

## CHAPTER XX--I CONTINUE TO MOVE IN GOOD SOCIETY

For about exactly two months I remained a guest in Prestongrange's family, where I bettered my acquaintance with the bench, the bar, and the flower of Edinburgh company. You are not to suppose my education was neglected; on the contrary, I was kept extremely busy. I studied the French, so as to be more prepared to go to Leyden; I set myself to the fencing, and wrought hard, sometimes three hours in the day, with notable advancement; at the suggestion of my cousin, Pilrig, who was an apt musician, I was put to a singing class; and by the orders of my Miss Grant, to one for the dancing, at which I must say I proved far from ornamental.

However, all were good enough to say it gave me an address a little more genteel; and there is no question but I learned to manage my

coat skirts and sword with more dexterity, and to stand in a room as though the same belonged to me. My clothes themselves were all earnestly re-ordered; and the most trifling circumstance, such as where I should tie my hair, or the colour of my ribbon, debated among the three misses like a thing of weight. One way with another, no doubt I was a good deal improved to look at, and acquired a bit of modest air that would have surprised the good folks at Essendean.

The two younger misses were very willing to discuss a point of my habiliment, because that was in the line of their chief thoughts.

I cannot say that they appeared any other way conscious of my presence; and though always more than civil, with a kind of heartless cordiality, could not hide how much I wearied them. As

for the aunt, she was a wonderful still woman; and I think she gave me much the same attention as she gave the rest of the family, which was little enough. The eldest daughter and the Advocate himself were thus my principal friends, and our familiarity was much increased by a pleasure that we took in common. Before the court met we spent a day or two at the house of Grange, living very nobly with an open table, and here it was that we three began to ride out together in the fields, a practice afterwards maintained in Edinburgh, so far as the Advocate's continual affairs permitted. When we were put in a good frame by the briskness of the exercise, the difficulties of the way, or the accidents of bad weather, my shyness wore entirely off; we forgot that we were strangers, and speech not being required, it flowed the more naturally on. Then it was that they had my story from me, bit by bit, from the time

that I left Essendean, with my voyage and battle in the Covenant,  
wanderings in the heather, etc.; and from the interest they found  
in my adventures sprung the circumstance of a jaunt we made a  
little later on, on a day when the courts were not sitting, and of  
which I will tell a trifle more at length.

We took horse early, and passed first by the house of Shaws, where  
it stood smokeless in a great field of white frost, for it was yet  
early in the day. Here Prestongrange alighted down, gave me his  
horse, and proceeded alone to visit my uncle. My heart, I remember,  
swelled up bitter within me at the sight of that bare house and the  
thought of the old miser sitting chattering within in the cold  
kitchen!

"There is my home," said I; "and my family."

"Poor David Balfour!" said Miss Grant.

What passed during the visit I have never heard; but it would doubtless not be very agreeable to Ebenezer, for when the Advocate came forth again his face was dark.

"I think you will soon be the laird indeed, Mr. Davie," says he, turning half about with the one foot in the stirrup.

"I will never pretend sorrow," said I; and, to say the truth, during his absence Miss Grant and I had been embellishing the place in fancy with plantations, parterres, and a terrace--much as I have

since carried out in fact.

Thence we pushed to the Queensferry, where Rankeillor gave us a good welcome, being indeed out of the body to receive so great a visitor. Here the Advocate was so unaffectedly good as to go quite fully over my affairs, sitting perhaps two hours with the Writer in his study, and expressing (I was told) a great esteem for myself and concern for my fortunes. To while this time, Miss Grant and I and young Rankeillor took boat and passed the Hope to Limekilns. Rankeillor made himself very ridiculous (and, I thought, offensive) with his admiration for the young lady, and to my wonder (only it is so common a weakness of her sex) she seemed, if anything, to be a little gratified. One use it had: for when we were come to the other side, she laid her commands on him to mind the boat, while

she and I passed a little further to the alehouse. This was her own thought, for she had been taken with my account of Alison Hastie, and desired to see the lass herself. We found her once more alone--indeed, I believe her father wrought all day in the fields--and she curtsied dutifully to the gentry-folk and the beautiful young lady in the riding-coat.

"Is this all the welcome I am to get?" said I, holding out my hand.

