

DEAD · MEN'S · BELLS

BY FREDERICK NIVEN



Can. Hines,
Frank J.

6/-

DEAD MEN'S BELLS



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LOST CABIN MINE
THE ISLAND PROVIDENCE
A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS
ABOVE YOUR HEADS (Short Stories)

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DEAD MEN'S BELLS
A Romance by Frederick Niven

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XI

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. <i>The Cinnamon Satin</i>	9
II. <i>Advice for a Prodigal</i>	29
III. <i>Ecclesiastical Matters</i>	39
IV. <i>On Ballygeoch</i>	54
V. <i>Mr. Defoe does me a Service, and I leave the Wester Mearns</i>	65
VI. <i>The Lure of Virginia</i>	73
VII. <i>We go Aboard the "Santona"</i>	84
VIII. <i>In the Firth</i>	101
IX. <i>Fighting the Storm</i>	115
X. <i>A Night and a Morning</i>	128
XI. <i>Corrievrechan</i>	137
XII. <i>A Secluded Cove</i>	146
XIII. <i>The Nettle Stew</i>	160
XIV. <i>In the Heather</i>	172
XV. <i>The Maid at the Inn</i>	195
XVI. <i>We leave the Pirates</i>	207
XVII. <i>A Dragon-fly does us a Service</i>	223

	PAGE
<i>XVIII. The Hold of a Highland Robber</i>	232
<i>XIX. In Balquhiddy</i>	243
<i>XX. Three Fingers Winks</i>	261
<i>XXI. The End of that Sang</i>	301

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Chapter I : *The Cinnamon Satin*

THE rustling of my sister's satin dress across the floor was full of sacred exultation. And indeed I was in sorry enough plight to make it rustle, for I had been expelled from my college and was here at home, a masterless man.

I thought to go a-fishing, and went over to look at the rods that lay along under the byre-eaves upon their nails; and there came across the courtyard the glint of the cinnamon satin and the trembling of the body as, when you press a rapier-point lightly on the ground, holding it upright, and then relax, the rapier takes an upward, undulating movement. Glancing corner-wise, I saw my sister's left elbow stiffly out, the hand clutching up the voluminous drapery behind. I looked more directly, standing there beneath the fishing-rods, and my sister passed with drooping lids, so that the touches of rouge upon her cheeks were the only points of relief—and gave me not a glance. Putting her head inside the pantry

Dead Men's Bells

door, in a voice both high and sweet, she made a complaint about there being hornets in the milk, not angrily, not fiercely, but in the voice of unbending *gentrice* that she wore on the days that she touched the rouge on her cheeks. Then she turned back, even as she seemed about to rustle away, and over her shoulder she asked :

“Your faither—is he better ?”

“He is some better, mistress,” I heard Nancy’s voice within.

“That is good,” came my sister’s voice, and she swept on again with a whirl of the cinnamon satin that sent a white pigeon, that had alighted in the yard, leaping and flying to the roof.

I had my eye on my sister, and saw her frown at the bird.

Then she turned and appeared to see me. Next our eyes met, and I smiled.

“Seeing you are free,” said she, “I wish you would go and see what ails Jock in the laigh pasture all this time calling the kye.”

I nodded, and passed out of the yard and down the path ; and only a little way down I met the kye with Jock plodding behind, stood in to the hedge to let them go by in the narrow lane, and fell in step beside him ; fell in talk likewise on the wonted themes—sword-play and archery and the

The Cinnamon Satin

state of trout in the burns, and how he had seen a deer that very morning on Ballygeoch. So we came hob-nobbing to the yard, and, looking up there, I saw that cinnamon satin and the clutching hand holding it up, and knew that I had sinned again to be thus chatting with the scullion.

I passed ahead of the kye that were now all clumped before the gate, and let the bars down for them to pass in, standing aside till Jock followed at their tails.

"All right, Jock," I said ; " I'll put up the bars " ; for I feared he would receive a lecture for the slowness of his steps ; and if he made an excuse that you should not hurry full kye, would be told he could go for them quicker—all because I was in the Black Books. I put up the bars with the tail of my eye on the edge of the cinnamon satin gown.

"I see you are going to have company," I said, when I had run the last bar through its horse-shoe.

"I have a great deal to attend to," said my sister. "There is little time for fishing and hob-nobbing with menials for a woman, when she has charge of a whole steading."

Such speeches are beyond me to fathom, and a complaint that fortune is so unkind as to prevent us from doing what in the same breath we

Dead Men's Bells

suggest it is not meet to do, seems illogical and odd to me. But I asked her :

"Is there anything I can do for you, then ?"

"Nothing now," said she ; and gave me her back, with the pleats all bunched and gathered.

I stood looking after her, and wondering why it should be that the skirt rustled so. I stood there and looked beyond the steading to the top of the moors below Ballygeoch, and saw how the sky, it being evening, and the sun going down over there, gave the ridge a kind of unreal look, as though the crest melted into golden air, and then I heard a squelch of a foot behind ; and there was Cousin Effie, with her eye on me, coming up the lane.

"What ails you ?" she cried as I turned.

"Ails me ? Nothing ails me. I was looking at the ridge of the hill melting into the sky."

She shook her head and laughed.

"When you turn your eyes to the hills, Robert, and see things like that, it is a sign to me that matters are troubling you." And then she added : "Was yon Cousin Janet's elbow I saw going in ?"

I confess to giving her a sharp, quick look. For I was worn down since coming home from Glasgow by a fortnight of stiff elbows and flea-bites that to put a name on was impossible ; and the way she said that word "elbow" seemed to roll

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The Cinnamon Satin

a stone from off my heart ; and I laughed presently, as her eyes, looking into mine, bubbled over with such merriment as to assure me that indeed crooked elbows had their significance and rustling gowns their assaults as well as oaths and fists. At my laugh my sister came hastening back, and, seeing Effie, broke into smiles, and welcomed her with every sign of fondness, told her my mother was indoors and expecting her ; and no sooner was Effie gone, than she wheeled upon me and said :

“ You are not dressed yet, and your mother’s brother is coming to-night. He’ll be climbing the hill by now.”

“ Uncle Tom ! ” I cried. “ Why did not you tell me ? ”

“ Ye tak’ little enough interest in the place,” said she, and might have said more, but out came my mother on Cousin Effie’s arm to see the sunset and taste the caller evening air after the heat of the day. My sister looked up at that to the crest of the hills, which had been rapidly changing while my mother and Effie had been indoors, and cried out how beautiful indeed it was, and rolled her eyes to it.

“ Oh ! ” says Effie, looking up. “ I see it is all changed. I thought ye wad like to see it as I saw it coming up the hill.”

Dead Men's Bells

The sun had plumped down behind the hill that was changing from green to a long, dark blue shadow, with as it were a line drawn along the crest.

My sister turned to Effie.

"Yon's where Robert likes to spend his days," said she. "He has a great taste for the hills, and he can sit by the hour there. Cannot ye, Robert?" says she.

Poor Effie was for mending matters, and said:

"You look after the sheep now ye are home again?"

And that was over-much for my sister.

"Looks after the trout," said she.

"They make a tasty dish," said Effie.

My sister laughed cheerily.

"Robert is not like the rest of fishers," said she. "He taks the dogs with him, and gives the catch to them." She caught Effie's eye. "He is fond of animals. Are you not fond of animals, Robert?" she asked, turning on me with so much affection in her gaze, which I had lacked since my return from Glasgow, that my heart was rejoiced. I blessed Effie's presence for having healed my sister of her animosity—and considered it in the light of a petty and passing spleen.

"Oh aye," I said. "I like them fine. I like

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The Cinnamon Satin

them so well that I think I'll fish no more for the trout, for it takes many mickle trout to satisfy ae muckle dog, and the trout are happier in the burns than the dogs in devouring them."

My mother had drawn Effie on along the flags to see some herbs that she had planted, for she prided herself on her apothecary skill. And, still laughing, and with her voice much as it was, but lower, my sister said : " 'Tis good to ken that something will keep ye from the burns."

Effie turned about, my mother's arm still in hers, and cried out :

" I did not hear, Janet. What did you say ? "

" Oh, I was only speaking to Robert," said Janet.

" Ah ! " said Effie, and turned again to my mother with : " Yes ? "

My sister shot a look at her back and crooked her elbow, and the cinnamon satin rustled up the flags and passed indoors. I turned to follow my mother and cousin round the beds, and my mother, seeing me, said :

" Oh, Robert, has Janet not told you that your uncle is coming over to-night ? "

" She has just now told me," said I.

" Well, don't you think you micht get dressed for his arrival ? " She clapped Effie's hand and

Dead Men's Bells

tucked it closer under her arm. "I like to respect my relatives," said she.

So I bowed to my mother and went indoors to dress.

My little room was hot still with the afternoon's sun and, in the clematis that swept round it, the last flies were droning. I groomed my hair and changed the rough stockings in which I had been all day for silk ones, shook out my ruffles on a new shirt, pulled down my waistcoat, and humming the while the air of "The Dusty Miller," took a new kerchief and splashed on it some eau-de-Luce that I had brought from Glasgow—and the door opened slightly, and my sister's voice, without, hailed me with: "Can I come in, Bobby?"

I made up my mind that she was healed, that she had been worried, and that I was perchance also fanciful, and that all the rustlings and frowns and other such matters that I, sore enough myself now about the outcome of the skull-cracking in Glasgow, took for innuendoes, gibes at my fall, and gibes at my misery and uselessness, were maybe as much in my fancy, as of her direct and cross-grained intention. Her voice was so friendly, hailing me in the passage, speiring if she could come in, and the last light was so dainty through the clematis that hung over the window and peeped

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The Cinnamon Satin

on either side, and the after-glow beyond Ballygeoch so grand, and the first furtive night so placid in the scented haystacks that I was open for all the world to come in.

"Come in, come in, sister," I said; and she entered the room, not with the rustle that had seemed rustling all over me, and burying me down, as under a cinnamon pall, but with what was but her company rustle, for when any friends (or foes) came to see us at the Wester Mearns, a rustle which, if it was not elegant *gentrice*, was its next-door neighbour that had pried over the wall, or stared at *gentrice* going by sufficient enough to get the rustle and the expression, greatly helped by the dab of rouge which, despite Saint Paul and the minister, and her soul, she applied upon such occasions.

If there had been any annoyance on her part at my expulsion from the college, outsiders were not to see it. If I was right in thinking there had been war, here, before my uncle's arrival, was, if not peace, a truce. She closed the door.

"You do set these clothes," said she, smiled on me, and then: "Robby, I hae just come up to ask a favour of ye. Mother is worrying so deeply about ye. Aye, I ken ye feel it—puir man—I ken it pains ye deeply——"

Dead Men's Bells

"Very deeply," I said.

"And ye find her religeeous talk very ill tae thole on top o't all?"

"It does not help muckle," said I.

"Ah," says she, "our grandfathers' eyes are blind to oor paths. They hae their ain auld-farrant way o' seeing a' things. My mother has just told me that she is pained again at your conduct. Even your uncle," says she, "you cannot rightly respect, and she had to ask you to go and dress for his arrival."

"I had not long notice of his coming," I suggested.

"No," said my sister. "I was so worried, with so much to think about." She looked so pained for herself that I asked what trouble she had.

"I suppose I am in it?" I asked.

"Oh, well, it does pain somewhat," said she, "to ken that the divinity is noo barred to ye."

"Believe me, sister," said I, "I could never have followed it." She frowned, so I added: "There is too much of the old necromancy in the theologians. They are but panderers to the——"

"Yes, yes; but you must not talk like this to your uncle to-night—for mother's sake."

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The Cinnamon Satin

"I shall keep strictly mute and impartial. If I do not hasten to change my coat for the coming of an old man, at least I have the respect for age and for my kin that would make me civil to him in my shirt. I have a difficulty in seeing how to don silk hose, in place of woollen, shows respect to relatives," and I paused.

"Mother's phrase?" she asked.

I nodded. "Oh, if only," I said, "it could be understood that my heart is in the right place——" and with that we heard my uncle's voice below.

"Are ye coming?" says my sister; and we passed down to greet him.

My mother and Effie were in the hall as we came down, and my sister slipped her arm into mine as we advanced, and as my uncle rose from bowing over my mother's hand, his eyes showing bright and searching under his powdered wig, glittering like the black satin cravat that peeped from under his snuff-coloured coat——

"Ah," said he, "here is the devoted sister," and held his hat forth in his left hand, resting the wrist lightly upon her shoulder, the hat projecting behind, and extending his right to hold hers with a kind of unctuousness. As that salutation was in progress I was a kind of onlooker on the scene: my poor mother fluttering a welcome,

Dead Men's Bells

my sister rustling a greeting, I awaiting whatsoever manner of welcome my uncle had to give, Cousin Effie, with head a little bent, beside my mother, looking on. I caught her eye briefly and deeply, and it was looking on this three-some of my uncle, my sister, and me, thoughtfully, deeply interested, and not at all smiling.

Then came my uncle's greeting for me. And it told me as plainly as possible that I was a black sheep, a prodigal, and that to be a black sheep was expected of me.

At an early hour I perceived that I was the cause of my uncle's visit. I sat by the board while a collation was served; and might have been a wooden platter for all the notice that was taken of my presence. But I knew there would be notice anon. My mother and he talked of the Five Articles and such matters; and you might have thought my uncle was a couple of hundred years old, and had been a hundred holy years of age at the time of the Synod of Dort. Another matter that kept him a-wagging was a sermon of George Buchanan which he expounded for our souls' good, and at end of that, after a pause, while my mother sighed an "Amen," sighed also, and wiped his lips with the napkin, shook his head, and said :

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The Cinnamon Satin

"'Tis a great call that is given to some men to expound Holy Writ to their humbler fellows by a knowledge of the Latin and Hebrew," and he met my eye and fixed me so that I felt called upon to speak, and said :

"It is conceivable that the Christ spoke in Greek, for Greek was——"

"Oh, a strange doctrine, a strange doctrine!" cried my uncle, holding up the ivory-like palms of his hands. "I had not thought that such heresy was taught at our college."

"Ah, nay," said I; "not at the college. 'Tis but the private talk of the scholars; only their private beliefs; but they do not teach them." And I smiled; and so did Cousin Effie. "Unless," said I, "Professor Simson; he is the only one with the honesty——"

"Honesty! honesty!" cried my uncle; and my mother's face saddened terribly; and my sister rustled more erect, as though to remind me to be careful. My uncle went on with voice as of Gabriel, on Socinianism and Arminianism and all the old charges, sins against the Confession of Faith, and all the rest of it, and that this tendency to "natural reason" among students was a grave error, and that the tendency to ally "moral seriousness" and "grace" could find no backing

Dead Men's Bells

in the Word of God. Belike it could not ! "It is a grave calling, and there is a spirit of lichtlying abroad that is maist strongly to be censured," he ended.

"It is, as you say, a grave calling," said my sister, as I thought out of courtesy toward our uncle. But I saw Cousin Effie look at her with anger. My sister turned to her and smiled ; and I observed that the smile was not returned.

The candles were even then brought in and set upon the table, and my uncle cleared his throat and blinked at the light, and his eyes were like black pin-points. I saw the pupils grow and stay. Effie arose and drifted to him and dropped a curtsy.

"I must bid you good night, sir," said she.

He hopped to his feet and bowed over her hand.

"Good night, my lass," said he.

She passed to my mother and kissed her. My sister half rose, saying : "Must ye be gone so early, cousin ?"

"Yes," snapped Cousin Effie, wagged her head, turned to me, and shot me a beaming smile, then tilted her head and closed and elongated her lips at my sister in a kind of imitation of the smile that was already fled from my sister's face, and

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The Cinnamon Satin

giving place to the shadow on her brows between the eyes.

As Cousin Effie departed I looked after her and she cast me a wave from the shadowed doorway. I started and looked at my sister, whose eyes were not upon the doorway, but upon me. The air of the room changed. Cousin Effie's voice went by without, singing:

“Hey the dusty Miller,
And his dusty coat,
He will win a shilling
Or he spend a groat.

Dusty was the coat,
Dusty was the colour,
Dusty was the kiss
That I got frae the Miller.”

And I saw three pairs of eyes harden toward the candles, and then three faces grow grim with the grimness that I have always associated with John Calvin, his chin. Then my uncle spoke.

“Robert,” said he, and there was a ponderous silence, in which I could hear a midge singing toward the candle, and a minute sizzling sound as he died. Nay, he did not die, he fell on the table. I put my forefinger on him and ended his torture, looked up and encountered again all the eyes.

Dead Men's Bells

"Killing a midge," said I, and I confess to an internal hilarity.

My sister smiled and murmured: "The lover of animals."

I did not smile. I looked at her sidewise where I bent to the table, and said: "He was singed and half dead, and I do not love to torture."

The shadow darkened on her brow.

"Could I have a word with you, Robert?" asked my uncle.

I rose.

"Certainly, uncle," said I. "Where shall we go?"

"I have taken a room at the inn," said he. "Walk down with me."

"At the inn!" cried my mother.

"To insure getting the morning coach," said he. "It is just as it were a step out of bed and to breakfast and another until the coach."

So we passed to the hall, and my uncle gave farewell to my mother and sister, and we walked out.

Now it was a night of many stars, and the Milky Way was like a plume of feathers, and you can talk little Calvin to a young man in the open and under stars.

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The Cinnamon Satin

droll, unforgettable remark, amidst a deal of feeling and groping, with hems and haws, toward advice, admonition. Part of the lesser talk, now that I recall the night, I mind was that I might maybe go to Leyden University, and there make a fresh start; and I replied to that, flippantly, that I believed that at Leyden the gownsmen were permitted to carry their swords and not forced to fight with cudgels, for it was the smashing of a townsman's skull in a *mêlée* that had caused me to be shorn of the hideous livery of Glasgow College and expelled from my Alma Mater. My uncle pondered this a long while as we stumbled downward towards the little line of lights in Eaglesham windows, late pee-weeps still crying to the stars, and scent of bog-myrtle in the caller air of night.

He heaved a sigh, and gave me the great advice that I have laughed at many times.

"Robert," said he, "I worry much about your welfare. You are my sister's son, and I feel an anxiety for you. I fear you are a sceptical-minded young man, carried away by the fancies of the day, writings of heretics and such. Perhaps you cannot understand how Christ was sacrificed upon the cross for the remission of sins."

"Oh, sir!" I cried, for the stars gave me a

Dead Men's Bells

disregard for all but happiness, "I am like the lad in an auld twelfth-century French ballad that Mr. Govan, the publisher, lent me—I had rather be in the company of the happy than wi' the constitutionally gloomy."

"I do not ken the auld irreleegious ballads of France," said he, "neither can I see their bearing upon this head. And I think your bookseller acquaintance is mair dangerous than a heretical professor. A professor may be heretical in private, but he will no' fill your heed wi' ideas of Goad and futurity taken out of chap books. Life is stern and sober, and shunnor or later you will find that it is so, and that you have a soul to save or damn for all eternity."

The blinking of the stars saved me from the gloom that such phrases usually cast me into—and he was too scatterbrained an old man to observe that I had not rightly replied to his original query.

His advice given me then, as the first cobbles of the street of Eaglesham rang under our tread, made me think that God must laugh, which struck me as a great thought, one I had never read anywhere. Zeus, to be sure, is made to laugh, but not God.

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The Cinnamon Satin

Glasgow," said my uncle gravely, "I have often had cause for doubt and sorrow. It is not the writing of a scholar. It is erratic and full of whimsalleeries. Why is it so?"

"To be truthful, sir," said I, "it is perhaps founded upon the writing of some men of letters, whose correspondence I have looked upon many times with great pleasure in the printing-house of a publisher—indeed Mr. Donald Govan." I gave the name with a momentary hesitation, Mr. Govan having been already censured. "He has letters from many writers of the day. Now that ye mention it, maybe I have fallen in love with their calligraphy, especially Mr. Daniel Defoe's."

"It is not a usual hand of write," he vociferated. "You should walk humbly with your God. Mr. Defoe! Defoe is a writer of seditious pamphlets. There is anither point. I hear ye are non-attending the kirk. Now, attendance at kirk is good for man. 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together,' d'ye mind?"

"Aye," said I, bubbling with merriment, "'wheresoever the carcass is, there shall the eagles be gathered together,' d'ye mind?"

"What!" he cried. "I see nae analogy."

"Come, come," said I, "surely so far as to the carcass."

Dead Men's Bells

He heaved a sigh.

"You should improve your handwriting. Shear it of whimsalleeries. Be mair like ither common men," he said solemnly. "I did not ken ye had given thought to the matter. I thocht it was sheer neglect." He buttonholed me at that, and must have seen me laughing at this compliment to my study of the manuscript letters of which my friend was so proud. "Attend Divine Worship and improve your handwriting," said he, and shook his forefinger in my face. "Wi' the hand of write you hae you'll never get a seecretarial posection and ye ken the poopit is barred to ye noo. And attendance at Divine Worship and study of the Scriptures will gie ye balance. Mind thae twa advices."

He took my hand and grasped it warmly, and departed into the inn, feeling he had done his duty. God kens. Perhaps he had. He had put himself to considerable inconvenience to come and advise me; for the Glasgow coach journey was tiring to ageing men. Nursing his two words of advice I returned, smiling under the stars, to the Wester Mearns.

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Chapter II : *Advice for a Prodigal*

MY dear mother, upon my return, was exceeding solicitous to know what my uncle had had to talk to me about.

"I presume," said I, "that he came in response to your request that he should do so."

"Did he tell you?" she cried out.

"Nay, not he. But I ken you so weel. I kent you had asked him to come to advise the black sheep."

"Oh, do not say 'black sheep,'" said she.

"Did he prove of service to ye?"

"He proffered me some advice," said I.

"To what purpose?" she asked.

"Ah!" said I. "Can you expect me to repeat advice so intimate to my soul?" For I think it our duty, nay, less our duty than what any fine man would do, to go as easy as possible with women-folk, especially those who love us. And I did not know how to tell the advice; because I did not know how she would take it; whether she would weep that such advice had to be given me,

Dead Men's Bells

or laugh at the drollery of two such pieces of advice to one who, if he had not wrecked his life, was to play the part of such an one to all who loved him—a kind of a whetstone to the knives of their creeds.

I could not for the life of me tell how it would affect her, to tears or to laughter; but I argued that to speak in this fashion was to give her ease by suggesting that the intimate holy of holies of my soul had been touched; and, alas! a shadow of pain crossed her face. She dropped my hand.

"Ah weel," she said, "if the speerit of the Almighty God is in your heart, your mother, maybe, should stand back as Moses before the bush."

I had hoped to evade my sister, thought she had already retired, as my mother now did. But my mother had hardly gone, and I was standing in the centre of the hall, ruminating what to do with my life, when my sister came down the stair and approached me.

"I fear," said she, "that you jaloused * that your mother had sent for your uncle to see you. It was on my mind all day, wi' foreboding. You jaloused the moment you saw his face? You are quick to read thochts?"

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Advice for a Prodigal

"Oh yes, yes," said I; "I jaloused. But never heed. He means well."

"And has given you some silly advice, I'se warrant, brother?"

"Let us say naething about it," said I. "It vexes me enough to be——" I paused and looked in her eyes, "treated as a masterless man. I'll be seeing the crier going round wi' his bell to announce that I am the black sheep among my kin."

"He did not help you muckle?" said she.

I broke out:

"Indeed he did not. Poor old dotterel! He told me to attend Divine Worship and improve my handwriting."

She gave a little laugh.

"Ah weel," said she, "there's some sense in that advice too; though maybe it sounds an odd coupling. But never mind, brother. Dinna fash yersel ower muckle thinking o' the future, for ye ken every cloud has its silver lining."

She bade me good night, and tripped away with the very slightest rustle, like a flag uncertain in changing winds. And I still stood in the changing winds and looked upon the devices in the mantel-board.

A little later I heard the sneck of my mother's door go, and my sister's voice bidding her sleep

Dead Men's Bells

well. I extinguished the candles, all but one, which I took to light me bedward, passed up slowly, and on the way heard my mother weeping, so tapped at her door in alarm. Her voice choked on a sob, and bade me enter, which I did, and ran to her.

"You are weeping," said I.

She sat up, putting aside the bed curtain with a gesture that went to my heart as no advice could ever go.

"Oh," said she. "Why do ye hide yourself frae me? Janet has told me that you are laughing at your uncle's advice, and you telt me——" and she broke into sobs.

"Laughing at his advice!" I cried, and took her in my arms. "God knows that I consider his advice——" and I stuck.

"Ah," she cried, "do not use God's name so. Swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is God's footstool; and, furthermore, there is the direct command—swear not at all." But why she left out the fine ending to her first text, unless because the sonorous sound of it seemed to her almost in itself a profanity—"neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King"—I cannot tell.

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Advice for a Prodigal

favourite of Montaigne and my English of Sir Thomas Browne there are many sonorous phrases, but few to compare with the phrases in this Book that has been turned into so much of a stumbling-block that many folk in their hearts hate it and the baser sort jest at it.

"Oh, my mither, my mither!" I cried, feeling what braid seas were betwixt us, "I speak from my heart. I told my sister that my uncle meant well and had done his best. I canna comprehend what is wrang here these days. It used not to be like this before I went to the college. I think the best I could do would be to get me gone for a soldier or join one o' the——"

My mother sat more alert and fixed me with her eyes and her face was all of a sad grey.

"I may tell you," said she, "that if you go into the army you forfeit the share in the lands of Wester Mearns."

I opened my eyes.

"Evil can never bring forth good," she said. "Do ye mind sax years ago how you cam' hame aye nicht frae Glasgow wi' a tavern song on your lips—to the very door—and how I was bidin' up for ye wi' my mither's love telling me something was amiss, and I lookit in your een and saw the dancing madness o' drink in them? D'ye mind?"

Dead Men's Bells

I bent my head over that old recollection.

"And I askit ye," she continued, "where ye had been, and ye told me at your Uncle Walter's. Ah weel—I ken that your Uncle Walter sat up wi' the bowl late at times—and him God can judge, for he is a lonely man wi' no wife nor weemen-folk tae gie him a hame, and whiles I hae a pity for the lonely body. But I had my suspecion, and I made inquiries. Ye had been wi' Uncle Walter, but no' at his lodging, only at his place o' business. I wormit it oot o' him that you had borrowed money from him tae——"

This gave me a shock, for I had clean forgot the borrowing, and could not recall having paid the loan back.

"And," went on my mother, "ye was wi' ane Captain Barclay, of Gardiner's dragoons. It was then that I said to myself, upon my bendit knees: 'This boy o' mine wants to go into the army instead o' into the Kirk, and maybe I should let him go, wi' a portion of money such as fits him'; but when I heard that ye had leed," her eyes were shining with the old tears, but she was not now weeping; "leed!" she cried, "I said to myself that in the matter of the army it was all over wi' ye; for it was over the heed of a captain of dragoons that ye had leed. Your second cousin,

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Advice for a Prodigal

foreby, wrote at that very time, as if the Lord wad try my soul, as was Job tried of auld, speiring if you was thinking of the future, and asking if ye was inclined for the profession of arms, and if ye was, for oor sanction, your faither's and mine's, for him to write to ye. He was in Avignon, I mind, and said he could put ye in the way of a captaincy. But no—no' after a lee. It was decided by me lang syne that if ye ever did tak' up arms ye would hae nae pairt in the Wester Mearns. Ye will see the justice o' this. Believe me, your mither, that every sin has its punishment."

"I ken it," said I grimly.

My sister was in the doorway.

"Oh, mother, mother," she said. "Why do ye vex yourself? Robert is no' so bad a lad. He's young, and he'll mend."

I turned on her.

"Why did you tell her?" I began; but my sister came to the bedside and clapped my mother's shoulder.

"I shouldna hae telt ye, mither," she said, "Ye put ower much stress on aye part and omit the other. Robert smiled at the advice of Uncle Tam; but he was rale good about it. He spoke rale weel of his Uncle Tam's intention."

And whom I could not pacify she pacified;

Dead Men's Bells

and my mother listened to her and dried her eyes, she thought with a handkerchief, but her hands had caught a fold of the bed-curtains. It was the most pathetic sight to my foolish eyes; but my sister laughed and said:

"See, see! you're putting saut tears on the bed-curtains."

My mother laughed through her tears, and said: "Ah weel, I'll mak' the best o't."

"Will ye sleep now?" I asked.

"I'll try," said she. So I kissed her forehead. And my sister happed the sheet over her shoulders.

"Ye are very good to me," said my mother to her. And we came out into the corridor.

"Good night," said my sister, and tossed her head, and away along the passage in a shambling walk, and the candle flame flying and near extinguished, and trailing smoke; and her door shut softly, and I went quietly to my room, pondering.

The carrier must have sent up a parcel late, when I was out with my uncle, for a packet was laid down beside my bedroom candle, as Nancy did when I was out late and aught came for me. It was from my old bookseller friend in Glasgow and contained a book, and a letter from him about that book, to tell me that he thought I would like

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Advice for a Prodigal

to see it, for it had not been out but seventeen days when there was a second edition; and the one which he sent me was the third, which, he heard, was also now exhausted, and a fourth in the press, and that it was the talk of all the coffee-houses in London. He did not ask of me to consider the writing of a burlesque upon it, but merely made the comment that the public would be ripe for such a thing from a competent hand.

I turned the pages with some curiosity, and read the title-page, which faced a cut of a man armed to the teeth and barefooted, and clad in what seemed like rough skins. He stood upon a beach by the sea, and backing him was a rough stockade, and seaward a ship with a scrolled stern tossing on the sea. *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner,* was the title. The book and the title-page gave out that the book was written by himself, but my friend said in his letter that the secret was blown, and that it was rumoured pretty generally that the author was Mr. Daniel Defoe, the pamphleteer.

I turned the pages listlessly at first, but was soon deep in that amazing romance—the woes of the house of Wester Mearns, that all wore upon my shoulders, fair Atlantean, forgot, till the first candle guttered in the socket, and drew me out

Dead Men's Bells

of my romance but far enough to light the bedroom candle from it, scarce aware of my action. So back into my romance again till that second candle guttered, and looking up I found that it was nigh light enough to read by the light of morning. The cocks were crowing, for four o'clock, I surmised by the light. But I must have some sleep to prepare me for the day now dawning, so went to bed. But between me and all the woes that I brought on others, by some accursed spell which I could not fathom, was Mr. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe digging out his shelter. I was on the island with him; and my mother's tears, and the rustling of the cinnamon satin, and the advices of my uncle were all paltry in a world that existed only to one who told himself that it existed.

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Chapter III : *Ecclesiastical Matters*

AFTERNOON found me marching up the hills towards Ballygeoch with a great anguish in my heart. The ins and outs of that anguish I have for the most part forgotten. If I sat down to look into the past with determination and concentration I could no doubt remember acutely much that tended to my bitterness in that day now so far off, and misted out by later and more robust days. I could no doubt, were I minded, recall words and how they were said, remember the silences, and how they fell—cruel speech and mean silence ; but though these things help to shape our lives, it is a bitter employ to go turning them up again.

Indeed, affairs at the Wester Mearns were growing too tangled for unravelling. Women can sit at the web and weave and unravel like Penelope ; but a man's way is to draw his dirk and cut the threads when webs are woven over him with too great intricacy.

It will suffice to recall that I had gone out to groom Sal, and my sister followed me.

Dead Men's Bells

"It seems a pity," said she, "that you should be bent to that task, Robert, hissing there with a curry-kame, who might be doing things of consequence."

"Seeing how I am at hame," said I, "I cannot have idle hands."

A neighbour looked in and stood chatting with her. "And what are you going to do, Robby?" she asked.

"Oh," my sister said for me, "he fills in his time. It aye keeps him from feeling he is idle, if naught else." And when I looked up, "Bobby," says she, "canna bear to be idle"; and I was worn so raw that I thought the visitor's face implied admiration for my sister's attempt to hide the fact that I was an idler, a good-for-nothing.

The web was growing round me so that I could not tell the real from the imagined, with always trying to maintain a broad vision among folk as narrow as the gate they were going in by. Lest I grew angry where no offence was meant, I bore all.

My sister would come and jeer at me, as I felt it, when we were alone; and then some friends would call in, and she would speak sweetly to me, and I be scarce able to answer for having

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Ecclesiastical Matters

swallowed her earlier words, and answer maybe a trifle sharp; whereat she would look and say: "Poor Bobby; he feels this set-back he has had at the college very badly."

So I would make a fresh name for a dour, callous wretch—or so I thought, though I learnt later that there were those who saw deeper than I had imagined they saw, and had an opinion of my sister such as, if they had spoken it in my hearing (such is my primitive way of sticking up for the Devil if I think he is of my family), I would have shoved in their teeth again.

Effie's mother, I mind, came in, and I was at the stable door, swinging the bits in a sack.

"Fine day, Bobby," she said, looking out at the back door.

I paused in my work to chat, and my sister came and went across the yard at great speed, running now to the kitchen, now to the spence, now beyond to the byre.

"You're busy," said Effie's mother.

"Indeed," said Janet, "'tis woman that works nowadays, and man can cleave heads and play ducks and drakes."

"Bob is busy enough," said Effie's mother, a pacific old lady—my father's sister.

"Oh, I'm no' thinking of Bob," said my sister.

Dead Men's Bells

"Bob's affairs are his ain. I set up to judge no one. But I aye stick to the care of the farm, for ye never ken what may befall."

"Is Bobby, then, thinking o'—are ye thinking of going awa' frae the place?" asked Effie's mother.

"I don't richtly ken——" I began.

