

CHAPTER XXX—EVENTS OF WEDNESDAY; THE UNIVERSITY OF
CRAMOND

I awoke to much diffidence, even to a feeling that might be called the beginnings of panic, and lay for hours in my bed considering the situation. Seek where I pleased, there was nothing to encourage me and plenty to appal. They kept a close watch about the cottage; they had a beast of a watch-dog—at least, unless I had settled it; and if I had, I knew its bereaved master would only watch the more indefatigably for the loss. In the pardonable ostentation of love I had given all the money I could spare to Flora; I had thought it glorious that the hunted exile should come down, like Jupiter, in a shower of gold, and pour thousands in the lap of the beloved. Then I had in an hour of arrant folly buried what remained to me in a bank in George Street. And now I must get back the one or the other; and which? and how?

As I tossed in my bed, I could see three possible courses, all extremely perilous. First, Rowley might have been mistaken; the bank might not be watched; it might still be possible for him to draw the money on the deposit receipt. Second, I might apply again to Robbie. Or, third, I might dare everything, go to the Assembly Ball, and speak with Flora under the eyes of all Edinburgh. This last alternative, involving as it did the most horrid risks, and the delay of forty-eight hours, I did but glance at with an averted head, and turned again to the consideration of the others. It was the likeliest thing in the world that Robbie had been

warned to have no more to do with me. The whole policy of the Gilchrists was in the hands of Chevenix; and I thought this was a precaution so elementary that he was certain to have taken it. If he had not, of course I was all right: Robbie would manage to communicate with Flora; and by four o'clock I might be on the south road and, I was going to say, a free man. Lastly, I must assure myself with my own eyes whether the bank in George Street were beleaguered.

I called to Rowley and questioned him tightly as to the appearance of the Bow Street officer.

'What sort of looking man is he, Rowley?' I asked, as I began to dress.

'Wot sort of a looking man he is?' repeated Rowley. 'Well, I don't very well know wot you would say, Mr. Anne. He ain't a beauty, any'ow.'

'Is he tall?'

'Tall? Well, no, I shouldn't say tall Mr. Anne.'

'Well, then, is he short?'

'Short? No, I don't think I would say he was what you would call short. No, not piticalar short, sir.'

'Then, I suppose, he must be about the middle height?'

‘Well, you might say it, sir; but not remarkable so.’

I smothered an oath.

‘Is he clean-shaved?’ I tried him again.

‘Clean-shaved?’ he repeated, with the same air of anxious candour.

‘Good heaven, man, don’t repeat my words like a parrot!’ I cried. ‘Tell me what the man was like: it is of the first importance that I should be able to recognise him.’

‘I’m trying to, Mr. Anne. But clean-shaved? I don’t seem to rightly get hold of that p’int. Sometimes it might appear to me like as if he was; and sometimes like as if he wasn’t. No, it wouldn’t surprise me now if you was to tell me he ’ad a bit o’ whisker.’

‘Was the man red-faced?’ I roared, dwelling on each syllable.

‘I don’t think you need go for to get cross about it, Mr. Anne!’ said he. ‘I’m tellin’ you every blessed thing I see! Red-faced? Well, no, not as you would remark upon.’

A dreadful calm fell upon me.

‘Was he anywise pale?’ I asked.

‘Well, it don’t seem to me as though he were. But I tell you truly, I didn’t take much heed to that.’

‘Did he look like a drinking man?’

‘Well, no. If you please, sir, he looked more like an eating one.’

‘Oh, he was stout, was he?’

‘No, sir. I couldn’t go so far as that. No, he wasn’t not to say stout. If anything, lean rather.’

I need not go on with the infuriating interview. It ended as it began, except that Rowley was in tears, and that I had acquired one fact. The man was drawn for me as being of any height you like to mention, and of any degree of corpulence or leanness; clean-shaved or not, as the case might be; the colour of his hair Rowley ‘could not take it upon himself to put a name on’; that of his eyes he thought to have been blue—nay, it was the one point on which he attained to a kind of tearful certainty. ‘I’ll take my davy on it,’ he asseverated. They proved to have been as black as sloes, very little and very near together. So much for the evidence of the artless! And the fact, or rather the facts, acquired? Well, they had to do not with the person but with his clothing. The man wore knee-breeches and white stockings; his coat was ‘some kind of a

lightish colour—or betwixt that and dark'; and he wore a 'mole-skin weskit.' As if this were not enough, he presently haled me from my breakfast in a prodigious flutter, and showed me an honest and rather venerable citizen passing in the Square.

'That's him, sir,' he cried, 'the very moral of him! Well, this one is better dressed, and p'r'aps a trifler taller; and in the face he don't favour him nowadays at all, sir. No, not when I come to look again, 'e don't seem to favour him nowadays.'

