

CHAPTER XXIX--WE MEET IN DUNKIRK.

Altogether, then, I was scarce so miserable the next days but what I had many hopeful and happy snatches; threw myself with a good deal of constancy upon my studies; and made out to endure the time till Alan should arrive, or I might hear word of Catriona by the means of James More. I had altogether three letters in the time of our separation. One was to announce their arrival in the town of Dunkirk in France, from which place James shortly after started alone upon a private mission. This was to England and to see Lord Holderness; and it has always been a bitter thought that my good money helped to pay the charges of the same. But he has need of a long spoon who soups with the de'il, or James More either. During this absence, the time was to fall due for another letter; and as the letter was the condition of his stipend, he had been so careful

as to prepare it beforehand and leave it with Catriona to be despatched. The fact of our correspondence aroused her suspicions, and he was no sooner gone than she had burst the seal. What I received began accordingly in the writing of James More:

"My dear Sir,--Your esteemed favour came to hand duly, and I have to acknowledge the inclosure according to agreement. It shall be all faithfully expended on my daughter, who is well, and desires to be remembered to her dear friend. I find her in rather a melancholy disposition, but trust in the mercy of God to see her re-established. Our manner of life is very much alone, but we solace ourselves with the melancholy tunes of our native mountains, and by walking up the margin of the sea that lies next to Scotland.

It was better days with me when I lay with five wounds upon my body
on the field of Gladsmuir. I have found employment here in the
haras of a French nobleman, where my experience is valued. But, my
dear Sir, the wages are so exceedingly unsuitable that I would be
ashamed to mention them, which makes your remittances the more
necessary to my daughter's comfort, though I daresay the sight of
old friends would be still better.

"My dear Sir,

"Your affectionate, obedient servant,

"JAMES MACGREGOR DRUMMOND."

Below it began again in the hand of Catriona:-

"Do not be believing him, it is all lies together,--C. M. D."

Not only did she add this postscript, but I think she must have come near suppressing the letter; for it came long after date, and was closely followed by the third. In the time betwixt them, Alan had arrived, and made another life to me with his merry conversation; I had been presented to his cousin of the Scots-Dutch, a man that drank more than I could have thought possible and was not otherwise of interest; I had been entertained to many jovial dinners and given some myself, all with no great change upon my sorrow; and we two (by which I mean Alan and myself, and not at

all the cousin) had discussed a good deal the nature of my relations with James More and his daughter. I was naturally diffident to give particulars; and this disposition was not anyway lessened by the nature of Alan's commentary upon those I gave.

"I cannae make heed nor tail of it," he would say, "but it sticks in my mind ye've made a gowk of yourself. There's few people that has had more experience than Alan Breck: and I can never call to mind to have heard tell of a lassie like this one of yours. The way that you tell it, the thing's fair impossible. Ye must have made a terrible hash of the business, David."

"There are whiles that I am of the same mind," said I.

"The strange thing is that ye seem to have a kind of fancy for her

too!" said Alan.

"The biggest kind, Alan," said I, "and I think I'll take it to my

grave with me."

"Well, ye beat me, whatever!" he would conclude.

I showed him the letter with Catriona's postscript. "And here

again!" he cried. "Impossible to deny a kind of decency to this

Catriona, and sense forby! As for James More, the man's as boss as

a drum; he's just a wame and a when words; though I'll can never

deny that he fought reasonably well at Gladsmuir, and it's true

what he says here about the five wounds. But the loss of him is

that the man's boss."

"Ye see, Alan," said I, "it goes against the grain with me to leave the maid in such poor hands."

"Ye couldnae weel find poorer," he admitted. "But what are ye to do with it? It's this way about a man and a woman, ye see, Davie: The weemenfolk have got no kind of reason to them. Either they like the man, and then a' goes fine; or else they just detest him, and ye may spare your breath--ye can do naething. There's just the two sets of them--them that would sell their coats for ye, and them that never look the road ye're on. That's a' that there is to women; and you seem to be such a gomerall that ye cannae tell the tane frae the tither."