"Indeed," said my sister, "I do not think a sister should be a burden any more than a wife. Rob may go here or go there, or try his hand at this or at that—it willna be colleging noo—but it is my place to continue the managing—see, Bob," she broke off, and sent me on some errand which I forget now, in such a way that if she had been a brother I would have told her to go to the Devil. But I have it very strongly implanted in me to bear with women all things. I mind how when I went off blithely to do her bidding her face fair girned, and her brow darkened on me like thunder, and my aunt gave her a look and quoth she:

"Ah weel!"

And when Effie's mother said these words "Ah weel" she was thinking, in behind her white, bobbing curls and her black satin and her creamy-like cheeks.

I laughed to myself as I went on my errand, surmising that my sister had not expected me

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Ecclesiastical Matters

to go so courteously, but had wanted me to show annoyance before a third party. I smiled to myself; but I considered that ere long I must leave Wester Mearns, as Marcus Aurelius says we may all leave a room where the brazier smokes, if the majority prefer the smoke to the absence of the brazier. It was not the way of Marcus Aurelius to suggest that the minority might, after all, throw out the brazier; all his great, fine mind working otherwise—and, indeed, I think I am wholly with Marcus Aurelius. When I came back Effie's mother was gone, and my sister was flipping and flying to and fro like a whirlwind, with kilted coats. I took up my work, and anon Nancy came to tell me dinner was ready.

We had the meal in quiet. My sister was clearly going a step further, and talked wholly to my mother, all about this to be done, and that to be done; and once, when I offered to do something for her, she just gave me an angry look. At last I cried out:

“What's wrong with you?”

My mother, who had taken the part of no part, sitting stately at the table as if she saw no side, put her hand on mine, and:

“Come, come, Robby,” said she. “Here is no way to speak to a sister.”

Dead Men's Bells

My sister said :

"Don't, mother ; don't cross him. It does no good. It only makes him swear under his breath."

As my mother was already going deaf and taking on that aspect of deaf folk who wonder what is being said that they miss, and they sensitive on the point, her face, as I saw, took a look of grief. She turned to me.

"I should hope," said she, "that a son of mine would do no such thing."

"A son of yours," said I, "loves you——" and I stuck.

My sister smiled, and very quietly said she, looking at her plate :

"And gets fou and cracks skulls."

I glanced up, quick and angry ; but it was not for me to say that she talked under her breath. Only, right down in what maybe they would call my soul, I hated her.

"Ah, Bobby, Bobby!" cried my mother ; "not a look like that ! Curb your temper, Bobby, and I hope you will never swear under your breath even, when your mother thinks only of your welfare. The tongue is a small member, but the root of all evil."

"You must not vex her," said my sister. "We

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Ecclesiastical Matters

canna have the trouble we had last night—and her sobbing herself to sleep.”

So after the meal, when my mother was gone to her corner seat, I hung in the hall till I saw my sister's direction, and followed her.

“See here,” said I. “I am getting near the end of all this. What is the meaning of it all?”

She turned on me, and burst into sobs!

“What a life! What a life!” she cried. “I hae nae pleasure in life!”

“Why!” I cried. “What's the matter?” For a woman all heaving back and breasts, and screwing her face like an anguished bairn, is a distressful sight.

She wept and heaved so that I thought she would burst, and I caught her in my arms.

“You must not greet like this,” I said. “What is the trouble?”

“Oh!” she cried, “ye aye were your mother's favourite; the son aye is the mother's ain, and I shouldna grieve. It is the woman's place to suffer, and the man's tae see the world,” and she sobbed wildly.

“Come, come,” said I. “You must not greet.” But in my heart I was thinking: “Oh, sets the wind so!” and also considering that she was doing very well toward alienating my mother

Dead Men's Bells

away from me. It was later, on Ballygeoch, that I thought maybe it mattered all very little. She had set my mother pretty far from me in one absence, and if I went away again could win her wholly away. But I clapped and consoled her, and she mopped her eyes, and for the rest of the day showed me, whenever she came upon me, a lugubrious face, the very image of grief.

As I was working in the stable later my mother came to me and said :

" Bobby, could I have a word wi' ye when ye are through ? "

" I shall come now," said I, and I washed at the pump and drew on my coat, and knotted my cravat and followed her.

" It's this, Bob. Ye are weighing heavy on your sister, wi' the constant thought that there is nae future for you. I hae seen her sad face ; her face is wae wi't. The divinity ye ken ye spoiled for yersel', and the army ye spoiled for yoursel'——"

I was on the point of crying, " Oh, be damned to ye ! " but that was a word that, if I was to be driven to say it at last, had best be said to the other.

" There's the farm," said my mother. " There's the Wester Mearns. Is it to be the farming, or

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Ecclesiastical Matters

what is it to be ? Are ye going to settle to this wi' her ? She has been mistress since ye went to the college——”

“ Was sent,” said I, foolish-like, perhaps.

“ I canna see the differ,” said she. “ Anyway, it has been a holiday here for you in the vacations. But hae ye got the necessary balance and stamina ? Are ye going to determine to hae it ? For, mind ye, it takes steadiness tae make a place, such as the Wester Mearns, conteenue. Or what is it ? A while since ye said that your bookseller freend—I forget his name—had asked ye to dae some wark for him, and I thocht that maybe my son micht write sermons such as George Buchanan. Noo that is gone tae. For how can a man that looks upon the wine when it is red and cracks folks’ skulls lead souls tae God ? ”

I had a droll thought of some of the professors in the colleges, one in especial who interrupted a gownsman in prayer with a “ Speak up, sir, in the name of God ” ; and another who knocked at his own door and asked if he lived there, on returning from a convivial meeting. But I agreed with her. A professor I respect as a man of erudition who can give you the dry bones of a thing and all the pros and cons. But I cannot see any man whose heart is not in a theme making any other

Dead Men's Bells

than lip converts to it. I told her, however, that my publisher friend, as she called him—

“Ye needna say it like that,” said she. “I hae a failing memory.”

I forgot what I was about to say for a space, and then minded again.

“He has asked me,” said I, “to write a pamphlet on a fact that we have discussed together, that the Christ spoke in the language of the people. I have drafted the whole idea, as in an exegesis, for him”; and I began to tell her more. But I had not gone far, though farther than I would have gone had I not warmed to my subject as I continued, before her eyes, staring on me, pierced my own interest, and the Christ, for whom I had a great admiration, faded from before me. Her eyes, that I loved so, were like the skies when the blue goes out and they fall leaden, or like lochs when clouds shadow them, and in place of light they fall fearsome, and make you think of men drowned in them.

“A son of mine! A son of mine!” she cried. “A son of mine seek to undo the Church of Christ, and pick at the stones with a hammer, and undermine the walls builded by holy men. Ah!” she cried, “we have the wars and rumours of wars, and here is my ain son fulfilling the pro-

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Ecclesiastical Matters

phency 'for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many'—a son of mine!"

"Ah, mother, mother," I cried, for she seemed about to fall in a worse fit than that I had seen my sister upon the verge of. "There is another word. It is to be remembered that even the Christ told Saint John that he had no richt to forbid the man round the corner. 'He who is not against us,' says He, 'is for us.'"

She seemed not listening, seemed waiting now, with eyes like stones, till I had done.

"A son of mine," said she, "setting himself against the Church, builded by great minds upon Christ."

"Ye hae said it!" I cried. "His mausoleum! His tomb! and no' His tabernacle. Builded upon John and Peter and men such as the popes, of whom I could give ye a list each one of which poisoned his predecessor so as to get the job——"

"Ye speak of the Church of Rome," she said, "the Scarlet Woman who sitteth upon the Seven Hills——"

"As if," says I, "one was not lairge enough for her hurdies."

"Dinna be coorse in adection!" cried my mother.

Dead Men's Bells

"The phrase is not mine," said I. "It was said by Wodrow, whom I often hear ye mention."

"Ah, is that so, are ye sure?"

"Quite sure," said I.

"Ah weel," said she, "there is excuse for him using it in his righteous indignation, but it smacks of levity the way you say it. Everything," says she, "matters for the spirit that is in it." Which was precisely what I had been after. I was foolish enough to continue.

"It is what I am saying," said I. "I speak of all the churches made by man; and I was about to quote to ye for the text of my intended pamphlet, 'Worship a Spirit in spirit and in truth.'"

She drew back, and a smile quite terrible to me came on her face as she controlled herself, a grey, cold smile.

"This," said she, "is blasphemy from you. Oh, my son—my son—quote the words of God, and pry at the foundations of His Kirk! A son of mine! A son of mine!" and she staggered to her room.

I followed, fain to comfort her. But she waved me from her, and closed the door of her closet.

There I stood in anguish. What could I do? What could I say? I began to wonder if there were such a thing as a soul at all for the saving

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Ecclesiastical Matters

by Christ or by Confucius, who saves souls in Muscovy. But my thoughts were all fevered and overwrought, and I had a mad desire to fly out and down to the inn, and fill myself with ale. I think such discussions on religion and such matters are all of the Devil. One of our scholars had it as his private opinion, I mind, that religious emotion, and the emotions out of it, were all kin with sexual emotion, and that the Protestant worshipping the Christ, or the Roman Catholic considering the Virgin, were but modern examples of the old Phallic worshippers. But as he is still in our college it is best I should not give his name. There would be but more fanaticism and excitements.

My sister came running in the corridor.

"What hae ye done? What hae ye said?" she cried, and she passed in to comfort my mother.

I went to my room and sat staring at the crest of Ballygeoch, and refused myself the dram that I was fair mad for. Drinking should be undertaken only in company, and in excess of joy, and not in the fashion of St. Paul's advice, solitary and for melancholy. I sat and looked upon the quiet crest of Ballygeoch, God knows how long, but at last there was a tap and my sister entered.

"Ye may as weel," said she, "mak' the best o't. Effie and her mother are below, and I do

Dead Men's Bells

not suppose you are going to wear a long face and show to everyone your sorrows, and mak' folk think that ye are na happy wi' us."

"I shall come down," I said; and I rose and combed my hair and, I mind, what was not my custom, tied it with a brown ribband and brushed the straws from my breeches, wondering at all this business of appearances—and canker at the heart. I passed out. And there was my mother smiling bravely like a woman with a deep grief, and my sister following her to the stair-head. And suddenly my sister gripped her arm and hissed at her:

"Can't ye catch up your gown mair gentry-like than that! See—catch it there"; and she snatched the gown and a hand.

My mother gave a start, but made no complaint. It made me think—that scene—of the way the gang-about bodies treat their ponies, kicking them under the belly, hitting them on the nose with full-clenched neive, and the ponies but flinch and then stand mute.

I stepped quickly toward my sister, and said I:

"Is this the way you treat the mother of whom you are so solicitous?"

My mother said not a word. In some way she had been broken. It struck me that perhaps I

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Ecclesiastical Matters

had helped at the breaking of her so that she would stand such treatment.

"I do not break her heart," said my sister.

My mother walked on down the stair and across the hall. I walked after her, putting in a step, as the saying is, and touched her shoulder.

"Did she hurt your arm?" I asked.

"Ah, my boy, for I still think you so in my heart," said my mother, "there are worse hurts than hurts to the body. There are wounds to the soul that can never be healed." And she walked on.

I opened the door and she sailed in, and my sister turned her head and thanked me as if I was a stranger, with her head in the air.

So I decided to leave the house of Wester Mearns where, do as I would, evil only came. They would be happier if I were gone.

I closed the door on them as their voices greeted their guests, and turning about went through to Nancy, and bade her, if I was asked for, to say I had gone up to look over the sheep on the hill, and, whistling Rover to heel, went out, and up to the open and the winds.

Chapter IV : *On Ballygeoch*

SO I climbed the hill of Ballygeoch, and as I went pee-weeps screamed round my head, and the light in among the waving bents was like the light I desired to see on the faces of my ain folk ; and long ere I had reached the summit with Rover I had come into a quieter outlook upon the ferment that vexed me.

The hills there roll southward into obscurity, roll after roll, away as far as to Dumfriesshire, with summits for league-marks on the way, such as Misty Law, that is always drawing a filmy cravat out of the sky, and wearing it, and casting it away, and trying a new one, day in, day out ; and all these waste places are as quiet as the sky over them, save for the whispering of gathering streams.

The hill-side was dotted with sheep, climbing and nibbling, and bleating one to another with plaintive voices across the slopes from which the sun was ebbing as colour fades from a wall with age.

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On Ballygeoch

Glasgow smoked to northward. Beyond Glasgow Campsie Fells drew their slow-mounting line, and gave their sudden dip westwards. Away beyond range on range of hill and mountain passed north ; and at the last of them something showed like a conical cloud—Ben Nevis, half across Scotland in the wild Highlands that I was soon to be in the midst of, its people then all agog with fresh plans for setting a king upon a throne, unbroken by their last defeat in that endeavour ; they all agog with setting a king upon the throne just as our Lowlands were all worrying about God and the Devil and the Bottomless Pit, and how to make the best of both worlds. The names of the plotters and fighters up there among these looming fastnesses, so near and yet so remote from the life of our country-side, came into my head like music : MacDonald of Sleat, Seaforth, Mar, the Chevalier de Saint George. It seemed strange that under these quiet Bens, darkening in the night, in the valleys beneath them, were red-coats seeking for arms in pit and thatch ; the wild Highlandmen, Camerons, MacDonalds, Stewarts of Appin, plotting how to bring back their chevalier, and then wrangling among themselves as to who should sit upon his right hand and his left, a people actually unfit for the union that is strength, more fit for standing

Dead Men's Bells

alone in the last breach, or, like the Macgregor, for playing each his own hand, Ishmaelitish. A queer, wild people. A people I admired. (I could not then know that I was to come to love them, not having the *Dà-shealladh* * that many of them possess.) A people hospitable and chivalrous. The king they wanted was as good as the other that they dubbed "the wee, wee German lairdie." In the frame of mind I was in at the moment, I felt that I could quite happily associate myself with their cause. I thought a little bitterly of that letter from Avignon, that had never been passed on to me. It was at Avignon that many of their preparations were made. Maybe my third cousin was with the Jacobites. I thought of the two sides, and felt I could quite gaily associate myself with their cause, lost, methought, before begun, because of the many "canny folk" who loved a God and a king to keep their coffers filled, and the end of the other cause would, belike, be but a peck of ballads.

All the while the colours were fading from hill and sky, and I ran my gaze southward through the mist, or haze, under which lay the country of the Campbells, cut off by the geography of their land, as well as by inclination, from all the

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On Ballygeoch

clans northward, ran my eye down to where, nearer than the mist over Argyll, the Isle of Arran soared up ; and Goat Fell was still blazing in the sunset, like a great blue amethyst, and the Firth was all grey like steel, with Ailsa Craig down yonder, farther south, standing in its flat grey, like a mausoleum.

And the pee-weeps kept crying overhead, and the voices of the sheep crying through the growing night, their movements drawing the eye to them to distinguish them from scattered rocks. And then a pee-weep would scream so close as to startle me and fly with beating wing so close over me that I could hear the " creak, creak " that his wings make, as though the joints need oiling—and he had better go borrow oil from the penguin, who cannot fly ! I had my bit smile, you see, sitting there lee-lane, diverting myself out of myself, with the open sweetness of the hill.

Then lights were pricked in the valley, here, there, and night fell, and the ultimate purple went out of the hills.

And so I rose, and home again, healed ; and was met with stony silence ; no sign from my mother of my return, so that I felt like a spoilt bairn ; and from my sister one look at me, as though to speak, then a searching gaze, as if we

Dead Men's Bells

had been playing at the chess, and she did not ken, till she looked at the board, that I had moved—and then a drawing erect.

They were sitting in the wide hall with the door open for coolness; and I sat down in a vacant place and heard the talk going on, about the Kirk and God, and how this preacher had unction, and the other the licht of God in his countenance; and my sister thought it a terrible thing that it was necessary that a preacher (Mr. Webster, an Edinburgh minister) should have to correct a professor (Mr. Simson) for heretical views; and Effie's mother murmured that maybe the minister did not understand all the ins and outs of the matter; and I thought (though I did not join my voice to it all) that it was small wonder if he did not, and that maybe neither did any of us, laymen or ecclesiastics, so built upon with Babylon has been the simplicity of Christ.

I moved over beside Effie, and my sister looked up from her frame, and down to it again, and began talking of Martha, and how her hands were worn with toil; and all the room sighed and shook their curls. And then she spoke of the Prodigal Son, and how it had been driven in upon her more and more, of late, how some preacher should take the two texts to expound, and make

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On Ballygeoch

a comparison between Martha and the Prodigal. And all this with covert glances toward me.

"I see," said I, "as it is in the play—as it were a whore and a knave."

"Your mother," said my sister, not noticing that I had confused Martha with another, but having another thrust as good, "doesna like the use of that word unless it be the hoor of Babylon."

Cousin Effie tittered outright, and my sister asked me, seeing I was near the door, if I would shut it.

I rose and closed it without a word. She watched me narrowly as I made back again and sat down. Then she glanced to Granny, who was there by this time.

"Bobby has been working in the stable," said she, "since he cam' hame from"—she seemed to catch herself up—"on vacation," said she, as if to hide my expulsion from those present, every one of whom knew more about that skull-cracking than I kent myself. It struck me that from a squabbling that had touched, at least in my heart, Æschylean heights, we were coming down to a kind of little children's bickering. I might have laughed at the humour of it; but I was beyond humour—and I fear my smile at the change was a bitter smile.

Dead Men's Bells

"And stable doors are aye on the swing," says my sister. "Is that it, Bobby?"

"Even so," said I, and turned to Effie, and we fell a-talking.

"I'm sorry to interrupt ye," says my sister; "but would ye snuff the candles?"

I glanced round, and up and snuffed the candles, and back again to Effie, and says I:

"I am sorry to mak' ye break off—pardon my rudeness, cousin—ye were saying?"

Effie tossed her head and glared at my sister.

"Indeed," she cried, "I have clean forgot. It was of little mair consequence than the maist that we women-folk hae to say."

My sister laughed and turned to talk to Granny.

Effie leant to me and put her head to my ear.

"What maks ye stand it?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I'm fair scunnered at her," she said. "Fetch and carry, fetch and carry! And what way?"

My sister's voice was going up talking to Granny:

"There's naething for a man's hands to do in the evening. If I ever hae—if I had an——" She tried again: "If I had my way o't I would give a' lads a bit of knitting, if it was but a gar—if it was but a pair of reins for playing horses. It is not but what a man has the desire to work. I

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On Ballygeoch

believe it is that, that aye keeps his hand fidgeting to the pocket where he keeps his snuff-box."

"Fetch and carry, do ye hear me?" Cousin Effie was saying. "Your nature is to fetch and carry for weans and women. I ken enough of ye for that. Is it fair to ye to have your every movement smirched and confounded?"

"Aye, aye," I said, "it doesna signify. She is a woman, Effie, and it behoves——"

"She's a bitch!" said Effie; and by some inadvertence of vehemence her voice tripped up an octave as it were, and the word sang in the midst of the candle-lit assemblage: Granny at her stocking with a great brass-bound and brass-clasped Bible by her side; my mother, under a candle with her horn spectacles low on her nose, knitting hose for me, with a face of brokenness, and as of still doing her duty, that kept stabbing into my heart, so that I called myself, pretty nearly, instead of having others call me so, the chief of sinners; Effie's mother rolling a ball from a skein that was spread between the backs of two chairs. Up jumps Effie's mother and snatches the wool.

"Hold this," said she. "Come over here and hold this."

"No, no," said I, "it wasna' the bitch. It was Rover."

Dead Men's Bells

My mother put her spectacles close to her eyes and turned to me. Effie louped in her chair.

"It was Rover did what?" said my mother, for the first sign of seeing me.

"Guddled for trout," said I, and Effie sniggered; "lay on the bank dipping his paw for them"—I felt a mad laugh coming—"his tongue," said I, "wagging."

Effie sniggered.

"His tail, I mean," said I, and now I was fairly a-going, "thumping the sod like," and then I took the full burst of it, like a burn in spate, "thumping the sod like a preacher dinging the dust out of the pulpit cushion." And then I up with my head and roared, and Effie came in, and we made a duet of it. And Effie cried out with the last of her laugh:

"It wasna that way at all!"

"It is a' very mysterious," said Granny.

"Oh, I dinna ken," said Effie, and her head went down and her eyes stared at my sister's, till in the candle-light my sister's eyes showed moist, and not with tears. She blinked; her gaze fell. Still Effie stared. She raised her gaze again, and Effie was still staring on her face; and her gaze dropped again. She shut her eyes tight, flung up her head right back on her shoulders,

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On Ballygeoch

and then opened her eyes and looked into a corner of the ceiling.

And then Effie trips over and takes the wool and stands in the centre of the room, her arms swinging left and right, and her mother, very amazed-like, winding the ball. And as Effie unwound the wool she began singing :

“ ‘My daddie is a cankert carle,
He'll no' twine wi' his gear :
My Minnie she's a scauldin' wife,
Hauds a' the house asteer.
But let them say or let them do,
It's a' ane to me'—

I forget the rest.”

She hummed a bit, her arms going, and broke into another stanza :

“ ‘My Auntie Kate sits at her frame,
And sair she lightlies me ;
But weel I ken it's a' envy,
For ne'er a joe has she.
But let them say or let them do,
It's a' ane to me.'”

And when this song was over the old folk had only sweet words for her sweet voice. My sister sat very glum, her mouth drawn and her brows contracted. And—you may think me a fool—but I felt a kind of pity for her (despite all her usage

Dead Men's Bells

of me), sitting there at her frame and understanding. As you will doubtless recall, the word is "wheel," and not "frame," in the song—a song my sister knew ; but she said nothing.

But it was not so deep a pity as to make me forget a deep appreciation of Effie's partisanship for me. It was a pity that made me feel that if there must be bickerings in this house I had rather leave it ; for it came to me then that if I was to begin fighting, I could stand the victories of my sallies less easily than the sitting down in siege.

The last wool was unwound ; the last of the hank dropped from Effie's fingers.

"What says the knock ?" said she, and bent her head and puckered her eyes to see the hour.

"Aye, aye, Effie, we must be stepping," said Effie's mother.

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Chapter V: *Mr. Defoe Does me a Service
and I Leave the Wester Mearns*

MY mother was always up betimes, and in the morning (having read myself into happiness, ere going to sleep, with the final pages of *Robinson Crusoe*) I awoke with the first light, went down to the yard, and douched under the pump.

I suspect that I had really done what is called "taking a resolve"; but I assure you that in the last step of it there was little of labour pains. Or, to change the metaphor, there had been clouds upon clouds gathering all these days; the resolution was swift as the lightning stroke; and after the cloud burst there was great refreshing.

I had taken up the *Robinson Crusoe* in no very happy frame of mind, plunged into the book where I had left it, and soon forgot my own existence, whether I sat or stood, metamorphosed out of misery by that enchanting narrative. Perhaps a moth in the candle, or perhaps a fluff of wind in the dimity, threatening its ignition, or

Dead Men's Bells

the flame's extinction, drew me back to the world, to find everything very still, the night far sped, and my limbs somewhat cramped. But, which was the great matter, my brain was swept and garnished and fresh. I looked in upon the three-some life in Wester Mearns, and in that moment said :

“ I shall leave here the morn's morning.”

I went to bed on that decision, neither questioning nor arguing, wholly at peace, and came awake, clear and glad, at an early hour ; and had already come in from the yard, towelling myself as I entered, when the first sounds of the morning's movement came from my mother's chamber.

I fell to work at once on my packing, quick and glad, with a great contempt for all pettiness, that aided me to make my selection of what things I required very little cumbersome. My mother had waked heavy-sleeping Nancy, and stepped out to see that Jock and the lad were out and stirring when I came down again.

“ Could I have a word with you, mother ? ” I said. She gave me a quick, feart look, and came in, and my heart was wae for her, and already I felt myself again the black sheep.

“ 'Tis just this,” said I, “ my sister manages fine, ye ken that.”

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Mr. Defoe Does me a Service

"She is a fine manager," my mother admitted.

"And I am but a cumberer of the ground," said I; "and the upshot is, that I am resolved that my course is to be gone from here—both for duty and inclination."

"If God is with ye," said my mother, after a kind of gulp, "wha am I to intervene? It is hard for a mither to lose a bairn. But this is very sudden," she said; "it is very sudden, Bobby. Is there anything wrang at hame?"

I looked in her anxious face. Maybe she had lost her way in all the webs of one kind and another cast upon her, and drawn upon her closer by her own hands.

"Nothing at all," said I, "nothing at all."

"I am glad," said she. "Ye ken, Bobby, I hae sometimes of late feart that ye werena happy. Ye are resolved upon this?"

There seemed the signs of a deep doubt and trouble in her eyes, her soul seemed webbed about, and anxious, like a snared fly when it has almost settled down in the web, and some gust of wind from without blows the web, and the fly minds on liberty.

I had a horrible feeling as of leaving her to the watchful spider to slip over her another thread.

But who am I to judge? I may see the would

Dead Men's Bells

all wrong. My own vision of it I must follow ; but I am not ever desirous to convert. I am no proselytiser, and all I ask is to travel my own way ; and all I ask of others is to make no attempt to restrain me or turn me aside. The only bound to my goings must be my neighbour's good, seeing that we are a kind of bees. There are bees that swarm, and there are solitary bees ; but we are all on the one planet, if not all gregarious, and hence my basis for a way of life. But I am upon a narrative, and not the expounding of a philosophy.

"Mind ye," said my mother, "this resolve of yours has a suddenness ; and, though the conversion of Saint Paul was byordinar' sudden, there is the danger of backsliding. From your quate demeanour I tak' it that there is some depth of grace in your decision, or else I would question it. As it is, I can but call to your mind that he wha puts his hand to the plough and turneth back is not fit for the Kingdom of God. Oh ! Oh ! ye seem hurt, Bobby—hae I given ye pain ? There was a spasm on yer face, lad."

"No," said I—and I could have wept.

"Ah weel," said she, "we will hae a wee while yet o' ane anither. Ye will no' be going the day."

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Mr. Defoe Does me a Service

"Do ye not think I had better?" said I; and I was the more determined to go, for a deeper anguish was coming that would soon make me yell for the hopelessness of any explanatory ladder to climb out of it.

"Oh, I dinna ken," she said. "I canna richtly advise ye. Ye ken what is done in haste may be repented at leisure."

"Ah," says I, "if ye will pardon me, that is a profane proverb, and I would quote to ye from Holy Writ——"

"Come, come," said my mother, giving me her pawky smile. "'Tis a droll turn for you to be teaching your mother the inspired words o' God."

I bowed to her.

"Aye—I'll be going the day," said I.

"To-day!" she cried.

"I have already packed all that I shall require," said I. "And the sooner the better—and the parting easier."

At the word "parting" she broke into tears, that had indeed already been welling, and slipped round the Cross of Christ, as it were (not that one of Calvary, I fear, but that one of John's way of seeing his Master), and came into my arms and clapped my shoulder. And she called me her ain bairn, and God forbid that what I

Dead Men's Bells

felt my duty she should dissuade me from. And so I saw my mother at the end of it.

At this came my sister with the last sleep making her eyes almond-shaped.

"What's this?" said she.

"Robby has ta'en a decision," said my mother. "He is leaving hame to seek his fortune in the world."

"Oh," said my sister. "Well, we have all the day before us, and breakfast tae eat. And when are ye thinking of going?"

I looked clean in her eyes.

"The moment breakfast is through," said I, and my mother gave such a leap at my voice that I added hastily: "I feel that having made the resolve it is for the best to act at once."

"Oh, dear!" said my sister; "and I have tae manage a' the place myself, have I?"

"Oh, be damned to you!" said I.

Turning on my heel, I went up for my portman-teaux. That last breakfast was the most painful that ever any of us made pretence to eat, and I was hardly seated before I had thrust back the plate and risen. Something took me by the throat, leaving the auld house, and I went slowly looking in each of the rooms, looking into each as if it were a last look on the face of the dead.

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Mr. Defoe Does me a Service

In my mother's room was an open jewel-case, and I saw a fob that had been my father's. My mother had come after me, tearful and wae and old-like, and I wondered what God had made us all for.

"Can I hae this," I asked, "for the family's sake?"

"Surely, surely," said she.

So I put it on, and we turned without a word, as if walking under something inevitable over us, and passed downstairs. But my sister had come into the hall to see the last of me, standing there in a way that minded me of some innkeeper-body speeding a guest that had not spent much, but that might do a harm to the inn if he was not seen away with a nod and smile, of dismissal maybe, but aye a nod.

She saw the blob of gold under my vest, and says she :

"What's that ?"

"My father's fob," I replied.

She frowned and considered. "Weel," said she, "the family relics richtly belang to me. Have I not been working here——"

"Odds bobs!" says I. "Ye can have my breeches that I have left up the stair if ye like"; and my mother said :

"Tut, lassie, ye canna wear a fob."

Dead Men's Bells

"Nae mair I can," said my sister. "Weel, gude-bye. Ye'll send word?"

I did not take her hand held out to me.

"Let's hae an end of hypocrisy at the last of it," said I.

"Oh, you'll surely send word?" cried my mother, and clasped me again, and made no sign of having understood, or so much as seen, the parting with my sister, and her tears rained on my shoulder.

My sister turned aside and stood back, ready to turn about and go upon her business when my feet should have passed from the porch. I near grat myself because of the Rood of Christ betwixt us, and us jinking round it like daft bairns at play. So I passed out, and saw Nancy throw her apron over her head and run into the byre after I waved her good-bye, passing through the yard for a short cut to the road.

With the hill of Ballygeoch all in a mist, though the morning was fine, I passed from the house of Wester Mearns, sad and glad, as life is, and down to Eaglesham, where old Jock had preceded me with my portmanteaux, to put them under the seat for me, and shake my hand at parting, and tell me how when he was a lad he had gone out into the world, "and it is gude to do sae. Gude-bye, lad, gude-bye."

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Chapter VI : *The Lure of Virginia*

I HAD left the past behind by the time the coach was rocking down the hill to Waterfoot, where the crows squawk in the trees beyond the burn, and where I had been happy once when I walked, instead of coaching, home, sitting under a tree there, to rest, with a duodecimo Virgil; and, I ought to say, I had sat nigh there another time in the shade till the road would seem less divergent before my feet, for I had been too free with the ale at Cathcart, with two other lads I had travelled that far with, and the sun was on my neck. I try to forget the latter, and oft recall the former, incident. I can mind even the flutter of the tree-shadows upon the page and the murmur of the tree, which was a lime.

The horn blew, and a lass came out with a packet from one of the cottages, and the red-nosed driver sprang on the great brake, which he had fitted with another layer of old boot-sole before leaving the inn at Eaglesham, and was eager to try.

Dead Men's Bells

When we paused, the sudden quiet of the place was manifest. He bent for the packet, and the lass blinked up under her sun-bonnet, and you could hear the horses breathing and the crows caw-cawing, and River Cart singing past beyond the cottages.

I looked back the way we had come, where the dust was settling again like a glittering and falling powder; and beyond the brae of Waterfoot there was a haze filling the valley betwixt it and Eaglesham, a summer haze. And I knew that up there was the rambling Eaglesham street, and beyond it the Wester Mearns, where Jock would now be back with an odour of tippenny on his lips, beginning to muck the byre, and Nancy would be at work, kirning maybe; and my sister and mother were there. Beyond would be the hill of Ballygeoch shouldering out of the heat haze, with sheep crying on his sides, and pee-weeps dipping and alighting and running, with their wee crests raised, and then running a step or two and leaping into the air and flying and crying.

And the long whip cracked, and we rolled on for Cathcart and Glasgow.

I am no great friend to cities, and writing this narrative in the Virginia woods, where I

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The Lure of Virginia

have come at last, although my first attempt to come hither miscarried, I am content.

Towns are smoky places, and beyond a certain size (when they have no more than two of a trade and one piper or fiddler) they come into the danger that beset Babylon. Towns are smoky places. The peat smoke of farm or shieling has a haunting smell on a country-side ; a wood fire, too, is kindly and natural ; but the burning of coal as they do in Glasgow is a mixed blessing. For the smudges fall a great deal and soil, and on rainy days, of which Glasgow has full share, the rain seems a great part blackened and muddy with the coal smoke. Though of course there is something to be said for the vents of the coal fires which make a greater heat in so many chimneys and maybe act as cleansers of the air, as a shovel fire is carried through a sick-room. In London, where there are more fashionables than in Glasgow, which is not averse of display, the coal fires cause the fashionables to change their cravats, they say, three times a day at certain seasons of the year, when the fogs press down the smuts of coal. And God kens that the stench of the Clyde at the Broomielaw is overpowering at laigh water, when the gobarts, and such boats that come thither, lie on one side in mud that is leaping with black flies.

Dead Men's Bells

I had little idea what I was to do in Glasgow,* but certainly I was not intending to stop there; and the sight of the Clyde running seawards through the mud gave me a notion of where it ran to, into the open firth that I had looked on many a time from Ballygeoch, with the rock of Ailsa Craig like a sentinel, and beyond that the seas of all the world.

It struck me to call upon my Uncle Walter. Tam could go to the Devil or to heaven with his two words of advice; but Walter (my father's brother) was a man that made little talk of religious matters. So I made my way to his place, and found him very cheery, he having just come back from his midday meat, that he had clearly washed down with a bottle.

"Hullo, hullo!" he cried. "I thocht ye would hae been feart tae show face on the scene of your skull-crackings," and he gripped my hand and then looked at it. "Troth," said he, "ye hae a lairge grip. By God," said he, "it is mair a grip for a sword than for shaking the hands of mittened auld wives, and haudin' dishes o' this

* For the benefit of those who may think I defame the city I may say that I have called my plantation here after it, Glasgow. I thought of Ballygeoch for its name, but the majority of the folk here could not get their tongues about that word.

