

CHAPTER XXII--HELVOETSLUYS

The weather in the end considerably worsened; the wind sang in the shrouds, the sea swelled higher, and the ship began to labour and cry out among the billows. The song of the leadsman in the chains was now scarce ceasing, for we thrud all the way among shoals.

About nine in the morning, in a burst of wintry sun between two squalls of hail, I had my first look of Holland--a line of windmills birling in the breeze. It was besides my first knowledge of these daft-like contrivances, which gave me a near sense of foreign travel and a new world and life. We came to an anchor about half-past eleven, outside the harbour of Helvoetsluys, in a place where the sea sometimes broke and the ship pitched outrageously. You may be sure we were all on deck save Mrs.

Gebbie, some of us in cloaks, others mantled in the ship's tarpaulins, all clinging on by ropes, and jesting the most like old sailor-folk that we could imitate.

Presently a boat, that was backed like a partancrab, came gingerly alongside, and the skipper of it hailed our master in the Dutch.

Thence Captain Sang turned, very troubled-like, to Catriona; and the rest of us crowding about, the nature of the difficulty was made plain to all. The Rose was bound to the port of Rotterdam, whither the other passengers were in a great impatience to arrive, in view of a conveyance due to leave that very evening in the direction of the Upper Germany. This, with the present half-gale of wind, the captain (if no time were lost) declared himself still capable to save. Now James More had trysted in Helvoet with his

daughter, and the captain had engaged to call before the port and place her (according to the custom) in a shore boat. There was the boat, to be sure, and here was Catriona ready: but both our master and the patroon of the boat scrupled at the risk, and the first was in no humour to delay.

"Your father," said he, "would be gey an little pleased if we was to break a leg to ye, Miss Drummond, let-a-be drowning of you.

Take my way of it," says he, "and come on-by with the rest of us here to Rotterdam. Ye can get a passage down the Maes in a sailing scoot as far as to the Brill, and thence on again, by a place in a rattel-waggon, back to Helvoet."

But Catriona would hear of no change. She looked white-like as she

beheld the bursting of the sprays, the green seas that sometimes poured upon the fore-castle, and the perpetual bounding and swooping of the boat among the billows; but she stood firmly by her father's orders. "My father, James More, will have arranged it so," was her first word and her last. I thought it very idle and indeed wanton in the girl to be so literal and stand opposite to so much kind advice; but the fact is she had a very good reason, if she would have told us. Sailing scoots and rattel-waggons are excellent things; only the use of them must first be paid for, and all she was possessed of in the world was just two shillings and a penny halfpenny sterling. So it fell out that captain and passengers, not knowing of her destitution--and she being too proud to tell them--spoke in vain.

"But you ken nae French and nae Dutch neither," said one.

"It is very true," says she, "but since the year '46 there are so

many of the honest Scotch abroad that I will be doing very well. I

thank you."

There was a pretty country simplicity in this that made some laugh,

others looked the more sorry, and Mr. Gebbie fall outright in a

passion. I believe he knew it was his duty (his wife having

accepted charge of the girl) to have gone ashore with her and seen

her safe: nothing would have induced him to have done so, since it

must have involved the lose of his conveyance; and I think he made

it up to his conscience by the loudness of his voice. At least he

broke out upon Captain Sang, raging and saying the thing was a

disgrace; that it was mere death to try to leave the ship, and at any event we could not cast down an innocent maid in a boatful of nasty Holland fishers, and leave her to her fate. I was thinking something of the same; took the mate upon one side, arranged with him to send on my chests by track-scoot to an address I had in Leyden, and stood up and signalled to the fishers.

"I will go ashore with the young lady, Captain Sang," said I. "It is all one what way I go to Leyden;" and leaped at the same time into the boat, which I managed not so elegantly but what I fell with two of the fishers in the bilge.

From the boat the business appeared yet more precarious than from the ship, she stood so high over us, swung down so swift, and

menaced us so perpetually with her plunging and passaging upon the anchor cable. I began to think I had made a fool's bargain, that it was merely impossible Catriona should be got on board to me, and that I stood to be set ashore at Helvoet all by myself and with no hope of any reward but the pleasure of embracing James More, if I should want to. But this was to reckon without the lass's courage. She had seen me leap with very little appearance (however much reality) of hesitation; to be sure, she was not to be beat by her discarded friend. Up she stood on the bulwarks and held by a stay, the wind blowing in her petticoats, which made the enterprise more dangerous, and gave us rather more of a view of her stockings than would be thought genteel in cities. There was no minute lost, and scarce time given for any to interfere if they had wished the same. I stood up on the other side and spread my arms; the ship swung

down on us, the patroon humoured his boat nearer in than was perhaps wholly safe, and Catriona leaped into the air. I was so happy as to catch her, and the fishers readily supporting us, escaped a fall. She held to me a moment very tight, breathing quick and deep; thence (she still clinging to me with both hands) we were passed aft to our places by the steersman; and Captain Sang and all the crew and passengers cheering and crying farewell, the boat was put about for shore.