'Jackass!' said I, and I think the greatest stickler for manners will admit the epithet to have been justified.

Meanwhile the appearance of my landlady added a great load of anxiety to what I already suffered. It was plain that she had not slept; equally plain that she had wept copiously. She sighed, she groaned, she drew in her breath, she shook her head, as she waited on table. In short, she seemed in so precarious a state, like a petard three times charged with hysteria, that I did not dare to address her; and stole out of the house on tiptoe, and actually ran downstairs, in the fear that she might call me back. It was plain that this degree of tension could not last long.

It was my first care to go to George Street, which I reached (by good luck) as a boy was taking down the bank shutters. A man was conversing with him; he had white stockings and a moleskin waistcoat, and was as ill-looking a rogue as you would want to see in a day's journey. This

seemed to agree fairly well with Rowley's signalement: he had declared emphatically (if you remember), and had stuck to it besides, that the companion of the great Lavender was no beauty.

Thence I made my way to Mr. Robbie's, where I rang the bell. A servant answered the summons, and told me the lawyer was engaged, as I had half expected.

'Wha shall I say was callin'?' she pursued; and when I had told her 'Mr. Ducie,' 'I think this'll be for you, then?' she added, and handed me a letter from the hall table. It ran:

'DEAR MR. DUCIE,

'My single advice to you is to leave quam primum for the South.

Yours, T. ROBBIE.'

That was short and sweet. It emphatically extinguished hope in one direction. No more was to be gotten of Robbie; and I wondered, from my heart, how much had been told him. Not too much, I hoped, for I liked the lawyer who had thus deserted me, and I placed a certain reliance in the discretion of Chevenix. He would not be merciful; on the other hand, I did not think he would be cruel without cause.

It was my next affair to go back along George Street, and assure myself

whether the man in the moleskin vest was still on guard. There was no sign of him on the pavement. Spying the door of a common stair nearly opposite the bank, I took it in my head that this would be a good point of observation, crossed the street, entered with a businesslike air and fell immediately against the man in the moleskin vest. I stopped and apologised to him; he replied in an unmistakable English accent, thus putting the matter almost beyond doubt. After this encounter I must, of course, ascend to the top story, ring the bell of a suite of apartments, inquire for Mr. Vavasour, learn (with no great surprise) that he did not live there, come down again and, again politely saluting the man from Bow Street, make my escape at last into the street.

I was now driven back upon the Assembly Ball. Robbie had failed me. The bank was watched; it would never do to risk Rowley in that neighbourhood. All I could do was to wait until the morrow evening, and present myself at the Assembly, let it end as it might. But I must say I came to this decision with a good deal of genuine fright; and here I came for the first time to one of those places where my courage stuck. I do not mean that my courage boggled and made a bit of a bother over it, as it did over the escape from the Castle; I mean, stuck, like a stopped watch or a dead man. Certainly I would go to the ball; certainly I must see this morning about my clothes. That was all decided. But the most of the shops were on the other side of the valley, in the Old Town; and it was now my strange discovery that I was physically unable to cross the North Bridge! It was as though a precipice had stood between us, or the deep sea had intervened. Nearer to the Castle my legs refused to bear me.

I told myself this was mere superstition; I made wagers with myself—and gained them; I went down on the esplanade of Princes Street, walked and stood there, alone and conspicuous, looking across the garden at the old grey bastions of the fortress, where all these troubles had begun. I cocked my hat, set my hand on my hip, and swaggered on the pavement, confronting detection. And I found I could do all this with a sense of exhilaration that was not unpleasing, and with a certain *crânerie* of manner that raised me in my own esteem. And yet there was one thing I could not bring my mind to face up to, or my limbs to execute; and that was to cross the valley into the Old Town. It seemed to me I must be arrested immediately if I had done so; I must go straight into the twilight of a prison cell, and pass straight thence to the gross and final embraces of the nightcap and the halter. And yet it was from no reasoned fear of the consequences that I could not go. I was unable. My horse balked, and there was an end!

My nerve was gone: here was a discovery for a man in such imminent peril, set down to so desperate a game, which I could only hope to win by continual luck and unflagging effrontery! The strain had been too long continued, and my nerve was gone. I fell into what they call panic fear, as I have seen soldiers do on the alarm of a night attack, and turned out of Princes Street at random as though the devil were at my heels. In St. Andrew Square, I remember vaguely hearing some one call out. I paid no heed, but pressed on blindly. A moment after, a hand fell heavily on my shoulder, and I thought I had fainted. Certainly the world went black

about me for some seconds; and when that spasm passed I found myself standing face to face with the 'cheerful extravagant,' in what sort of disarray I really dare not imagine, dead white at least, shaking like an aspen, and mowing at the man with speechless lips. And this was the soldier of Napoleon, and the gentleman who intended going next night to an Assembly Ball! I am the more particular in telling of my breakdown, because it was my only experience of the sort; and it is a good tale for officers. I will allow no man to call me coward; I have made my proofs; few men more. And yet I (come of the best blood in France and inured to danger from a child) did, for some ten or twenty minutes, make this hideous exhibition of myself on the streets of the New Town of Edinburgh.