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The Lure of Virginia

new-farrant and fushionless tea. I dinna ken what Glasgow is coming tae. Your puir misguided Uncle Tam, your mither's brither, was up here the other day hauding up pious hands ower yon skull-cracking ploy o' yours. 'A damned gude day's wark,' says I. 'A damned gude day's wark.'—'I beg your pardon,' says he.—'It's granted,' says I. 'A damned gude day's wark. It's a sad end for eedication tae come intil the cul-de-sac o' the poopit, or even tae settle the bickerings o' twa fairmers ower their boundary dyke. Ye ken the story o' the twa fat bucks frae the Braes o' Balwhidder. You fleece the ane and I'll fleece the ither.' Wad ye believe me? he didna ken it! He has nae fund o' stories, naither droll nor bawdy." He broke off. "What brings you to Glesca?" says he.

"On my way into the world," said I.

"Oh," said he, and looked on me with his bulging eyes. "It's come to that o't?" said he. "Man, man, that's a peety. When I heard o' yon skull-cracking and the dismissal I thocht to myself: 'Now that goodwife, his mither,' whom I respect very heartily," and he crossed his fingers on his paunch and bowed, "'will hae a queer takin' on. And the sister will be for makin' the maist o't.' Man, man, yon sister o' yours would expire wi' fair holy ecstasy o' perfaiction

Dead Men's Bells

if ye was tae put a lass in the famely way. Mony a time I hae almost wished, if it wadna hae been an encumbrance tae an honest lad like you, that ye would bairn yon serving-lass at the Wester Mearns, just tae see your sister's een rolling up tae the heevens. It would be ower great ecstasy for her—the chief o' sinners, damned for ever, living in the same hoose wi' ye—your ain blood-kin—think o't, man—think o' the deleerious joy!”

I had at first been fain to pretend no understanding in his talk, not that I took any offence, though perhaps a slight, maybe foolish, twinge at mention of Nancy (for she was a fine lass); but now, sister or no sister, I burst out in a laugh, and he poked a finger in my waistcoat, produced his silver snuff-box, and snapped it open under my nose. “Sneezin’?” he said. I took a pinch, and he showered one under his own neb, which I saw was swelling since last I had seen him, and turning ruddier. “Hoots and havers!” he said. “Ye would try to hide the facts o' the case from me, and no' wash your linen in public. But it is a' as plain to me what mainner o' individual she is as my nose indicates to her my besetting sin”; and he teeheed with merriment.

Poor Uncle Walter, he died for lack of his liver, through over-drinking, within two years.

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The Lure of Virginia

"Well, lad," he began again, "it's a strange world for those wha hae what is called in France the spirit o' *bonhomie*. There seems whiles to be a pact against them. They who accept the heart that ye are aye throwing at them accept it but to suck it like a limon. They wha reject it reject it but tae force ye tae throw it awa' on worse folk. As for your expulsion, lad, it was a braw gecht ye made o't. I wasna ashamed o' ye, lad——" He shook his head. "Tae tell the truth, I'm some feart that I let drap on mair than ane occasion that ye were my nephew! Ye see, lad, in a sense ye suffered for ither folks' ploys. There have been ower mony humorous lads in the college afore ye. I mind—Oh, let me see, maybe saxteen or seventeen year ago, the wits used tae hand up names of their fellows in the kirk—for need o' spaeshul prayer, ye ken—and yin o' them was expelled for that; he went ower far wi't, and the authorities made inquiries, and found oot that he was makin' a jest o't. Then there was anither lad aboot the same time, I mind, was oot late wi' a moll, and attacked the city guard for her amusement—that was in the days when the scholars could wear a sword; he cut the serjeant's ramrod in twa—Oh, great days, great lads!" And he chuckled, and added: "It canna be alood; it's fair rideeculous. Eh, lad, but

Dead Men's Bells

I mind the greatest of all of yon Town and Gown ploys—let me see—aye—that was in the year 'four. Man, yon was a sight. I had a glisk o't masel' for auld times' sake. Aye—yon was gaun too far; and when the shooting began in the court, and—oh, aye—yon was going too far—but ye hae to pay for it nooadays." He looked into the past and laughed again. "There was mair humour than onything else in the case of Steadman—that's just afore your time; he said he'd burn the college doon if they didna gie him mair whisky—a student of diveenity, mind ye, and a Master of Arts. Hoots, man, there's been mony a worse expulsion than yours. For my ain part I canna see what they object to the students playin' bools and billiards for, aither. I like a game at the bools masel' whiles. Aye, aye! weel, lad," and he sighed, "I can gie ye nae advice on hoo tae mak' the best o' baith worlds. I am a puir body for advice. But maybe I could dae something for ye juist to gie ye a send-off. Do ye stand in need o' money? I'm no' going to offer you a poseetion in my business, naither at home nor in the abroad, for I dinna haud wi' freends* daying sic kinds o' service to their kin. If you didna please me in business, and I was to dischairge ye, fowk wad

* Relatives (Scots).

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The Lure of Virginia

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speak o' my cruelty tae my kin. On the ither haund, if ye was successful wi' me, fowk that didna like ye wad say ye owed it a' to me. I had far raither gie ye a purse o' money and say, 'Noo, gang yer ways, and when yer auld uncle dees o' liquor ye'll maybe remember yersel' that he wasna atehgither unworthy of remembrance'; or maybe better than that, maybe ye'll juist remember him. Hoo much ha'e ye—money like?"

"Oh, I shall manage," said I.

"Ah weel! mind ye, there's a fine pleasure in coming on in the warld and telling yersel' that ye did it a' yersel'. And for your ain pleasure I dinna want tae tak' that from ye. But if ye was thinking of going tae the abroad, noo, I could put ye in the way of a cheap passage maist tae ony part—and a free passage indeed tae some ithers. There are merchants in Glesca in my debt, and slow payers, and I could tak' a debit o' your passage in lieu o' the price o't and no' miss it—and thanks to ye for helping me to get the money back." He gave his most deiightful smile, that obliterated the odour of ale and cheese and snuff that clung to him as to a rose its scent (or I had better say a dandelion—poor Uncle Walter!), and drew forth his snuff-box, and tapped it, and passed it again to me.

Dead Men's Bells

I took a pinch, and said I :

"I had certainly not intended to stop in Glasgow."

"Well, let me see," said my uncle, "thank ye; let me see." He levelled the snuff in the box with a forefinger, as some folk play, with the spoon in the salt, at table. "I hae a boat lying at Irvine for the city of London. That doesna attract ye. I hae a client in the Madagascar trade. Then there's Virginia——"

"Virginia!" I cried. "I would like fine—and best of all—to go to Virginia."

"Good," said he. "As it happens, I can get ye a free passage to the Carolinas ony day. Well, lad, I'm fell busy the day; but I hae nae doot ye hae acquaintances tae see in the toon, so if ye gang your ways noo, and come back here on the knock o' sax, I'll maybe hae news for you. Ye're sure it's the Carolinas?"

I nodded.

"Yes," said I.

"I'm wi' ye," he said. "I believe in a young man seeing the world. If ye shouldna poo it aff in the Carolinas, there's ither places. Ye can crack a skull in aye place and get drummed oot and divested o' yer garb—yon's an ugly goon, the goon of the Glesca College—and that's no' to

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The Lure of Virginia

prevent ye cracking fifty skulls in some ither place
and coming to the tap." He took a good pinch.
"Ah weel, I suppose I should gie ye advice;
but I hae nae advice worth mentioning unless it
be what I hae learnt oot o' my ain weakness,
instead o' oot of the weaknesses of ithers; and
that would be tae avoid takin' the glass after the
yin that maks ye no' quite sure if ye are drunk or
sober—for the liver is a kittle member and the root
of much evil; and with a bad liver ye will find a
diffieculy in being in with yersel', and when ye
are no' in with yersel' ye will find it hard tae be in
with the world; and life's no' worth living when
ye are no' in with it." He teeheed gently and
derided himself: "I aye tak's a glass myself when
I feel myself getting no' cheery." And he sat and
laughed at himself.

Chapter VII : *We Go aboard the* *"Santona"*

TWO days later my Uncle Walter and I climbed aboard the Greenock coach at the "Saracen's Head," and were soon upon the way. It was like him, before starting, to send out a glass for the driver, and leave a *pour-boire* for the ostler—and have a stiff one himself.

He had a droll toast for me as I made to take up my dram.

"Here," says he, "is less of that false courtesy that is weakness in ye, and mair of your honest anger breaking through."

He set down his glass, having tossed this stirrup-cup down his throat at one gulp. I made two of mine, in haste, and followed.

We sat up beside the driver, for the day promised brightness and freshness; and as we slowed for the bridge and the stench of Clyde assailed our olfactory nerves, he passed his snuff-box to me, snuffed himself, and bent forward to the driver, thrusting the silver box at his side. The driver gathered his reins in one hand, with a bobbing

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

of his head, and a "Thank your honour," and inserted a great black thumb and snuffed vigorously.

We came to the bank, and the driver handled the reins with that great air and beaming face that signify to passers-by a good party of travellers on the roof.

"Ye ken the signeeificance of yon toast of mine?" asked my uncle, turning to me.

"I have been weighing it," said I, "and I understand. There is sometimes a civility demanded of us, and expected, that is not civility rightly, but a laying bare of ourselves to those that would wound us, folk who are never civil, a kind of a submissiveness expected of us by our inferiors, to give them an opening, as weaker runners are granted a start in the race."

He had not put by his snuff-box, and seemed to forget that he had already snuffed and held the lid still half open, sheltered from the wind by his hand, listening to me. He now took another snuff and snapped the lid shut, bending thoughtfully with that air of the man whose favourite reading was Montaigne.

"Ah weel," said he, "so long as ye ken it that weel ye will not suffer. The danger is when ye think fetters are chains of office, insignia of merit. When a man kens what he is daeing he can stoop

Dead Men's Bells

his body mony a time, and never stoop the soul within. God preserve me! Here am I talking about the soul wha determined tae say nae mair o't. It scunners me to hear the word droppit in every sentence"—he paused and nudged me with his elbow—"by the kind of folk wha think it has something to dae wi' kirk attendance and a commonplace caligraphy showing nae mair character than the cross, his mark, of some Heeland nowt drover." He looked sidewise on me and met my eye, and we smiled on each other, and he teeheed gaily, saw the snuff-box in his hand, tapped it gaily, and gaily took a third pinch, and returned the box to his pocket.

"Aye, your Uncle Tam is a gey auld-farrant bitch o' a body," said he. "I like rale weel tae see him whiles, when I am melancholy. Mony's the laugh I hae when he goes away."

He bent forward and bade the driver, when we pulled up at Little Govan, to give him time for a refresher. The driver touched his hat. "And yane for yoursel', if ye are dry in the thrapple," said my uncle.

"Thank your honour."

"This brig *Santona*," said my uncle, "that I have got ye a passage on for the Carolinas is something on my mind—and your passage foreby."

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

The owner of her is a man to whom I hae been o' aye service and anither, and so, when I steppit in and askit him for a passage for you, he cried out that he was rale glad to do onything for me; but I could see that he wasna sae glad—he was fair taken aback. So I says to him: 'Ye can coont that much oot of the bit debt to me, and deduct the price of a passage in the debit accoont'; but it wasna that, Bob, it was something deeper than that. I think I hae it."

"Yes?" I asked.

"Ye see, I hae a ship insurance business. You that's been to college—can ye tell me—was there nae insurance in Shylock's time that he had to be in sich a pother aboot his ships that didna come in?"

"I never thought of that," said I.

"I never thocht o't myself till I was in the underwriting business," said my uncle. "I ken it's a far aulder business than maist folk imagine, and there was underwriters in the city of Bristol in Queen Elizabeth's day, though maybe no' called by that name. Weel, I find that my partner in the underwriting has this brig *Santona* heavily insured. If she goes through to the Carolinas we are very weel indeed, but if she doesna go through we hae a thoosand or twa mair than is

Dead Men's Bells

advisable to pay to the owner. It's a fair gamble. And so maybe ye are going to do me a service instead of me doing ain to you—maybe ye'll juist keep your eye on the skipper, and see that he doesna put yon brig on the rocks of aither the Hebrides or America."

To tell the truth, it had irked me a little to have to ask a service of my uncle, and this news cheered me greatly. I think I sat more erect, and I must have showed pleasure, for he chuckled and tapped his box again.

"Life is not worth muckle without struggle," said he. "Lang may it be afore all nations o' men are brithers, for when that day comes, and there is nae mair need for the thoughtful man to keep his muscle up lest the savage man taks his gentleness for timeedity—when the lion and the lamb lie doon thegither—such is human nature I greatly doot"—and he took his snuff—"it will be but a lang drunkenness and fornication—and no' a healthy drunkenness and fornication—but a puir, fushionless, intaed, wambly kind of business. I'm glad tae see ye like the voyage better wi' a spice o' danger."

"I like it fine," I said.

A wild-eyed water-man in singlet and drawers,

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

with bare legs and feet (I mind how as we sat in the stern sheets, when he lay back on his oars, we marked the great toes pressed on the seat amidships, and how, when he craned his head about, to see how he was making, his collar bones showed like the crossed bones on tombs),* rowed us out to the *Santona*. She looked small enough from the shore, but as we came alongside she seemed to grow in the water, with her black hull along which the homing tide washed and lapped, sending wavering fires under her counter, and changing lights like snakes along her hull when the little wavelets came down, after lapping up, and left wet strips to the sunlight.

The water-man drew in an oar and came alongside, sculling with the other, then shipped oar and grasped the end of the rope ladder that hung over, and nodded to my uncle. A seaman looked over the side.

"What's your business?" he growled.

My uncle got upon his legs with deliberation.

"Is Mr. Williams aboard?" he asked, half standing in the bobbing wherry and looking up.

"A'body is aboard, and we put out with the first of the ebb."

* This seems a long parenthesis for a student of Glasgow College.

Dead Men's Bells

Another face came and peered over and sharply challenged us with a rasped "Yes?"

It was not an amiable tone. I looked up sharply at the speaker, and my uncle stood up and caught the ladder.

"Are you Mr. Williams?" said he, very slow, drawling.

"I am the master's mate. Mr. Williams is—is indisposed."

"Aye," said my uncle; "it is generally the way. Weel, I'm coming on board."

"What is your business?" asked the mate.

My uncle took a letter from his pocket and held it up.

"I hae a letter here from the owner regarding a passenger," said he.

"We have heard nothing of a passenger, and have nae quarters prepared," said the mate, but puckered an eye over his aquiline nose at the upheld letter.

"So, so," said my uncle. "Your owner wrote a letter for you the day afore yesterday, in my presence, and was to despatch it for you——"

"I havena seen it——" began the mate.

My uncle continued:

"There is therefore all the mair necessity tae be careful that this note isna lost afore it

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

come to its destination. The ither, I tak' it, miscarried." He winked at me. "Maybe I'd better come up and gie it to ye on the deck, for it micht slip from your hand." He held it up and showed the direction upon it.

"Come aboard," said the mate; and the waterman holding the ladder steady, and I holding the small boat close with a rope, and both fending with a foot, my uncle panted aboard. I followed up the ladder and climbed in-board after him.

The mate turned about and cried: "Carry on, boatswain! Carry on, in God's name. Ye ken their work without me aye—" ended in the midst of his speech and looked at the letter.

"I see," said he, "it is addressed juist tae the ship, so the old man needna be disturbed."

"The ither," said my uncle, negligently inserting a finger under his cravat, and easing his throat after the climb in-board, "was addressed to the master. I thocht this mair advisable."

"Aye—the master is indisposed," said the mate, and broke the seal and glanced at the note, then looked on me.

"Is this the passenger?" he inquired.

"I am the passenger," said I; and my uncle stood a step back and pulled forth his silver snuff-box and held it in a palm, looking, head bent,

Dead Men's Bells

lips pouting, with bulging eyes upon the mate. The mate turned his head slowly, giving him a thoughtful sidewise look.

"Lindsay?" he said. "Lindsay? I seem to ken the name."

I leant over and called to the water-man to pass up my belongings, stretching down; but the hull was too deep. I looked back to the deck. Ropes lay here and there, in coils, and hung in loops from the belaying pins. I saw also a spare rope's end; but I had measured this mate with the aquiline nose and the dancing hazel eyes.

"May I have this rope to draw up my portmantaux?" I asked.

He turned and looked at me.

"Why not?" said he sharply.

"Because," said I, feeling the strained air, "if I had taken the service of one without a 'By your leave,' it is as likely as not you might have thought I was encroaching on your rights. Seamen on their own deck are like little kings."

We looked each other in the eyes, and then he smiled grimly.

"Or maybe one of the hands would haul up the luggage," suggested my uncle.

"Is't that kind of passenger?" said the mate.

"Even so," said my uncle; "the kind of pas-

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

senger that may be this or may be that. Ye never ken what way he may jump."

The mate looked at my uncle and laughed. "I thocht so," he said, turned to one of the men and cried :

"You there, bring in-board this gentleman's luggage." And then to us : "Maybe ye would step below and get a ceevil welcome and drink the anchor's weighed (whilk is seafaring for the stirrup-cup or *deoch an doruis*) with your nephew before ye go ashore."

"Wi' pleasure," my uncle acquiesced.

We passed aft with yards swinging over us, and sails flapping down out of their gaskets over our heads, and so down the companion-way into twilight.

My Uncle Walter went first, turning about, seaman-like, and down the stair backwards, to show belike that he was acquainted with ship usage. The mate went down facing the cabin, as seamen generally do in harbour or port, holding each rail lightly, slipping them through his fingers, and his heels just clacking lightly on the brass edges of the steps. I followed.*

A slip of a white-faced boy came out of the gloom looking fearfully at us.

* This is the most tantalising hiatus in the book. I confess to a mad interest in which way Mr. Lindsay descended.—EDITOR.

Dead Men's Bells

A grunting voice babbled from a shadow sternward :

"What ? What ? Who's yere ? Molly ! Molly ! Damn my eyes !" and then broke into song.

"Fair fa' the gudewife and send her gude sale,
She gies us white bannocks to relish her ale ;
Syne, if that her tippenny chance to be sma',
We tak' a gude scour o't, and ca't awa'.

Toddlin' hame, toddlin' hame,
As roond as a neep come toddlin' hame.

My kimmor and I lay down to sleep,
Wi' twa pint-stoups at oor bed-feet"—

and then the singer fell exhausted, and grumbled into incoherence.

"Mr. Williams is indisposed," said the mate.

"So I hear," said my uncle. "A man wha canna carry liquor should abstain. There is a sense o' degradation in a man singing a bawdy ballad upon his back."

The mate looked over his shoulder to the boy, and in a softer voice than he had used before, "Glasses, boy," said he.

The boy's face cleared.

"Yes, sir," said he, and dived into the pantry and back again with the glasses on a tray, just tinkling a little with the nervousness of his hand. The mate looked at him.

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

"Ye hae nae need to be feart o' me, boy," said he; and then he turned to the table where a bottle stood and lifted it.

Down the companion-way came a chanting of voices in words I could not distinguish, and a click—click—click of iron or steel, and then a shout of:

"Yah! Yo-ho!

Tom's gone to Hell—O!"

"Ye'll hae the bottle in the fiddles come nicht," said my uncle. It pleases most men for strangers to drop a phrase that shows some knowledge of, or interest in, their calling.

"Not this bottle," said the mate, "if I am any judge of the signeeificance of your honour's complexion," and bowed when he said it, and they smiled friendly on each other. I also smiled, standing by, seeing how it was said and taken; and the mate included me in the friendly glance with the faint tail-end of it. Then he poured three noggins and handed ours with a bow.

"I'll gie ye a toast," said he. "May the passenger come safe to his voyage's end."

We touched glasses and drank.

"Passenger! Passenger!" grumbled the master's voice from the shadow under the stern windows.

My uncle said: "I, too, hae a bit toast—but

Dead Men's Bells

maybe Mr. Williams would be pleased to join us."

The mate stepped to the stern and drew the curtain with a clattering of the rings along the semicircular rod. On the settee below a great man like a haggis half sat up with bewildered hair and red, bewildered eyes.

Down the companion came :

"Yah! Yo-ho!

Tom's gone to Hell—O!"

and a cry of "Anchor's weighed!" Then a "lap, lap, lap," sounded round the brig, and she, falling off in the tide, brought Mr. Williams to a sitting posture with his feet to the deck.

"Here's Mr. Lindsay, wha finances Mr. MacWhirl, the underwriter," said the mate sharply; and then, wheeling about: "I am richt, am I not?" he asked.

My uncle nodded, and "Ah weel, there is nae harm done," he said, "as it happens"; and he looked admiringly on the mate. "I suppose MacWhirl has droppit my name, Robert; he has yin weakness, and that is his conceit, and he is aye drapping hints that he is in wi' me"; and he laughed at this word on Mr. MacWhirl's conceit. A man who jests at his own expense has always that, at any rate, to win him friends, and my Uncle

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Walter had many lovable qualities. He looked at the mate.

"Yon's a smart man," said he; "and dae ye observe that he is as fou as a fiddler—fou as a fiddler, and standing on his pins like a man?"

Mr. Williams rose and set his huge bulk in the centre of the stern, under the deep windows, puckered lips and brow, and stared and bowed at nothing.

"Well," said he, "what brings ye back? I thocht it was all signed and settled. It is no' usual tae come aboard like this when we're thrang wi' getting the tide."

"It's just for a toast, Mr. Williams," said my uncle, and added: "God preserve me, he tak's me for Mr. MacWhirl," and teeheed over the joke. "Come, fill your glass, sir, and tak' the toast."

Mr. Williams rolled toward us and took a glass, his left eyebrow going up and his right down—then the right up and the left down—in the most ridiculous manner.

"A good voyage to the *Santona*," said my uncle, "and a happy passage, as well as a happy landing for the passenger."

"Passenger!" spluttered Mr. Williams, stood

Dead Men's Bells

with his glass in his hand, then sinking to a chair, blinked. "I hae nae passenger," said he.

"I am the passenger," said I.

Down the companion came :

"Come, and I will sing you,

What will you sing me?

I will sing you one-O!

What is your one-O!?"

Mr. Williams began to smile a leering smile. He sat grinning and considering, then rose and held his glass aloft, and leered over it to me.

"To our better understanding," said he, and drank, and staggered a little.

"Ye can fa' back in your chair again," said my uncle, which he promptly did. "He'll mind faintly when he waukens," said my uncle. "Weel, weel, I maun be getting up and ower the side again."

We three ascended to the deck. The shores were slipping past us to starboard and larboard, and close ahead were the two openings—of Clyde and the Gair Loch.

The water-man was astern, his boat towing from the painter, he lying in the stern-sheets, so that the wherry's bow was high in air, and the *Santona's* wake, already boiling whitely, kept tossing and tossing the wherry like a cork, and the waves splashed either way from under it. Seamen were

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We Go aboard the "Santona"

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still aloft, bellies to the yard, and legs straddled back, feet on the foot-ropes, and sprawling to their work of making sail; but those sails that were already set were drawing, and the tide had turned.

"Ye'll maybe luff for me to go over the side at Wester Greenock," said my uncle to the mate.

"Maybe ye had better be ower now," the mate replied; "for it will be easier for the water-man. If ye gang ower opposite Wester Greenock proper it takes a devil of a pull to land ye there; but"—he looked at the sliding shore—"if ye gang ower now it's an easy pull, and ye'll land comfortable."

He walked to the stern (I can see him now, as I write, his supple back, and the longish stride for a seaman, with a kind of a drag like an actor of tragedy) beyond the tiller-man, and hailed and awoke the drowsing water-man, spoke a word to the tiller-man, cried an order to those forward—and the brig swung so that the painter rope to the wherry fell slack, and the water-man brought her alongside.

My uncle took my hand.

"'Tis an accident this," said he, "this maitter that ye hae scented oot the posseebeelities o'—a fair accident. I did ye the turn juist for the turn's sake—ye ken that?"

"I ken," said I, and took his hand.

Dead Men's Bells

"But it's no' a bad accident," said he. "It will help to mak' a man o' ye. Good-bye, lad. I hae nae advice for ye. I leave ye to the world."

He shook hands again with me, took the mate's hand, and went over the side.

The water-man pushed off. We came up again on our course; and there was the last of my kin, sitting ponderous in the stern-sheets of a small boat, waving his hand, and a little lean water-man pulling easy toward the shore, the bow headed directly for it; but, with the easy pulling and the running tide, the boat was going at a tangent for the bay where Wester Greenock sends up its smoke. And anon the point hid the small boat and the *Santona* slipped on upon the next reach.

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Chapter VIII : *In the Firth*

THERE was a great sea on in the Firth, every wave not only white-tipped but clamorous, and spindrift flew so that the Firth seemed to smoke.

Off the Island of Bute we put about on a long tack, and, having stowed away my belongings beneath a bunk assigned to me in a wee cupboard of a berth, I slipped on deck, leaving Mr. Williams snoring on the stern-locker, whither he had returned like a somnambulist from the chair, to see that Island of Bute rushing by, fringed about with breakers.

The tiller-man, as I came on to the poop, was in the act of spitting directly out into air with a toss of his head. The wind took the expectoration flying directly overboard. It was an odd, almost gross little incident to drive home the sense of being out in the windy world. The mate was turning about with lolling and balancing gait on the deck, as though he relished the art of it.

"There's a pleasant end for mariners," he

Dead Men's Bells

said to me, with a joggle of his head landward. I looked leeward, where he indicated, and saw the ribs of no less than three ships all so close to one another that you could have tossed a biscuit over all three in one flip. They minded me of what old Jock at the Wester Mearns had told me of skeletons of camels on the deserts of the east. Prester John we whiles called him, because of the tales of his early roving. "Like ribs of ships on the ocean's floor." But here was the edge of the desert of the sea. White foam burst and danced above these ribs in little jets as the waves washed through. The tiller-man swung himself backward against the tiller, and brought the island more on our quarter, but the channel for us was clear enough, and from it now I saw deeper into that place of wrecks, a V-shaped steep slope of pebbles, about sixty strides wide, I should say, where the angle of the V was buried in the sea. On one side was a perpendicular wall of rock like a wharf-front.

A solitary sea-gull swept over the bay, up the hill-face inland, mounting higher, higher, and then, coming above the shelter of the ridge, it was suddenly taken with the gale, and blown a hundred yards before recovering, as you might blow a midge from before your face. I watched the gull come beat, beating up again into the wind

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over the three black wrecks in the bay. It gave a wilder aspect to the melancholy grandeur of that cove.

The men on deck knew their work. There was a cry from the mate, a yo-hoing and running, and hauling on the ropes by the men, a word to the tiller-man and the mainsail came drifting back, gave a crack aloft, the boom flew over my head. Other crackings and reports went on aloft at the main-mast—the steersman swinging round to the other side of his tiller, shoved it hard up; a whirlpool took place astern, and for a moment the sky and the islands seemed to spin round us. Then the tiller came down again, and we were scudding away from that desolate bay, the water between the end of Bute and Cumbræ Beg, out from Glen Bay, with its three ribs of wrecks and its menace. The next tack brought us to the south of Arran, with the hump of Holy Island (or Lam-lash Island) standing up like a younger brother of Ailsa Craig (whose other brother is the famous Bass Rock of the Forth), with all that great, blue, and quiet Island of Arran beyond it fringed about with breaking waves.

Again we swirled about and went lurching south-east, with the Ayrshire coast lying low on the windy horizon, and Ailsa Craig standing

Dead Men's Bells

up in the sea in the most resolute way. The sight of it was like a cry to arms. But it gave me also a kind of regret—or the first cousin to a regret: I was glad enough in many, many ways to be gone from Wester Mearns, but things might have been otherwise there. I knew that they could never now be mended. But above the Wester Mearns was Ballygeoch, from whose top I had often looked and seen this Ailsa Craig, picking it out of the haze of distance, because it stands so solitary, and eleven hundred or so sheer feet out of the sea. And away north-east there, quite beyond hope to pick out from here, would be Ballygeoch, all quiet, and just the pee-weeps crying.

From below I heard Mr. Williams's voice growling and incoherent. Then it rose clear:

"In the name of all land-lubbers," cried the master's voice, "in the name of—" a staggering step and sound of a scuffle and a slap, "Don't say o'clock to me, but tell me by the bells! And that will learn ye. See what victuals the cook has for me."

I looked at the mate and found him eyeing me, thoughtful.

The boy appeared at the companion-way, and went running amidships to the cook's galley, and I marked him look over the galley door. The lower half was shut, as a barn door shuts.

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What the boy said I did not hear. But the cook, over his fire in the tiny box of a place (I could just glimpse him from where I stood holding to the weather-rail), his back braced against the wall, cried out :

“Weather side, you land-lubber !”

The boy stood dazed.

“Weather side !” shouted the cook.

The dazed boy slipped round to the other side, and the cook leant out there and bellowed :

“No seaman and no cabin-boy can come to the leeward of a galley. Only a ship’s officer can come to what door pleases him”—his hand shot out and smote the boy on the side of the head, lifting him from the swinging deck—“and that will learn ye !”

I made three leaps of it to the poop’s edge, and had a foot to the stair to go down and give the cook one of the same for himself. What a man may stand from a woman he will not take the equivalent of from another man nor stand by and see given to a stripling, without having a duty to perform. But Mr. Wylie touched my shoulder.

“Ye are a passenger,” said he in a grim voice, dropping the hand he had just raised to touch and arrest me with. His head was down and sidewise,

Dead Men's Bells

in the most insouciant manner. My head went up.

"Well?" says I.

"A passenger may not interfere wi' the government of the ship."

I considered the matter, looked back at the boy, who had risen and stood at the galley door, then looked again at Mr. Wylie.

I recognised that he was right, from the point of view of the commonwealth. But there are other views.

"Maybe," said I, "a passenger can make a protest, then?"

"And be telt to mind his own business, maybe," said he. And, looking back on it later, I could see that he was more talking as in dialectics than in anger; but at the time I saw it not.

I had a moment of triumph.

"Good," says I. "I shall lay the matter before your master." And I can see now that he less wilted with anger than showed what was to become a kind of admiration for me.

I stepped to the companion-way, and his voice called:

"Mr. Lindsay! I would remind ye that if the master of a ship bids his officer tae put any member of the crew or any passenger in

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irons, it is the officer's duty to see that it is done."

I swept about and gave him the bow that prefaces a single-stick bout, so that the hilt of my sword flung forward, and I made a leg to him.

"When you receive orders, Mr. Wylie (seeing it is your place), you will obey them," I drew erect, "to the best of your ability," says I. "Nae man can do more."

His face flushed on the red of sea and *aqua vitæ*, and he looked a very bubblyjock.*

But we were running in for the Ayrshire sands, and the roar over them was close on us. The next leg of our tacking (in sea-parlance) had to be seen to. He turned aside and cried his orders as I passed down to the cabin.

[The second officer, I may as well say here, and have done with him, was queer from the first. He was a lean, high-cheek-boned fellow, with protruding knees, came, I believe, from Largo, where the man Alexander Selcraig (that Richard Steele wrote about in *The Englishman*, and that suggested the book of *Robinson Crusoe* to Mr. Defoe) came from. But this second mate was little credit to Largo. He had long fingers with great knuckles, and breathed with his mouth hanging wide open, and his hazy eyes seemed

* Turkey.

Dead Men's Bells

to dance inwardly, and, even when looking on me, elude me. He did his "trick" on deck, and came below and slept in his hammock with a long leg over the side, and with choking snores. When awake he seemed half daft, or recovering of a bad bout, or in some sickness, and it did not surprise me when, off Cantyre, the first day of the storm that was to come on us, there was a shout on deck, the note of excitement in which called me up and brought Mr. Wylie also awake and on deck, to find that he had jumped overboard. The steersman had brought the brig up into the wind, and sailors were all agog, and peering over the bulwarks, and some were already running to unlash one of the boats from its rests on the deck; but never a sign of the angular second mate from Largo could we see, though we tacked about for an hour or more over the same reaches. The cabin-boy told me, in the time of storm that came after, that some of the men called me their Jonah, and others said: No; it was the second officer's ghost, following us with its mouth hanging open, that brought ill-luck on the ship. It was certainly a gloomy enough incident.]

I came down into the gloom of the cabin and balanced at the deck with a hand to the bulk-head. A volley of profanity met me.

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"Damn your eyes, you bastard. When are ye going to get your sea-legs? Damn your eyes——"

Here was what I had been saving up for these last days at home, and I glowered in the gloom of the place, and saw the muckle toad of a master at the table, and stepped over to him.

"D'ye ken wha ye talk to?" I cried, and dealt him one swinging blow under the chin that put him and his chair to the end of the cabin.

A square bottle of that rum which seamen drink stood on the table in what is called a fiddle, and in my rage I drew it out and broke the neck on the table-edge, and splashed the contents on him as he was scrambling to his feet.

"A little less of this for a head like yours," I said, "would be advisable."

I did not feel as though I had struck him at all. My time at home had put an edge on me that would have, as the sea-saying is, bitten into an anchor.

He scrambled up spluttering:

"God damn it! who are you? I thocht it was that cabin-boy."

The anger oozed from me on hearing that he had not been using his Broomielaw vituperation on me. But I was minded, by his words, of my errand below.

Dead Men's Bells

"Whae are ye?" he cried, standing to his legs ready for fight, but bewildered too.

"I am the passenger," said I; "and I was just stepping down to inform you that that cook of yours has smashed your cabin-boy to the deck."

