CHAPTER XII--ON THE MARCH AGAIN WITH ALAN

It was likely between one and two; the moon (as I have said) was down; a strongish wind, carrying a heavy wrack of cloud, had set in suddenly from the west; and we began our movement in as black a night as ever a fugitive or a murderer wanted. The whiteness of the path guided us into the sleeping town of Broughton, thence through Picardy, and beside my old acquaintance the gibbet of the two thieves. A little beyond we made a useful beacon, which was a light in an upper window of Lochend. Steering by this, but a good deal at random, and with some trampling of the harvest, and stumbling and falling down upon the banks, we made our way across country, and won forth at last upon the linky, boggy muirland that they call the Figgate Whins. Here, under a bush of whin, we lay

down the remainder of that night and slumbered.

The day called us about five. A beautiful morning it was, the high westerly wind still blowing strong, but the clouds all blown away to Europe. Alan was already sitting up and smiling to himself. It was my first sight of my friend since we were parted, and I looked upon him with enjoyment. He had still the same big great-coat on his back; but (what was new) he had now a pair of knitted boot-hose drawn above the knee. Doubtless these were intended for disguise; but, as the day promised to be warm, he made a most unseasonable figure.

"Well, Davie," said he, "is this no a bonny morning? Here is a day that looks the way that a day ought to. This is a great change of

it from the belly of my haystack; and while you were there sottering and sleeping I have done a thing that maybe I do very seldom."

"And what was that?" said I.

"O, just said my prayers," said he.

"And where are my gentry, as ye call them?" I asked.

"Gude kens," says he; "and the short and the long of it is that we must take our chance of them. Up with your foot-soles, Davie! Forth, Fortune, once again of it! And a bonny walk we are like to have."

So we went east by the beach of the sea, towards where the salt-pans were smoking in by the Esk mouth. No doubt there was a by-ordinary bonny blink of morning sun on Arthur's Seat and the green Pentlands; and the pleasantness of the day appeared to set Alan among nettles.

"I feel like a gomeral," says he, "to be leaving Scotland on a day like this. It sticks in my head; I would maybe like it better to stay here and hing."

"Ay, but ye wouldnae, Alan," said I.

"No, but what France is a good place too," he explained; "but it's

some way no the same. It's brawer I believe, but it's no Scotland.

I like it fine when I'm there, man; yet I kind of weary for Scots

divots and the Scots peat-reek."

"If that's all you have to complain of, Alan, it's no such great

affair," said I.

"And it sets me ill to be complaining, whatever," said he, "and me

but new out of yon deil's haystack."

"And so you were unco weary of your haystack?" I asked.

"Weary's nae word for it," said he. "I'm not just precisely a man

that's easily cast down; but I do better with caller air and the

lift above my head. I'm like the auld Black Douglas (wasnae't?)

that likit better to hear the laverock sing than the mouse cheep.

And yon place, ye see, Davie--whilk was a very suitable place to

hide in, as I'm free to own--was pit mirk from dawn to gloaming.

There were days (or nights, for how would I tell one from other?)

that seemed to me as long as a long winter."

"How did you know the hour to bide your tryst?" I asked.

"The goodman brought me my meat and a drop brandy, and a candle-

dowp to eat it by, about eleeven," said he. "So, when I had

swallowed a bit, it would he time to be getting to the wood. There

I lay and wearied for ye sore, Davie," says he, laying his hand on

my shoulder "and guessed when the two hours would be about by--

unless Charlie Stewart would come and tell me on his watch--and

then back to the dooms haystack. Na, it was a driech employ, and

praise the Lord that I have warstled through with it!"

"What did you do with yourself?" I asked.

"Faith," said he, "the best I could! Whiles I played at the

knucklebones. I'm an extraordinar good hand at the knucklebones,

but it's a poor piece of business playing with naebody to admire

ye. And whiles I would make songs."

"What were they about?" says I.

"O, about the deer and the heather," says he, "and about the

ancient old chiefs that are all by with it lang syne, and just about what songs are about in general. And then whiles I would make believe I had a set of pipes and I was playing. I played some grand springs, and I thought I played them awful bonny; I vow whiles that I could hear the squeal of them! But the great affair is that it's done with."

With that he carried me again to my adventures, which he heard all over again with more particularity, and extraordinary approval, swearing at intervals that I was "a queer character of a callant."

"So ye were frich'ened of Sim Fraser?" he asked once.

"In troth was I!" cried I.

"So would I have been, Davie," said he. "And that is indeed a driedful man. But it is only proper to give the deil his due: and I can tell you he is a most respectable person on the field of war."

"Is he so brave?" I asked.

"Brave!" said he. "He is as brave as my steel sword."

The story of my duel set him beside himself.