As soon as Catriona came a little to herself she unhandled me suddenly, but said no word. No more did I; and indeed the whistling of the wind and the breaching of the sprays made it no time for speech; and our crew not only toiled excessively but made extremely little way, so that the Rose had got her anchor and was

off again before we had approached the harbour mouth.

We were no sooner in smooth water than the patroon, according to their beastly Hollands custom, stopped his boat and required of us our fares. Two guilders was the man's demand--between three and four shillings English money--for each passenger. But at this Catriona began to cry out with a vast deal of agitation. She had asked of Captain Sang, she said, and the fare was but an English shilling. "Do you think I will have come on board and not ask first?" cries she. The patroon scolded back upon her in a lingo where the oaths were English and the rest right Hollands; till at last (seeing her near tears) I privately slipped in the rogue's hand six shillings, whereupon he was obliging enough to receive from her the other shilling without more complaint. No doubt I was

a good deal nettled and ashamed. I like to see folk thrifty, but

not with so much passion; and I daresay it would be rather coldly

that I asked her, as the boat moved on again for shore, where it

was that she was trysted with her father.

"He is to be inquired of at the house of one Sprott, an honest

Scotch merchant," says she; and then with the same breath, "I am

wishing to thank you very much--you are a brave friend to me."

"It will be time enough when I get you to your father," said I,

little thinking that I spoke so true. "I can tell him a fine tale

of a loyal daughter."

"O, I do not think I will be a loyal girl, at all events," she

cried, with a great deal of painfulness in the expression. "I do not think my heart is true."

"Yet there are very few that would have made that leap, and all to obey a father's orders," I observed.

"I cannot have you to be thinking of me so," she cried again.

"When you had done that same, how would I stop behind? And at all events that was not all the reasons." Whereupon, with a burning face, she told me the plain truth upon her poverty.

"Good guide us!" cried I, "what kind of daft-like proceeding is this, to let yourself be launched on the continent of Europe with an empty purse--I count it hardly decent--scant decent!" I cried.

"You forget James More, my father, is a poor gentleman," said she.

"He is a hunted exile."

"But I think not all your friends are hunted exiles," I exclaimed.

"And was this fair to them that care for you? Was it fair to me?"

was it fair to Miss Grant that counselled you to go, and would be

driven fair horn-mad if she could hear of it? Was it even fair to

these Gregory folk that you were living with, and used you

lovingly? It's a blessing you have fallen in my hands! Suppose

your father hindered by an accident, what would become of you here,

and you your lee-lone in a strange place? The thought of the thing

frightens me," I said.

"I will have lied to all of them," she replied. "I will have told them all that I had plenty. I told HER too. I could not be lowering James More to them."

I found out later on that she must have lowered him in the very dust, for the lie was originally the father's, not the daughter's, and she thus obliged to persevere in it for the man's reputation.

But at the time I was ignorant of this, and the mere thought of her destitution and the perils in which she must have fallen, had ruffled me almost beyond reason.

"Well, well, well," said I, "you will have to learn more sense."

I left her mails for the moment in an inn upon the shore, where I

got a direction for Sprott's house in my new French, and we walked there--it was some little way--beholding the place with wonder as we went. Indeed, there was much for Scots folk to admire: canals and trees being intermingled with the houses; the houses, each within itself, of a brave red brick, the colour of a rose, with steps and benches of blue marble at the cheek of every door, and the whole town so clean you might have dined upon the causeway. Sprott was within, upon his ledgers, in a low parlour, very neat and clean, and set out with china and pictures, and a globe of the earth in a brass frame. He was a big-chafted, ruddy, lusty man, with a crooked hard look to him; and he made us not that much civility as offer us a seat.

"Is James More Macgregor now in Helvoet, sir?" says I.

"I ken nobody by such a name," says he, impatient-like.

"Since you are so particular," says I, "I will amend my question,
and ask you where we are to find in Helvoet one James Drummond,
alias Macgregor, alias James More, late tenant in Inveronachile?"

"Sir," says he, "he may be in Hell for what I ken, and for my part
I wish he was."