At the word "passenger" he repeated it—"Passenger!" At the rest, all burst upon him, "Cook!" he cried. "Smashed him to the deck! I'll learn the cook whae has a right tae use his fists on my ship—and whae only—but—see here! Passenger, ye say? Passenger?" He felt his head where it had come in contact with the wall. "I hae a kind o' faint remembrance——"

All this while Mr. Wylie's voice had been bellowing on deck, and the ship going about, so that her spinning on her heel had no doubt helped to addle the pate of the master, he coming out of his cups to the force of my fist. But now, as we heeled over and ran again steadily, we heard a shriek on deck from forward.

"It's time I was on deck," cried the master, and spread his great chest and heaved upward through the narrow companion-way, I at his heels, for I did not know whether the way he had taken my blow was because he was too bemused with drink rightly to comprehend what had greatly helped to sober him, or because he was bidding his

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time for a blow back in some other way. He had a treacherous little pig's eye in the fat of his face.

We came to the deck to see Mr. Wylie returning to the poop, and the cook picking himself from out the leeward scuppers, with a bloody nose, the cabin-boy propped against the starboard wall of the galley, the seamen forward looking over their shoulders, some grinning, some but observing.

"What's this o't?" broke out the master.

Mr. Wylie looked up and saw him, touched his hat, and jerked his head toward the galley.

"Just aiding ye in getting ye the victuals ye want," said Mr. Wylie.

The master drew himself together, blew through his nose, puffed his lips, and looked at the cook, who was now shambling to the galley door. He looked next over at the shores—Ailsa Craig on the larboard, the slightest smoke of Irvine astern, Pladda, the islet to south of Arran, hidden in the ceaseless steam of breaking waves. He recognised how long he had lain below.

"Ah weel," he said. "I'm on deck noo, Mr. Wylie."

Mr. Wylie inclined his head, shot me an interested look, and stood easily by.

The pale-faced cabin-boy, with bulging eyes

Dead Men's Bells

looking on a dish that the cook had passed out to him, mounted warily to the companion, and passed down cannily, and using his elbow to creep against the wall, in a terror lest he let the dish topple over.

"Ye can just carry on till I hae some meat tae refresh myself, Mr. Wylie, and then I'll put on my considering-cap," said the master, watching the boy descend—as indeed we all were watching him—as though he might be the centre of a disturbance.

"Yes, Mr. Williams," said the mate, and paced the deck a few steps.

Mr. Williams stood balancing on his great bowed legs, puckering his lips, frowning, slanting his eyes sideways toward me, and as if examining my stockings and shoes. I stood awaiting developments, and deep down in me I felt something that had been bottled, or something that had been packed and packed, and pounded in, and tramped in, and then a cork or a lid put over it, something fit to burst all corks and lids.

There came up before me my sister's face, dour, calculating, full of jealousy and self-pity, and that hard glamour of religiosity. I seemed to want this toad of a master to order Mr. Wylie to put his passenger in irons, so that I could crush

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his ugly neck. As it fell out, he squattered un-
gainly, like a great sow grunting to a trough,
down to the cabin. I watched him go, and then
wheeled on the deck against a puff of stronger
wind, and crammed my hat on—and there stood
Mr. Wylie cramming his hat down, and his eyes
looking at me amused and curious.

We came erect again.

"I see ye hae a bloody hand," said he.

I looked at my knuckles and found them skinned.

"I must hae struck against something," said I.

He turned and pointed landward, astern.

"Yon's the last smoke of Irvine," said he. "A
bonny toon—a fine whimpling river—a bonny
yellow strand—I ken naething I could like better
than the soond of Irvine cobbles under my heels.
When I'm an auld man I'd like tae breathe my
last wi' feet going by in the close, and ken that
the broon thatches and red tiles are shouthering
roond me. There's a sense of cosiness and hame.
But I'd raither meet the deevil on the high seas
than Goad in Irvine. There's a kind of a brode-
ness and glamour about the Deevil; he has never
been narrowed doon in tae creeds and sectarianism,
at least no' worth talking about—a hell fire club
here and there maybe, and the Devil worshippers
of Africa, that maybe ye hae heard some seafaring

Dead Men's Bells

man tell ye exist—but that's no' exactly sectarianism, ye ken"; and he gave a bitter look at the last of the place he loved so well as to wish to die in, though not to live in—and somehow there seemed less pressure upon the lid or cork I have mentioned. I had a smile then, thinking how true Mr. Wylie spoke; for here, at the very doorway of the world's devilry, I seemed to have met a friend.

He wheeled on me abruptly.

"Did ye hit him?" he asked.

"I put him his length."

"So!" he said. "I thocht I heard a dunt. Ah weel—Mr. Lindsay."

And the sense of the hitting power below awoke again. I was not so much belligerent as more wide-awake in the squabbling world.

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Chapter IX : *Fighting the Storm*

THE wind, which had been blowing for three days out of the south, had veered and come out of the south-west. With the south wind blowing even a hurricane to begin with, the Virginia voyage need not be frowned upon, once Rathlin is cleared, for after that, beyond the outer isles (or the Long Island, as the inhabitants call the strip of many islets that make what is the ultimate Hebrides or Western Islands) there is all the Atlantic for sea-way. But a gale clean out of the south-west is an irksome one to meet; and one south-west by west, as seamen say, keeps them tacking and tacking until they could drop from exhaustion. It was that latter wind that we had come into, fluttering and fluttering in a series of tackings that kept a feeling of anger and tension on the deck; and off Cantyre indeed, for a long while, we made next to no headway until the tide, changing, came to our aid.

The seamen had little rest, tacking and tacking

Dead Men's Bells

for two days, during which time the master never showed that he saw me one way or another. He never said a word to me, nor I to him. He was, I judged, the kind of ignorant savage that if I spoke to him he would think I felt a desire for his soft side, for fear of his hard side, as it is with those races of acknowledged savages that have been used for generations to a despotic rule by their own kings; when we go amidst them our easiness has to be guarded, and our ideas of freedom have to be brought to them by degrees. And this master, I thought, was of the same world as those people of West Africa, who, when a king dies, inter a hundred slaves with him, and suchlike cruelties. I was glad I had learnt single-stick and sword-play at the college, and shooting on the moors above Wester Mearns, as well as to appreciate a sonorous line of Virgil.

It would have been possible for Mr. Wylie to have brought about some amity by including us both in his words when he spoke; but, without any parade of being aware that he was not aiding to draw us together (though not playing Iago and making new mischief between us), he made no step toward aiding us to an amicable ground.

When we crept by Rathlin he had a word for the master on the currents, and for me a comment

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Fighting the Storm

on Saint Columba having made that island a half-way house on his voyage from Ireland to the Hebrides. When we were swept up off our track, outside the inner Hebrides, beyond the fifty-sixth parallel, he had a word to that effect with Mr. Williams, pricking the chart that was pinned to the table; and to me a comment on the superstition of the ignorant classes that devils dwell in Colonsay (the island on our starboard, which we brought presently astern, beating back into the rising gale), because the fuchsia and geranium and other flowers and herbs, that grow on no other island of the Hebrides, flourish there.

It was upon the third day that Mr. Williams abruptly addressed his first word to me.

"Mr. Lindsay," said he suddenly, as I came to the table, where we made little attempt to sit, generally standing with straddled legs at the spence door, and helping ourselves from the shelves as best we could. "Mr. Lindsay, I canna hae a passenger on my ship wearing a smallsword."

I looked up startled, more at his mere speaking than at his matter. I considered quickly. Then I smiled.

"Troth," said I, "now that ye mention it,

Dead Men's Bells

it is a foolish encumbrance, and wholly unnecessary," and I dived back to my wee berth and tossed it in the blankets, and came back looking at the knuckles of my fist. He was swelling and gloating at the spence door as I came, holding on to it with one hand, and eating with the other, and looking ready to say more; but he encountered my eye as I looked from my fist, and our eyes met and stayed. He gulped his pannikin of spirits. And just then the boy slipped down for Mr. Wylie's pannikin.

"What are ye putting in that?" asked Mr. Williams, seeing the boy ferreting for a bottle.

"Mr. Wylie wants a bottle of the tippenny, Mr. Williams, sir," he said, shaking a little; "and if there's a fire in the galley——"

"Ah! There—a drop of raw spirits is better than a fushionless warmed tippenny in weather like this," and he poured the pannikin half full of brandy. "Tak' him that up."

The boy went up with the pannikin, and I helped myself to some food; and as I was munching and balancing Mr. Wylie shot into the cabin by throwing forward his feet while still on the deck above the companion-way, lowering his head so as not to hit it on the hatch (pulled all over now for the breaking waves); and so he slid

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Fighting the Storm

abruptly down into the cabin with hands on the rails. Mr. Williams looked up, and I started slightly at the wild leap.

"Hech, sirs!" cried Mr. Wylie, "I havena been off the deck for twenty-four hours"—dived to the spence, caught up a bottle by the neck. Then: "Thank ye kindly for the speerits, Mr. Williams," he said; "but ye ken I seldom touch the hard stuff after I come aboard, and certainly never after the anchor's weighed. I broke my wont this time to toast the underwriter——"

Mr. Williams stared.

"It's the same thing," said Mr. Wylie. "Walter Lindsay is Mr. MacWhirl, as the merchants phrase it. But I never touch the hard stuff after anchor's weighed for onybody's pleasure," and away on deck he went, stepping a long step up the stair with a swing against the side and an agile recovery.

"It warms ye in sich wark," cried Mr. Williams recovering from his astonishment that had dropped his jaw.

"Oh, I ken it was weel meant!" cried back Mr. Wylie, his voice quite thin, he just stepping into the whistling storm. "But a clear head is needed noo." His voice came clearer, for he had thrust his head and shoulders back, standing on

Dead Men's Bells

deck. "There may be naething left tae us but to choose which rock we pile upon."

I looked at Mr. Williams to see how he took this, and he seemed as puzzled as I.

Then Mr. Wylie was running down again, his heels sliding off the brass-bound stair in a quick rattle—I never saw him come down in what they call sailor fashion—and says he: "I forgot the pannikin."

"Ye seem to be turned your ain servant," said Mr. Williams, turning his head about on his shoulders.

"My ain servant and my ain master would be my crest if I had the making o't," said Mr. Wylie. "Aye, if we must go aground somewhere, I'd liefer hae a place where I micht scramble tae land!"

We gave a mighty roll and pitch, and Mr. Wylie flung up his leg to balance himself and planted his foot out. It was half-way up the wall, he standing by the ship's side, and so greatly did we roll, the deck canted like a roof, and he to the leeward side. The master and I hung on to the brass rail on the windward. The brig pitched back more even. Mr. Wylie bending smartly for his pannikin, which was dancing on the deck, looked at Mr. Williams with a smile almost merging on a wink.

"Ye are soople," said Mr. Williams.

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Fighting the Storm

"Soople am I?" said Mr. Wylie, fixed the master's eye, and hastened on deck, looking bigger and more robust than I had thought him in his rough seaman's coat that he had donned.

Mr. Williams was still drinking, as he had been during all these days. When he sweated he seemed to sweat pin-points of raw spirit. Now he had another dram, spilling half the contents on his chin, and bending forward, no halt in his quaffing as he felt the dribbles. I looked at the wall, and saw, high up, the mark left by Mr. Wylie's foot. It had a kind of derision for the swilling master in the brandy-laden atmosphere of that little den. I made for the companion-way, and hauled myself on deck. The lid of the companion, as well as the doors, had been closed, and I felt for the way out, found the handle, and turned it—and slap came the door with the burst of wind. I swung on deck and flicked it shut, and gasped for breath; for the wind invaded my lungs, as it invaded the cabin every time the door opened, with a leaping violence.

We were among moving mountains, wave on wave, great and greater, jumbling and hissing, and the brig *Santona* was coasting their sides, plunging down and soaring up, and two men were hanging to the kicking tiller.

Dead Men's Bells

I had a comprehensive knowledge of a great tossing black-green sea with white crests, of the darkness of that sea, of the blackness of the low sky that dipped far off toward a crevice of white at the horizon. Waves exploded constantly on the bows and shot up, and the spume scudded the length of the brig, rattling like hail, and stinging like hail.

Then I distinguished a harsher sound among the very clamorous sound of the sea. The sea and the wind, even in their anger, are pitched upon a melancholy key; but this other sound was beyond melancholy. It was hideous and terrific in its harshness. I clung to the rail, unheeded by Wylie or the men. They had but one aim: to hold the brig on to these seas. Two sails fluttered only, and the brig added her sounds to the storm, with a pounding of blocks and the crying of the wind in the rigging, shrill as a whistle. That note went up and up and ceased, as if it had gone too shrill for human ears to hear, and then came again.

As a landsman I should have said that we were doomed; but the three men at the wheel, for Wylie was helping them, seemed as if they would fight through it. Man is not only a dreamer, he is a very practical animal too, and to see a scene of this kind gives one a thought as much

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Fighting the Storm

of the wonderful little creature man is, to do all this in such a wilderness of seas, as of what an awesome thing is the universe.

That harsher sound in the sea passed away slowly, and we came into a less choppy area of the storm, the current seeming to set one way instead of there being an agonising jumble of waters, making us both roll and pitch all in one moment.

We headed on in this wild, staggering manner, and then a wave suddenly took us in the bows, worse than even the earlier ones, hitting higher than these earlier ones that I had seen; and as we had but dipped from its forerunner, and had not yet given that odd, steadying tremble, before swinging up again, it just flipped against the bows, and came with a waving sweep along the decks. You can have an idea of it if you thrust out your arm before you and undulate the fingers in the motion. Like that the wave came and swept our length, over the fo'c'sle and sweeping in the waist. The brig hung a spell, and then came quivering up and up. I had a sense of exultation, as if I heard her laugh and exult. But again the thing happened, and again. It was after the second sweep over us that Mr. Williams loomed at the companion and hauled himself aft, a sailor's cap on his head, and the wings tied over his ears.

Dead Men's Bells

He bent his head as he staggered by me, and had his second word for me, roared in my ear :

“Passengers should be below !”

I bent my head and roared back : “I’m no’ going below like a rat in a trap !”

He leered and laughed, and I cried : “I prefer to see the fecht !”

I knew that our position was full of danger. I hardly thought of any assault from Mr. Williams. At any rate there was to be none then, for Mr. Wylie, seeing him, left the tiller to the two men and came canted and beating up to us, and when he stopped clutched us both, one hand to each, to steady himself.

“That’s the third time, Mr. Williams !” he cried. “Driven under for certain, or maybe pooped, which is it tae be ?”

Mr. Williams glowered.

Another wave slipped over the bows and came sweeping. It spouted at the bitts like a fountain, and leapt over the fo’c’sle and surged in the waist, sweeping along the scuppers like a frothy burn in spate.

“She’d run before it better than rise tae it,” he cried ; “but I’m some feart ye hae left it ower late — thinking — tack in this — let alone — pit aboot.”

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Fighting the Storm

"It's feasible yet!" cried Mr. Wylie. "But in another hauf 'oor, let alone an——"

They allowed the wind to carry them further aft, and brought up by the tiller.

That putting about, as it is called, was one of the grandest moments in my life.

To sit under your vine and fig tree and ponder is good, and a thing I am prone to; and if there were no dreaming men there would be no doing men. But it is good to be doing. There is a pride in yourself and a joy in life, acting and toiling on the edge of the unknown. You lose the dread of the unknown, and feel that you will always be going on and doing, that there is really no sea to drown your heart from rejoicing, and actually no earth to plug your eyes from delighting. It is good to have been in the world where are no wee bickerings of women, and disputes of ministers, no rustlings of cinnamon satins, but rustlings of seas and trailing of clouds.

That putting about atoned for all the pettiness I had had to pass through of late.

I believe it was tried again and again; for I could see the two seamen, and Mr. Wylie, who had rejoined them, all hanging on to the tiller, and the *Santona's* head payed off a wee, and then smack would come a wave a bit on the quarter,

Dead Men's Bells

and she would heel over, and another wave, and they would all lean resolutely back, and the bow would swing as it was again. Thus three times was it attempted, the three of them hanging to the tiller, and clinging to it as close as ever ecclesiastic to a scruple upon the "conditionality of Grace," talking about a God he had never felt, never known.* Mr. Williams would now and then hurl himself to it with them, and make a four-some of it. I let go my hold of the rail, and the wind drave me back to them, when I brought up again and prepared to aid them as I saw I could, they hanging close to the tiller, as one holds cheek close to the butt of a fusil to prevent the shock of recoil, they hanging close thus so that their ribs might not be stove in. When the rib that, according to the myth or symbol of Genesis, God took out, sits and jeers at men, and rustles her satin at him, let him remember a day like this of ours off the Malin Head.

Suddenly Mr. Williams and Mr. Wylie shouted together, and slackened, and followed, the tiller. The seas burst at the bows. Mr. Williams resigned his hold and staggered forward, and I leapt to his place.

* It is very clear that Mr. Lindsay was not intended for the Kirk.—EDITOR.

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Fighting the Storm

Over we went as his voice, bellowing to the men forward, came back to us. The foresail, that still showed at the bows, flapped. The yard of the topsail, that still hung, came round. We heeled over and over.

"Wear!" roared Mr. Wylie, and we who had let the tiller gingerly down grappled afresh, and reversed our work with bursting muscles.

The wave crests came level with us. The deck sloped like a roof, a sea swept us, and we quivered down, and then suddenly shot up with a jar.

We had done what they call "wearing ship." Sweat poured from us. The world had turned. The wind was astern; we were flying before it.

Chapter X : *A Night and a Morning*

THERE was no more talk from Mr. Williams of going below for me.

We ran now before the seas as resolutely as we had before been striving to keep heading into them, and, whether the *Santona* was built well or ill for the latter occupation, she was assuredly nimble at this art of keeping ahead of the waves ; or, when the waves came bursting, as ever and again they did, so quickly one on the other that there was scarce pause between, and the rear broke on the foremost ere the foremost had broken of its own sweep, she rose, and as it were bade them pass under her, and only their crests would patter and scud about us in spray.

There was never now a wave sweeping her length ; no wave now swept from stern to bow, as, before, waves had swept from bow to stern.

But the force of the gale did not abate. And of all the war of waters we were very acutely aware, each clutching somewhere along the rail, and seeing the whiteness break in the blackness.

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A Night and a Morning

Once a man loomed past me, tilted to the wind, going tillerwards, and a draggled man anon, leaning against the wind, staggered forward. Then Wylie ran past me and away amidships through the spray, and returned with another man, seeming to herd him to his work. They passed, and that other man who had been at the tiller during our great wrestling bout with it danced past me, lurching forward, where he would fall wet in wet blankets and snore, with the frightened rats running near him. For an experience the sea is very good, or if it be voyaged over to discover new lands; but the business of the sea, to manœuvre a hold of goods and notions from one port to another and empty the hold, and refill it, and manœuvre back for poor pittance, and generally to the tune of oaths, and not infrequently of blows, seems a bitter business. Poor devils!

And yet they, too, had a wild joy in the abandonment of it all. Even my time of helping at the tiller showed me that a passenger has less joy than a participator; and to feel that bobbin of a brig answer to us as we clung there was a wonderful experience in itself. This other was great also—flying before the wind, and all the while life looking into the face of death, and the heart less afraid than exulting.

Dead Men's Bells

I had the knowledge that if I got through here to land again, there would be a peak of life to remember.

I thought of all my past life, all its great days, and counted them, like the Saracen king, those with the sunlight on them; then death would grin on me in some threatening wave, or wallowing downward of the brig and tardy rising, and I would consider (or feel, rather) that after all we must die, and that death ends many bickerings.

Then over the darkness came less a light than a capacity to see, to see some distance, more distance, over the tossing waves. Now and then, as we poised on wave-tops, I glimpsed a bordering blackness, of low cloud, or land.

Overhead the clouds streamed, quicker than we. To look up at them for long gave a sense as of being waterlogged, or at anchor. Perhaps we were waterlogged! Sinking! A grip of fear would come on seeing all the tossing expanse with no hope, and then a thrusting of the fear aside. I am of the opinion that he who grows round-shouldered in a library reading upon ethics and smiling incredulous at any tale of the world outside, that comes not to him out of a folio, but through some chance visitor who has been away and come home again, is the poorest specimen of man alive.

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A Night and a Morning

And when he murmurs "*Sapiens dominabitur astris*" I cannot but smile. Let him shut out the draughts and put flannel round his sore throat, and draw his heavy curtains but a little more sedulously, and suffocate, and cease. I have seen the breed in Glasgow College for whom life was a footnote to books and not books a footnote to life. These are they who make persecutions. But here is my Lindsay, or Kinnear, moralising, and maybe my bitterness, coming in.

The grey turned brighter and stayed, and mountains loomed on the starboard, and we stood off from them—an arduous work in that wind which was upon our larboard stern.

I hauled myself aft again, beside Mr. Wylie and the master, where they clutched nigh the tiller; and I looked and wondered, for there was but one man at the tiller, and Wylie keeping an eye on it, and ever and again aiding. The other seaman must have been washed overboard.

"Is't Colonsay, think ye?" shouted Mr. Williams.

"We'll shune ken," shouted back Wylie, as he and the seaman put off the brig's head further, edging away from the land which was still far off. "If it's Colonsay we'll lift the steep face of Mull at this gait. If it's no'——" his voice did not carry.

Dead Men's Bells

I cocked my head to catch.

"—the pull o' Corrievrechan," I heard.

The master, seeing me edging down and hearkening, my head up, curious for the words, read my face, I think, for afraid.

He gave me his third word.

"Ye are no' overboard yet, passenger?" he jeered.

Wylie gave a shout and pointed. Ahead of us was a long black coast through the mist and spume. It showed as if a river ran over a cliff, far as we could see of it north and south. Only, as we swept nearer, despite the attempts to hold off, we could descry that this appearance was due to the swiftness with which the waves reared up on the ledges of that coast, so that another was surging up and over ere the predecessor had run back.

"It's Knapdale!" shouted Mr. Williams. "As sure as daith if we keep off ower much we're into the tow of Corrievrechan. But if we keep in there"—his voice was lost—"Carsaig—I ken it—ledge runs oot, and sooth the ledge is shoals, and north the ledge a channel"—"clean in"—"flung high and dry." The spaces in between the words are shrieking wind and roar of sea.

"And be burst on the rocks!" cried Wylie,

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A Night and a Morning

and leant back on the tiller ; and he, with the seaman, had her head again bob-bobbing off shore.

Mr. Williams edged closer, and I followed him.

There was great turmoil within me now, after his remark, a sense of having had an insult from one I could hit back and break. I was fain to give him the English, with my fist, of *a verbis ad verbera*.

"Ye canna mak' the soond!" he cried. "I'll warrant that what between the pull o' Corrie-vrechan and the burst o' gale, syne we win to the gulf at the head o' Jura she's in yon whirl, and syne on yon ugly rocks—and there's nae hope yonder!"

I saw that Wylie was not with him. Wylie was more of a navigator ; and, besides, I knew my uncle's suspicion of the intended destination of the brig.

"Slip the tiller up," cried Mr. Williams. "There's a current in tae Carsaig, and ye'll catch it noo at this gait, north o' Carsaig—and it sweeps back and in—and it will bang us high on yon beach. There's no' anither chance like this for leagues."

"Mr. Williams!" I cried, "ye forget that your passenger happens tae be full nephew to the underwriter—and the *Santona* is insured for an unco' stake!"

Dead Men's Bells

He turned and glared on me, and, I suppose, thought at sight of my slimmer build before his bulk that he could crush me. He leapt at me, but I dodged him, ducked under his blow, and took him under the jaw.

His soaked sailor's boots slipped on the deck, and down he went, and shot nigh under the rail. I leapt and gripped him just as he gripped the lowest rail.

When he had gained a sure hold I looked at him again, and saw the vindictive face glare on me.

I think I had borne too long with my religious kin. I think it was a mistake for a man such as I to bear so long. I was not as great as I thought, not great enough for so much reticence as I had practised. Something had to come out. If he had shown a sign of even knowledge that I had helped to haul him in-board it would not have happened. But he clutched the rail and drew up, with his teeth showing.

"Oh, damn your fat haggis face! Damn your insults! Damn you for hitting that boy! Damn you for your——" I know not what else. With every cry I pounded on his face, he parrying to no avail, for there was a madness in me that aided my eye to slip in under and over his staggering parries. It was when I heard myself cry, "Ye

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A Night and a Morning

damned, Anabaptist, canting, hypocritical bitch," and got him again under the jaw and lifted him on his back, his great heels in the air so that he came down curved on the root of his spine—it was then, at that cry, that I knew whom I had (in a deep sense) been actually pounding thus.

He did not trust himself to rise, slithered down to the lee-rail, brought up there, and anon, at a heeling of the brig, eyeing me, manœuvred up again for the windward, eyeing me, I think, with but one eye, for the other was rapidly closing.

Wylie and the seaman had their work to do. The men forward may, or may not, have seen. All I knew was that Mr. Williams was clinging to the rail eyeing me. Then suddenly Wylie leapt forward, just as the master made a quick movement. Wylie grasped his arm, and a seaman's sheath-knife fell to the deck, stuck there, the point buried, and quivered.

Mr. Williams plunged down for it. Mr. Wylie kicked at the same moment, kicked sharply at it, and snapped off the point in the deck; and the haft with its three-quarters of blade span out over the rail.

"For your ain good," said Wylie, and back to the tiller.

We had passed Carsaig Bay. The glimpse

Dead Men's Bells

of long-running waves going up a steep incline of beach had passed, or was but passing, when I looked round, seeing the master do the same, and sensing that the feud, for the moment, had abated. I saw but that glimpse of it; and then we were sweeping along northward with naught but cliffs, with seas breaking on them, to leeward.

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Chapter XI: *Corrievrechan*

THERE is a current in these seas sets back southward close in to the Knapdale shore, much as in a river there is a backwash up-stream along the bank where the current is very swift in the centre. The central current here is of course that famous race of Corrievrechan, one of the worst of the many races that take place around our wild shores. It is a noisy spate in certain states of wind and tide, before which the race in the narrows of Clyde from between the Moir and Beg Cumbraes to the Fairlie sands is but a creeping stream, and the Kilbrannan race a mere jest of an hour or two that a ship can slide into Lamash Bay or the Sound of Bute, and bide there safe from, till the turning. But indeed all our west coast is full of currents that contest with the tides and make dangerous seas. The currents about Lochaber Loch * and Lismore, Mr. Wylie tells me, are about as dangerous (at least to small boats) as any of the coast.

* Now called Loch Linnhe.

Dead Men's Bells

The shores on either side here are void of shelter, and Loch Sween is more of a death-trap than a haven. The race of Corrievrechan up the Sound of Jura has swamped many boats at the end of it up yonder, in the bottle's neck of it, among the scattered rocks and isles.

I think we must have been close enough in shore to have the drag upon us, as it were, of this southward-setting backwash or current, it holding us out of the greater race northward. They made shift to get a fragment of sail on her to aid the steering.

But the Atlantic gale, screaming over from Islay and Jura (with her Paps, as they call the two high Bens standing up heedless of us, bonny, bonny, indeed, and of a cold blue, across the rage of seas, but heedless), held us shorewards also, but *incidit in Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim* ; and suddenly we gave three kicks up and then jolted forward.

There was no doubt about these knocks from below. We had driven over one of the out-jutting toothed ridges. The greater volume of spray close by told of rocks there, and the swelling of the sea, closer still, told of rocks not far beneath. It was all a very kittle business : a lee shore, a bad current running north well off it ; a less bad, but bad enough current running south, half-way

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between the great current and the rocks, or maybe nearer the rocks than half-way. If Mr. Wylie had had his way, we would have been out in the greater current, taking our chance in it, running north, and all standing by for the fight at the end of Jura; but the master would have him hold in closer to shore, to catch the drag of the south-running current. Mr. Wylie, as a navigator, would have chosen more sea-way, for the nearer we came to the south current the nearer, at the same time, we came to the lee shore.

Mr. Williams, at these three dunts, ran forward to the break of the poop, and bellowed to the men to cut away the sail that had been set to help the steering. The men ran to that work, and the sail flew up in air, and like a small cloud disappeared in the sky, flying high over the waters. And away down into the waist the master ran, shepherding the men to and fro, and getting them to work on the pumps.

"De'il hae him!" cried Wylie. "He's going to hae his way o't"; but still clung to his desperate business of trying to hold the brig off shore.

We were now of course swept and sprayed constantly. The men at the pumps worked to the knees in wallowing water that slapped about on the decks and gurgled and spouted in the

Dead Men's Bells

scuppers. But we were not triumphed over by the storm; even the storm in a way defeated itself by its excess, or maybe it might be said that the quiet strength of the shore defeated it for us; for, as with the backwash of water, so was it with the wind, which, pouring on the hills, swept back in eddies.

Had that sail not been cut away Mr. Wylie might have managed better.

But now Mr. Williams was like to have his way. The men kept to their pumping, and the southward current got us and began to drive us back toward Carsaig. I waited to feel us go over that ridge again as we drifted back and back.

"Goad!" cried Mr. Wylie. "He has a certain skill in seamanship; if no' for saving a ship, leastways for wreckin' it cannily."

"Is't a' ower wi' us, sir?" asked the man who clung with us to the tiller.

"Oh, no' so bad as that, I hope," said Wylie. "There's aye Carsaig; and maybe between us we hae enough seamanship to get upon yon wee slant o' beach."

At that a wave leapt on us and creamed and shouted, and took the two boats bodily up from the deck. The men left the pumps and charged upon one of the boats, wrestled with it, held it

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down, secured it ; but they did not return to the pumps. Mr. Williams, who had been coming aft again as they pumped, and had clung to a stay when that wave washed us, turned about and, having watched the capture of the boat, bellowed to them to get back to the pumps again. But they threw up their heads and mocked at him.

And indeed the brig was slowly settling. The pumps could not keep pace with the inrush.

Mr. Williams came aft to us.

"There's aye Carsaig for it," he cried. "We can but resign tae this current. It swings clear back tae Carsaig, swirls in there and oot again. But it tak's in close enough tae use it into the bay ; and between the wind and the tide we'll win the beach."

Mr. Wylie cast a critical eye on the shore and the waves. I could have made no guess as to how the tide set.

"I'm some dootful," said he, "that the tide has turned ; and wi' a tide setting aff——" He left the sentence there ; and Mr. Williams looked as if he could have hit him a blow ; but Mr. Wylie was as damnably insouciant, his eyes looking out of his dripping face, as he had been when I came aboard and he measured me.

Dead Men's Bells

"We'll try it," said Mr. Williams.

"So be it," said Mr. Wylie.

We were now joggling back and back, the steerage almost lost on her, so that she was whiles like a blundering log. We joggled outward a little way, and syne swung back, but all too quietly excited in our drifting to have eyes for aught else, and our ears deafened by the pounding and hissing of the sea.

Suddenly, bang clear down on us came a ship, rising on the crests, plunging down and burying her nose, and surging up again with dripping bowsprit.

I can the better understand collisions on the high seas, having seen the unexpected celerity of that approach.

We joggled almost bow on to land, till I expected that we would swing clear about, then swung backward—I think the helm must have been battered—and that ship came clean on us, with a flapping figure gesticulating on the bows.

Then the bowsprit drave down on us. We leapt aside. It crashed down, driving on our deck, and then heaved up; but as it heaved up I made a leap for it, feeling that we were certain to be crushed upon the *Santona*.

One other also leapt with me, and we soared

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in air, hanging and clinging. I had but the one mad idea in my mind to climb up before the bowsprit came down again, and all I could do was to cling, for we seemed to be snatched up an incredible height into the vault of flying spume. Then we came flying down, clinging, and the battered poop of the *Santona* was flying up to meet us.

I had a sense as of a blow before a blow came, could see myself spiked and bashed into the *Santona's* poop—and at that instant the poop sagged off; and, instead, I was banged into water, so that it is a wonder that my ear-drums did not burst. Then up again! Away off was the *Santona*, with the men clinging to her as to a log. Then again down with fearful speed, and I braced for the shock that took me like a great slap, nigh as hard as wood. If I had not been feet first, and had come down sidewise, I had been stunned.

So, bit by bit, now swinging in air, anon plunged in the sea, half drowned and gulping and panting, I crawled up to the bowsprit, over which Mr. Wylie was already swinging a leg and clutching to it with seaman's grips.

When we slid and balanced and grappled one after the other, like caterpillars on a windy bough, along the bowsprit, and were hauled inboard by

Dead Men's Bells

the man there, the *Santona* was nigh lost to sight, a wallowing log, with a scrap of mast, astern.

The deck of this ship was thronged with men, a demented crew indeed, but not panic-stricken. They seemed rather like a shipload of the insane, making shift, half a dozen of them, to dance a hilarious hornpipe on the canting decks, joggling asunder, joggling together, screaming, laughing. Balancing at the fo'c'sle was a lad naked save for seaman's drawers held on by a great magenta sash of silk very wet and clinging, and he handed up pannikins of liquor, which were half spilt, half drunk by those above, and tossed down the empty ones to someone below.

I fancied she must be one of the French wine-ships that bring their dutyless cargoes to the Highlands and Isles (so that the wild Highlanders can quaff wine cheaper than we in Glasgow, and their wives drink tea and wear the finest of Holland's lace), and that as she was sinking the mad crew were making the best of the end, priming themselves for the last of it in these seas, acting upon the phrase, *Emori nolo, sed me esse mortuum nihil curo*.

I cast an eye along the decks. There were one or two sails, reefed, upon her, and two men at the tiller, and she seemed under their control, despite the gale. Not but what the ship had

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felt the gale's fury. Her bulwarks had suffered, and remains of gun tacklings slapped on the deck like snakes. I think the gaps in the bulwarks must have been where guns had carried away with havoc ; for one small gun was careering on the decks farther aft, and a pack of these delirious fellows treating it as a sport, running from it, when it charged upon them, leaping up to let it go under, shouting and rejoicing like lunatic bairns.