"To think of that!" he cried. "I showed ye the trick in Corrynakiegh too. And three times--three times disarmed! It's a

disgrace upon my character that learned ye! Here, stand up, out with your airn; ye shall walk no step beyond this place upon the road till ye can do yoursel' and me mair credit."

"Alan," said I, "this is midsummer madness. Here is no time for fencing lessons."

"I cannae well say no to that," he admitted. "But three times, man! And you standing there like a straw bogle and rinning to fetch your ain sword like a doggie with a pocket-napkin! David, this man Duncansby must be something altogether by-ordinar! He maun be extraordinar skilly. If I had the time, I would gang straight back and try a turn at him mysel'. The man must be a provost."

"You silly fellow," said I, "you forget it was just me."

"Na," said he, "but three times!"

"When ye ken yourself that I am fair incompetent," I cried.

"Well, I never heard tell the equal of it," said he.

"I promise you the one thing, Alan," said I. "The next time that we forgather, I'll be better learned. You shall not continue to bear the disgrace of a friend that cannot strike."

"Ay, the next time!" says he. "And when will that be, I would like

to ken?"

"Well, Alan, I have had some thoughts of that, too," said I; "and my plan is this. It's my opinion to be called an advocate."

"That's but a weary trade, Davie," says Alan, "and rather a blagyard one forby. Ye would be better in a king's coat than that."

"And no doubt that would be the way to have us meet," cried I. "But as you'll be in King Lewie's coat, and I'll be in King Geordie's, we'll have a dainty meeting of it."

"There's some sense in that," he admitted

"An advocate, then, it'll have to be," I continued, "and I think it a more suitable trade for a gentleman that was THREE TIMES disarmed. But the beauty of the thing is this: that one of the best colleges for that kind of learning--and the one where my kinsman, Pilrig, made his studies--is the college of Leyden in Holland. Now, what say you, Alan? Could not a cadet of Royal Ecossais get a furlough, slip over the marches, and call in upon a Leyden student?"

"Well, and I would think he could!" cried he. "Ye see, I stand well in with my colonel, Count Drummond-Melfort; and, what's mair to the purpose I have a cousin of mine lieutenant-colonel in a regiment of the Scots-Dutch. Naething could be mair proper than

what I would get a leave to see Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart of Halkett's. And Lord Melfort, who is a very scienteefic kind of a man, and writes books like Caesar, would be doubtless very pleased to have the advantage of my observes."

"Is Lord Meloort an author, then?" I asked, for much as Alan thought of soldiers, I thought more of the gentry that write books.

"The very same, Davie," said he. "One would think a colonel would have something better to attend to. But what can I say that make songs?"

"Well, then," said I, "it only remains you should give me an address to write you at in France; and as soon as I am got to

Leyden I will send you mine."

"The best will be to write me in the care of my chieftain," said he, "Charles Stewart, of Ardsheil, Esquire, at the town of Melons, in the Isle of France. It might take long, or it might take short, but it would aye get to my hands at the last of it."

We had a haddock to our breakfast in Musselburgh, where it amused me vastly to hear Alan. His great-coat and boot-hose were extremely remarkable this warm morning, and perhaps some hint of an explanation had been wise; but Alan went into that matter like a business, or I should rather say, like a diversion. He engaged the goodwife of the house with some compliments upon the rizzoring of our haddocks; and the whole of the rest of our stay held her in

talk about a cold he had taken on his stomach, gravely relating all manner of symptoms and sufferings, and hearing with a vast show of interest all the old wives' remedies she could supply him with in return.

We left Musselburgh before the first ninepenny coach was due from Edinburgh for (as Alan said) that was a rencounter we might very well avoid. The wind although still high, was very mild, the sun shone strong, and Alan began to suffer in proportion. From Prestonpans he had me aside to the field of Gladsmuir, where he exerted himself a great deal more than needful to describe the stages of the battle. Thence, at his old round pace, we travelled to Cockenzie. Though they were building herring-busses there at Mrs. Cadell's, it seemed a desert-like, back-going town, about half

full of ruined houses; but the ale-house was clean, and Alan, who was now in a glowing heat, must indulge himself with a bottle of ale, and carry on to the new luckie with the old story of the cold upon his stomach, only now the symptoms were all different.

I sat listening; and it came in my mind that I had scarce ever heard him address three serious words to any woman, but he was always drolling and fleering and making a private mock of them, and yet brought to that business a remarkable degree of energy and interest. Something to this effect I remarked to him, when the good-wife (as chanced) was called away.