With my first available breath I begged his pardon. I was of an extremely nervous disposition, recently increased by late hours; I could not bear the slightest start.

He seemed much concerned. 'You must be in a devil of a state!' said he; 'though of course it was my fault—damnably silly, vulgar sort of thing to do! A thousand apologies! But you really must be run down; you should consult a medico. My dear sir, a hair of the dog that bit you is clearly indicated. A touch of Blue Ruin, now? Or, come: it's early, but is man the slave of hours? what do you say to a chop and a bottle in Dumbreck's Hotel?'

I refused all false comfort; but when he went on to remind me that this was the day when the University of Cramond met; and to propose a

five-mile walk into the country and a dinner in the company of young asses like himself, I began to think otherwise. I had to wait until to-morrow evening, at any rate; this might serve as well as anything else to bridge the dreary hours. The country was the very place for me: and walking is an excellent sedative for the nerves. Remembering poor Rowley, feigning a cold in our lodgings and immediately under the guns of the formidable and now doubtful Bethiah, I asked if I might bring my servant. 'Poor devil! it is dull for him,' I explained.

'The merciful man is merciful to his ass,' observed my sententious friend. 'Bring him by all means!

"The harp, his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy;"

and I have no doubt the orphan boy can get some cold victuals in the kitchen, while the Senatus dines.'

Accordingly, being now quite recovered from my unmanly condition, except that nothing could yet induce me to cross the North Bridge, I arranged for my ball dress at a shop in Leith Street, where I was not served ill, cut out Rowley from his seclusion, and was ready along with him at the trysting-place, the corner of Duke Street and York Place, by a little after two. The University was represented in force: eleven persons, including ourselves, Byfield the aeronaut, and the tall lad, Forbes, whom I had met on the Sunday morning, bedewed with tallow, at the 'Hunters'

Rest.’ I was introduced; and we set off by way of Newhaven and the sea beach; at first through pleasant country roads, and afterwards along a succession of bays of a fairylike prettiness, to our destination—Cramond on the Almond—a little hamlet on a little river, embowered in woods, and looking forth over a great flat of quicksand to where a little islet stood planted in the sea. It was miniature scenery, but charming of its kind. The air of this good February afternoon was bracing, but not cold. All the way my companions were skylarking, jesting and making puns, and I felt as if a load had been taken off my lungs and spirits, and skylarked with the best of them.

Byfield I observed, because I had heard of him before, and seen his advertisements, not at all because I was disposed to feel interest in the man. He was dark and bilious and very silent; frigid in his manners, but burning internally with a great fire of excitement; and he was so good as to bestow a good deal of his company and conversation (such as it was) upon myself, who was not in the least grateful. If I had known how I was to be connected with him in the immediate future, I might have taken more pains.

In the hamlet of Cramond there is a hostelry of no very promising appearance, and here a room had been prepared for us, and we sat down to table.

‘Here you will find no guttling or gormandising, no turtle or nightingales’ tongues,’ said the extravagant, whose name, by the way, was

Dalmahoy. 'The device, sir, of the University of Cramond is Plain Living and High Drinking.'

Grace was said by the Professor of Divinity, in a macaronic Latin, which I could by no means follow, only I could hear it rhymed, and I guessed it to be more witty than reverent. After which the Senatus Academicus sat down to rough plenty in the shape of rizzar'd haddocks and mustard, a sheep's head, a haggis, and other delicacies of Scotland. The dinner was washed down with brown stout in bottle, and as soon as the cloth was removed, glasses, boiling water, sugar, and whisky were set out for the manufacture of toddy. I played a good knife and fork, did not shun the bowl, and took part, so far as I was able, in the continual fire of pleasantry with which the meal was seasoned. Greatly daring, I ventured, before all these Scotsmen, to tell Sim's Tale of Tweedie's dog; and I was held to have done such extraordinary justice to the dialect, 'for a Southron,' that I was immediately voted into the Chair of Scots, and became, from that moment, a full member of the University of Cramond. A little after, I found myself entertaining them with a song; and a little after—perhaps a little in consequence—it occurred to me that I had had enough, and would be very well inspired to take French leave. It was not difficult to manage, for it was nobody's business to observe my movements, and conviviality had banished suspicion.