"Well, and I'm afraid that's true for me," said I.

"And yet there's naething easier!" cried Alan. "I could easy learn ye the science of the thing; but ye seem to me to be born blind, and there's where the deefficulty comes in."

"And can YOU no help me?" I asked, "you that are so clever at the trade?"

"Ye see, David, I wasnae here," said he. "I'm like a field officer that has naebody but blind men for scouts and eclaireurs; and what would he ken? But it sticks in my mind that ye'll have made some kind of bauchle; and if I was you I would have a try at her again."

"Would ye so, man Alan?" said I.

"I would e'en't," says he.

The third letter came to my hand while we were deep in some such talk: and it will be seen how pat it fell to the occasion. James professed to be in some concern upon his daughter's health, which I believe was never better; abounded in kind expressions to myself; and finally proposed that I should visit them at Dunkirk.

"You will now be enjoying the society of my old comrade Mr. Stewart," he wrote. "Why not accompany him so far in his return to France? I have something very particular for Mr. Stewart's ear;

and, at any rate, I would be pleased to meet in with an old fellow-soldier and one so mettle as himself. As for you, my dear sir, my daughter and I would be proud to receive our benefactor, whom we regard as a brother and a son. The French nobleman has proved a person of the most filthy avarice of character, and I have been necessitate to leave the haras. You will find us in consequence a little poorly lodged in the auberge of a man Bazin on the dunes; but the situation is caller, and I make no doubt but we might spend some very pleasant days, when Mr. Stewart and I could recall our services, and you and my daughter divert yourselves in a manner more befitting your age. I beg at least that Mr. Stewart would come here; my business with him opens a very wide door."

"What does the man want with me?" cried Alan, when he had read.

"What he wants with you in clear enough--it's siller. But what can

he want with Alan Breck?"

"O, it'll be just an excuse," said I. "He is still after this

marriage, which I wish from my heart that we could bring about.

And he asks you because he thinks I would be less likely to come

wanting you."

"Well, I wish that I kent," says Alan. "Him and me were never

onyways pack; we used to girn at ither like a pair of pipers.

'Something for my ear,' quo' he! I'll maybe have something for his

hinder-end, before we're through with it. Dod, I'm thinking it

would be a kind of divertisement to gang and see what he'll be

after! Forby that I could see your lassie then. What say ye,

Davie? Will ye ride with Alan?"

You may be sure I was not backward, and Alan's furlough running towards an end, we set forth presently upon this joint adventure.

It was near dark of a January day when we rode at last into the town of Dunkirk. We left our horses at the post, and found a guide to Bazin's Inn, which lay beyond the walls. Night was quite fallen, so that we were the last to leave that fortress, and heard the doors of it close behind us as we passed the bridge. On the other side there lay a lighted suburb, which we thriddled for a while, then turned into a dark lane, and presently found ourselves wading in the night among deep sand where we could hear a bullering of the sea. We travelled in this fashion for some while, following

our conductor mostly by the sound of his voice; and I had begun to think he was perhaps misleading us, when we came to the top of a small brae, and there appeared out of the darkness a dim light in a window.

"Voila l'auberge a Bazin," says the guide.

Alan smacked his lips. "An unco lonely bit," said he, and I thought by his tone he was not wholly pleased.

A little after, and we stood in the lower storey of that house, which was all in the one apartment, with a stairs leading to the chambers at the side, benches and tables by the wall, the cooking fire at the one end of it, and shelves of bottles and the cellar-

trap at the other. Here Bazin, who was an ill-looking, big man,
told us the Scottish gentleman was gone abroad he knew not where,
but the young lady was above, and he would call her down to us.

I took from my breast that kerchief wanting the corner, and knotted
it about my throat. I could hear my heart go; and Alan patting me
on the shoulder with some of his laughable expressions, I could
scarce refrain from a sharp word. But the time was not long to
wait. I heard her step pass overhead, and saw her on the stair.