"What do ye want?" says he. "A man should aye put his best foot forrit with the womankind; he should aye give them a bit of a story

to divert them, the poor lambs! It's what ye should learn to attend to, David; ye should get the principles, it's like a trade. Now, if this had been a young lassie, or onyways bonnie, she would never have heard tell of my stomach, Davie. But aince they're too old to be seeking joes, they a' set up to be apotecaries. Why? What do I ken? They'll be just the way God made them, I suppose. But I think a man would be a gomeral that didnae give his attention to the same."

And here, the luckie coming back, he turned from me as if with impatience to renew their former conversation. The lady had branched some while before from Alan's stomach to the case of a goodbrother of her own in Aberlady, whose last sickness and demise she was describing at extraordinary length. Sometimes it was

merely dull, sometimes both dull and awful, for she talked with unction. The upshot was that I fell in a deep muse, looking forth of the window on the road, and scarce marking what I saw. Presently had any been looking they might have seen me to start.

"We pit a fomentation to his feet," the good-wife was saying, "and a het stane to his wame, and we gied him hyssop and water of pennyroyal, and fine, clean balsam of sulphur for the hoast. . . "

"Sir," says I, cutting very quietly in, "there's a friend of mine gone by the house."

"Is that e'en sae?" replies Alan, as though it were a thing of small account. And then, "Ye were saying, mem?" says he; and the

wearyful wife went on.

Presently, however, he paid her with a half-crown piece, and she must go forth after the change.

"Was it him with the red head?" asked Alan.

"Ye have it," said I.

"What did I tell you in the wood?" he cried. "And yet it's strange he should be here too! Was he his lane?"

"His lee-lane for what I could see," said I.

"Did he gang by?" he asked.

"Straight by," said I, "and looked neither to the right nor left."

"And that's queerer yet," said Alan. "It sticks in my mind, Davie, that we should be stirring. But where to?--deil hae't! This is like old days fairly," cries he.

"There is one big differ, though," said I, "that now we have money in our pockets."

"And another big differ, Mr. Balfour," says he, "that now we have dogs at our tail. They're on the scent; they're in full cry, David. It's a bad business and be damned to it." And he sat

thinking hard with a look of his that I knew well.

"I'm saying, Luckie," says he, when the goodwife returned, "have ye a back road out of this change house?"

She told him there was and where it led to.

"Then, sir," says he to me, "I think that will be the shortest road for us. And here's good-bye to ye, my braw woman; and I'll no forget thon of the cinnamon water."

We went out by way of the woman's kale yard, and up a lane among fields. Alan looked sharply to all sides, and seeing we were in a little hollow place of the country, out of view of men, sat down.

"Now for a council of war, Davie," said he. "But first of all, a bit lesson to ye. Suppose that I had been like you, what would yon old wife have minded of the pair of us! Just that we had gone out by the back gate. And what does she mind now? A fine, canty, friendly, cracky man, that suffered with the stomach, poor body! and was real ta'en up about the goodbrother. O man, David, try and learn to have some kind of intelligence!"

"I'll try, Alan," said I.

"And now for him of the red head," says he; "was he gaun fast or slow?"

"Betwixt and between," said I.

"No kind of a hurry about the man?" he asked.

"Never a sign of it," said I.

"Nhm!" said Alan, "it looks queer. We saw nothing of them this morning on the Whins; he's passed us by, he doesnae seem to be looking, and yet here he is on our road! Dod, Davie, I begin to take a notion. I think it's no you they're seeking, I think it's me; and I think they ken fine where they're gaun."

"They ken?" I asked.

"I think Andie Scougal's sold me--him or his mate wha kent some part of the affair--or else Charlie's clerk callant, which would be a pity too," says Alan; "and if you askit me for just my inward private conviction, I think there'll be heads cracked on Gillane sands."

"Alan," I cried, "if you're at all right there'll be folk there and to spare. It'll be small service to crack heads."

"It would aye be a satisfaction though," says Alan. But bide a bit; bide a bit; I'm thinking--and thanks to this bonny westland wind, I believe I've still a chance of it. It's this way, Davie. I'm no trysted with this man Scougal till the gloaming comes. BUT," says he, "IF I CAN GET A BIT OF A WIND OUT OF THE WEST I'LL

BE THERE LONG OR THAT," he says, "AND LIE-TO FOR YE BEHIND THE ISLE OF FIDRA. Now if your gentry kens the place, they ken the time forbye. Do ye see me coming, Davie? Thanks to Johnnie Cope and other red-coat gomerals, I should ken this country like the back of my hand; and if ye're ready for another bit run with Alan Breck, we'll can cast back inshore, and come to the seaside again by Dirleton. If the ship's there, we'll try and get on board of her. If she's no there, I'll just have to get back to my weary haystack. But either way of it, I think we will leave your gentry whistling on their thumbs."

"I believe there's some chance in it," said I. "Have on with ye, Alan!"