Then one edged down to a door in the bulwark that slammed open and shut, nimbly grasped it and hauled it wide and back against the bulwark on the inside. The ship tossed and the gun charged upon him. He leapt up to the bulwark and grasped the clews of the ratlins, feet down against the top of the door. The gun crashed where he had been a moment ago, slithered forward, slithered aft ; the ship swung back, and it joggled away ; the ship swung again, and it shot out and into the waves. And that daft gommeral clinging with one hand, kissed the other with his lips to the cheering and jeering spectators, and slipped again to the deck.

Chapter XII: *A Secluded Cove*

THEY carried us aft, all friendly enough, to the poop. Two of them were at the tiller, and one (I noticed his hands upon the tiller, and his left hand wanted the forefinger) I took to be the chief of them; until another man, half in and half out of the companion-way, scrutinising us (while the men were explaining how we had come aboard, and the three-fingered man was crying out to us if we knew the coast), called out: "Oh, for God's sake let me hear my own voice!" He signed to us to come below with him.

So there sat Mr. Wylie and I in this ship's cabin with the man that the three-fingered man had called "Kennedy." I may as well say of him here, as he came into the public eye later, and dangled before it through three tides, that my first impression of him was not of good.

Steaming toddy was given us, and it sent the blood dunting through our veins.

Mr. Wylie took his glass and sipped the liquor, and our clothes ran water to the deck, and we

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A Secluded Cove

steamed upward. Conceive us in that low-roofed cabin, whose chiefest odour was of grog, and the next of wet clothing, steaming to the roof like three lime-kilns.

"Ye seem blown out of your latitude," said Mr. Wylie.

"We are off our course," admitted Kennedy, balancing on the edge of the table.

I began to come back to myself and to take stock of the place as though in a very lively dream that I desired to remember on waking.

There was a little pause as we drank our liquor, and Mr. Kennedy sat surveying us. My eye rested on a sheet of foolscap pinned to the wall, and I fell to reading it absently. What I read was something to this effect :

"Captain Roberts—his rules. Rule No. I. Every man to have his vote in affairs of moment, and every man to have equal share of all fresh provisions and all strong liquors at any time seized—unless scarcity advises a retrenchment and allowing.

"Rule II. Every man to go in his turn, according to the list of the crew, upon prizes.

"Rule III." This was marked out with red and writ over it were the words, "This be damned—J. K." So, being thus rendered curious, I read

Dead Men's Bells

the rule, which showed beneath the marking out, and it was to the effect that no one was to dice or play at the cards for money. The reason for that, methought, was obvious.

The next rule I skipped, seeing it marked through, my curiosity now less acute, and skipping now, to get the gist of the whole, and a little marvelling into what surroundings we had climbed upon that bowsprit.

I read another rule to the effect that all pieces, fusils, pistols, cutlasses were to be clean and in condition for instant use, and beside this rule, in the margin, was written "*Bueno*," and its English equivalent, "Good."

"Can I render you any service, maybe in unknown waters?" asked Mr. Wylie, and I came back from skimming those amazing rules.

"As to service—we have rendered you one, and would only expect a return," said Kennedy.

"I fear I do not tak' your meaning," said Mr. Wylie.

"Have we not saved your lives?"

"It is the first I have heard of it," said Wylie.

Kennedy stared and frowned, and glanced at Mr. Wylie, who sipped at his glass.

"Did not we haul you aboard from your wreck?" asked Kennedy.

A Secluded Cove

"The fact," said Mr. Wylie definitely, "is that ye clove into our ship and dunted a hole in her, and we clambered aboard ye by sheer alertness and soopleness."

"Oho!"

"Even so. Now, Mr. Kennedy, I only state the fact o't, for 'tis as weel tae be on a richt basis at the beginning o't." I saw his eye fixed as if by accident on the rules upon the wall as he sipped at his glass again. "But let be sich arguments. Ye ken the facts as weel as I. And so—what can I do for ye?"

"You know these seas?" Kennedy asked, looking very dour.

"I ken these seas, truly," said Mr. Wylie. "Were we not, at the moment ye clove into us, getting into a current that was to heave us high and dry—wi' a wee pickle o' seamanship at the end o't—in Carsaig Bay, and nothing more to do but walk over to Inverary, and thence to Glasgow, and swear tae the wreck, and tak' oor share o' the insurance?"

Mr. Kennedy laughed, and showed his yellow teeth, and seemed to be a trifle relieved.

"Or our share of reward from the underwriters for informing upon the owners," said Mr. Wylie, and left off staring at the rules to consider the pit of Mr. Kennedy's stomach.

Dead Men's Bells

Mr. Kennedy shot him a look in his mask-like face.

"Heads I win, shield you lose, is your motto, like mine, I see," said he.

"It is a great matter to ken how a cat falls," said Mr. Wylie. "I hae studied the drop of cats as sedulously as Mr. Lindsay here of the Glasgow College has studied the law wi' all its quibbles and turns and ruses for getting the best o't for a client," which gave me something of a gasp, which I choked, seeing his mask-like face.

"However," said Wylie, looking up in Kennedy's face, "this is all whimsical side-issue. Can I be of service to ye on the seas here, where I ken my way through?—and let be tae dispute the pros and cons of our coming."

"Well," said Kennedy, "the thing we do want is a secluded cove to land and leave the ship."

Mr. Wylie considered the table of rules.

"I ken many secluded coves," said he. "I am your man—for a share."

"Share!" cried Kennedy. "Why, you will be put to land! Is not that sufficient reward? And you can go and claim on what side you will, for your wreck."

"Aha," said Wylie; "but you hae knocked that on the head, for what do we ken of oor brig

A Secluded Cove

now ? So I would like some mair certain compensation."

Kennedy laughed.

"You must understand the position," said he. "I could have you put overboard with a shot at your heels, if ye did not pilot at my offer."

"Oh !" said Mr. Wylie quietly. "And if I piloted ye ?"

"Then you could land, and go free, go your wye."

"Now, Mr. Kennedy," said Wylie, "would ye listen to me ? I put it to you as a man of the world"—and Kennedy, I declare, seemed to swell—"if you had made no mention of shot at my heels, and a wet, sudden end, that would sound good. But ye ken human nature ; and having taken that stand ye must see that ye would sorely tempt me tae blow the gaff on ye so soon as ye were landit."

Mr. Kennedy but grinned ever so slightly.

Mr. Wylie continued :

"Your reply to that doesna need words ; it would be but a resairved chuckle in your thrapple at the thought of how to put us beyond troubling ye when ye had your feet on dry land—or wet land, let me say, for there's many a trackless bog in the West Heelands."

Dead Men's Bells

Mr. Kennedy but frowned on him, and then his grin increased. Mr. Wylie looked into the grin.

"My naitural riposte tae that chuckle o' yours and the silence, the signeeficance o' which is obvious as speech, would just be a resolve on my part—aye, I may as well speak it too—a resolve that so soon as ye run into the secluded cove, Mr. Lindsay here would dae his share; for the seal which ye observe pendent from his waistcoat can not only get a man free of the law, affixed to a lang-winded and unintelligible document, but can clap evildoers in the Tolbooth, or the little-ease, or the clink, or whatever name ye ken the place by."

He sat and smiled on Kennedy in his turn, and I thought Kennedy would revert to his original intention, and see both of us trussed up and flung to the fish.

There would be a fight first, I thought. Wylie went on :

"There would be nae sense in trying to mak' awa' with baith of us as soon as ye ran into the secluded cove; for ye will need as much piloting on land as at sea. Why, man, wi' my knowledge of the land here I could run ye into a cove that looked quiet enough, and no sooner would ye be

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A Secluded Cove

seeking the roads back from it than ye would be set upon, surrounded, questioned, suspected, tried for pirates, and all dangling frae the gibbet by Inverary."

"See here!" cried Kennedy, who was, as we heard later, an old jail-bird. "What would ye have?"

Mr. Wylie made no foolish crowing, as I was almost tempted to do at this turn. He but nodded toward the rules, and said:

"A man's share each, the smallest share ye have, that is, and——"

"Hell and blazes!" cried Kennedy.

"Hoots! Hoots!" said Wylie. "Can we no' arrange this wi' the civeelity of twa men of the world?"

"Oh, hell!" cried Kennedy. "Neither of you have helped to gather the gear and wealth, and it is a stiff offer. Now—that's mere logic, Mr. Wylie."

"Mere logic! Ye would not prefix the word with 'mere' if ye was college educated and as quiet and thoughtful as Mr. Lindsay here. And I'm no' so sure about your logic. Ye hae tae mind that without a secluded cove ye canna come to shore, and again, once ashore, without somebody wha can produce a bit of authority ye are scarce

Dead Men's Bells

likely to pass without question to the Clyde ports
—I tak' it that is your aim ? ”

“ We were thinking of them,” said Kennedy.

“ Ah weel ; you'll maybe see the logic of us getting each a share, for otherwise who's to land ye, who's to guide ye ? Never a groat o' your spoil would you buy ale and plesure wi', and all your bawbees would be confiscated by thae wha would hang ye——”

“ Oh, damn you and your gallows ! ” said Kennedy. “ Let me put the matter before the crew.”

He gave so cunning a look that I feared he would, once on deck, and we alone there, make the cabin our grave by some stratagem ; but Mr. Wylie let him rise and move off.

He was at the companion-steps when Mr. Wylie spoke again :

“ The shunner I tak' up the pilotage the better for ye a', ” he said. He wet a finger to his tongue in some seaman's oath. “ See that,” said he, “ that's wet.” He wiped it on his sleeve, and held up his hand again. “ That's dry ! I'm fair wi' ye. But if you tak' mair than a reasonable time to come to an agreement,” and he jerked his head toward the rules, “ we'll be wanting a gunner's share each. Ye ken, Mr. Kennedy, when a pilot

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A Secluded Cove

comes on board—'tis the usage of all the seas of the world—he does coont as something greater than a seaman."

Mr. Kennedy was climbing the stair.

Mr. Wylie watched the feet disappear, and then turned to me.

"Deeploamacy first is a grand rule," said he, and sat thinking; and I stared at the clause that he had conned: "The captain and quartermaster to receive two shares of a prize; the master, boatswain, and gunner one share and a half, other officers one and a quarter."

He took the lees of his dram.

"I feel mair comfortable," said he, and then rose and wandered on the swaying deck. Over in a shadowed corner he grunted "Aye," and I heard him rummaging.

Again I heard him grunt "Aye."

He came back toward me, holding a pistol and a sword.

"I can find nae powther, but here is a pistol, and here a sword. Which are ye mair at hame wi'?"

"You'd better hae the sword if there is no powder," I said.

"A lowlander's reply, indeed," he said, and laughed. "The butt of this could gie a cloor on

Dead Men's Bells

a man's head would want some stitching. I think ye'd like the sword."

I held my hand for it. He thrust the pistol in his breeches, and I buckled on the sword. Then he sat down and looked at his empty glass, I sitting on the table's edge—and down the stair came feet smartly running. He who had been at the tiller advanced, and Kennedy came after him.

The three-fingered man spoke first.

"Come up, gentlemen," said he. "Kennedy has told me. As ye have seen what we are and made so light of it"—and he bobbed a bow to me something as a valet to a judge, and another to Wylie—"up ye come—and your request for a seaman's share strikes me as reasonable enough."

"Deeploamacy" had won in the first throw of the dice, if that be a permissible metaphor.

We went up to find the sea far easier under the lee of Jura.

The sea ahead was rougher where the Atlantic comes in betwixt Jura and Scarba.

"I have just a faint knowledge that there is a plyce 'ereabouts called Corrie—Corrie—vreckan, or some such name," said he of the three fingers. "But whether we passed through it when your honours came aboard"—I saw Wylie give him a glance—"or whether——"

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A Secluded Cove

"Yon's the Gulf of Corrievrechan," said Mr. Wylie, and pointed ; "but the tide has turned, and all we have to fear is the burst of Atlantic gale. The set of tide has saved ye from the worst of that."

"We had a mighty under-tow," said Three Fingers.

"Aye, but ye are running fine for me to carry ye ower to the lee of Scarba."

"Ye know the channel ?" said Three Fingers.

"I could gie ye the fathoms from the Soond of Skye to the Mull of Cantyre," said Mr. Wylie ; and then sharply to the man at the tiller, who was glad of Three Fingers' return to judge by his expression, he gave his order.

Then he gave me a bow, and as in an aside said he :

"Mr. Lindsay, ye will be sitting on the bench again, or travelling round upon circuit work sooner than ye hoped."

Kennedy made a sign to Three Fingers, and drew him off, and they colloqued a spell, and from their averted faces, and eyes looking now at my shins, now at my fob, and never at me fairly, I took it they were weighing me in a balance betwixt them for some man of position not beyond using his power in the land for shady ends, and comforting themselves on winning so good a

Dead Men's Bells

couple of helpers, one to pilot them past the rocks of the sea, and the other, when they landed, past the Tolbooths and gallowses.

Then they came back and leant on the rail with us, Mr. Wylie conning us through the seas; and as we were now coming nigh the first greater whiteness at the head of Jura, he turned to them and cast up his head, and asked them, with a glance comprehending both, and singling out neither, to be so good as bid the crew to stand by, "for here we hae unco' squalls," said he.

Three Fingers leapt to the forward rail and bawled his orders on the instant, and we tossed into the fight with the Atlantic gale, Mr. Wylie's lips firm together. Now he was crying to Three Fingers for less sail, and anon for more, now bidding the tiller-man put down the helm, and, "Sir—bid them be lively with that foresheet," which Three Fingers would translate, or embroider, bawling at the break of the poop.

So a matter of two or three hours later we fluttered up the Sound of Luing, and not long thereafter Mr. Wylie, shouting himself the orders for tacking, because of the narrow channel, was taking the pirate-ship foaming into an inlet that was clearly deep as the sea, and against the walls of which the waves roared up and whirled.

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A Secluded Cove

There was a quick and anxious jamming down of the tiller, and a yelling of "Let that sheet go—let it go—damn ye!" from Wylie, and the balance to it from Three Fingers—and we slid about in this locked channel and, with the way we had on us, glided on upon a new reach that opened before us, where just a kind of rumour, or echo, of the outer sea pursued us.

Chapter XIII: *The Nettle Stew*

UNDER the hills, the summits of which were all awash with grey clouds, so that the green of the grass was more grey than green, and the heather dull and dank, the work of unloading began.

There were some remains of a jetty here, that aided the labour. At first sight of it Kennedy had said: "I see a jetty," doubtless remembering how Mr. Wylie had suggested that, if he was not to be dealt fairly by, he might run the ship into a cove near some place where would be danger for the company.

"Aye," said Mr. Wylie, "it was a better jetty four year ago, when I cam' in here wi' a ship tae carry aff some of the Heelandmen that had had enough of the red-coat persecution after that wrastle o' theirs over a King."*

There was a great deal of itching and scratching

* There are more of these Highlandmen landing on our shores now, since in the second "wrastle" they were thrown, but would not lie down to be trampled.

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The Nettle Stew

among the men as they worked ; and Mr. Wylie, seeing this, made a suggestion to Kennedy that some of the lads be set upon the hills to gather some "green stuff for the blood, after your Jamaica saut beef and lashings o' fiery liquor."

Kennedy, a suspicious person, gave him a furtive look.

"Heather," he cried, "nothing but heather ! What is your game ? "

"Mr. Kennedy," said Wylie, "I will be inclined tae think ye hae some game yersel', as ye ca' it, if ye persist in seeing double in what I mean for your ain good. Did ye ever hear o' spinach in any lands ye hae visited ? "

"There is none here," said Kennedy.

"No, but there are nettles ; and nettles are as good as spinach, once ye get beyond the pu'ing o' them. Maybe a gentleman o' your calling will no' mind setting his hand tae a stinging nettle for the sake o' what's to come after."

"What do you mean by that ? " cried Kennedy.

Three Fingers, who had come up in the midst of this talk, laughed.

"The gentleman does not take us for traders," he said ; "he made no sign of such an error from the first. But what of the nettles, sir ? Is it so ? Do they serve for eating ? "

Dead Men's Bells

"You kindle a fire and get a pot or twa ready," said Wylie.

"They will see the smoke," said Kennedy.

Wylie examined him, as it were.

"Of the colour of the mist," said he, "and whelmt in it. I'm lighting nae beacon for you."

"My God," said Three Fingers, "this is a change of a country from the Caribbean Islands," for everything was dripping with the mist that clung on the hills, and made bush and blade and rock hang with moisture.

But he came ashore with us in person, and, with plenty of swearing at the nettles, helped us to gather a great pile.

As we went stooping and gathering, and the lads bringing ashore their dunnage, said Mr. Wylie :

"Mr. Kennedy is fairly suspicious of me."

Three Fingers laughed.

"It is in his nature," said he. "He was suspicious of Captain Roberts, and I think it was because Roberts got so tired of his watching ways that he told him he had better go off in the first capture we took for his own. Roberts knew he had been getting a following too, d'ye see ?"

"I see," said Wylie.

"Yes, a suspicious fellow, and always measuring

The Nettle Stew

in his own bushel. Now I could see from the first, sir, that you was a seaman and a scholard, and your friend a scholard and a gentleman. I know your word is your word, and once passed you will keep it."

"Are ye so sure?" asked Wylie.

"As sure as I be here," he paused, "a-picking bloody nettles with your honours."

I saw the drift of this at once, that the rogue would fain be "in with us," for the sake of his neck; but that he was the kind of man to have his full share of the doubloons that even now were being dumped upon the shore.

"Kennedy is not a seaman," he went on; "indeed, if all tales be true, he is a pickpocket of London Town, transported to the plantations, and escaped to the fillibustering."

"I could see he was no navigator; but they call him captain," said Wylie.

"That's it, your honour. 'Tis the way we have. The captain over all, and the master or navigator next; but, between your honour and me, the navigator is often the better man, only his mind don't run to tricks for coming to the top; but the navigator is often——"

"Aye, aye," said Wylie, "and the navigator is more necessary when all is said—a pilot or navi-

Dead Men's Bells

gator on the high seas, and a good guide on land are baith necessary."

Kennedy here came up after us. He gave us his suspicious look, as though wondering what we had found to talk of as we pulled the nettles.

"The pot is on the fire," he said.

"Ah weel," said Wylie, "we hae armfuls o' a gude green kitchen tae your Jamaica saut beef here."

Kennedy seemed puzzled—perhaps at the word "kitchen," which he might not understand in the Scot's sense of Wylie's use.

We all passed back to the shore, and the nettles went upon the next stage toward the eating of them, while the men flung the bags of moneys on a spread sail, and also carried off what belongings they had need of, as underwear and notions tied in handkerchiefs by the four corners, or in sacks with string around the necks. They had still their biscuits and some salted meat, and now were already eating, some of them, and one knocking the bung into a small keg, and another prising with his sheath-knife the cork from the neck of a pot-bellied bottle of Dutch brandy. But the most delayed their eating until the nettle stew would be ready for their appetites and their curiosity. Some, indeed, went gathering more for a second

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The Nettle Stew

pot already filled from one of the many trickling burns that came like streaks of silver down the steep slopes out of the mist. There was much swearing thereupon along the slope from the nettle-pluckers, and swearing below at the wet wood of the fires that sizzled and smoked.

Kennedy cleared his throat, and cried out that the computation be made while the —— pots were a-boiling on the —— fires ; and added, in a kind of jeer, as though to bring the laugh on us, seeing we were aloof from the sorry gang of cut-throats : “ I have my doubts of nettle stew.”

“ Did ye ever,” asked Wylie lightly, “ hear the tale of the wild Heelandman that went to London and put nettles in his coat pockets ? ”

“ Did he eat them raw, *like* an ass eats thistles ? ” asked Kennedy, for these lean little London knaves have a certain agility in the baser kind of repartee.

Wylie let the laugh pass.

“ No, man ! ” said he. “ But every London pickpocket that dipped his hand got such a stang that he yelped and disclosed himself.”

There was a chuckle at this, and a fair bellow from Three Fingers.

Kennedy glared, and showed his teeth like a beast, and turned it into a bad smile.

Dead Men's Bells

"Oh," said he, "and what then? That was not the end of the story?"

"Troth," said Wylie, "I never heard the sequel. There was enough humour in the tale that way for me. But I could invent the anticlimax, though it would hae little humour; and I fancy that whiles a pickpocket got the Heelandman's foot in his hurdie, and whiles he found himself in the lock-up, just as the Heelandman was moved."

"Ha-ha!" cried Three Fingers, and passed over to the spread sail.

They had various under-titles, boatswain, gunner, and so forth, and Kennedy had a dirty pocket-book in a canvas bag hung to his neck by a string, which he fished up from below his shirt; and Three Fingers had a pocket-book; and some of the lads had their own notes; one or two of their ledgers were but bits of sticks with notches cut in them, private ledgers, as some of our Indians near this plantation compute upon sticks. They had all, clearly, a fair notion of their shares already, which was to be accounted for by the fact that, as we gathered in our subsequent migrations with them, there had no prizes been taken for some time, but a decision come to, to disband. Ireland had been their goal, and they had counted upon

The Nettle Stew

making a landing upon the west coast, and passing through these uncouth people to one of the easterly ports, and each slipping away upon various ships to whatsoever place he was minded to settle or debauch in. It was these late gales that were the cause of their coming to the wild Highlands.

Kennedy cleared his throat and said :

“Well, boys, there will be a deduction in the amounts due to you, so as to give a seaman’s share to each of these gentlemen that have aided you ashore.”

The eyes of all jumped hard glances toward us, and they glared at us so that it was as if we had been looked upon by a pile of rats.

Three Fingers shot a quick look at Kennedy, and seemed about to speak, but Wylie was before him.

“See here, boys,” he cried, “let me give you the rights of it. Are ye listening to me? Now, now, Mr. Kennedy”—for Kennedy seemed about to speak—“let the boys have the right of it. We were promised, not only for piloting ye, but for a service yet to perform, a seaman’s share each——”

One or two complained.

“Listen tae me further,” Wylie said, cocking his head. “I wad draw your attention to a fact that

Dead Men's Bells

education helps to, and lack of it might blind ye to. Mr. Kennedy would divide the amounts first among officers and men, I see, and then, out of your shares deduct a seaman's share each for us, till we all come even. But that is not fair sailing. That makes you pay not only for your own pilotage—and the further service still due—but for his and the officers'——” He had a quick dismissal for the boatswain, who was for a word. “You see that, don't ye?”

They saw it, and had evidently had a knowledge of Kennedy's ways already. But he had some hold on them to have taken his place as captain, on leaving Captain Roberts, and, indeed, he had led them away.

He laughed, and said he :

“'Twas but to save computing again—for my head is scarce fit to make a fresh reckoning.”

Three Fingers chipped in suddenly, looking sharply at Mr. Wylie, as to say, “You will notice this,” and, I think, did much to win all over, though Wylie could well enough have had his way without a seconder.

“We must compute again!” cried Three Fingers. “See, Kennedy, if ye try to evade your part of share to these gentlemen for their first service, small blame to them if they bid you go to 'ell and

The Nettle Stew

find your way thither. For me—I say, play fair wi’ the gentlemen.”

“Do they know the roads hereaway?” asked one man; and, though there was some scowling, there were none to question the crucial matter of our receiving a share at all.

Wylie turned toward the voice. He had been looking at Kennedy, and did not pick out the man who spoke, looked but in his direction. It had the effect of making him address the group.

“The plain answer to that,” said he, “is that I know the lie of the land, though not the roads through it. I ken the lie of the land sufficient to keep ye off the road for Inverary, where ye’ll stand as little chance, I’se warrant, as a Maclean or MacDonald in the butt-end of Kintyre, and to put ye on the way to Glasgow or Dumbarton.”

“Ye said ye knew the land!” cried Kennedy.

Wylie muttered something about “Deeploamacy be damned,” and “The de’il tak’ them wha hae the least pint stoup,” looked again at Kennedy after that muttering, and shot a lip at him.

“So far as I see,” said he, “this is a matter between men and officers. I but offered a suggestion of fairness as I see it.”

The boatswain was again about to enter the

Dead Men's Bells

dispute, but Three Fingers winked to him, which I caught, and said he :

"Come, Kennedy, it is only fair that we pay our little bit with the men; all pay equal, officers and men"; which met with cries of approval from the men; they sick of these seas, and all parched and heady, and weary for the journey's end, some large town with brothels and publics. So the money was counted out, and some bars of silver wrangled over for their approximate value in coin. These were eventually kept apart, and diced for by the men, and I noticed that some of those who won them took them very doubtfully, and one or two cast away theirs, thinking, doubtless, of a possible arrest in days soon to come, and cross-questions about such belongings.

Even as this task of sharing ended, Wylie, when the men were beginning to cluster and talk, walked over to the pots.

"And now, boys," said he, "for our nettle stew—whilk you will find a good kitchen to your saut meat and a fine antidote tae scurvy and itchings. Has anyone a spune?"

He peered in the first steaming pot.

"I didna undertake tae forage as weel as guide; but I can throw into the bargain what knowledge

The Nettle Stew

I hae o' edible herbs, which every seaman should know. I'll throw that into the bargain."

He turned to the lads, whose glowering looks were passing.

"I'm no' the kind of man," said he, "tae mention no names—wha would skin a louse tae get the tallow, or worm intil a Jew's navel looking for pork"—and they laughed at his diplomatic vulgarity. "A spune, lads!" his voice cried gaily. "A lang spune!"

He turned to Kennedy.

"Ye'll hae heard oor Scottish proverb?" said he.

"I know it," said Three Fingers, strolling up behind and scenting the pot; "it takes a long spoon to sup with the Devil."

"Even so, sir," said Wylie, and took the spoon proffered to him by one of the watching pirates.

Chapter XIV: *In the Heather*

HERE we were, thirty men, stepping through heather bushes that must have stood a foot high, and every bush entangled with its neighbour, so that the heather, from a distance, might have seemed like the mere colour of the hill's soil and a firm surface. Mr. Wylie led to one side, I to the other, Three Fingers between us. The men followed, loaded with their sacks on their shoulders, or carrying their handkerchiefs—a motley crowd, showing all the colours of the rainbow, hatted, and kerchiefed and bareheaded. Their shirts, put together, would have made a Joseph's coat. Their antics, as they strode constantly high-stepping through the heather and blundering in unlooked-for declivities, soon ceased to excite their laughter, wearied, and anon irritated them. Their language would have given my Uncle Tom, who wanted me to attend kirk and improve my calligraphy, a stound that would have put him in his grave.

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In the Heather

"Look at that Kennedy," said Three Fingers, glancing round over his shoulder.

"What about him?" I asked, as he addressed himself to me.

"He leads the rear. Do ye know why?"

I looked round, and at sight of the glowering, trampling file behind, I thought I understood why Kennedy chose to be to the rear, and not ahead of the men.

"He fears a shot in the back," I suggested, "and a division of his share."

"That's it! A dirty mind 'e has. Measures everybody's corn in 'is own bushel. I don't set up to be anything myself beyond what I am. If Kennedy should stick in a bog on these wet hills and cry for help to me, I should sit on 'is shoulders and drive 'im down to 'ell. That's me. But I don't look for treachery. Did you see 'ow he suspected even your friend? Why!" he cried, his voice going up as if because of vehemence, "I would trust your friend's word—and yours too—both your honours."

"Don't keep on flattering me!" snapped Wylie, trudging in the heather. "I might be tempted to go back on my word if I heard too much of a song o't."

Three Fingers laughed. "Your honour will have his jest," said he.

Dead Men's Bells

We tramped on to the summit where the bald hill reared out of the heather and there sat down ; and below us, where we did not look down on mist, we could see hill-sides, and shores, and islands, and seas.

The view was vaster than I could have imagined—range on range of mountains passed north and south and east with mist in the valleys and their heads jutting out. Seaward were Islay and Jura and Mull, the latter blotting out what lay beyond with its precipitous front ; out over Jura we could see into the Atlantic with its scattered isles. There was something awful in the view.

And now came an opportunity to Three Fingers again. Some of the men lit their cigarros, of which they had brought many bundles ashore ; some lit pipes, and Mr. Wylie sniffed the odour and his face looked pained.

"Would your honour care for a smoke ?" asked Three Fingers.

"I think I could cut a throat for it," said Wylie.

Very carefully Three Fingers unwrapped a bundle he carried.

"Will your honour accept this ?" said he. "I did not like to encroach on your honour on the ship ; but I brought it along. 'Maybe,' thinks I, 'as his honour is a traveller, he has learnt

In the Heather

the love of the weed, and maybe he could do with a draw of the soothin' 'erb,'” and he carefully opened a boxful of the pipes called churchwardens and presented a bagful of the herb.

Kennedy sat glum and speechless.

Wylie laughed as he stretched forth an accepting hand.

Our smoking over, we jogged on along the crest till below us we saw an arm of the sea and a castle beyond, and smoke of a hamlet.

“Now, boys,” said Wylie, standing to survey the champaign, “I can, as I said, give ye the lie of the land, if not the lie of the roads, such as they are in this wild country. To begin with,” and he pointed inland and east, “yon’s your way.”

The men began to cry out for a descent on the hamlet that showed below us; and that we let them dispute among themselves. The upshot was that they were for the hamlet; and thither we went. But it took much longer to arrive at it than the depth of the hill had given them to expect it would. For the hill was difficult to navigate, now for precipices and, below the precipices again, for the boggy plateaux covered with moss into which several sank and were blackened as high as to the thighs with the black mud below. This brought them all back after us to evade these

Dead Men's Bells

places by a circuit, jumping from tussock to tussock of the heather, and circumventing the broader of these morasses, though plenty had to be squelched through at their narrowest parts.

As we came down, at length, we could distinguish people about the cottages and in the fields. Women worked there in the little fields with the men, as is done among races that are civilised. There were no horses visible, the people carrying their produce in great wicker baskets slung with a thong around the forehead. The cottages were humble, but looked fit to resist gales, being of great stones and the interstices all well filled. The roofs were all of thatch, well weighted against rude winds.

The descent of thirty men, such as we, upon such a place, could not but raise a commotion and some consternation. The country was in a troublous state. The red-coats were for ever cropping up here and there searching for secreted arms. But a month or two earlier there had been another attempt on behalf of the Chevalier, beyond the country of the Appin Stewarts, in the valley of Glenshiel, which had brought more trouble to the land. Fugitives from that fight were also being sought for (as we were to hear presently when we came in touch with the folk) not only in the vicinity of Glenshiel northward, but as far south as to

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In the Heather

Balquhiddy and Loch Lomond, some of the Macgregors of that part, who were so much of freebooters, now upon one side now upon the other, or upon none (as often as not under a kind of intimidated protection from Argyll), having taken part in that last rising. Participators in the rising of four years ago before were still supposed to be in the country, and were being sought for.

Agents of those Jacobites in France were coming and going, ships hovering and dropping them and anon standing by to take them off again, all up and down the coasts. Spaniards had taken part in the Glenshiel fight on behalf of the Chevalier, just as Dutchmen were landed on the Forfar coast to fight for the German Lairdie—and seem to have left their mark there. “Fat far?” they say in these parts, by Montrose and Arbroath, for “what for?” and any Montrose folk that I have ever known reminded me of a tun-bellied Dutch bottle, and are as much Dutch as Scottish.* These people that we were now to come among are the finest folk in Scotland. Even as a Lowlander I say it, and if I had to be born again, I would be born a Stewart of Appin.†

These highlandmen live hard all ways round;

* Mr. Lindsay had his prejudices—

† But was not petty.—EDITOR.

Dead Men's Bells

their chief food, oatmeal, made into brochan; bread and cheese and ale their staple diet; *usquebaugh* their fiery beverage, which they say keeps the chill of the wet climate from their bones, but which is a very heady beverage to drink by the glass as if it was tippenny. They snuff all the day long, out of horns, and are not content with a pinch, but have a little horn ladle in the mull, and use that to scoop up the snuff into their nostrils. They have but lately begun to add the potato to their diet, though they have frequently fish, and not infrequently game to eat. But see them upon the roads, and compare them with the uncouth folk of east Scotland, or the heavy, stolid folk of my own part, and you cannot but admire them. Even the lowliest of them has the air of a king.

As we came down upon this village it was but to be expected that at first they should be anxious, in such troublous times. The women went toward the houses and the men stood resolute to meet us. We could hear, as we approached, the unusual sound, in these parts, of a fiddle, for the bagpipe was the more usual instrument.

But just as the harp passed from, so is the fiddle coming into, the highlands. The sound of that fiddle put this sorry gang of masterless lads in mind of pots of ale and bottles of brandy and

In the Heather

bawdy song, and the loose spendthrift merriment of seaboard towns. They came down the last rolls of that steep hill shouting and cheering and waving their hands.

The men-folk of the place clustered watchful, uncertain what to make of us. As we drew near we spoke to several, but always the reply was "Nae English." That did not hamper us from knowing which of the cottages was the inn of the place. The noses of these lads smelt it out straightway; and soon the whole throng were clustered like hiving bees inside it and, without, about the door.

We tarried without, Mr. Wylie and I and Three Fingers; but the sound of the fiddle scraping again within told us that if the fiddler had "nae English," he at least knew their requirements. We heard them shouting for one song and another, "Nancy Dawson," I think, was the name of one they cried for, if I mind right, but the fiddler kept on with his highland airs, from one to another.

Then he seemed to have a fresh try, and inspiration, and began upon a hornpipe.

