

## How Nicol Sought His Fortune Elsewhere

Then there was silence for a space, while the light faded, and the old, stately dames looked down at us from their frames with an air, as it seemed to me, all but kindly, as if they laughed to see us playing in the old comedy which they had played themselves.

I turned to her, with whom I had borne so many perils.

"Dear heart," I said, "you are the best and fairest of them all. These old men and women lived in other times, when life was easy and little like our perplexed and difficult years. Nevertheless, the virtue of old times is the same as for us, and if a man take but the world as he find it, and set himself manfully to it with good heart and brave spirit, he will find the way grow straight under his feet. Heaven bless you, dear, for now we are comrades together on the road, to cheer each other when the feet grow weary."

On the morning of the third day from the time I have written of, I was surprised by seeing my servant, Nicol, coming into my study with a grave face, as if he had some weighty matter to tell. Since I had come home, I purposed to keep him always with me, to accompany me in sport and see to many things on the land, which none could do better than he. Now he sought an audience with a half-timid, bashful look, and, when I bade him be seated, he flicked his boots uneasily with his hat and looked askance.