"And have you no more memory of old friends?"

"Keep me! wha's this of it?" she cried, and then, "God's truth,

it's the tautit {19} laddie!"

"The very same," says

"Mony's the time I've thocht upon you and your freen, and blythe am  
I to see in your brows," {20} she cried. "Though I kent ye were  
come to your ain folk by the grand present that ye sent me and that  
I thank ye for with a' my heart."

"There," said Miss Grant to me, "run out by with ye, like a guid  
bairn. I didnae come here to stand and haud a candle; it's her and  
me that are to crack."

I suppose she stayed ten minutes in the house, but when she came  
forth I observed two things--that her eyes were reddened, and a  
silver brooch was gone out of her bosom. This very much affected  
me.



"I never saw you so well adorned," said I.

"O Davie man, dinna be a pompous gowk!" said she, and was more than usually sharp to me the remainder of the day.

About candlelight we came home from this excursion.

For a good while I heard nothing further of Catriona--my Miss Grant

remaining quite impenetrable, and stopping my mouth with

pleasantries. At last, one day that she returned from walking and

found me alone in the parlour over my French, I thought there was

something unusual in her looks; the colour heightened, the eyes

sparkling high, and a bit of a smile continually bitten in as she

regarded me. She seemed indeed like the very spirit of mischief, and, walking briskly in the room, had soon involved me in a kind of quarrel over nothing and (at the least) with nothing intended on my side. I was like Christian in the slough--the more I tried to clamber out upon the side, the deeper I became involved; until at last I heard her declare, with a great deal of passion, that she would take that answer from the hands of none, and I must down upon my knees for pardon.

The causelessness of all this fuff stirred my own bile. "I have said nothing you can properly object to," said I, "and as for my knees, that is an attitude I keep for God."

"And as a goddess I am to be served!" she cried, shaking her brown

locks at me and with a bright colour. "Every man that comes within

waft of my petticoats shall use me so!"

"I will go so far as ask your pardon for the fashion's sake,

although I vow I know not why," I replied. "But for these play-

acting postures, you can go to others."

"O Davie!" she said. "Not if I was to beg you?"

I bethought me I was fighting with a woman, which is the same as to

say a child, and that upon a point entirely formal.

"I think it a bairnly thing," I said, "not worthy in you to ask, or

me to render. Yet I will not refuse you, neither," said I; "and

the stain, if there be any, rests with yourself." And at that I

kneeled fairly down.

"There!" she cried. "There is the proper station, there is where I

have been manoeuvring to bring you." And then, suddenly, "Kep,"

{21} said she, flung me a folded billet, and ran from the apartment

laughing.

The billet had neither place nor date. "Dear Mr. David," it began,

"I get your news continually by my cousin, Miss Grant, and it is a

pleisand hearing. I am very well, in a good place, among good

folk, but necessitated to be quite private, though I am hoping that

at long last we may meet again. All your friendships have been

told me by my loving cousin, who loves us both. She bids me to

send you this writing, and oversees the same. I will be asking you  
to do all her commands, and rest your affectionate friend, Catriona  
Macgregor-Drummond. P.S.--Will you not see my cousin, Allardyce?"

I think it not the least brave of my campaigns (as the soldiers  
say) that I should have done as I was here bidden and gone  
forthright to the house by Dean. But the old lady was now entirely  
changed and supple as a glove. By what means Miss Grant had  
brought this round I could never guess; I am sure, at least, she  
dared not to appear openly in the affair, for her papa was  
compromised in it pretty deep. It was he, indeed, who had  
persuaded Catriona to leave, or rather, not to return, to her  
cousin's, placing her instead with a family of Gregorys--decent  
people, quite at the Advocate's disposition, and in whom she might

have the more confidence because they were of his own clan and

family. These kept her private till all was ripe, heated and

helped her to attempt her father's rescue, and after she was

discharged from prison received her again into the same secrecy.

Thus Prestongrange obtained and used his instrument; nor did there

leak out the smallest word of his acquaintance with the daughter of

James More. There was some whispering, of course, upon the escape

of that discredited person; but the Government replied by a show of

rigour, one of the cell porters was flogged, the lieutenant of the

guard (my poor friend, Duncansby) was broken of his rank, and as

for Catriona, all men were well enough pleased that her fault

should be passed by in silence.