The feet were all a-dancing and a-shuffling on the instant within and without the change-house.

Poor devils—dancing, who might soon be dancing in air. But they would have spurned our pity,

Dead Men's Bells

they whose cry was "A short life and a merry one"—and such was their pleasure, such their merriment. A little old wife seemed to see that we were not all of that way of thinking, and came slowly and cannily from a cottage in which she seemed to dwell with a cow, carrying to us, one in each hand, two bickers of milk. She had no English, but understood our thanks as well as we the hospitality of her offering. When the coggies were quaffed away she shambled to her cottage. Mr. Wylie turned about to the change-house door, for there were now sounds of altercation within.

The seamen were for treating the villagers, whether they would or would not. Mr. Wylie was on the point of stepping in when a man was thrust forward toward us by his fellows, to whom he had perhaps, in an unguarded hour, boasted of a knowledge of the English. He advanced upon us with the word "Sheep."

"——," said Three Fingers. "He takes us for drovers."

"No," said Wylie; "he means ship. Yes, sir."

"Sheep," said the man, and waved his arm down the loch. But his English seemed to begin and end in "Sheep."

Wylie took up a stick and began to draw a rough outline of the sea-coast, and the people came

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closer, crowding and looking over his shoulder, at a loss at first, but when he began to put in the islands they understood.

"Scalpa," said Wylie, pointing, and——

"Aye, aye, whateffer," said the linguist, and pointed to another part. "Mull," said he, "whateffer."

Three Fingers dabbed his finger somewhere about Stornaway.

"Wreck," said he.

Wylie gave a chuckle.

Kennedy came ferreting out.

"What's this?" he asked.

"A' for your gude," said Wylie.

"Wreck," said Three Fingers, and fell to talking such pidgin-English as he may have used to some Carib in the impression that to talk something nonsensical, in a language he could scarce have understood had it been addressed to him, might make him intelligible.

"She kens whateffer," broke in the linguist, who seemed to sense, if not the meaning of decent English, the fact of its being travestied, looked nigh indignant, and turned to translate the fact that we were shipwrecked seamen, and whatever else he believed that he had understood, to the other villagers.

Dead Men's Bells

"Mr. Kennedy," said Wylie, "if ye tak' my advice ye'll get the lads oot of here."

"What for? Is there any danger here? They seem friendly enough. There's an old dame giving the boatswain a dish of milk—God love me—see him chuck her chin."

Wylie looked about and frowned.

"Even so," said he. "The heeland folk will give you hospitality, but they hae the pride of—Mr. Lindsay, we'll be stepping." And away we went, he bowing deep to the old dame and shooting a look at the boatswain.

Three Fingers shouldered his bundle and was at our heels.

"Come on, you swine!" he said to the boatswain, in that coarse way that you have noticed the lower types can speak to one another and yet, by some special intonation, deduct affront from what is, on the face of it, an affronting remark.

The boatswain gave a bob and followed. Looking round, we found that the pirates were coming, running, and hailing back for those within, coming after us in twos and threes, and also in solitary singing or sullen units.

"What's all the haste?" said Kennedy, following on our heels.

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In the Heather

country," said Wylic. "Cawmell country is no heeland country in the guid sense. There's guid Cawmells, of course, they of Auchenbreck and of Glendarvel, of the Breadalbane kin and suchlike, but they dinna make what is meant when ye say Cawmell, in the usual sense of the word, that ye would ken if ye cam' to Inverary wi' yon ship o' yours for a witness against you, and the coins of all the world scattered in every change-house for another word against ye. Ye'd get but Jeddart Justice.* Mark ye—this news of us will travel. We hae misguided them in the matter o' our landing—baith as to the manner o't and the viceenity o't. But there's nae sense in letting the grass grow under your feet till ye win mony a mile frae the coast hereabout. When ye come to Breadalbane or Balquhiddel ye can tarry and cast your money about. And if ye dinna behave there ye'll hae a Maclean's or a Macgregor's dirk in your kidneys. They settle their ain village troubles in their ain way. Awbody's business is his ain business in the heelands, unless ye come in touch wi' the red-coats or Argyll's folk, and then it's the kind gibbet of Crieff or the gallows of Inverary."

* "Jeddart Justice." Jedburgh Justice—the hanging first, the trial after.

Dead Men's Bells

"But these people are Highland enough," said Kennedy.

"Ah weel," said Wylie, "gang your ways! But I'll gie ye the last word o' advice, and maybe ye'll understand. The black and green of Argyll is as bad a colour as the snuff-colour of the Lowlands—worse in a way than the red-coat—if ye chance upon them as ye are the noo, all of ye fou, and all of ye loaded wi' Louis d'ors and doubloons and broad-pieces and I kenna what o' foreign money, and never an honest humble boddle, and wearing rings of gold wi' rubies in them. Saw ye ever honest seamen of the Firth of Clyde wi' any ither jewellery beyond a pair of wee earrings, and maybe a silver ring at the maist on his pinkie? I'm very lang-suffering wi' ye. Ye ken I'm a master of a merchant ship, and I'm very lang-suffering wi' a pirate——"

"Damn ye!" cries Kennedy, and made to strike, but Three Fingers leapt in and caught the arm.

"Ye—fool!" he cried. "Do ye not know truth when ye hear it? If I was the gentleman now I would shake you hoff and go my own way, and think I had done enough for you. You get his word to pilot you overland, and then argue his advice from the outset. If I was 'im I would

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say : ' Very well, to 'ell with you,' and go on my way."

Kennedy fell back, and Three Fingers routed on the gang that had been coming up and giving ear to all this, stretched across the rough track by the loch-side, serving out Wylie's word afresh to them with his own condiments and spices of speech.

All that Mr. Wylie said was :

" Be careful, Mr. Kennedy. Ye may try my patience."

We held on up that loch-side all day, with wasps and the great heavy heather bees droning, and little flies flying on us and lighting constantly about our eyes as if we had been cattle, and indeed we felt like it—beasts of burden all carrying burdens which weighed heavy in the clammy heat as the day wore on and the sun poured down on the hills, and on the loch that shimmered like a strip of Chinese silk. It was a beautiful, sparkling country. The crests of the mountains where they broke and shouldered above the heather sparkled as if they were so much peak of precious stone, and the tallest had snow in their high ravines. Lower the hills sparkled, as we walked, as if the fairies of the Highland myths were abroad, so that sometimes at a flash suddenly come and gone I would

Dead Men's Bells

step back again to be sure whence it came, and find it was the flash of the mica-studded bank of one of the burns, the mica exposed by the falling away of the bank, and the spray washing it; and beside us, the twinkling and sparkling of the loch, which had its currents too, kept on all the way.

Ever and again, from some promontory a heron would arise and fly away over the water, close to it, in slow and heavy flight. Ever and again we in the forefront would find a movement on some crest of hill drawing our gaze thither abruptly, and we would see a startled stag stand a moment on the crest, all taughtened in alertness, neck craned, antlers showing, turned against sky or against farther hillside—and then he would be gone.

We slept that night in a wood, at a place where the loch broke in two and one arm ran away north upon the farther shore.

There was there a lonely shieling, as they call these huts in which they live nearer the wilder parts of the moor at the season when the cattle need to be minded; but there was no sign of an occupant. Perhaps the inhabitants had fled at sight of our approach, the shieling being so lonely situated.

Before we could counsel our rowdy crew (who had brought more *usquebaugh* with them than

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In the Heather

bannocks and smoked salmon from the hamlet) they had demolished the frail patch of vegetables beside the shieling for their pots, which they took in turn to carry at first, but which were, toward the end, carried by the least brutal. They took down also the fishing-tackle from over the door under the thatch.

The trout were leaping in the loch, nigh sunset, for the flies. And fishing being a sport for which, despite my resolution in the melancholy house of Wester Mearns, I have never lost taste, though I have long ceased to fish but for the pot, I approached one of the fishers and borrowed his line, which he gave civilly enough. Cutting a supple branch of willow from a little wood upon the point, I made me a pliant rod and whipped the loch up and down to the tune of half a dozen as bonny trout as ever I took out of Cart.

As I was a-fishing, the colours were all changing for the end of day, and when I looked around me and gave heed I was stabbed through with the lonely and savage majesty of the place: a strip of green promontory—beyond, a ribband of bright blue, which was another arm of the sea—beyond again, a dark blue range of hills—beyond, and higher, a far-off range of indigo—beyond that, clouds of a blue between the shade of the lake and the first

Dead Men's Bells

range—beyond again, pink sky with purple clouds; over all, a sky of deepening shades of blue up to the summit. I can understand that the highlands are a place where one weeps easily for the pity of man's short days, with such pageantry of nature going on all the while, weeps for the infinitesimal life of man with all its brave dreams. But it is a place, for another reason (namely, its squalls and tempests), where a man must learn to take many knocks without flinching—with neither subservience nor show of fear.

When I came back at last, to where all clustered round their pots eating a mixed meal, I found Mr. Wylie giving a discourse in his slow voice.

He sat against a rock on the slope where they had selected to camp, and in such a way that he had, as it were, the throne, and must be the centre, no matter how they disposed themselves on the space of sward. He was advising, in his droll, fleering, bantering fashion, that a portion of money be left at the door of the shieling to pay for the stolen produce. "Baith for the justice o't and for yer ain gude," I heard him end one of his periods on this head as I arrived.

Kennedy seemed not to be arguing the point, and sat wolping from the common pot with his fingers,

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flicking them and damning when he scalded his hand. The boatswain was picking up courage, having brought two bottles along in his pocket from the clachan, and having "dragged his anchor" in the seaman's phrase.

"Oh, be —— to such ways," said he. "Ye would never have made a rover. Ye may be a great navigator," he added quickly; and when some leered at him, "Ye would not have made a rover!" he cried again. "I say it!"

But the boatswain seemed very little of a favourite. Also—Mr. Wylie ignored him. Perhaps the boatswain had used his authority over those who had elected him, for some special gift of seamanship or of devilment, too saucily, had carried his authority too braggartly. Mr. Wylie allowed the matter to rest, and up got one after the other of these daft lads that were so depraved, and yet so pitiable in their joint folly and evil, and away over to the shieling door, each trying to outdo the other by heaping each one more than his predecessor before the door. If there have sprung up there any myth of a more than usual spendthrift fairy, here is the truth of that fairy.

Wylie looked on at the result of his harangue in the dying day, the blue shadows falling on the shieling and making all vague.

Dead Men's Bells

"God sake!" said he. "They are mair tae peety than tae censure."

The day being gone and night fallen we began to break branches off the trees for bedding, and to stretch out to rest, taking off our coats and throwing them over us loosely, as it is warmer so to sleep.

Some few built up one of the fires afresh, and by the light of the resinous flames, over a pack of cards, fell to the work of some getting wealthier and some poorer—and upsetting the recent equality of possessions.

The dark hours are not long in the open in summer. I dozed more than slept, ever alert for some calamity in that crack-pated gathering; and with the first light went down to the loch and stripped off all my clothes, being unpleasant from sleeping in the clothes I had tramped in.

As I came out of the water, which was so ice-cold as to set me chattering as soon as I got knee-deep—a trouble I promptly cured by a plunge out, and over the head—Mr. Wylie was stepping down to join me, and others were stirring.

One stood at the shieling door staring at the ground, and we saw him come back, stepping light and furtive.

"What's afoot?" said Wylie.

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We saw the man wander among the still dozing and sleeping herd, and then saw him kick at someone, who rose up, wildly and astonished, to a sitting posture. There were signs of a general altercation. The sounds of it came down to us; and then we saw the two grapple, the one who had been so rudely aroused first clutching at the other pirate's legs. They reeled this way and that; both up, both down, rolled over. We could not follow all the affair, because of the circling of the others, with their cries and counter cries.

Then came a very terrible cry, on the note of a rat's when a dog has given it the flick in air, but human into the bargain; the voice yelled loud, and the echoes took it up in the quiet hills till they seemed to be watching. I never touched any experience so weird. Then the crowd came apart, and one man rose and stood aside, and bent and wiped his knife on the grass.

"I'll hae my bathe," said Mr. Wylie, and began to loosen his soiled cravat.

I emulated his coolness, and waited while he splashed. There was a deal of gesticulating and shouting among the pirates above while he was thus refreshing himself; and, as we came up again from the loch, several of them ran to us, and, giving seamen's salutes, all spoke at once to the

Dead Men's Bells

effect that that swine of a boatswain, as they called him, had gone to the shieling in the night and carried away all the moneys they had left; and the man who had discovered the theft had accused him, been insulted and called a whoreson meddler, and, in the scrimmage that had ensued, had knifed the boatswain to death.

"Kennedy says he must swing to a tree," they said. "We say, 'To hell with that.' What say you, Captain?"

"I say the same as you," said Wylie, and they turning and moving back with this verdict, Wylie and I followed.

"He says No," said they to Kennedy.

"It is the law of the ship!" cried Kennedy. "Was it not Captain Roberts's law that a fight that was not a fair pitched duel was to be treated as a murder?"

"Well—and did you not put your quill through many of his rules yourself and change them about?" cried one.

"What's he got to say anyway?" cried Kennedy.

Wylie nodded grimly. "Mr. Kennedy," said he, "I'm still piloting—and when the pilot is aboard—though I canna call ye a seaman, yet ye'll ken seamen's usage—when the pilot is aboard—as I think I have had occasion——"

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"Oh, to hell!" cried Kennedy.

"To tell you before!" yelled Wylie, and looked the maddest man you would care to see. "When the pilot is aboard the master tak's second place, or the captain, as you ca' him."

Three Fingers kept his own counsel.

"And now, boys, when ye return a pickle o' money to the shieling door we'll be on the road and dae wanting breakfast. We'll mak' an appetite first," ended Wylie, and shouldered his bundle.

Away we filed with our belongings up the slope of the hill, the boys sharing, ere they went, the dead boatswain's part of plunder, and neither the two gunners nor yet Kennedy nor Three Fingers disputing, nor seeking a share. Also they left some money again at the shieling door, but not as much, I suspect, as they had cast there in their first fuddled attempt each to outdo the other, even in generosity—if such it could be called. As we went up the hill there was an eagle circling down to the point of the loch. They who have seen an eagle sweep and circle lose something of respect for the bookworms that will sit in their studies reading books of voyages, and when a traveller tells them of buzzards or hawks or eagles, or storms on the high seas, or adventures with wild folk, make some silly jest. I cannot be too thankful that I was

Dead Men's Bells

stripped of my gown in Glasgow and set out into the world, nor too thankful that while at college my reading was as much in the books despised by the pedants, even down to the ballads of the street hawkers. To have seen a ragged-winged eagle circle to a corpse is more memorable than Heraclitus ; and such episodes will help a man the better to the practice of a quiet strength in place of a flightiness, and a better possession of that *siccum lumen* of which Heraclitus is the exponent.

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Chapter XV: *The Maid at the Inn*

LATE in the afternoon, after the most exhausting march, relieved only by sudden downpours of rain that came out of sunny skies and passed off in rainbows and glitter of new-washed rocks and new-wet heather bushes, we came upon another road, tending east, a road that, by Ayrshire standards, was but a drove-road; and, following its windings south and east, we came to another hamlet. It lay, very diminutive, under a great mountain called Cruachan. Upon this hamlet our wild pack advanced more circumspectly and like honest shipwrecked mariners. Here also the wild lads made way for Mr. Wylie to pass first into the wee change-house, one even turning to another of the more brutish and shoving him aside with a "Make way for the captain, you — fool!"

I surmised that they were beginning to think more, the farther they came from their discarded ship, of what, in their slang, they called "the janisseries," and doubtless Kennedy was not the only

Dead Men's Bells

one who had begun his course hellward with petty thieving that had introduced him at an early age to the inside of his town's tolbooth, and later packed him off to the plantations.

We had come on the place suddenly around a bend where a spur of the hills, bearded with short grass and gnarled with many strewn boulders, icant out to the lower pastures. The folk were still in the near fields, and rose up stiffly, getting the feel of their limbs slowly, and looking about on us with curiosity. As we advanced into the little clachan (as they call their hamlets) those in the fields were pursuing us.

I followed Mr. Wylie indoors, to the low-roofed place, and the others came trooping after.

"Good day to the house," said Mr. Wylie, and an old wife who appeared in the misty rear replied in the English, but with a very thick Highland accent, that, while thick, was musical.

Wylie turned to the lads, and "Ye'd better hae some viands first, do ye no' think?" said he; for some of them were already peering at the shelves where the bottles showed their dull sheen in a corner.

"Ah! Pless me!" cried the old wife, "wha are ye all?" as they came thronging in.

"Well, we are no' redcoats," said Wylie.

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The Maid at the Inn

"We hae come ower the water ourselves, and been shipwrecked, and we hae nae quarrel wi' others that hae come ower the water."

"Shipwrecked mariners!" she cried, letting pass the other significance of his speech.

"Puir shipwrecked lads," he said, "turning back seeking the Lowland ports, where I have nae doot the ordinary civeelities will be accorded them, and thae be helpit hame."

"Puir lads!" cried the wife; then turned and called in the Gaelic that we, of course, could not understand. And then, "Lads, lads," said she, "there's nae settles to hold ye all whateffer. But we'll mak' tae pest o't."

The silly gommerals had been sobered enough by their tramping, and by Mr. Wylie's harangues and counsels, to abstain from mocking her pronunciation—for they who call, for example, the word "idea" either "idee" or "idear," are always prone to mock those who, instead of putting in an "r" where it never was, broaden the "r," as do we of the lowlands, or make a "b" sound almost like a "p," as Gaelic speakers are apt to do when speaking English. Only one or two began a guffaw, and were checked by the words of the others, who cried out in their free and easy fashion, "Good for mother. We'll shake down, mother."

Dead Men's Bells

"There is a sheep bloodit oot-by," she said; "and if ye can but bide a wee, there will be plenty of collops to gang round, ettled oot wi' some deer ham and smoked salmon."

"That's the thing, mother! We'll make the platter clean." And, seeing from her manner that she was for treating them as a starving and helpless crew, they began: "Don't you fret, old one! We'll pay ye. Set the meat before us, and we'll pay you, mother."

Thus they might have begun to undo the good impression of our beginning here. But the old wife did not, belike, expect the best manners from southern seamen, and took their words as well meant.

But when one called for a bottle to toast her "phiz," and another one otherwise phrased it to drink to her "figurehead," she turned to the more sedate and ignored these others.

In by the front door, at this stage, came a great, tall, ruddy-faced man, in the swinging Highland gait, an old man, but very grimlike, bony and vigorous, the keeper of a change-house (for he was the goodwife's man), but with a bearing as if he was head of his clan, with a smile for the houseful.

"Come, lads," he said. "Hae a lining tae

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The Maid at the Inn

your pellites whateffer to begin with. If ye will have the patience, cockyleekie and collops will line your wames, and then you'll let me have ta plesure of refreshing ye with a *deoch-an-doruis* and setting ye on your way."

He saw Wylie and nodded to him.

"Ye hae a wild lot o' lads," he said; "they will pe rejoicing to pe landit whateffer."

"'Tis the way of seamen ashore," said Mr. Wylie.

"Ah weel, sir, I shall fill the lads' pellites and set them on their way."

There had been an odour of slightly burning or firing meal from the back part that reminded me of the tale of the scones that King Alfred was set to watch, and now a lass came out from the kitchen door with a great piled platter of barley-meal cakes, and walking into the midst of the clustered lads, said she in the sweetest voice: "Ta collops will pe a whily. Could ye no petter refresh on the cakes, ye wrecked lads, while ye will be waiting?"

There had fallen a hush at her advent ere she spoke. I do not profess an explanation; she was but a slip of a lass of a build that the French call "*petite*," with wide-set grave eyes, and as for her dress, I could not tell you how she was attired—which is perhaps the finest tribute to her taste.

Dead Men's Bells

To me it was a person and not a woman that came into the front of the house then.

My Cousin Effie was the kind of lass I could have married and had weans by, had she been minded, and our consanguinity not been a preventive to a wise man; maybe some such thought, or rumour of such a thought, had slipped into my mind whiles on seeing her. But here was a new feeling toward one of the other sex that I make bold to consider (although they tell me few women see it so) a far finer leaning toward a woman. King Edward, son of King Ethelred (Edward the Confessor), who reigned in England so far away as 1042, was of my mind, according to the Chronicles, and so also was the writer of the *Religio Medici*, and many another both traveller and scholar. This lass it would have seemed an indignity to have looked upon but as a person—and not as a woman. Such was my thought, and I found myself wondering if the world held such another.

These daft and evil mariners too had some sense of her that maybe they could not express. But I can tell you how they acted and comported themselves: a quiet fell over them, and they were as if shamefast; one feeling his neckcloth, another tucking up a hanging fragment of rent sleeve,

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The Maid at the Inn

others smoothing out their hair. Poor lads! The Ratcliff Highway "Doxies," as they called them in their tales of their episodes ashore, were all they had to know of womankind. Several not only touched their hats, but doffed them and looked as timid as if they were before a judge—no, I have lost it, and put a wrong complexion on their bearing—now that I consider how some of them later mocked the judge and jested toward the gallows. It was not timidity, but, I think, a sense of the lass's fineness and open-eyed honesty and sympathy.

They took the barley cakes as if they had been sacred.

The father, I think, suddenly aware of how he was looking on upon the scene, and recollecting himself, said: "Come out-by, lads, and ye'll hae a cut of the kebbock wi' the cakes."

They had no idea of what "kebbock" might be, but went after him like lambs. The lass withdrew with her empty platter, and those who were still in the front chamber began to change their tune, and "By God! A fine wench! A fine bit of stuff," says one.

Several cried out in their vernacular: "Shut up, ye bloody fool." And to one of the light talkers, another, I heard, with interest in how

Dead Men's Bells

men may despise what they follow (for he was one with a wealth of strange stories as we trudged), cried out in a low voice: "Belay! Belay! Can't you see that she'm different to a trull, to talk so of the maiden?"

She came back again with a replenished platter, which she set down this time upon the table, and the mother said: "Juist help yourselves, lads."

The lass had been aware of the effect of her first entrance (I believe), and was in no wise puffed up by it. Doubtless in passing the cakes she had surmised what rapscallions the lads were too. But she made no sign—only set the platter down and departed.

"Aye," said Mr. Wylie quietly at my side, "a rare lass."

He turned about, and we both walked to the door and looked out over the rising slopes around the clachan, and heard a cock crow, I mind.

"A rare lass—but I hae little doot behind it a' as saulless as the lave," said Wylie.

I whipped round on him, perhaps as comic in my anger or indignation as (from one point of view, which I can understand, though it is not mine, which I can understand, I say, which is a different word from *sympathise with*) the seamen had been in their awe.

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The Maid at the Inn

"Come, come!" he said. "I think ye ken what the sex is yoursel'. Ye needna to look at me as if ye would bash me in the jaw and ca' me—what was it?—aye, 'a damned, canting, hypocritical bitch.'"

He looked deep in my eyes with a little fleering and yet friendly smile.

The woman that was my blood kin came up in my mind's eye, and made a kind of disappointment in the world.

The lass had come in again with a word to her mother; and Mr. Wylie, standing in the doorway, considered her not rudely, but almost sadly.

"Come oot-bye," he said, and we went out before the house. He caught the lapel of my coat.

"It's a droll world," said he.

"It is that," said I.

"D'ye ken," said he, "I got a scunner at weemen early in my life." I could have smiled; for the man was little older than I. "It was but ae phrase o' a lass—ae phrase and nae mair, but I assure you it was a comprehensive criticism of her saul, if ye can ca' that a saul that resided in sick a pink and white parcel o' hair and banes and mensuration."

"Oh!" I said.

Dead Men's Bells

"A lass had made a fule o' me," said he, "as many a lass does wi' a man—for, mark ye, the maist o' courtships are juist a giggling on the part of the lass at the devotion (such as ye saw the noo, a fine devotion at the best o't) of the man. Ye can see the way a lass looks at a lad makin' love—rale love, ye ken—admiring love—that she is juist laughing fit tae burst, in below, at him takin' her for what he does, laughin' at the rideeculous posection he puts himsel' in wi' his deemeenin' protestations o' his love and unworthiness. Oh, it tickles her deeply. Ah weel, I had a lass like that. And ae day she flang me ower in what I couldna' but consider a fair dirty fashion. It feenished me. And I was tae be mair feenished syne. It feenished me wi' her. 'Weel,' says I tae her, 'weel,' says I, 'if this is woman, I'm scunnered wi' the sex.' She tossed her head—and ye ken she had a tip-tilt juist on the fair point o' her nose—and I saw it then for the first time. 'Aye,' says she—mark ye this, Mr. Lindsay," and he clipped freshly my lapel—" 'Aye,' says she, 'when I hear a man say the like of that then I ken what his ain weemen folk are!' My Goad! If ye want the dirty kick, Mr. Robert Lindsay, gang tae a wumman for't."

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The Maid at the Inn

"Aye, indeed," said he. "Ye see there's your ain mither insulted, and nae man can stand that—no' if his mither was a hoor." He shook his head sadly.

"What did ye do?" said I.

"Do! I said but: 'Na, na! It's the first woman a man loves that gives him his views o' the sex.' She drew up at that, and her grey eyes were dotted and marlt wi' the sign o' some emotion, I neither ken nor care to ken what. I couldna delve in a wumman's cosmogony. It's ower full o' contradiction, and as little coherent as the yatter o' the village loony, for me tae follow. Maybe she felt that I was richt, or maybe no'. Onyway she flyped her head again. 'That's an excuse,' says she; 'when a man is a hater of weemen, it's his ain weemen folk that ye can judge.'"

"What did you say?"

"Oh, troth, I juist says: 'This is unnaicessary repiteetion.' And I passed on and left her. Ye canna serve a wumman——"

The lass of the inn came out and looked left and right and saw him.

"How mony of the mariners are there, what-effer?" she asked.

He swept his hat off, and stood, not ogling and bowing like a fashionable, but as if he talked to a man he respected.

Dead Men's Bells

"There's juist thirty of us all told," he said. "I'm some afraid we gie ye a deal o' trouble."

"Oh, nae trouble—it is a pleasure tae help the wreckit lads upon their way."

He stood thoughtful as she departed.

"She's a grand, grand lass," said he, "wi' a' the directness and honesty o' a man and a sweetness greater than his strength. Aye—man—she does a po'er to allay the remembered anger o' yon I was even the noo telling ye. Goad!" He gave a whimsical chuckle. "Aye, I mind I was telling ye—I turned on my heel. Aye, I turned and left her, and never a word mair. But I went hame and grat—aye, sir—grat—wi' sheer vexation that I couldna hit her—and then, I went out and focht wi' every mortal man in the streets o' Irvine that lookit even sideways on me." He puckered his mouth. "I mind the cry o' victory ower each o' them afore the guard gat me and put me in the joug syne, tae the eternal discomfort o' my faemily. It was 'Tak' that, ye tip-nosed bitch!" He smiled a dry smile. "The way tae ken ithers, Mr. Lindsay, is to ken yoursel'."

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Chapter XVI: *We Leave the Pirates*

THE next day was to be our last with the pirates. We had been travelling through a very narrow glen or gorge, into which shafts of sunlight poured and slanted through high corries. I can see that place still, a long rocky ridge running down toward us, and the end of the ridge broken off and leaving, as it were, a monstrous tooth standing up alone at the end of it. I can recall the changing weather: rain, or rather mist, driving along through these gashes of glens, rain or mist that soaked us, then wind that dried us; roaring burns foaming down the centre of boulder-strewn chasms so broad that they kept me wondering what the burns must be like when in spate, in spring, when the winter snows melt. All these things are memorable: grey clouds lifting from mountains at dawn; wedges of sunlight high up on mountain-sides above gloomy glens; mist driving anon through these cloven glens, stinging and chill; then sun-rays flooding steeply down, and flies humming

Dead Men's Bells

and the smaller birds trilling afresh. But, at times, above all other memories, comes the memory of the melancholy that these lonelier glens give. Perhaps thoughts of the sad troop we travelled with made the melancholy greater ; but I do not think so. I think these looming and criss-crossing mountains are melancholy in themselves. Something in their very immense silence, rendered more intangible, inaccessible, by the booming of echoes of shouting burns under waterfalls, crept into the heart there like an old sorrow. If one were as old as the streams, one might be as happy ; if one were as old as the mountains, one might be as majestic and as quiet ; but to look at them—aye, to feel the mountains looking at one, to hear the careless streams singing to one, or shouting, almost with a human voice, under some black fall—that is to know melancholy. After sunset, when the clouds would be piled in awesome devices above and beyond the dark bulk of the mountains—and, mind you, all that bulk full of brawling streams—there would come in to me (quite apart from our society) a sense as of an immense regret, as if for a vision almost possessed, and lost. There are those who will jest at these feelings as much as at my attempt to tell of them ; but there they are ; and whether I be of more good in the world,

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We Leave the Pirates

or less, for hearing these voiceless voices of Nature I do not know, nor care ; and it is not to the point. But my book would not be true to myself if I did not try to tell of the country as it spoke to me. Even before sunset, before the lochs are leaden sheets with points jutting into them, from the rocks of which the currents send out fanning ripples such as follow a swimming duck, even before sunset and the leaden hour, when the water is deep green, or deep purple, or deep blue, but, whatever its colour, always on the deep side, not on the vague, even before sunset, melancholy glides on the lochs and moves upon the hills. The heron's scream is melancholy, and melancholy is the cry of the pee-weep. A mortal is moved to think of his brief life, and could brood himself into settled melancholy, wondering why he had been sent into life, what it was all for. It is one of the most obvious thoughts, but he who would feel it swirl in his heart must see the day go and night come and dawn follow, among the mountains of Appin and Lorne. We had wound our way through that wild country, south and east from the seaboard, and came at last into a country of grassy valleys and little woods of birch trees like jetting fountains of leaves, and shivering alders by the loch-sides and the burn-sides, and dingles full

Dead Men's Bells

of foxgloves and that poisonous weed that is so like rhubarb as to make one of the lads, he remembering, perhaps, the nettle stew, come running after Mr. Wylie with a "Captain! Captain!" And Mr. Wylie wheeling about, "Is not this rhubarb?" he asked.

I mention this incident less to show the dangerous little knowledge of the man (are we not all ignorant, and all but in our first books, no matter how far we learn?) than to tell of the effect of his hail on Kennedy.

"Damn your soul! Damn your eyes!" Kennedy cried. "Captain! Captain! Captain! Your captain will lead you to the High Toby, I begin to think."

Wylie wheeled on him.

"Here, then," cried he, "if that is your belief, let us part; my piloting is over!" And Three Fingers emitted a great yelping and cruel laugh.

Kennedy had that laugh ringing in his ears; and he saw, also, that the men were with Wylie, by their looks of trouble at the suggestion that they be left in that valley, uncertain of their way.

Wylie sat down, flipping aside his sword (which he had confiscated on leaving the ship) the easier to rest. He sat upon a kind of bench of grass, at a place where the hill broke away abruptly and

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We Leave the Pirates

dropped a foot that showed how thin was the top soil, with much gravel below. His coat-tails spread behind, and his sword.

"Go your ways, Mr. Kennedy," said he.

"Aye, that's but fair!" said Three Fingers.

"Oh, I shall go my ways," cried Kennedy, and whirled about and went on, marching down the valley southward with his sack on his shoulders and the sweat pouring.

"Nay, nay! Not so speedy! We go first!" cried Three Fingers. "I know ye too well for that. We don't have you upon the road before us to drop hints and make pitfalls for us." But Kennedy held on.

"Let him go," said Mr. Wylie.

Three Fingers turned back.

Even as this was afoot, away behind we heard a far crying and bawling and three or four shots fired. Over the hill to rear, which we had just traversed, came half a dozen of the laggarts, backing before a mob of dogs and thrusting into them and shooting off their pistols.

I had no thought but to run to their aid, and that was the common thought of us all—all save Kennedy, who must have heard and seen, for he was not beyond the next shoulder of the hill; but he held on, all the more selfishly glad of his

Dead Men's Bells

start, I surmised, on seeing us take the back track.

It was not only dogs that were assaulting the stragglers. The valley resounded with barks, pistol shots, shouts.

Our arrival sent the attackers packing—a parcel of Egyptians that had been crossing the hill down toward the burn—leaving two dead men and three dead dogs on the field. On our side there was one man dead and all were wounded, some with very ugly wounds from the uncouth weapons of these Egyptians, which, apart from their fusils and pistols, were sickles turned into crooked knives.

It seems that one of the dogs from the band of the Egyptians had come growling after one of the men, and he, growing weary of the animal growling at his heels, had (he showed us how) pulled his pistol from his sash, and bending sideways and throwing back his hand, shot it through the head and strolled on. This brought the whole pack of Egyptians charging upon them.

What to do with the dead bodies we were uncertain.

“Let us drag ’em down to the stream in the bottom,” said one.

“Na,” said Wylie; “there is nae sense in poisoning the water, as that would do.”

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We Leave the Pirates

"Oh, let them lie; they be dead!" cried one—which was the view of all.

Foxes and ravens could see to the sepulture; and we went on, one or two tarrying to pick the pockets of all three, and share the spoil. They went on mighty sullen thereafter, all nursing their cuts and bites. Some were for turning back and extirpating the whole pack of the Egyptians, but the enemy had had a good start, and had disappeared in the woods that are all carpeted there in the hollows with the blue of the foxgloves. So we went on, as I say, and all the lads were ready for another fight that would not be sprung upon them so unexpectedly.

"Someone, I greatly doot," said Wylie to me, "is to be called a 'canting hypocritical bitch' after this."