This she descended very quietly, and greeted me with a pale face
and a certain seeming of earnestness, or uneasiness, in her manner
that extremely dashed me.

"My father, James More, will be here soon. He will be very pleased

to see you," she said. And then of a sudden her face flamed, her eyes lightened, the speech stopped upon her lips; and I made sure she had observed the kerchief. It was only for a breath that she was discomposed; but methought it was with a new animation that she turned to welcome Alan. "And you will be his friend, Alan Breck?" she cried. "Many is the dozen times I will have heard him tell of you; and I love you already for all your bravery and goodness."

"Well, well," says Alan, holding her hand in his and viewing her, "and so this is the young lady at the last of it! David, ye're an awful poor hand of a description."

I do not know that ever I heard him speak so straight to people's hearts; the sound of his voice was like song.

"What? will he have been describing me?" she cried.

"Little else of it since I ever came out of France!" says he,

"forby a bit of a speciment one night in Scotland in a shaw of wood

by Silvermills. But cheer up, my dear! ye're bonnier than what he

said. And now there's one thing sure; you and me are to be a pair

of friends. I'm a kind of a henchman to Davie here; I'm like a

tyke at his heels; and whatever he cares for, I've got to care for

too--and by the holy airn! they've got to care for me! So now you

can see what way you stand with Alan Breck, and ye'll find ye'll

hardly lose on the transaction. He's no very bonnie, my dear, but

he's leal to them he loves."

"I thank you from my heart for your good words," said she. "I have that honour for a brave, honest man that I cannot find any to be answering with."

Using travellers' freedom, we spared to wait for James More, and sat down to meat, we threesome. Alan had Catriona sit by him and wait upon his wants: he made her drink first out of his glass, he surrounded her with continual kind gallantries, and yet never gave me the most small occasion to be jealous; and he kept the talk so much in his own hand, and that in so merry a note, that neither she nor I remembered to be embarrassed. If any had seen us there, it must have been supposed that Alan was the old friend and I the stranger. Indeed, I had often cause to love and to admire the man, but I never loved or admired him better than that night; and I

could not help remarking to myself (what I was sometimes rather in danger of forgetting) that he had not only much experience of life, but in his own way a great deal of natural ability besides. As for Catriona, she seemed quite carried away; her laugh was like a peal of bells, her face gay as a May morning; and I own, although I was well pleased, yet I was a little sad also, and thought myself a dull, stockish character in comparison of my friend, and very unfit to come into a young maid's life, and perhaps ding down her gaiety.

But if that was like to be my part, I found that at least I was not alone in it; for, James More returning suddenly, the girl was changed into a piece of stone. Through the rest of that evening, until she made an excuse and slipped to bed, I kept an eye upon her without cease; and I can bear testimony that she never smiled,

scarce spoke, and looked mostly on the board in front of her. So that I really marvelled to see so much devotion (as it used to be) changed into the very sickness of hate.

Of James More it is unnecessary to say much; you know the man already, what there was to know of him; and I am weary of writing out his lies. Enough that he drank a great deal, and told us very little that was to any possible purpose. As for the business with Alan, that was to be reserved for the morrow and his private hearing.

It was the more easy to be put off, because Alan and I were pretty weary with four day's ride, and sat not very late after Catriona.

We were soon alone in a chamber where we were to make-shift with a single bed. Alan looked on me with a queer smile.

"Ye muckle ass!" said he.

"What do ye mean by that?" I cried.

"Mean? What do I mean! It's extraordinar, David man," say he,

"that you should be so mortal stupid."

Again I begged him to speak out.

"Well, it's this of it," said he. "I told ye there were the two

kinds of women--them that would sell their shifts for ye, and the

others. Just you try for yoursel, my bonny man! But what's that

neepkin at your craig?"

I told him.

"I thocht it was something thereabout" said he.

Nor would he say another word though I besieged him long with

importunities.