I could never induce Miss Grant to carry back an answer. "No," she

would say, when I persisted, "I am going to keep the big feet out of the platter." This was the more hard to bear, as I was aware she saw my little friend many times in the week, and carried her my news whenever (as she said) I "had behaved myself." At last she treated me to what she called an indulgence, and I thought rather more of a banter. She was certainly a strong, almost a violent, friend to all she liked, chief among whom was a certain frail old gentlewoman, very blind and very witty, who dwelt on the top of a tall land on a strait close, with a nest of linnets in a cage, and thronged all day with visitors. Miss Grant was very fond to carry me there and put me to entertain her friend with the narrative of my misfortunes: and Miss Tibbie Ramsay (that was her name) was particular kind, and told me a great deal that was worth knowledge of old folks and past affairs in Scotland. I should say that from

her chamber window, and not three feet away, such is the straitness of that close, it was possible to look into a barred loophole lighting the stairway of the opposite house.

Here, upon some pretext, Miss Grant left me one day alone with Miss Ramsay. I mind I thought that lady inattentive and like one preoccupied. I was besides very uncomfortable, for the window, contrary to custom, was left open and the day was cold. All at once the voice of Miss Grant sounded in my ears as from a distance.

"Here, Shaws!" she cried, "keek out of the window and see what I have brought you."

I think it was the prettiest sight that ever I beheld. The well of



the close was all in clear shadow where a man could see distinctly,

the walls very black and dingy; and there from the barred loophole

I saw two faces smiling across at me--Miss Grant's and Catriona's.

"There!" says Miss Grant, "I wanted her to see you in your braws

like the lass of Limekilns. I wanted her to see what I could make

of you, when I buckled to the job in earnest!"

It came in my mind that she had been more than common particular

that day upon my dress; and I think that some of the same care had

been bestowed upon Catriona. For so merry and sensible a lady,

Miss Grant was certainly wonderful taken up with duds.

"Catriona!" was all I could get out.

As for her, she said nothing in the world, but only waved her hand  
and smiled to me, and was suddenly carried away again from before  
the loophole.

That vision was no sooner lost than I ran to the house door, where  
I found I was locked in; thence back to Miss Ramsay, crying for the  
key, but might as well have cried upon the castle rock. She had  
passed her word, she said, and I must be a good lad. It was  
impossible to burst the door, even if it had been mannerly; it was  
impossible I should leap from the window, being seven storeys above  
ground. All I could do was to crane over the close and watch for  
their reappearance from the stair. It was little to see, being no  
more than the tops of their two heads each on a ridiculous bobbin

of skirts, like to a pair of pincushions. Nor did Catriona so much as look up for a farewell; being prevented (as I heard afterwards) by Miss Grant, who told her folk were never seen to less advantage than from above downward.

On the way home, as soon as I was set free, I upbraided Miss Grant with her cruelty.

"I am sorry you was disappointed," says she demurely. "For my part

I was very pleased. You looked better than I dreaded; you looked--

if it will not make you vain--a mighty pretty young man when you

appeared in the window. You are to remember that she could not see

your feet," says she, with the manner of one reassuring me.

"O!" cried I, "leave my feet be--they are no bigger than my neighbours'."

"They are even smaller than some," said she, "but I speak in parables like a Hebrew prophet."

"I marvel little they were sometimes stoned!" says I. "But, you miserable girl, how could you do it? Why should you care to tantalise me with a moment?"

"Love is like folk," says she; "it needs some kind of vivers." {22}

"Oh, Barbara, let me see her properly!" I pleaded. "YOU can--you see her when you please; let me have half an hour."

"Who is it that is managing this love affair! You! Or me?" she asked, and as I continued to press her with my instances, fell back upon a deadly expedient: that of imitating the tones of my voice when I called on Catriona by name; with which, indeed, she held me in subjection for some days to follow.

There was never the least word heard of the memorial, or none by me. Prestongrange and his grace the Lord President may have heard of it (for what I know) on the deafest sides of their heads; they kept it to themselves, at least--the public was none the wiser; and in course of time, on November 8th, and in the midst of a prodigious storm of wind and rain, poor James of the Glens was duly hanged at Lettermore by Ballachulish.