The day was hot, the way arduous, the recent incident was sordid and cruel under the burning sky and in the stagnant air of that valley. I made no smile in response to his sally. For two pins I could have told him to go to the Devil; but, instead, I crushed down the bitterness that we all felt as we travelled now.

We spared ourselves not at all. All we desired was to be out of that valley with its bald hill-tops, its mocking glades, with the foxgloves in

Dead Men's Bells

the dingles, and its burn that seemed to my ears then to run with a hard, unforgiving sound, flying and fleering at us with its silent flashes over the falls; and its little tributaries, high up among the upland rocks, jeering at us in their misty wavering over high ledges.

Two of the men fell a-wrangling, and the others paying no heed till the two slung down their bundles and fell to it with their knives on that uneven ground.

"I'll give ye what I gave that mastiff!" came from one.

"I'll give ye what I gave that brown-faced, whoreson knave," said the other.

One or two tarried, cruelly to jeer them on. The others followed our example, left them to settle their dispute in their own way, and continued along the hill, which, by a blessing, was, though heathery, easier to walk upon than many—a kind of green cart-track running and winding through the bushes. But all the hill was thus patched with green among the bushes of heather, so that sometimes we were uncertain whether we walked by a drove-road proper or merely on the green, and (as it were) heather-bald spaces.

At the bend of the next spur we looked back, and saw one of the recent combatants stooping

We Leave the Pirates

and turning over his dead man and rifling his pockets. The fellows that had stopped to watch were now half-way between us and the scene of the fight, they having, after all, followed us, and yet been too interested to follow quickly, but had come backing away, looking on the scene as Lot's wife looked back upon Gomorrah.

Round the bend we passed. And there, below, was a road, and, marching on the road, with brisk step westward, a file of red-coats.

Down we sat summarily in the heather, and stared through the heather tops, transfixed, till they had gone from sight.

Three Fingers, who was close to our heels, had flung down and crawled back to sign to the others to tarry. Now he peeped over the ridge again, rose, and beckoned them on again.

They came furtively over the hill's shoulder, and seeing no red-coats (as he explained) believed that we were in some conspiracy to frighten them. This was a bad turn; for if they thought that we feared them, and had tried, like some foolish mothers with their weans, to frighten them into passivity with bogies, they would consider that we had no great belief in our own worth, and set on us, in what, I have remarked, is the way of the ignorant.

Dead Men's Bells

They were in very bad key indeed. And the victor in the duel, coming in then, did not mend matters toward peace for them, although, as it happened, he diverted them from considering on the possibility that we were somewhat a-dread of them.

They cried out on the victor for a share of what he had rifled from the dead man.

He bade them all be damned. It was a single combat, he said, and he had been one of the losers at the cards they had been playing, of which I told you. We also marked that he was one of the hardest drinkers.

"What say you, Captain?" asked this murderous man.

But Mr. Wylie's diplomacy was falling sick—and here it took to bed.

He waved his arm wide.

"Ye can a' gang your ways," he began.

As he spoke others were taking up the phrases that had been Kennedy's:

"Who is he?"

"Who be he to settle?"

"He bain't our captain!"

"And be damned to ye all!" said Wylie.

"Be damned to you!" cried the man who had just come up from his killing and had called

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We Leave the Pirates

for Wylie's decision, which, if he had not got in his behalf, he had, it should be remarked, not had against him, Wylie but washing his hands of them all.

As the man spoke he shot back his hand for his ready knife. But Wylie was indeed (as Williams had remarked on the brig) "soople." He whipped his sword out and round and back—and forth in a lunge, and ran the blade home under the man's lowest rib.

Another leapt on me ere Wylie had recovered from that sudden response to the sudden attack; but I leapt back just enough to draw sword and gave him cut one of the single-stick I had learnt with Prester John in the barn and practised with the worthy in Glasgow College. My assailant, leaping in, slipped on a stone. A pistol cracked behind me at the same moment. The ball went in the skull of my assailant, and he fell like a sack of potatoes, and went rolling so down-hill till at the bottom the body absolutely leapt—crashed into the bottom's bracken, and through the blue foxgloves by the burn and into the burn with a splash. And there we all stood looking down at that rolling body as it disappeared.

The men circled round and stood off uncertain.

Some took at once to their heels, legging on for

Dead Men's Bells

the road below, others stayed nigh. Wylie stood over the man he had slain. Those who remained began to speak up :

"Quite right, your honour."

"Right you was, sir."

"No blame to ye, sir."

These numbered the greater portion still, perhaps a matter of fifteen.

Mr. Wylie looked on them.

"See here," said he, "do ye mark that road ?"

"Aye, aye !"

"Very good. If ye go west on it—the way the red-coats went—ye come in time to Inverary. If ye go the other way ye come in time tae Dumbarton, by Tarbet ; and Dumbarton is on the Clyde."

"Where is your honour going ?"

"Me ? That is well asked. I am going on upon that road to the first sizable inn, whilk is, I believe, at the place called Tarbet. And I am going to give you a start. And if I find any of ye at Tarbet I shall give ye away to the red-coats—if ye jouk them that far yersel's wi' your shouting and fechtin and advertising your passage. And ye will all be in the Tolbooth of either Inverary or Dumbarton before a week's out. I'm minded to stay at that inn of Tarbet and sleep the sight and taste of ye from my mind."

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We Leave the Pirates

"Is there not a way to Edinburgh?" asked Three Fingers.

"Surely there is," said Wylie, easier to him, I noticed. "And the best way for the like of you to Edinburgh is by the hills, and hold a course till ye come out by them on to flat land—that will be the carse o' Stirling. Then speir your way and put up a sad tale, and ye will find plenty to peety ye and put ye on your way for Forth and the Port of Leith."

"Come here, lads," said Three Fingers, and drew aside, and the men followed him for the most part.

I say "for the most part," because one tarried no longer, but took off at once, alone; two others wheeled, talking, and away off in company over the hill.

The one who had gone alone passed to the road, and we saw him legging out there, with his bundle on his back, and his blue shadow, like a new kind of garish and mad-like pedlar.

What Three Fingers said we could but guess—as for his arguments; but the tenor of them was clear. He came back toward us.

"Good-bye, your honours," he said; "and our respects to ye both for all ye have done for uz." He came a little closer. "For your honours"

Dead Men's Bells

sakes I have talked the lads into going to the Forth and getting away by the Port of Leith or the Queensferry, or even by Dysart, which lies on the coast opposite, and I could make out to find my way thither now"; this latter more loudly, then low again: "Seeing your honour is so clearly sick of us all—and" (more loudly) "thanking your honour—your honours both—for all the pilotage."

Wylie stood firm, and it struck me suddenly that we both still held our ensanguined swords in our hands, and were looking mighty grim.

"What about this body, sir?" asked Three Fingers.

Wylie averted his head from it. "To hell wi' it!" he cried. And then he looked on it. "Puir masterless gommeral!" said he, "Naither yin can mend the ither muckle."

"By your honour's leave then," said Three Fingers, touched his forelock, and, stooping, adroitly annexed the dead man's share—slipped his knife along the dead man's bundle and looked on the contents, turning them over lightly, a few kerchiefs, a change of drawers, but no coin hid there. He rose and went back to the pack.

Some of them waved a farewell. Others but shot baleful glances. Three Fingers followed,

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herding them before him; and the variegated crew passed straggling up the hill, took the crest upon a ridge instead of in one of the easier-looking but wet crevices (as they had learnt by now), showed upon the ridge—and then dipped and were gone.

Wylie approached the corpse and prodded it with his foot, till it rolled downward after the other, and crashed into the bracken. But he had not spurned it with sufficient energy to send it beyond the foxgloves, and it lay there upon its back, with loose neck, among the blue of the foxglove dingle.

It was so clear and shining a day that as we looked at that sight we saw the largest of the flies that rose and danced above the disturbed bracken.

"What do ye call these blue flowers?" asked Wylie. "D'ye ken the name?"

"Foxglove," said I, "in the usual parlance; or *digitalis purpurea*. The common people," I added, "call them 'dead men's bells,'" hardly thinking what I was saying, talking in a kind of stunned fashion.

"The common people," said Wylie, "aye come nearer the bitter heart of life. Oh, my Goad, man Lindsay, I am wearied. These last days hae been an age. Whatna crew is yon! Have I been dreaming, Lindsay? Where are they?"

Dead Men's Bells

He looked along the hills. Never a sign nor a tremor. The bend of the road below wound vacant at this glen's end. The mountains soared round. A running of burns, a hum of bees, and the dry odour of heather and bracken, and the aroma of bog-myrtle, and the blue silence whelming all, these made up the day.

A great quiet was on the hills. Only shadows of very high and fleecy clouds passed on the slopes. Life—man's life—our own life—was unreal.

I shared with Mr. Wylie that sense, as a thin wind passed by on the hill and the tufts of longer grass, like bent, bleached among the heather, stirred and swayed and then stood still.

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Chapter XVII: *A Dragon-fly Does us
a Service*

THAT part of the country into which we were now come, between Highland and Lowland, seemed to be a kind of "no man's land."

The lads who had gone off would have to walk warily; for though the people are hospitable, they are very open to take affront.

"Touch me wha dare"—"Wha daur meddle wi' me?"—"Touch not the cat but in glove"—and such other proverbs are the watchwords of Highland clans, showing their belligerent independence, or the names of lochs or mountains in their land—such as "Lochaber!" or "Loch Sloy!" showing their deep and real patriotism.

They are hospitable, but they demand civility of a high order from their guests. Even in this country into which we were adventuring, where were many fragments of clans, hospitality was to be looked for. But, on the other hand, among these fragments of clans, were the MacGregors,

Dead Men's Bells

little better than outlaws. Some of them had been in the rising of that very year at Glenshiel, but in the rising of four years before they had seemed neither for the Chevalier nor for the German Lairdie, but had shown their Ishmaelitish way, a way that had got ingrained into them through generations of falling between two stools. As for us, if all tales were true, we might run the risk of being set upon for ransom by them if we were "too well put on" as to our attire; so, though we had carried all the way from the wreck each a fine suit, as well as underwear, we decided, sitting there and discussing, still to play the part of shipwrecked mariners.

"Ye see," said Wylie, who was very well posted for a Lowlander on all the intertribal affairs of the north, and was a great deal of a Jacobite from (I suspect) his sympathy with these exiles he had carried to America, "Ye see," said he, "yon pirate ship must lang since have been discovered away up in yon cove. And it would tell its story plain as speech."

"Aye," said I; "and the thread of the story can all be followed."

"Even so," said he; "Louis d'ors and Spanish money and Portuguese scattered along the country like a paper chase, and no' an honest boddle drapit

A Dragon-fly Does us a Service

anywhere. Louis d'ors are mair common in Heeland than in Lowland, but some small change is to be looked for in the pockets o' shipwrecked sailors. The story can be followed fairly easy."

"And dead men," said I.

"Aye," said he. "This journey of ours goes to the tune of dead men's bells"; and he swiped at one with his sword, wiped the blade then in the grass, and sheathed it. "News travels in the Heelands. Man, I dinna ken if it's a mere superstition, like what they have in Ayrshire, tae the effect that wolves still run on winter nichts around the lee of Mistilaw and yelp on Tinto; but I seem tae hae it instilled in my mind that ye can be sure o' hospitality in every corner o' the Heelands save this strip atween us and Clyde. The sympathy tae the red-coats in Argyll country is, of course, as common knowledge as the dirtiness of Simon Fraser. But I'm no' referring tae them. I'm referring tae the sundered folk on the border of the Heeland line."

"Argyll has had a bad name since the Glencoe massacre," I said.

"Aye," said he. "But let us no' tak' the bad Heelands for a fair specimen. We have been entreated very kindly so far all the way, and maybe, after all, the MacGregors will be kindly tae us."

Dead Men's Bells

See hoo we managed wi' the pirates; and the MacGregors canna be worse than that. Besides, I sympathese wi' the MacGregors, which is half-way to a welcome. Their troubles began lang ago, as maybe ye ken, if they teach you the history of your land ony mair recently than the Romans, at the college."

I smiled.

"Their troubles began in the days of the Bruce, did they not?"

"I kenna so far back," said he, "unless by hearsay. But I ken enough to ken that they ha' been set upon wi' all mainner o' devices for their extirpation, such as was tried by the same hand on the MacIans—put fighting against their neighbours, so as to help to kill oot baith—lands burned—name taken awa'—by Act o' Parliament, mind ye—and here are we naming it in their own country; but it's a fell insult, and micht kill some folk wha minded aboot being outlawed; but instead o' sitting doon tae dee they——"

I recalled the last time he had reminded me of my phrase.

"They cry out 'Ye damned Anabaptist hypocritical bitch,' to the world," I suggested.

"I'm glad ye hac forgiven me yon," said Wylie.

A Dragon-fly Does us a Service

"Aye, even so—weel—it's decided we jüst go on then as shipwrecked mariners, fumbling through Scotland seeking the Clyde?"

"It seems best," said I; "but that is not to prevent us changing our drawers and singlets."

He smiled.

"Nae mair it is," said he; "which remark has a' the soond common sense of an auld wife—what is called practical. I would like fine tae hae a bath and change masel'." *

"Let us try this burn along the brae here for a pool," said I.

So we passed on to this tributary burn coming gushing in its own cloven glen, and threaded upward, slipping over the rocks till we came to a linn with a thunderous rumble.

There was a dragon-fly shuttling to and fro above it, in that disconcerting dash and flick round and dash back.

"It's a bonny pool," said Wylie. "But yon's a fearsome insect. Does a dragon-fly sting? I wouldna care for't tae alight upon me."

I laughed to think of the man who had upset Kennedy by his "deeploamacy" and become practically the leader of these men, and ended by running one through ("deeploamacy first, Mr.

* Change his linen (Scots).

Dead Men's Bells

Lindsay, and hit after") with his sword, being fearful of a small insect.

"Man!" he cried suddenly. "Ye hae never seen me shoot," pulled his pistol and primed it, and fired at the dragon-fly, and missed.

"Let me see your pistol," I said; and you will pardon me for telling that at my shot there was no more dragon-fly, just the pool bubbling and turning with cool water and calling us.

"Eh, man, ye can shoot," he said, and peeled his coat.

We plunged about in the pool with great delight, chattering at first, for it is inconceivable how icy cold these streams are in the midst of a hot summer's day.

Having no towel to dry with, when we clambered out, we fell on the expedient of racing in the heather to dry, as boys race around the village pond in summer. And suddenly "crack" went something, and it was Mr. Wylie's ankle in a rabbit-hole, and down he went.

Here was a fine plight for us; for he swooned with the pain, and into a second swoon as soon as he came out of the first and tried to stand up.

I found his shirt, and he pulled it on over him presently, and helped him to dress, dressed myself, and he hopped like a lame frog to the pool's edge

A Dragon-fly Does us a Service

and swooned again! But I splashed him with water, and when he came round with an "Oh! Oh! man Lindsay—Oh, aye—I mind," and pulled himself together, he put his foot in the running water to ease it; but the leg was swelling fast.

Then, looking up, we saw a great, loose-limbed man close on us with a fusil on his arm, and as we looked up he hailed us in Gaelic. We shook our heads. He came closer.

"Is it proke?" said he for a beginning, which was friendly enough. And he came clear down through the bushes and fell on a knee, and began to feel the swelling.

"It is not proke," he said. "But you will not can move it for two-three days whateffer."

He stood up and looked at us, Wylie squatted there with the bad ankle out-thrust, the other knee up and an arm round it and his chin on it, I crouched beside him.

"Are ye upon the right side?" said this summary Samaritan, or Bonesetter, or whatever was his place in the world. He was back on both knees and sitting on his heels, surveying us.

"I am from Eaglesham in Renfrew," I began, thinking to say I was on no side, "and my companion here is——"

"From Irvine in Ayrshire," said Wylie, with a

Dead Men's Bells

"th—!!" over the pain of his ankle, swollen already as large as his two clenched fists. "We are baith Lowlanders, and the Lowlands, as ye ken maybe, are mair taken up wi' gathering gear and disputing aboot God than with Kings. But as for my sympathies, sir, looking on upon your country, I will make bold to say that I am glad this is no' Campbell country; and for a farther honest indication of mysel', and puttin' mysel' plain before ye—if I am ever sae misguided as to tak' a wife and hae weans, and ane is a boy, I will no' ca' him Simon—for Simon tae my mind, lookin' on ye ken, seems tae be on the way toward Judas; and I'm thinking it is a name that will fall into disrepute and die without an Act o' Parliament——" He paused.

"Ye can say nae mair than that!" cried the man. "Indeed I would hae helpit ye were your sympathies richt side or wrang side whateffer; but I was na sure if I should tak' ye tae the only shelter I ken here where ye can hae ta leg seen tae—whateffer."

He was looking about, and seemed to grow troubled.

"Have ye nae pistol?" he asked anxiously.

I looked about, and found it behind a rock in long grass where I had dropped it.

A Dragon-fly Does us a Service

"Yes," I said. "We fired."

"Oh!" sighed the man. "That's a' right then. Was't at an enemy?"

Wylie gave a thin laugh.

"At a dragon-fly," said he. "And if the shot brought you here, and you can get me a place to lie a spell——"

"Ye hae tae thank the dragon-fly," said the man.

He bent to the foot.

"Gie me your cravat," he said to Wylie, and when he had it, bound up the foot, over instep and round ankle, in very able fashion.

"Noo," he said. He looked to me. "You tak' him under ta yin oxter* and I will tak' him up by ta ither, and see if we can mak' ta loch, and find him a couch and a welcome whateffer."

* Armpit.

Chapter XVIII: *The Hold of a Highland Robber*

ABOUT an hour's sliding and wrestling downward toward a loch-side, that had come into our view after maybe a couple of hours' stumbling and wrestling upward, brought us, by nightfall, to a little bay, where a boat had been drawn up and hid in the bushes.

As we pulled out into the loch a light sprang up on the opposite black shore, as if some man moved there with a lamp; and anon it seemed as though he were descending the hill to meet us. If he were of our Good Samaritan's party they were less secretive than he. And the light certainly did not trouble him, despite the caution of his arrival upon the scene of our pistol shot, and all his alertness on the way over that hill; his pausing, for example, near the summit, and creeping ahead to look over, and suchlike behaviour that had made us certain he was either one of the MacGregor freebooters or in the company of

The Hold of a Highland Robber

some of the "wanted people" of the late insurrection who were still in Scotland.

We rowed on over that lake that was surrounded by dark shores of a deepening blackness; but, rowing on, what had seemed a lamp became a fire. I could see the leaping edge of it, and now and again sparks shot up and went out over it in the blackness. The gentle splash of our oars was all the sound; that, and a faint squeak, tiny as that of a mouse, when the end of the pull came and the oars swung back. Then I saw one tending the fire, the splashes of red light and hewn shadow on his face and figure, we near enough for that and the night so dark round him.

Our long, angular friend but said: "Yon's ta cove," as he looked about, rowing; he gave one clear whistle, and the figure in the light made a gesture over the fire, and it, and its reflection that shot down into the lake, went out.

There was an air of melodrama about this. One could almost hear the heels clank on the stage boards, and the "Ha, ha!" and would have been prepared, on landing, to find the maker of the fire with his hand out to a tree, and holding it with thumb and forefinger as artless mummers do, or letting fall a tin shield, as though to announce that it was of tin by its clatter.

Dead Men's Bells

More was to follow to a like tune ; for we headed directly toward the place in which the parcel of fire had been extinguished ; and voices of unseen people gave direction in the Gaelic, and we glided on, the oars being shipped. I just dimly saw our rower abruptly lower his head, and an overhanging branch flicked my hat, and I clutched it on, ducking, Wylie ducking beside me.

The boat was grasped on both sides, guided on a little way, and then we stayed. Our eyes becoming used to the shadows of the dark shore, we discerned those figures that bent to help us.

"Give me ta hand," said a voice, and I rose gingerly, aware that bushes thrust out and over.

My eyes pried in the darkness afresh, and I made a step tentatively toward what seemed firm bank—and was ; and so came to land.

Then the Samaritan helped up Wylie toward me, and came jostling cannily after him, and there we were all steadying and groping in a dark wood.

Along the uneven bank of this cove we proceeded, one of those who had welcomed us preceding us to thrust and hold aside the more resolute branches.

The melodramatic approach, and now the pitch black into which we were passing more deeply, caused me to take all this escapade suddenly for

The Hold of a Highland Robber

a nightmare or florid imagination of sleep, born of reading old romances. But as a pungent odour now set me sneezing, I considered that I must be awake and in actuality, and pushed on, supporting Wylie upon my side. So we three all edged and shuffled through the darkness.

I sneezed again ; Wylie sneezed ; light flickered in the pitch black ahead that smelt of earth.

I felt—being on the left, felt, more than saw—that I was in imminent danger of running my head upon some projecting solidity.

Our guide dragged Wylie a little to right, with a word of caution ; I followed, and then we saw a fire on the floor of a cave into which we had thus stumblingly and stiffly entered.

Our eyes smarted, and watered, by Nature's way of easing the smarting. We breathed short, for a long breath bit the lungs with the inhaled fumes.

Through the tears made by the smoke, I saw a man, who sat beyond the fire, with a mighty shadow behind him on the cave's wall, rise—or, rather, saw his shadow commence to swell frightsomenely, gigantic, to the roof, and the top part flatten along the roof ; and under the shadow he advanced on us—a squat man with sandy hair and pale face and amazingly long arms.

He hailed us in the Gaelic, and the Samaritan

Dead Men's Bells

answering for us: "Bo' jour," says he, and he shot us some bad French. He shot it at us with an air as of testing us.

"Bo' jour, monsieur," said Wylie, who had the smattering of French of all mariners, and then added: "I hae little French; but my freend here can talk to ye in the Latin, sir, which, though a deed language for ordinary men, is of value atween the educated."

The plain English was good enough for me; but I did the courtesy to reply in what French I had, though I have a deep suspicion of its accent, as it is understood better by Scotsmen and Englishmen than by Frenchmen. Our host in the cave listened and bowed, and assured me, in English, that my voice took him to France.

"I could believe myself," said he, in a guttural voice, "in the bonnie land of France. Weel, we must get ye a couch, for your freend is injured, I see." And he led the way to a couch of fir boughs.

A pot was on the fire hanging from a tripod. The smoke but rose to the roof, and surged there, and fell, finding little egress.

Our guide began his explanation of our plight, in English for courtesy, and was soon plunged in Gaelic for celerity. The stubby host hearkened, with a great air, and turned to us.

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The Hold of a Highland Robber

"See," said he, "see—a cogue of *eanaruich* for the travellers. A fresh cogue frae the spence."

Wylie had been let down easily by us upon the fir boughs that served for a settee in the place. He dropped his hat in an exhausted fashion, and looked up smiling.

"Spence?" said he.

"It is my little joke," said our host, not ill pleased at the doffing of the hat; and we saw a man, who so far had been hidden in the smoke beyond the fire, rise and rummage in a kind of cupboard dug in the cave's wall.

"Ta *eanaruich* is the pest she can give ye for the nonce, but ye will hae mair presently—some fresh collops. Ye will pe hungry whateffer?"

A bowl was handed to me by the man I had not observed till he had been summoned out of the smoke by his red chief, as a sorcerer would fain summon, with certain smoking herbs and chalked parallelograms and triangles, like a mixture of the propositions of Euclid, the spirits of the dead.

I sat sipping it, and then quaffed it up, finding it not unpleasant.

"See—see—the gentleman's cogue," said the sandy man from his kneeling over Wylie's foot; and the bowl was taken from me—taken from me as if by a spirit indeed, for the air of the place,

Dead Men's Bells

after our days on the hills, and the quaffing of the *eanaruich*, were putting me asleep where I sat.

I blinked my eyes in vain to keep awake. The red man, thumbing at Wylie's foot, wavered mistily away, and my head reeled with exhaustion. It might have been all a dream made out of fragments of old plays. It seemed unreal, following our journeys out in the sun and sleepings under the stars. The picture came in on me then of the dead man with broken neck among the dead men's bells. I saw again the dragon-fly darting swift as a shuttle, whirling, darting.

And I returned the hospitality of this place by toppling gently back, and gently falling asleep.

When I awoke there was a feeling in the air that told me it was morning. The air was kindlier. The fire was out, though a torch of resinous wood flickered and spat in a niche of the cave. As I stretched awake and looked about and saw Wylie by my side, asleep, the Samaritan entered.

"Good day to ye," he said.

Refreshed by my slumber, my first thought was of all I had heard of the touchiness of these Highland folk, and I began apologies for having been unable to keep awake.

"Oh, ye was needing a sleep, whateffer," said our friend. "It was maybe regretful, but your

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The Hold of a Highland Robber

freend made up for you, and they—they—I dinna ken ta English—aye—birlt ta wine——”

Mr. Wylie grunted, and sat up and looked about him.

“Oo aye, I mind,” he said. “Good morning.”

At once the Samaritan plunged into a serious story.

His master's compliments, and he thought maybe we had better find some other place to bide in. He was along the loch his ainsel', lying in wait to give the slip to some of the *sidier-roy** that were coming along the loch and beating the bushes. The *sidier-roy* had been in the neighbourhood for twa-three days. They might maybe be headed off, but maybe no'. And maybe the gentleman with the bad ankle would think it better to creep awa' the other way.

It struck me with little wonder that the whereabouts of this haunt had been suspected, if it was the usage of these outlaws to burn beacons at their door to guide back members of their party who might be abroad. And surely such a proceeding was unnecessary. It seemed like a travesty of secrecy.

“It wouldna be safe for you I'm thinking, also, whateffer,” said our good friend. “Ye see ye are maybe ane of the sailors, an officer of them, of

* Red-coats.

Dead Men's Bells

course, if ye are ane of them—it is not my pusiness—put maybe——”

We stared at him.

“Are they looking for some sailors too?” asked Wylie.

“Inteed yes. Some sailors that have been travelling down from ta Appin Stewart country, or thereabouts, so I hear, and they have peen shooting and quarrelling whateffer, and there is a suspeecion that they are rovers.” He looked sharply at us. “Some say they are maype some of the Spanish sailors that took to the heather after Glenshiel, but——” he looked dryly again “herself does not think it likely whateffer.”

Wylie sat up.

“Even so!” said he, considering. “No—that is a foolish suggestion. Faith! My friend and I saw them too. We have been in their company too, had it forced upon us.”

“Ah weel, if ye haf been in their company that will pe enough for ta *sidier-roy*.” Our friend considered. “How is ta foot?”

“It is gey bad.”

“Aye! And yon tappit hens o’ last nicht was maybe forgivable; but they was foolish for sich a sprain, and will na help whateffer. But I hae brought ye a shilt.”

The Hold of a Highland Robber

"A stilt!" cried Wylie. "Man, it's no' so bad as that surely. Surely I dinna come tae a stilt yet, and me no' yet five-and-thirty."

"Shilt! A shilt!" corrected him our Samaritan. "Let us lift ye, sir, and get ye outdoors and tae a better place. Ye had the pest ye could have here, but I think I'll can find ye a petter."

"Ye are very good," said Wylie, but was looking woebegone at his foot. "It is no' so very bad, d'ye think?"

"Hoots! hoots! See—let me grip an oxter—yes, yes—and you grip the other, sir. Come—that's it."

"Oh, I'm soople on ae leg," said Wylie, hopping up. "But a stilt——"

We began our passage to the mouth of the cave.

"She will come back for your pelongings," said the Samaritan, seeing them lying there; and out we passed.

At the mouth of the cave, tied to a tree by the bridle, was a little grey pony.

"Oh! I ken now! I mind now! A shilt, oh aye!" said Wylie. "Of coorse, of coorse. I should ha' mindit. I heard it called so in Aberdeen; but they put the diminutive on to it, and called it a shilty."

"I kenna Aberdeen ways, sir," said our bene-

Dead Men's Bells

factor. "But I hae put the ordinary saddle on her whateffer. Now, steady, sir, and she will bring out your pelongings."

We looked at each other, and smiled when he had gone into the cave, and I helped Wylie to mount. He was seated upon the shilt when the Samaritan returned, and——

"Aye, aye," said the latter, casting our bundles over the pony's haunch, "we will be stepping through the woods." And he took the bridle.

"I am indeed very muckle your debtor," said Mr. Wylie.

"Hoots! Hoots!" said the Samaritan, and off we set up-hill through the woods on our way to another and better lodging.

Somewhere below, along the lake, would be the squat red robber with the long arms, lying in wait for the searching red-coats, and considering their numbers and weighing the questions of Flight and Fight.

But not a sound except a blackbird's trill came to us out of the woods as we plodded off.

Chapter XIX: *In Balquhiddar*

WE trudged now through the heather in a fashion that I was reminded of recently when reading that fascinating and deep book *Don Quixote*, the four volumes of which were sent out to me by a friend in Glasgow.

The shilt was not of many hands, and Mr. Wylie's legs thrust out like stilts—in the true sense of that word.

Away we went through the early morning, emerged from the wood, and began to navigate through one of those desolate and melancholy places of tussock of heather and pool, tussock of heather and pool, that are so frequent in the height of land between summits, now and then still having glimpses of the loch, through gaps here and there below us. Then we jogged away from it, threading through this melancholy tract. The flies had scarcely yet begun their buzzing. Over distant ridges, from the valleys between, we could see the steam running up into the sky, and the sun running down and bringing out the

Dead Men's Bells

colours : green, purple, blue, brown. The bees had hardly yet begun their heavy flight.

The webs of ground-spiders stretched from bush to bush, glistened with drops of moisture, spread like grey veils. The spiders had spread their webs as fishermen spread nets. Now and then, when we pushed through clumps of bracken, there would come dancing up on us little clouds of disturbed gnats, or a moth that had been going to sleep on the lower side of the leaves would flutter away and sink again from sight. Once a hare rose and leapt, leapt, leapt, with head twisted in fear toward us, away and away, leaving a track of quivering bushes.

Suddenly our guide pulled up so sharply that the shilt's forehead butted him in the back. And at our very feet, coiling through the world of heather, was a something that gave off changing colour like the verdigris in the inside of a pan, and yet with a certain beauty in its changing, reminiscent, too, of the colours on the puffed breast of a strutting pigeon. It was an adder, and our guide bore down on it with a cudgel, and beat it out of existence.

"She was once stang by one whateffer," said he ; "and her neck swelt up so big as—your ankle," turning to Wylie, and tugging the rein of the

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In Balquhiddy

shilt again, with a downward look at the adder and a muttered "'Claw for claw,' as Conan said tae the Jester," he led onward again through the wilderness.

Through this wild land, then, holding to the summits, and refreshing ourselves on the way with barley-cakes and pulls of the brandy flask, we came at last to a view of rolling slopes all glittering green, and saw a far valley with a road twining through its midst and a cluster of houses at the far end.

It struck me as one of the most beautiful places I had seen in all our Odyssey, though, looking back now, it is hard to choose between one glen and another of that purple land of bens and glens. All these west Highlands of Scotland have a deep glamour, and if they go into the heart at all, go into it for ever. If I had to be born again, and had my choice, I should be born Highland. The colours of that part of Scotland are blue and purple and green, and, though mists often fall and sweep, when the mists rise the country is shining—as when a lapidary wets a precious stone with his tongue, the better to behold its fires.

Our guide surveyed this valley with great care, puckering his eyes below their heavy eyebrows, and searching quickly and keenly to the far extremities,

Dead Men's Bells

running his gaze here, there, and all throughout it.

"Aye," he said, "there are nae *sidier-roy* in the place the day," and we began the descent.

At the first house we came to our guide knocked, and an old lady came out at the summons, and an explanation was plunged into in the Gaelic by our good friend.

Suddenly the lady changed to the English, doubtless because our Samaritan had come, in course of his harangue, to a comment that we were of the Lowlands.

"Himself will be in shortly," said she. "Bring in the shentleman."

So we helped Wylie to dismount, with his foot as large as though he were an old gouty man. The lady got down upon her knees, blowing on the peats, blowing the seed of the fire into a flame, as we helped Mr. Wylie to a chair. He began a fine speech of thanks to our Samaritan, who stood back now, his task over, a very gommeral before the lady of the house, now that he was indoors, fumbling with his great bonnet.

It was a household of Maclarens that we had come to in this part of the country that, as Mr. Wylie put it, was so much of a "no man's land"; and our welcome was as kindly as could be desired.

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The broth pot was on the fire, and the odour of the bubbling put an edge on our appetites. The lady left it and came to examine Mr. Wylie's foot.

Like most of her countrywomen she had a great knowledge of simple remedies, herbs and their concoctions for drinking and for liniments. She was crying out that it was a bad sprain whatever, but that she was the woman to put it well, when a dog plunged into the kitchen, flapping its tail, and a man followed and stood curious in the doorway.

This was Mr. Maclaren, who had been abroad on his business, and at his curious face the thought flashed drolly into my mind of the old ballad which I have never seen printed, and which, as it is sung in various ways with various words, should be set down. For what is the printing-press for, if not to preserve the best that has been made and sung by the people? If there had been a printing-press in ancient days we might have had the whole of that ballad of which we only read that "the women sang one to another in their play, and said, 'Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands'"—undoubtedly the refrain of some old ballad of victory.

Dead Men's Bells

This appropriate ballad of which I speak came into my mind drolly :

“Hame cam’ oor gude man at e’en
And hame cam’ he;
And there he spied a grey horse
Where a horse sudna be.
‘Here, gude wife!’ he up and cried,
‘Here, gude wife!’ quo’ he,
‘How cam’ this grey mare here,’ quo’ he,
‘Without the leave o’ me?’”

Mr. Maclaren spoke in the Gaelic, a word or two, and his gude wife said: “See, Donald, come and look at this sprain that the Lowland shentleman has got upon his travels.”

