

CHAPTER XIV--THE BASS

I had no thought where they were taking me; only looked here and there for the appearance of a ship; and there ran the while in my head a word of Ransome's--the TWENTY-POUNDERS. If I were to be exposed a second time to that same former danger of the plantations, I judged it must turn ill with me; there was no second Alan; and no second shipwreck and spare yard to be expected now; and I saw myself hoe tobacco under the whip's lash. The thought chilled me; the air was sharp upon the water, the stretchers of the boat drenched with a cold dew: and I shivered in my place beside the steersman. This was the dark man whom I have called hitherto the Lowlander; his name was Dale, ordinarily called Black Andie. Feeling the thrill of my shiver, he very kindly handed me a rough

jacket full of fish-scales, with which I was glad to cover myself.

"I thank you for this kindness," said I, "and will make so free as to repay it with a warning. You take a high responsibility in this affair. You are not like these ignorant, barbarous Highlanders, but know what the law is and the risks of those that break it."

"I am no just exactly what ye would ca' an extremist for the law," says he, "at the best of times; but in this business I act with a good warranty."

"What are you going to do with me?" I asked.

"Nae harm," said he, "nae harm ava'. Ye'll have strong freens, I'm

thinking. Ye'll be richt eneuch yet."

There began to fall a greyness on the face of the sea; little dabs of pink and red, like coals of slow fire, came in the east; and at the same time the geese awakened, and began crying about the top of the Bass. It is just the one crag of rock, as everybody knows, but great enough to carve a city from. The sea was extremely little, but there went a hollow plowter round the base of it. With the growing of the dawn I could see it clearer and clearer; the straight crags painted with sea-birds' droppings like a morning frost, the sloping top of it green with grass, the clan of white geese that cried about the sides, and the black, broken buildings of the prison sitting close on the sea's edge.

At the sight the truth came in upon me in a clap.

"It's there you're taking me!" I cried.

"Just to the Bass, mannie," said he: "Whaur the auld saints were afore ye, and I misdoubt if ye have come so fairly by your preeson."

"But none dwells there now," I cried; "the place is long a ruin."

"It'll be the mair pleisand a change for the solan geese, then," quoth Andie dryly.

The day coming slowly brighter I observed on the bilge, among the

big stones with which fisherfolk ballast their boats, several kegs
and baskets, and a provision of fuel. All these were discharged
upon the crag. Andie, myself, and my three Highlanders (I call
them mine, although it was the other way about), landed along with
them. The sun was not yet up when the boat moved away again, the
noise of the oars on the thole-pins echoing from the cliffs, and
left us in our singular reclusion:

Andie Dale was the Prefect (as I would jocularly call him) of the
Bass, being at once the shepherd and the gamekeeper of that small
and rich estate. He had to mind the dozen or so of sheep that fed
and fattened on the grass of the sloping part of it, like beasts
grazing the roof of a cathedral. He had charge besides of the
solan geese that roosted in the crags; and from these an

extraordinary income is derived. The young are dainty eating, as much as two shillings a-piece being a common price, and paid willingly by epicures; even the grown birds are valuable for their oil and feathers; and a part of the minister's stipend of North Berwick is paid to this day in solan geese, which makes it (in some folks' eyes) a parish to be coveted. To perform these several businesses, as well as to protect the geese from poachers, Andie had frequent occasion to sleep and pass days together on the crag; and we found the man at home there like a farmer in his stading.

Bidding us all shoulder some of the packages, a matter in which I made haste to bear a hand, he led us in by a looked gate, which was the only admission to the island, and through the ruins of the fortress, to the governor's house. There we saw by the ashes in the chimney and a standing bed-place in one corner, that he made

his usual occupation.

This bed he now offered me to use, saying he supposed I would set up to be gentry.

"My gentrice has nothing to do with where I lie," said I. "I bless God I have lain hard ere now, and can do the same again with thankfulness. While I am here, Mr. Andie, if that be your name, I will do my part and take my place beside the rest of you; and I ask you on the other hand to spare me your mockery, which I own I like ill."

He grumbled a little at this speech, but seemed upon reflection to approve it. Indeed, he was a long-headed, sensible man, and a good

Whig and Presbyterian; read daily in a pocket Bible, and was both able and eager to converse seriously on religion, leaning more than a little towards the Cameronian extremes. His morals were of a more doubtful colour. I found he was deep in the free trade, and used the rains of Tantallon for a magazine of smuggled merchandise.

As for a gauger, I do not believe he valued the life of one at half-a-farthing. But that part of the coast of Lothian is to this day as wild a place, and the commons there as rough a crew, as any in Scotland.

