen sufficed for me. Now I lie in a stinking

dungeon; and do you know, Mr. Balfour," he went on, taking my arm and beginning to lead me about, "do you know, sir, that I lack mere neCESSaries? The malice of my foes has quite sequestered my resources. I lie, as you know, sir, on a trumped-up charge, of which I am as innocent as yourself. They dare not bring me to my trial, and in the meanwhile I am held naked in my prison. I could have wished it was your cousin I had met, or his brother Baith himself. Either would, I know, have been rejoiced to help me; while a comparative stranger like yourself--"

I would be ashamed to set down all he poured out to me in this beggarly vein, or the very short and grudging answers that I made to him. There were times when I was tempted to stop his mouth with some small change; but whether it was from shame or pride--whether

it was for my own sake or Catriona's--whether it was because I
thought him no fit father for his daughter, or because I resented
that grossness of immediate falsity that clung about the man
himself--the thing was clean beyond me. And I was still being
wheedled and preached to, and still being marched to and fro, three
steps and a turn, in that small chamber, and had already, by some
very short replies, highly incensed, although not finally
discouraged, my beggar, when Prestongrange appeared in the doorway
and bade me eagerly into his big chamber.

"I have a moment's engagements," said he; "and that you may not sit
empty-handed I am going to present you to my three braw daughters,
of whom perhaps you may have heard, for I think they are more
famous than papa. This way."

He led me into another long room above, where a dry old lady sat at a frame of embroidery, and the three handsomest young women (I suppose) in Scotland stood together by a window.

"This is my new friend, Mr Balfour," said he, presenting me by the arm, "David, here is my sister, Miss Grant, who is so good as keep my house for me, and will be very pleased if she can help you. And here," says he, turning to the three younger ladies, "here are my

THREE BRAW DAUGHTERS. A fair question to ye, Mr. Davie: which of the three is the best favoured? And I wager he will never have the impudence to propound honest Alan Ramsay's answer!"

Hereupon all three, and the old Miss Grant as well, cried out

against this sally, which (as I was acquainted with the verses he referred to) brought shame into my own cheek. It seemed to me a citation unpardonable in a father, and I was amazed that these ladies could laugh even while they reprov'd, or made believe to.

Under cover of this mirth, Prestongrange got forth of the chamber, and I was left, like a fish upon dry land, in that very unsuitable society. I could never deny, in looking back upon what followed, that I was eminently stockish; and I must say the ladies were well drilled to have so long a patience with me. The aunt indeed sat close at her embroidery, only looking now and again and smiling; but the misses, and especially the eldest, who was besides the most handsome, paid me a score of attentions which I was very ill able to repay. It was all in vain to tell myself I was a young fellow

of some worth as well as a good estate, and had no call to feel abashed before these lasses, the eldest not so much older than myself, and no one of them by any probability half as learned.

Reasoning would not change the fact; and there were times when the colour came into my face to think I was shaved that day for the first time.

The talk going, with all their endeavours, very heavily, the eldest took pity on my awkwardness, sat down to her instrument, of which she was a passed mistress, and entertained me for a while with playing and singing, both in the Scots and in the Italian manners; this put me more at my ease, and being reminded of Alan's air that he had taught me in the hole near Carriden, I made so bold as to whistle a bar or two, and ask if she knew that.

She shook her head. "I never heard a note of it," said she.

"Whistle it all through. And now once again," she added, after I
had done so.

Then she picked it out upon the keyboard, and (to my surprise)
instantly enriched the same with well-sounding chords, and sang, as
she played, with a very droll expression and broad accent -

"Haenae I got just the lilt of it?

Isnae this the tune that ye whustled?"

"You see," she says, "I can do the poetry too, only it won't rhyme.

And then again:

"I am Miss Grant, sib to the Advocate:

You, I believe, are Dauvit Balfour."

I told her how much astonished I was by her genius.

"And what do you call the name of it?" she asked.

"I do not know the real name," said I. "I just call it Alan's

air."

She looked at me directly in the face. "I shall call it David's
air," said she; "though if it's the least like what your namesake
of Israel played to Saul I would never wonder that the king got
little good by it, for it's but melancholy music. Your other name
I do not like; so if you was ever wishing to hear your tune again
you are to ask for it by mine."

This was said with a significance that gave my heart a jog. "Why
that, Miss Grant?" I asked.

"Why," says she, "if ever you should come to get hanged, I will set
your last dying speech and confession to that tune and sing it."

This put it beyond a doubt that she was partly informed of my story and peril. How, or just how much, it was more difficult to guess.

It was plain she knew there was something of danger in the name of Alan, and thus warned me to leave it out of reference; and plain she knew that I stood under some criminal suspicion. I judged besides that the harshness of her last speech (which besides she had followed up immediately with a very noisy piece of music) was to put an end to the present conversation. I stood beside her, affecting to listen and admire, but truly whirled away by my own thoughts. I have always found this young lady to be a lover of the mysterious; and certainly this first interview made a mystery that was beyond my plummet. One thing I learned long after, the hours of the Sunday had been well employed, the bank porter had been found and examined, my visit to Charles Stewart was discovered, and

the deduction made that I was pretty deep with James and Alan, and most likely in a continued correspondence with the last. Hence this broad hint that was given me across the harpsichord.

In the midst of the piece of music, one of the younger misses, who was at a window over the close, cried on her sisters to come quick, for there was "Grey eyes again." The whole family trooped there at once, and crowded one another for a look. The window whither they ran was in an odd corner of that room, gave above the entrance door, and flanked up the close.

"Come, Mr. Balfour," they cried, "come and see. She is the most beautiful creature! She hangs round the close-head these last days, always with some wretched-like gillies, and yet seems quite a

lady."

I had no need to look; neither did I look twice, or long. I was afraid she might have seen me there, looking down upon her from that chamber of music, and she without, and her father in the same house, perhaps begging for his life with tears, and myself come but newly from rejecting his petitions. But even that glance set me in a better conceit of myself and much less awe of the young ladies. They were beautiful, that was beyond question, but Catriona was beautiful too, and had a kind of brightness in her like a coal of fire. As much as the others cast me down, she lifted me up. I remembered I had talked easily with her. If I could make no hand of it with these fine maids, it was perhaps something their own fault. My embarrassment began to be a little mingled and lightened

with a sense of fun; and when the aunt smiled at me from her embroidery, and the three daughters unbent to me like a baby, all with "papa's orders" written on their faces, there were times when I could have found it in my heart to smile myself.

Presently papa returned, the same kind, happy-like, pleasant-spoken man.

"Now, girls," said he, "I must take Mr. Balfour away again; but I hope you have been able to persuade him to return where I shall be always gratified to find him."

So they each made me a little farthing compliment, and I was led away.

If this visit to the family had been meant to soften my resistance,
it was the worst of failures. I was no such ass but what I
understood how poor a figure I had made, and that the girls would
be yawning their jaws off as soon as my stiff back was turned. I
felt I had shown how little I had in me of what was soft and
graceful; and I longed for a chance to prove that I had something
of the other stuff, the stern and dangerous.

Well, I was to be served to my desire, for the scene to which he
was conducting me was of a different character.