So there was the final upshot of my politics! Innocent men have perished before James, and are like to keep on perishing (in spite of all our wisdom) till the end of time. And till the end of time young folk (who are not yet used with the duplicity of life and men) will struggle as I did, and make heroical resolves, and take long risks; and the course of events will push them upon the one side and go on like a marching army. James was hanged; and here was I dwelling in the house of Prestongrange, and grateful to him for his fatherly attention. He was hanged; and behold! when I met Mr. Simon in the causeway, I was fain to pull off my beaver to him like a good little boy before his dominie. He had been hanged by fraud and violence, and the world wagged along, and there was not a pennyweight of difference; and the villains of that horrid plot

were decent, kind, respectable fathers of families, who went to

kirk and took the sacrament!

But I had had my view of that detestable business they call

politics--I had seen it from behind, when it is all bones and

blackness; and I was cured for life of any temptations to take part

in it again. A plain, quiet, private path was that which I was

ambitious to walk in, when I might keep my head out of the way of

dangers and my conscience out of the road of temptation. For, upon

a retrospect, it appeared I had not done so grandly, after all; but

with the greatest possible amount of big speech and preparation,

had accomplished nothing.

The 25th of the same month a ship was advertised to sail from

Leith; and I was suddenly recommended to make up my mails for Leyden. To Prestongrange I could, of course, say nothing; for I had already been a long while sorning on his house and table. But with his daughter I was more open, bewailing my fate that I should be sent out of the country, and assuring her, unless she should bring me to farewell with Catriona, I would refuse at the last hour.

"Have I not given you my advice?" she asked.

"I know you have," said I, "and I know how much I am beholden to you already, and that I am bidden to obey your orders. But you must confess you are something too merry a lass at times to lippen {23} to entirely."



"I will tell you, then," said she. "Be you on board by nine o'clock forenoon; the ship does not sail before one; keep your boat alongside; and if you are not pleased with my farewells when I shall send them, you can come ashore again and seek Katrine for yourself."

Since I could make no more of her, I was fain to be content with this.

The day came round at last when she and I were to separate. We had been extremely intimate and familiar; I was much in her debt; and what way we were to part was a thing that put me from my sleep, like the vails I was to give to the domestic servants. I knew she

considered me too backward, and rather desired to rise in her opinion on that head. Besides which, after so much affection shown and (I believe) felt upon both sides, it would have looked cold-like to be anyways stiff. Accordingly, I got my courage up and my words ready, and the last chance we were like to be alone, asked pretty boldly to be allowed to salute her in farewell.

"You forget yourself strangely, Mr. Balfour," said she. "I cannot call to mind that I have given you any right to presume on our acquaintancy."

I stood before her like a stopped clock, and knew not what to think, far less to say, when of a sudden she cast her arms about my neck and kissed me with the best will in the world.

"You inimitable bairn?" she cried. "Did you think that I would let  
us part like strangers? Because I can never keep my gravity at you  
five minutes on end, you must not dream I do not love you very  
well: I am all love and laughter, every time I cast an eye on you!  
And now I will give you an advice to conclude your education, which  
you will have need of before it's very long.

Never ASK womenfolk. They're bound to answer 'No'; God never made  
the lass that could resist the temptation. It's supposed by  
divines to be the curse of Eve: because she did not say it when  
the devil offered her the apple, her daughters can say nothing  
else."

"Since I am so soon to lose my bonny professor," I began.

"This is gallant, indeed," says she curtsying.

"I would put the one question," I went on. "May I ask a lass to  
marry to me?"

"You think you could not marry her without!" she asked. "Or else  
get her to offer?"

"You see you cannot be serious," said I.

"I shall be very serious in one thing, David," said she: "I shall  
always be your friend."

As I got to my horse the next morning, the four ladies were all at that same window whence we had once looked down on Catriona, and all cried farewell and waved their pocket napkins as I rode away. One out of the four I knew was truly sorry; and at the thought of that, and how I had come to the door three months ago for the first time, sorrow and gratitude made a confusion in my mind.

PART II--FATHER AND DAUGHTER