"The young lady is that gentleman's daughter, sir," said I, "before
whom, I think you will agree with me, it is not very becoming to
discuss his character."

"I have nothing to make either with him, or her, or you!" cries he
in his gross voice.

"Under your favour, Mr. Sprott," said I, "this young lady is come
from Scotland seeking him, and by whatever mistake, was given the
name of your house for a direction. An error it seems to have
been, but I think this places both you and me--who am but her
fellow-traveller by accident--under a strong obligation to help our
countrywoman."

"Will you ding me daft?" he cries. "I tell ye I ken naething and
care less either for him or his breed. I tell ye the man owes me
money."

"That may very well be, sir," said I, who was now rather more angry than himself. "At least, I owe you nothing; the young lady is under my protection; and I am neither at all used with these manners, nor in the least content with them."

As I said this, and without particularly thinking what I did, I drew a step or two nearer to his table; thus striking, by mere good fortune, on the only argument that could at all affect the man. The blood left his lusty countenance.

"For the Lord's sake dinna be hasty, sir!" he cried. "I am truly wishfu' no to be offensive. But ye ken, sir, I'm like a wheen guid-natured, honest, canty auld fellows--my bark is waur nor my bite. To hear me, ye micht whiles fancy I was a wee thing dour;

but na, na! it's a kind auld fallow at heart, Sandie Sprott! And

ye could never imagine the fyke and fash this man has been to me."

"Very good, sir," said I. "Then I will make that much freedom with

your kindness as trouble you for your last news of Mr. Drummond."

"You're welcome, sir!" said he. "As for the young leddy (my

respects to her!), he'll just have clean forgotten her. I ken the

man, ye see; I have lost siller by him ere now. He thinks of

naebody but just himsel'; clan, king, or dauchter, if he can get

his wameful, he would give them a' the go-by! ay, or his

correspondent either. For there is a sense in whilk I may be

nearly almost said to be his correspondent. The fact is, we are

employed thegither in a business affair, and I think it's like to

turn out a dear affair for Sandie Sprott. The man's as guid's my
pairtner, and I give ye my mere word I ken naething by where he is.

He micht be coming here to Helvoet; he micht come here the morn, he
michtnae come for a twalmouth; I would wonder at naething--or just
at the ae thing, and that's if he was to pay me my siller. Ye see
what way I stand with it; and it's clear I'm no very likely to
meddle up with the young leddy, as ye ca' her. She cannae stop
here, that's ae thing certain sure. Dod, sir, I'm a lone man! If
I was to tak her in, its highly possible the hellicat would try and
gar me marry her when he turned up."

"Enough of this talk," said I. "I will take the young leddy among
better friends. Give me, pen, ink, and paper, and I will leave
here for James More the address of my correspondent in Leyden. He

can inquire from me where he is to seek his daughter."

This word I wrote and sealed; which while I was doing, Sprott of his own motion made a welcome offer, to charge himself with Miss Drummond's mails, and even send a porter for them to the inn. I advanced him to that effect a dollar or two to be a cover, and he gave me an acknowledgment in writing of the sum.

Whereupon (I giving my arm to Catriona) we left the house of this unpalatable rascal. She had said no word throughout, leaving me to judge and speak in her place; I, upon my side, had been careful not to embarrass her by a glance; and even now, although my heart still glowed inside of me with shame and anger, I made it my affair to seem quite easy.

"Now," said I, "let us get back to yon same inn where they can speak the French, have a piece of dinner, and inquire for conveyances to Rotterdam. I will never be easy till I have you safe again in the hands of Mrs. Gebbie."

"I suppose it will have to be," said Catriona, "though whoever will be pleased, I do not think it will be her. And I will remind you this once again that I have but one shilling, and three baubees."

"And just this once again," said I, "I will remind you it was a blessing that I came alongst with you."

"What else would I be thinking all this time?" says she, and I

thought weighed a little on my arm. "It is you that are the good

friend to me."

CHAPTER XXIII--TRAVELS IN HOLLAND

The rattel-waggon, which is a kind of a long waggon set with

benches, carried us in four hours of travel to the great city of

Rotterdam. It was long past dark by then, but the streets were

pretty brightly lighted and thronged with wild-like, outlandish

characters--bearded Hebrews, black men, and the hordes of

courtesans, most indecently adorned with finery and stopping seamen

by their very sleeves; the clash of talk about us made our heads to

whirl; and what was the most unexpected of all, we appeared to be

no more struck with all these foreigners than they with us. I made