I got easily forth of the chamber, which reverberated with the voices of these merry and learned gentlemen, and breathed a long breath. I had passed an agreeable afternoon and evening, and I had apparently escaped

scot free. Alas! when I looked into the kitchen, there was my monkey, drunk as a lord, toppling on the edge of the dresser, and performing on the flageolet to an audience of the house lasses and some neighbouring ploughmen.

I routed him promptly from his perch, stuck his hat on, put his instrument in his pocket, and set off with him for Edinburgh.

His limbs were of paper, his mind quite in abeyance; I must uphold and guide him, prevent his frantic dives, and set him continually on his legs again. At first he sang wildly, with occasional outbursts of causeless laughter. Gradually an inarticulate melancholy succeeded; he wept gently at times; would stop in the middle of the road, say firmly 'No, no, no,' and then fall on his back: or else address me solemnly as 'M'lord' and fall on his face by way of variety. I am afraid I was not always so gentle with the little pig as I might have been, but really the position was unbearable. We made no headway at all, and I suppose we were scarce gotten a mile away from Cramond, when the whole Senatus Academicus was heard hailing, and doubling the pace to overtake its.

Some of them were fairly presentable; and they were all Christian martyrs compared to Rowley; but they were in a frolicsome and rollicking humour that promised danger as we approached the town. They sang songs, they ran races, they fenced with their walking-sticks and umbrellas; and, in spite of this violent exercise, the fun grew only the more extravagant with the miles they traversed. Their drunkenness was deep-seated and

permanent, like fire in a peat; or rather—to be quite just to them—it was not so much to be called drunkenness at all, as the effect of youth and high spirits—a fine night, and the night young, a good road under foot, and the world before you!

I had left them once somewhat unceremoniously; I could not attempt it a second time; and, burthened as I was with Mr. Rowley, I was really glad of assistance. But I saw the lamps of Edinburgh draw near on their hill-top with a good deal of uneasiness, which increased, after we had entered the lighted streets, to positive alarm. All the passers-by were addressed, some of them by name. A worthy man was stopped by Forbes. ‘Sir,’ said he, ‘in the name of the Senatus of the University of Cramond, I confer upon you the degree of LL.D.,’ and with the words he bonneted him. Conceive the predicament of St. Ives, committed to the society of these outrageous youths, in a town where the police and his cousin were both looking for him! So far, we had pursued our way unmolested, although raising a clamour fit to wake the dead; but at last, in Abercromby Place, I believe—at least it was a crescent of highly respectable houses fronting on a garden—Byfield and I, having fallen somewhat in the rear with Rowley, came to a simultaneous halt. Our ruffians were beginning to wrench off bells and door-plates!

‘Oh, I say!’ says Byfield, ‘this is too much of a good thing! Confound it, I’m a respectable man—a public character, by George! I can’t afford to get taken up by the police.’

'My own case exactly,' said I.

'Here, let's bilk them,' said he.

And we turned back and took our way down hill again.

It was none too soon: voices and alarm bells sounded; watchmen here and there began to spring their rattles; it was plain the University of Cramond would soon be at blows with the police of Edinburgh! Byfield and I, running the semi-inanimate Rowley before us, made good despatch, and did not stop till we were several streets away, and the hubbub was already softened by distance.

'Well, sir,' said he, 'we are well out of that! Did ever any one see such a pack of young barbarians?'

'We are properly punished, Mr. Byfield; we had no business there,' I replied.

'No, indeed, sir, you may well say that! Outrageous! And my ascension announced for Friday, you know!' cried the aeronaut. 'A pretty scandal! Byfield the aeronaut at the police-court! Tut-tut! Will you be able to get your rascal home, sir? Allow me to offer you my card. I am staying at Walker and Poole's Hotel, sir, where I should be pleased to see you.'

'The pleasure would be mutual, sir,' said I, but I must say my heart was

not in my words, and as I watched Mr. Byfield departing I desired nothing less than to pursue the acquaintance

One more ordeal remained for me to pass. I carried my senseless load upstairs to our lodging, and was admitted by the landlady in a tall white nightcap and with an expression singularly grim. She lighted us into the sitting-room; where, when I had seated Rowley in a chair, she dropped me a cast-iron courtesy. I smelt gunpowder on the woman. Her voice, tottered with emotion.

'I give ye nottice, Mr. Ducie,' said she. 'Dacent folks' houses . . .'

And at that apparently temper cut off her utterance, and she took herself off without more words.

I looked about me at the room, the goggling Rowley, the extinguished fire; my mind reviewed the laughable incidents of the day and night; and I laughed out loud to myself—lonely and cheerless laughter!.....

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[At this point the Author's MS. breaks off]