One incident of my imprisonment is made memorable by a consequence it had long after. There was a warship at this time stationed in the Firth, the Seahorse, Captain Palliser. It chanced she was cruising in the month of September, plying between Fife and

Lothian, and sounding for sunk dangers. Early one fine morning she was seen about two miles to east of us, where she lowered a boat, and seemed to examine the Wildfire Rocks and Satan's Bush, famous dangers of that coast. And presently after having got her boat again, she came before the wind and was headed directly for the Base. This was very troublesome to Andie and the Highlanders; the whole business of my sequestration was designed for privacy, and here, with a navy captain perhaps blundering ashore, it looked to become public enough, if it were nothing worse. I was in a minority of one, I am no Alan to fall upon so many, and I was far from sure that a warship was the least likely to improve my condition. All which considered, I gave Andie my parole of good behaviour and obedience, and was had briskly to the summit of the rock, where we all lay down, at the cliff's edge, in different

places of observation and concealment. The Seahorse came straight on till I thought she would have struck, and we (looking giddily down) could see the ship's company at their quarters and hear the leadsman singing at the lead. Then she suddenly wore and let fly a volley of I know not how many great guns. The rock was shaken with the thunder of the sound, the smoke flowed over our heads, and the geese rose in number beyond computation or belief. To hear their screaming and to see the twinkling of their wings, made a most inimitable curiosity; and I suppose it was after this somewhat childish pleasure that Captain Palliser had come so near the Bass. He was to pay dear for it in time. During his approach I had the opportunity to make a remark upon the rigging of that ship by which I ever after knew it miles away; and this was a means (under Providence) of my averting from a friend a great calamity, and

inflicting on Captain Palliser himself a sensible disappointment.

All the time of my stay on the rock we lived well. We had small ale and brandy, and oatmeal, of which we made our porridge night and morning. At times a boat came from the Castleton and brought us a quarter of mutton, for the sheep upon the rock we must not touch, these being specially fed to market. The geese were unfortunately out of season, and we let them be. We fished ourselves, and yet more often made the geese to fish for us: observing one when he had made a capture and searing him from his prey ere he had swallowed it.

The strange nature of this place, and the curiosities with which it abounded, held me busy and amused. Escape being impossible, I was

allowed my entire liberty, and continually explored the surface of the isle wherever it might support the foot of man. The old garden of the prison was still to be observed, with flowers and pot-herbs running wild, and some ripe cherries on a bush. A little lower stood a chapel or a hermit's cell; who built or dwelt in it, none may know, and the thought of its age made a ground of many meditations. The prison, too, where I now bivouacked with Highland cattle-thieves, was a place full of history, both human and divine.

I thought it strange so many saints and martyrs should have gone by there so recently, and left not so much as a leaf out of their Bibles, or a name carved upon the wall, while the rough soldier lads that mounted guard upon the battlements had filled the neighbourhood with their mementoes--broken tobacco-pipes for the most part, and that in a surprising plenty, but also metal buttons

from their coats. There were times when I thought I could have heard the pious sound of psalms out of the martyr's dungeons, and seen the soldiers tramp the ramparts with their glinting pipes, and the dawn rising behind them out of the North Sea.

No doubt it was a good deal Andie and his tales that put these fancies in my head. He was extraordinarily well acquainted with the story of the rock in all particulars, down to the names of private soldiers, his father having served there in that same capacity. He was gifted besides with a natural genius for narration, so that the people seemed to speak and the things to be done before your face. This gift of his and my assiduity to listen brought us the more close together. I could not honestly deny but what I liked him; I soon saw that he liked me; and indeed, from the

first I had set myself out to capture his good-will. An odd
circumstance (to be told presently) effected this beyond my
expectation; but even in early days we made a friendly pair to be a
prisoner and his gaoler.

I should trifle with my conscience if I pretended my stay upon the
Bass was wholly disagreeable. It seemed to me a safe place, as
though I was escaped there out of my troubles. No harm was to be
offered me; a material impossibility, rock and the deep sea,
prevented me from fresh attempts; I felt I had my life safe and my
honour safe, and there were times when I allowed myself to gloat on
them like stolen waters. At other times my thoughts were very
different, I recalled how strong I had expressed myself both to
Rankeillor and to Stewart; I reflected that my captivity upon the

Bass, in view of a great part of the coasts of Fife and Lothian,
was a thing I should be thought more likely to have invented than
endured; and in the eyes of these two gentlemen, at least, I must
pass for a boaster and a coward. Now I would take this lightly
enough; tell myself that so long as I stood well with Catriona
Drummond, the opinion of the rest of man was but moonshine and
spilled water; and thence pass off into those meditations of a
lover which are so delightful to himself and must always appear so
surprisingly idle to a reader. But anon the fear would take me
otherwise; I would be shaken with a perfect panic of self-esteem,
and these supposed hard judgments appear an injustice impossible to
be supported. With that another train of thought would be
presented, and I had scarce begun to be concerned about men's
judgments of myself, than I was haunted with the remembrance of

James Stewart in his dungeon and the lamentations of his wife.

Then, indeed, passion began to work in me; I could not forgive

myself to sit there idle: it seemed (if I were a man at all) that

I could fly or swim out of my place of safety; and it was in such

humours and to amuse my self-reproaches that I would set the more

particularly to win the good side of Andie Dale.

At last, when we two were alone on the summit of the rock on a

bright morning, I put in some hint about a bribe. He looked at me,

cast back his head, and laughed out loud.

"Ay, you're funny, Mr. Dale," said I, "but perhaps if you'll glance

an eye upon that paper you may change your note."

The stupid Highlanders had taken from me at the time of my seizure nothing but hard money, and the paper I now showed Andie was an acknowledgment from the British Linen Company for a considerable sum.

He read it. "Troth, and ye're nane sae ill aff," said he.

"I thought that would maybe vary your opinions," said I.

"Hout!" said he. "It shows me ye can bribe; but I'm no to be bribit."

"We'll see about that yet a while," says I. "And first, I'll show you that I know what I am talking. You have orders to detain me

here till after Thursday, 21st September."

"Ye're no a'thegether wrong either," says Andie. "I'm to let you

gang, bar orders contrair, on Saturday, the 23rd."

I could not but feel there was something extremely insidious in

this arrangement. That I was to re-appear precisely in time to be

too late would cast the more discredit on my tale, if I were minded

to tell one; and this screwed me to fighting point.

"Now then, Andie, you that kens the world, listen to me, and think

while ye listen," said I. "I know there are great folks in the

business, and I make no doubt you have their names to go upon. I

have seen some of them myself since this affair began, and said my

say into their faces too. But what kind of a crime would this be
that I had committed? or what kind of a process is this that I am
fallen under? To be apprehended by some ragged John-Hielandman on
August 30th, carried to a rickie of old stones that is now neither
fort nor gaol (whatever it once was) but just the gamekeeper's
lodge of the Bass Rock, and set free again, September 23rd, as
secretly as I was first arrested--does that sound like law to you?
or does it sound like justice? or does it not sound honestly like a
piece of some low dirty intrigue, of which the very folk that
meddle with it are ashamed?"

"I canna gainsay ye, Shaws. It looks unco underhand," says Andie.

"And werenae the folk guid sound Whigs and true-blue Presbyterians

I would has seen them ayont Jordan and Jeroozlem or I would have

set hand to it."

"The Master of Lovat'll be a braw Whig," says I, "and a grand

Presbyterian."

"I ken naething by him," said he. "I hae nae trokings wi' Lovats."

"No, it'll be Prestongrange that you'll be dealing with," said I.

"Ah, but I'll no tell ye that," said Andie.

"Little need when I ken," was my retort.

"There's just the ae thing ye can be fairly sure of, Shaws," says

Andie. "And that is that (try as ye please) I'm no dealing wi' yoursel'; nor yet I amnae goin' to," he added.

"Well, Andie, I see I'll have to be speak out plain with you," I replied. And told him so much as I thought needful of the facts.

He heard me out with some serious interest, and when I had done, seemed to consider a little with himself.

"Shaws," said he at last, "I'll deal with the naked hand. It's a queer tale, and no very creditable, the way you tell it; and I'm far frae minting that is other than the way that ye believe it. As for yoursel', ye seem to me rather a dacent-like young man. But me, that's aulder and mair judeecious, see perhaps a wee bit

further forrit in the job than what ye can dae. And here the
maitter clear and plain to ye. There'll be nae skaith to yoursel'
if I keep ye here; far free that, I think ye'll be a hantle better
by it. There'll be nae skaith to the kintry--just ae mair
Hielantman hangit--Gude kens, a guid riddance! On the ither hand,
it would be considerable skaith to me if I would let you free.
Sae, speakin' as a guid Whig, an honest freen' to you, and an
anxious freen' to my ainsel', the plain fact is that I think ye'll
just have to bide here wi' Andie an' the solans."

"Andie," said I, laying my hand upon his knee, "this Hielantman's
innocent."

"Ay, it's a peety about that," said he. "But ye see, in this

world, the way God made it, we cannae just get a'thing that we

want."

CHAPTER XV--BLACK ANDIE'S TALE OF TOD LAPRAIK

I have yet said little of the Highlanders. They were all three of

the followers of James More, which bound the accusation very tight

about their master's neck. All understood a word or two of

English, but Neil was the only one who judged he had enough of it

for general converse, in which (when once he got embarked) his

company was often tempted to the contrary opinion. They were

tractable, simple creatures; showed much more courtesy than might

have been expected from their raggedness and their uncouth