He advanced with a “Good day to ye” and a scrutiny and nod for each, and a “Weel, Tavish,” for our Samaritan. Fomentation was the joint advice, fomentation, and then a liniment rubbed in, which the lady would prepare.

“She must be going now whateffer,” said Tavish.

“Will ye no’ stop and have some of them broth?” asked the lady. But Tavish thought he had better be gone; and Mr. Maclaren did not press him to stay.

It would appear that it had either been already settled, or was taken for granted, that Wylie was to bide here till his foot was well.

In Balquhiddar

"I will hear of your honours again," said Tavish, and shambled off with his ungainly gait, and was out before we could say so much as one word of thanks.

Mr. Maclaren followed him, and they stood without quite a considerable while colloquing together in low voices.

The result of that colloquing seemed well, for when the hoofs of the shilt sounded without, and Mr. Maclaren re-entered, his face was wholly friendly.

"We must get the shentleman in ta bed," said he. "Rest for ta body is a guid help tae a sprain such as this."

The bed was just a kind of a great box in the wall, set back out of the kitchen to one side of the ingle, with a duplicate to the other side of the ingle upon the same wall. Mr. Maclaren made ready the bed and helped Mr. Wylie into it, the gude wife the while with her back to us over the peat fire, the smoke of which went up to a hole in the roof, not directly over the fire, for fear of rain extinguishing it. So here was Wylie in bed, and a pot of water heating for the fomenting of his sprain, and another pot preparing the broth for sustenance.

I looked through the deep window and saw the

Dead Men's Bells

hills billowing up with their wee enclosures of fields about the clachan, and heard a lowing of cattle and the far-carried baaing of sheep, and had a sense of being, if not at a journey's end, where I could very well make my journey's end, and be at rest.

I can remember still the special odour of the place, fumigated with the peat on the broad hearthstone, and the scent of heather and grass and rich earth that whelmed it. The house of Maclaren in Balquhiddel was more homely and natural to my mind than the cave of the red robber, and Mr. Maclaren was every whit as hospitable.

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I think Wylie was asleep before the fomentation was over; certainly his leg, after the binding, was put beneath the blanket for him, and he slept the round of the clock thereafter. The cave of the red robber had not given him a restful sleep, and he was utterly worn out. But now all was well, and he lay content, and renewing himself in the house of Maclaren.

As for me, I loafed all that day, full of cockylekee and collops and potatoes (which they had then begun to grow in Balquhiddel). I gave myself over to resting in this country that we had been labouring through. I strolled abroad a trifling

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In Balquhiddar

way and looked on the stones in the little kirk-yard, and walked down to the loch below a bonny dip of the hill, thinking on no danger.

The system of agriculture here, although it was a country of fragments of clans (Graemes, Buchanans, Macfarlanes, Maclarens, and others), was, as in all the Highlands, the runrig system. In the Lowlands, even in my time, the passing of that system had begun, and we were following what seems to me the better English fashion. I have heard of the troubles with the 'dyke-levellers' in Galloway and elsewhere, and think the levellers are mistaken in their action, and behaving in a dog-in-the-manger manner. For the runrig system is not the fine commonwealth in the practice that it is in the theory. I would have every man own and till his own parcel of land. I object, on the one hand, to the dyke-levellers who will not let a man enclose a piece of ground and study it for the rotation of crops; on the other hand, I run cold at certain phrases in tacks * such as "Then and in this case" (the failure to pay on a certain date) "this present Tack shall *ipso facto* become void and null, without any process of Declaration following upon the said contravention. It shall be lawful for the owner to

* Leases.

Dead Men's Bells

let the land as if no Tack had been granted." I would that each man could have his sufficient parcel of land and be himself thereon with neither fear nor aggrandisement. In short, I would have a world of bonnet lairds in so far as the ground is concerned. A short tack is always haunting the mind of a man who improves his ground; for landlords have a way of increasing the cost of ground when it is improved, heedless of what that work has cost to the improver. As for runrig, the sentiment toward it is, I think, based on error. Runrig is not the fine communal idea in practice. It is not really a mutual management, each working for all. If the grazing land (or outfield), for example, seem to one man to be overstocked and he withdraw a cow, another will put one more on. So it always is in practice, I have observed. Further, how can a man with a mind toward the improving of the breed of stock carry out his ideas on the outfield, where all run loose together? As for agriculture, it is worse. Each tenant has his rig; they are all in a community, but if one rig fails and another is successful, as often happens by the lie of the land, and the way it takes the sun or drains the water, the more successful does not make up the loss of the less successful. It is a farce of communism. Better far even to have

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the small farm, fenced about, and for a man (if each man cannot have each his own parcel of ground) to be either owner or labourer. The labourer can, as is done on large estates with the lairds, for, let us say, liming a dozen rigs, take the produce of one. Let us have landlord and bouman, if you will; and, as it is in the Highlands in so far as stock is concerned, one man with charge of so many head of beasts, and sharing in their increase to an agreed proportion with the owner. Let us have that also in agriculture. But the runrig system, though it sounds fine, is poor in fulfilment. I should like to see every place of a size about that of the Wester Mearns, that a man and his sons could manage, if need be, or a man and one or two labourers, they paid part in kind, part in money. In the Highlands, of course, there is not so great need to worry about the position of the folk and the lairds, for there are game on the hills and fish in the burns. But the game, at least, will pass some day; and then will come the pinch; and life will not be all so care-free. Even the laird's table will support fewer hangers-on, ghillies and pipers and tellers of the tales of Ossian. But I am no economist—perhaps some reader is already laughing at me—and I had better get back to my narrative. But before getting back I would just

Dead Men's Bells

remark that a plantation in Virginia frees such an one as I of many tangling troubles about how best to live, both for himself and for others.

News of us must have passed about among the people, for (I am not certain whether it was on the second or third day of our residence, and it hardly signifies; I remember incidents better than dates) on the way back from one of my rambles, a man carrying a sickle in his hand (and on his way, I took it, to cut rushes) fell in step with me.

News of us, I say, must have been passed about among the people; for he gave me a friendly salute, falling level in his stride, and:

"Is your fellow-traveller mending?" he asked.

"Thank you, sir," I said, "he is mending well. He is asleep most of the time. I think that is good medicine."

"He has travelled far maybe?" said he.

"We have come no inconsiderable ways," said I.

"Inteet," said he. "I was just considering if maybe ye had seen in your travels a pack of tarry mariners that came through here the day before ye, and spent a pile o' siller in ta inn yonder?" I gave him a look. "We had tae gie them ta road oot of Balwhidder," said he. "They fell fighting among themselves, and the next step was that one

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of them got into bad words with one of the dwellers here—not much loss.”

“Oh!” I cried. “Was he killed? Did they fight?”

“Oh, I canna say that ta man that was killed was in great favour. He was naither a Graeme nor a Maclaren.”

“There was a fight?”

“A bit duel. It wasna a common fight. Not but what the sailor body focht in a new manner. The man that was kilt had a great name for his play with the dirk, but yon three-fingered seaman—I see ye ken him,” for I must have started.

“Indeed, I would not try to hide the fact,” said I. “I ken yon three-fingered seaman.”

“Ye need not hide it from me,” said he. “I wondered if maybe ye were ta officers of ta ship, or what——”

“I was a passenger,” said I.

“Oo aye,” said the man with the sickle. “So you had nae authority over them; and the other, your freend, was maybe an officer and they left ye when he had his accident.”

He was more eager, I noticed, to hear of us now than to continue his interrupted tale of the three-fingered man and the fight.

I bethought me that I was in a country where

Dead Men's Bells

the capacity for leadership was highly honoured, and so said I :

"He was not their officer to begin with. He was on another ship, on which I was a passenger. He and I were the only two saved of that wreck. We came on this company by accident—it's a lang story—and he held them in check, too, all the while we were with them. But some days ago he began to feel he had befriended them and restrained them long enough. We could be troubling to keep them out of difficulties no more."

"Oh ! that was the way of it !" said my man. "I see. Ah weel, sir, they will pe requiring a leader and guardian now whateffer, unless yon three-fingered man who threw the knife at Roy, wha had been drinking with him, and both in their cups—richt in the jugular, it was, a wondrous aim—unless he cares to hold them together, which I doubt. I think by his manner, when the folk gathered after the fight and told them they must go their ways, that he was trying to give the others the go-by.—Well, here is where ye stop." And we said good day, and I passed indoors.

Wylie was awake and holding forth to the lady on his dislike—as a looker-on and Lowlander, ye ken, even that way—for Campbell—him they call Argyll—and for Simon Fraser—him they call

In Balquhiddar

Lord Lovat, aye looking for the winning side. But every nation has its selfish members, and its shilly-shalliers and unscrupulous and traitorous bodies—and faith, ye ken, he believed that in his heart he was a Jacobite.

The lady was working about at the fire; and her son, a fine stripling of the name of Dugald, was sitting on a stool, nursing his kilt around his upgathered knees, like a cut of a fairy on a mushroom.

“And Mr. Lindsay is o’ my mind,” Wylie said, seeing me coming into the midst of the talk.

“Indeed,” said I, “I could fight all my days for the privilege of being laid at the last of them upon some Heeland hill.”

“Bonnily said, Mr. Lindsay, wi’ the melancholy of all poetic minds wha aye feel (and canna escape from) the sense of the flying days and the unkent end.”

I bided my time, and Dugald having slipped out, and our hostess being at work at the fire, I told him of my talk with the man with the sickle, and suggested that our kind hosts should know our story in its entirety, lest they might think it strange if they got bits of it to piece together from others of the villagers.

“Aye,” he agreed, “it would be mair fitting for them to be able to give the villagers the ins

Dead Men's Bells

and outs o't, and put them richt in this and that when the story is discussed—for discussed it will be—a village is a village a' the world over. Mr. Mac-laren would feel it a pain in his heart (whether he showed it or no') if he didna ken mair o' us than his niest neeboor."

"I was richt to say what I did?" I asked.

"Eh? To the man oot-bye? Oh, aye! The folk of the Heelands may gossip like ilka ane; but even if the pirates got into trouble such as Tavish suggested, and we were posted wi' them, and seekit for by the red-coats, we wouldna be given awa' here. Ah, here's Mr. Maclaren."

Mr. Maclaren hailed us in the door, and, tossing his bonnet into the far bed, came to see the foot.

"Ye'll get this foot to the ground the morn whateffer, for a try," was his decision. And he fell to thumbing it skilfully.

As he thumbed Wylie was adroitly leading the talk round to our tramping in the heather, and was already close to the matter of the pirates when someone without hailed the house, and Mr. Maclaren passed to the door to answer.

"I am no' sure," we heard him say; "but maybe the Lowland shentleman could tell you. It is no' a French coin whateffer." And he came back holding a coin in his palm.

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"Can you shentlemen tell me what country this coin pelongs tae?"

Wylie looked at it.

"Portugal," said he. "I see you have had that pack of mariners doon here that we was with—I was juist coming to that, to tell ye o' them. Now, Mr. Maclaren, now that I am refreshed, ye must hear it all—aye, Portugal."

"They have been through here inteet," said Mr. Maclaren. "The man outside tells me there is word of a pitched fight with the Graemes and them upon the road to Perth."

"Ah weel," said Wylie, "I'm no' surprised—nor will you be when you hear the story of our travels."

Mr. Maclaren passed out with the coin and gave the information. And from without the man who had brought the coin cried:

"Thank you. Good day, shentlemen."

"Good day, sir," cried Wylie. "I kenna wha ye are, but ye are of this hospeetable clachan, whilk is enough for me."

Mr. Maclaren, I think, by his voice, invited the man in half-heartedly, more eager, I expect, to hear our story than to introduce the two.

"Some other time—when he has his foot to the ground—it might be mair convenient for the house," said the other voice.

Dead Men's Bells

So you see we were very happy and very much at home with these simple and homely folk; and indeed I think not only I but Mr. Wylie, too, had a certain regret when in a day or so he had his foot fit for again taking the road.

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Chapter XX : *Three Fingers Winks*

THE question of how it would be best to travel was settled by a fortunate incident.

Duncan Maclaren, the fine son of our host, came in from fishing, with news that a drove of cattle was being made up for some of the southern trysts, and his father asking this and that about them, in the country fashion, it thus came out that Tavish was chief drover, and we all looked at one another at that with the one thought.

I can see it yet and mind all as if it was yesterday, instead of going on for thirty-five years ago. There was the first clap of a thunderstorm broke out as we all took the same notion—to travel south with the drovers, as there was a hue and cry after the pirates, and the law being a kittle business, it would be wisest to keep out of trouble. Of course, if we came suspect and were arrested, our manner of travel would look black too; but we thought it safest to get through to Glasgow, if possible, without being linked with the pirates,

Dead Men's Bells

and so far there had been no word of our connection with them, the chief trouble being their terrorising fashion of travelling.

The thunder pealed and the hills took it up, and before the echo of a clap had died out a new clap had burst in the clouds—and so for a good hour the roaring went on, so that claps and echoes were all whelmed into one ear-splitting, reverberating roar. I could never have imagined anything so awesome, sitting there waiting for the din to have an end, and the chamber flashing light, as if the fiercest summer day for a second blazed into it, and then showing an awesome blackness that made the room like a cavern.

We stepped to the wee window and bent and looked there at the sheets of rain, the lightning flashing in them so that we had to keep our eyes puckered ready to close at the fiercest stabs of light; there we all bent, looking out, all watching the storm, and glorying in the immensity of it. I remember noting then how thick the walls of the cottage were, for, leaning there and peering out, my elbow was just at the inner edge and my fingers did not come quite to the outer edge of the aperture.

I cannot understand anyone who has ever rightly seen a storm, and felt it in his breast,

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Three Fingers Winks

and heard it, having any patience with the displays of Vauxhall Gardens and the like. To put a boat about in a gale, to hear the heaven's artillery, to have come to love some green and spacious country-side, and know that to-morrow you must leave it—these things, for my part, seem to bring a kind of greatness into the heart.

When the storm was past, and we went out to see the thatch-eaves running the water down, and the drops beginning to lighten, and breathed the scent of the earth, and felt the great freshness of the air, we put aside, for a space, the thought that had been in all our minds when that storm began. But it had to be spoken of sooner or later.

Into that talk, which befell afterwards, when the cruise was lit, Mrs. Maclaren entered with :

“ Oh, it is not for shentlemen to travel like drovers whateffer. Twa such as Captain Wylie and Mr. Lindsay of Wester Mearns ” (for she gave a title as soon as she had heard of the place) “ canna travel like that whateffer, Donald.”

Her man smiled on her.

“ Did not the soldiers go into Carlisle intil a cart of hay ? ” he asked—which made me think of the wooden horse of Troy. “ And didna King Jamie beg a glass of water from the miller o’ Crammond ? ”

Dead Men's Bells

So the end of it was that, instead of but having Tavish's respects and kind inquiries sent to us by young Duncan, and a promise that he would look in on us before going (which I doubt if he would have done, he being a shy man under a roof, if it was even of thatch), Duncan went forth to seek him again, and tell him that we were open again to be befriended.

The reply to that was more abruptly to the point than we had any thought (or any desire) it would be: a lowing of nowt, and the smell of them coming in, and their many breathings and clink of their meeting horns without.

"God preserve me!" cried Wylie. "There is a drove o' nowt. I hope it's no' Tavish's." And his eyes filled when Duncan came in, saying:

"Here he comes!"

"This is unco' sudden," said Mr. Wylie, and rose and stood up, feeling his weight on the bad ankle, and shaking his head, and saying:

"Man, I doot if"—and trying his leg again and again—"I doot if this foot of mines"—and then: "Ah, but we canna bide here for ever, muckle as we would like it."

"Are ye sure," cried Mrs. Maclaren, "that your ankle will stand it? There will be other droves whateffer. Or maybe if ye stayed awhile

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Three Fingers Winks

longer ye could consider it safe enough to travel riding in your braw suits o' claith."

But I think that to have tarried, under whatever excuse, would have been but to have brought a kind of anguish into the last days, for we would have known, through their flying hours, that the next decision to go must be kept.

I mind all the sense of sorrow that I had that last day had the flavour of those ballads that Scotland has the art of making out of its troubles and its joys, and the procession of rains and suns. A kind of a stang of melancholy was in the joy of these last hours in Balquhiddar such as lives in all the old songs; songs such as that which tells the tale of the Earl of Murray and his slaying at Donnebristle.

I have heard that ballad sung by a little lass of eight years, in a company of Scottish exiles, and there was none that could speak when her voice, innocent of what it was creating for us, dropt away on the last of it :

"O lang will his lady
Look ow'r the castle downe,
Ere she see the Earl of Murray
Come sounding through the towne."

I have little heart, even at this date, to tell of our farewell to Balquhiddar at the tail of these

Dead Men's Bells

nowt, which went at just the slow pace to suit Mr. Wylie's leg. But one incident I must tell.

We were at our brief farewell (Mr. Maclaren pouring out the *deoch-an-doruis*, and Mrs. Maclaren blinking her eyes) when we happened to avert our heads and look out and up on the hill.

And there was a man with a great cudgel in his hand, up from the road a little beyond the milling nowt, his right arm swinging out in semicircles holding his walking-staff high, his loose canvas drawers flapping, his hat, with the wear and weather, flapping about his head, which was bound, beneath, with a handkerchief. He had donned round his waist a Highland sporran, and it bobbed before him as he walked. He looked so gay and wild a figure as he legged along the hill, his right arm swinging in these curves, his free left hand (that arm held up to balance his sack upon his shoulder) waving its three fingers downward to the clachan, that we heard the folk, out and about outside, laugh. He must have waved back to them as he passed, and these independent and warlike people could not but admire the roguish effrontery and daring of the man, who had evidently given the go-by to his fellows, and was heading back to the Glasgow road, through the Lennox, like enough.

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Three Fingers Winks

He was away along the hill and flapping from sight around the shoulder above the road when we came out and began our trudge, we attired in the oldest apparel Maclaren could give us, at the tail of the nowt, headed for Glasgow.

Three Fingers was just passing from sight, around the second bend of the road (to which he had descended), when we, having taken our last look on Balquhiddy, came around the first after the cattle.

Tavish made guarded inquiries here and there for the daft-like sailor in the villages we passed through, and always the word (when there was any) was that he had passed yesterday, or the day afore yesterday, till we came near Balfron—and there we heard that he had been at his knifing again, and had made a run for it into the hills.

I think we had a quiet hope that the sorry rogue would slip through them and get away again to the high seas to end some other way than at the rope's end—though he was surely of the breed of which it is said "they were made to be hanged."

I fear we were a little too fine, Wylie and I, and our delicacy led us into a disturbance.

For two days we had followed the nowt at a snail's pace with our wild-looking friends and their dogs. They had their resting-places on the way,

Dead Men's Bells

and arranged the daily journey so that we came to these places about the hour of twilight—dips in the hills, folds of hill-side beside the green drove road, with perhaps a rock for shelter, and a stream near by for mixing the drammach. Arrived at the end of a day's stage they would walk round the nowt till the beasts began to settle and flop to their knees and lie down to chew the cud over the snatched fodder of the day ; for as we travelled the nowt were all the while snatching and tearing at the grass.

After the drammach was eaten from a common bowl, though each of us had our own horn spoon, we sat close to the fire in the chill evening air, with just the sound of the burn for company ; and the crying of late pee-weeps, and the click of meeting horns when two of the beasts stirred and turned their heads each to each. The dogs were scattered round the drove, lest any of its members strayed, and only came in for their supper when called ; their wisdom on the route and their handling of the beasts awoke perennial admiration.

Then we mere human beings would sit about the fire and take a hand at the cards ; or perhaps stories would be told such as drovers love to tell, of one that saw the Devil on the road when he was taking a flock of sheep to Falkirk Tryst ; how

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Three Fingers Winks

the sheep all fled back butting against his legs ; and how his two dogs refused to go a step ahead to herd them to the road, but hung whining at his heels—dogs that had never shirked work in all their days. Or they told, as they came to know us better, tales of a wilder life than that of taking cattle to the markets, told wild rollicking tales of raiding in the Lowlands under command of one of the outlaw Highland-border rieurs, and driving herds off in the night from Lowland pastures and outfields. Or they told of assisting at the kidnapping of some bailie, of Dumbarton or Glasgow, who was forth about the Highland line upon business, and holding him for ransom. These latter tales they told with many nods one to the other, and omission of names of those concerned, wise “Ye ken wha I refer taes” replied to by winks and nods and “oo ayes”—and the wild story would proceed.

What is it in our composition that makes us relish such wild tales, even while we know that it is pleasanter (to put it mildly) to live in a countryside where our cattle (be we landed proprietor, or kindly tenant, or but runrigger with our two or three kye in the common herd on the outfield) can graze in peace ? Such wild tales amuse us, and, if not in the doing, certainly in the narrating,

Dead Men's Bells

give us a daft admiration for the rievers. And we all know that it is not a pleasant thought that if we are abroad and put up at some inn, we may, strolling out in the evening to see the stars and taste the caller air, as a change from the mixed odours of candles and ale and cheese, receive a clout on the head from some leaping shadows out of a thicket. And yet we almost all love to hear tales of such encounters.

On the third night, after the nowt had settled, there began a kind of hinting from one to the other that a drop of liquor would be a great comfort on such a night—for there was a drizzle of rain. We looked one to the other, Wylie and I, and Wylie said :

“Can we no’ step over to the village if it’s so handy, and hae a refreshment ?”

But there was some head-shaking at this. The cattle could not be left. We were in a debatable land there, where droves of cattle sometimes changed owners.

“Oh,” cried Wylie, “surely naebody wad hae the effrontery tae drive your nowt aff here, and them herdit under your very nose ?”

“It is not that whateffer,” explained one (Ian Graeme). “It is no’ likely that such a thing would happen ; but there is other drovers over yonder where ye see a licht, and if maype they are making

Three Fingers Winks

up their minds to step over to Balfron, and maybe we do the same, and foregather there, and tak' a dram, then maybe we begin to talk of nowt, and maybe have another dram, and then maybe there is an argument, and a dirk drawn. It is petter not—not but what there is nae doot wha would pe the victors whateffer."

This was very wise counsel, and we decided to act upon it. But no sooner had we so decided than the snuff mull was handed round so disconsolately, as if it contained but a poor makeshift for easing the tedium of huddling in the wet, and the stories flagged so sadly, that, smoking the dejection, I suggested that Wylie and I might step over to Balfron and bring a jorum back. I had another idea also in this, and was for killing two birds with one stone.

Our fellow-travellers nodded over the suggestion, and each seemed to be leaving it to another to voice approval, so as not to appear too eager for our hospitality.

"That's what we'll dae," said Mr. Wylie, and rose to his feet.

"It wad pe certainly welcome," said one; and another agreed, if it was not a putting upon the shentlemans and a turning us into ghillies, whatever. But we pshawed aside that civil suggestion,

Dead Men's Bells

and shook the dust from us, and flipped off as much mud as possible, stretched our limbs, a little stiff from sitting in the drizzle, scarce sheltered in a rock's lee, gathered our plaids about us, and took off through the thin rain toward a blur of a handful of lights that was Balfron cottages.

Once out of earshot of the encampment Wylie said:

"Fegs! It was as much for myself as for their refreshment, honest lads, that I seconded ye so blithely; I want to buy a sark, for, to tell the plain truth, Lindsay, I'm fair lousy. Our friends are very honest and good lads, but their manner o' life is no' conducive tae cleanliness. God—what's this?" And he leapt and whipped about suddenly alert, so that my remark to the effect that I had offered to fetch the jorum with the idea of buying a change of linen at the same time stopped short on my lips.

It was one of the drovers' dogs leaping after us.

"Go back, sir! Go back!" I ordered him, and he refused. I ordered more determined, but he merely stood doubtful. "Go back!" I cried. "You must bide at your sentry work. Go back!"

Through the wet darkness, from the haze over the fire we had left, Tavish's voice hailed:

"Tak' him wi' ye! I sent him after ye, for it's a dark nicht, and he kens the road."

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Three Fingers Winks

The wise beast gave a loup in the dark at our feet, as if to say: "See that! 'Twas right for me to come."

"So be it," I said; and we set forward again, the dog, and Wylie and I at his heels.

Yapping spaniels in a basket, brought in by a page, with the string of the basket around his neck, for the patched dames to google and gurgle over, make some dislike the canine race. But just as these coarse-minded and simpering and giggling dames who are of no use but to flaunt at routs and talk scandal of their associates, and worry haberdashers looking over all the lace in the shop, and grumbling even over what they purchase, while their ribboned spaniels anoint whatever bolts of cloth may be leant against the counter, just as they are only a small part of humanity, so are their peevish spaniels but a small part of the canine race.*

Your drover's dog does not care to be googled over, and if you put a ribbon about his neck it is my belief that he would forsake work and die of chagrin; but he will be your friend if you are sensible with him.

I peered down at this beast, and, from his size, distinguished which he was.

* This diatribe seems a little unnecessary, but I need not cut it out.—Ed.

Dead Men's Bells

"Ah well, Riach," I said, "thank you for your guidance."

He but looked over his shoulder and walked on, understanding that we were now in acknowledged company, and there was no more necessary.

Soon we came to the village and found the inn with the wattle door half open.

"Here we are," said Wylie; "we'll step in here first and hae a dram and speir where we can buy a sark."

In we stepped, the dog dropping to heel, and found the blinding candle-light in our eyes, which made us blink after the dark road. We blinked and blinked again, and then saw the occupants, some in tartans, some in the snuff-colour or green of the Lowlands, some bonneted, some beavered, one that stood out somehow from the rest, lace-hatted, and in a long riding-coat, stretching his legs, alone, at a little corner table, with a hand in his high left breeches pocket, and the coat falling back, disclosing a pistol butt.

We walked to the little cupboard-like place where the wild lass sat on a stool between the casks and with a shelf of bottles to her hand, gave her a good evening, and called for our dram and a cut of cheese, and maybe a cake, if she had any, though there seemed naught but liquor here.

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Three Fingers Winks

The dog had lain down at my heels, and now emitted a faint growl. I thought it was but a yawn at first, and looked down, expecting to see him stretching fatigued and at ease after his day's work with the beasts, and glad of the rest; but he was lying with his nose on his paws and looking into a corner settle. Something kept me from glancing in the direction at once. I looked back to the petticoated lass and took my glass from her. The dog gave another faint growl, and Wylie looked down at him with me this time, and he looked up at us.

I shot a quick glance toward the settle, my eyes being now fit to see better in the place, and I looked back speedily.

"Take your dram and keep your eyes off that settle," I said quickly to Mr. Wylie.

His face was quite blank as he lifted his glass. He held it up as though to toast me.

"What is't?" he said, nodding to me.

I nodded to him, and we sipped our liquor.

"Kennedy did not take the Dumbarton road," said I.

He turned his back full on the settle.

"Is't him?" he said.

"Aye," said I, looking down on the dog.

"Well—why all the secrecy? What can he do?"

Dead Men's Bells

"He has three cronies wi' him," said I, "and I do not like their looks."

"Three of the pirate lads?" asked Wylie lightly.

"No—three tykes of his own breed, I think; and he is talking of us, and they pretend not to be looking at us."

"Man," said Wylie quickly, "I micht step over to him and just advise him quietly tae let sleeping dogs lie. What mak's ye fear trouble? Ye hae been listening to over mony tales o' the second sight and premonitions, I'm some feart!" And he laughed gaily.

The laugh was heard in the corner, and, seeming to signify no suspicion on our side, made the four look more boldly on us, as I saw with the tail of my eye.

"That Kennedy is just the rogue to try to have us lifted in connection with——" And I paused, for I had seen a bill upon the wall.

"There's nae proclamation here-awa'," said Wylie. "It was the lads that went Stirling way that made the trouble."

"Read yon," said I, "on the wall."

He looked, and saw at once what it was—and stepped boldly over and began to read a proclamation for the arrest of any members of the sloop

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Three Fingers Winks

(so it was called in the proclamation), which had just caught my eye.

We turned back, after that easy perusal, to where we had been by the table, and I was aware of some glances upon us.

"I doot if any will come down this way," said the maid, seeing that we had been reading.

"Oh, I'm no' sure," said Wylie. "We heard at some places on our way that one of them had gone through here."

Some of those who were clearly natives of, or resident in, the place, looked up, and one entered the conversation.

"What was he like, sir?" he said. "Did they say?"

"Oh aye, they said; but no' a bit like what ye read in a proclamation. Height, and colour o' hair, and even colour o' een, are points a man often doesna recall. It sounds odd; but if ye consider it, it is so. 'Like a rat' was what maist o' them said"; and he laughed.

So did some of the occupants of the place. And I saw the long man on the tilted stool (he of the long riding-coat) raise his glass and glance at Wylie over it. I kept my eyes from roving to the shadowed settle where Kennedy sat.

"'Furtive een' was what they said," Wylie

Dead Men's Bells

went on ; " een that shifted left and right ; and fidgetin' fingers—mair like a pickpocket frae the cities than a rover of the high seas—nane o' the Borrowdale about him."

" It's a wonder no more o' them has been taken," said one of the resident drouths.

" Ah weel," said Wylie, " live and let live, ye ken. And then there's the ither adage whilk says ' Ye ken your ain ken best ye ken ' ; and maybe they are a wheen tarry cut-throats, but—mind ye—if ane o' them made trouble wi' me personally, I wad save the Tolbooth his board and lodgin' waiting for his hanging. But, if he would gang his way quately, there's a bit o' me that would be inclined to let him gang."

" Yes, yes."

" Aye, aye."

It seemed a popular outlook.

But one of the Lowland merchant-looking bodies broke in :

" Ye'll excuse me, sir, but this lenity is, when ye consider how mankind hangs thegither, as it is in the Latin phrase——"

" Pardon me, sir," said Wylie, " I am nae scholar."

" Hum, hum ! " and the merchant-like body cleared his throat and bowed, as if apologising ;

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Three Fingers Winks

quite a likable body, I thought him. "Well, sir, you see, we are a gregarious sort o' beasts, and so we must bear in mind not only our private employments, but how they affect the species of whilk we are units. And if there be those who will go cutting throats, then it is the duty of those who will not go cutting throats to put a restraint upon the throat-cutters."

"That's what I say, sir," said Wylie, and bowed, which made him look odd, even to my now accustomed eyes, in his long wrapping drover's plaid. "And if he tried to cut my throat, I would give him a fell arduous whiley."

He of the riding-cloak and laced hat and tilted chair, rose, and slipped over smiling to have his glass replenished, with but a sign to the lass, as though not to interrupt with speech, but desiring to relish the budding argument the better over a dram.

The four men in the shadowed settle sat quiet as mice behind the meal kist when the cat walks gently in front.

The merchant body put his head amiably to one side. I thought his companion looked as if he regretted the discourse, the entry into the lists in the taproom.

"For you, sir," said the merchant body, "that

Dead Men's Bells

is still but the personal outlook. Ye are on the right side——”

“Oo aye, I hope so,” said Wylie, and there was a little jump in the place.

The lace-hatted man, sitting down again with his new dram, shot a quick look on Wylie.

The companion of the talkative merchant looked perturbed.

The merchant, on his part, hastened to say :

“I use the phrase no’ in the poleetical sense. I meant to say that ye are on the side of the law-abiding, or let me say of the non-throat-cutters—hem—hem !”

Wylie inclined his head.

The long-cloaked listener put his head to one side and stretched his legs. I found myself looking at him, though he had not spoken.

He examined Wylie quizzically, and then thoughtful-like produced a knife and cut a lemon through amidships and squeezed a half over his glass.

The merchant continued :

“By ‘the right side’ I meant the right side in our discourse of mankind. Ye are on the side of not cutting throats. Nature has made ye, sir, able to protect yourself ; and so ye are free and easy, and say to the throat-cutter, ‘Gang your ways.’ But he nicht gang his ways and cut the

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Three Fingers Winks

throat o' some honest enough lad wha hadna his strength——”

“Ah, sir,” said Wylie, “your argument is faulty. Ye should say that he micht gang his ways and cut the throat of some honest lad wha was sleeping, to gain your point wi’ me; for you see, being the man I seem to imply, I micht answer ye, ‘Well, then, let all men keep strong, and let the strongest live——’”

“The fittest physically,” suggested the merchant.

“Na, na! the combeenation—brain and muscle. Ah well—aye—let us say the fittest tae live in a wild warld where there are throat-cutters. But, tae go on, if ye said ‘he micht go his ways and cut the throat of a man wha was sleeping,’ then ye micht win me over tae the side of arresting evil-doers myself—for the common good—for that wad be a forcible argument.”

Up jumped the merchant.

“Oh, sir, sir! Come to our table, and join us in our dram, and let us mak’ a birling o’t, for you are a fine man, if ye hae nae Latin. Ye are a man after the heart o’ Plato, wha wad hae an argument no’ for the sake of the victory of wan, and the defeat of the tither, but for the advancement towards a better understanding of how to live. Will ye do me the honour?”

Dead Men's Bells

We passed to the table, all smiling gaily ; the natives of the place mostly looking on, nodding to each other, wagging their heads.

As we sat down two of the four men who had been mouse-still in the sheltered settle rose and went out speedily. And even as we were ladling the punch from our new friend's bowl, and his friend was looking at us and saying quickly, " You will pardon me, gentlemen, but I do not think, for all your drovers' plaids, that you are drovers," other two rose in the darkened corner, Kennedy and his remaining crony. Kennedy went out upon the farther side, using his companion for a shield, and also arranging his hat on his head, with his nigher hand raised as a farther shield. The dog rose and watched their departure, growling in a low rumble. Not till Kennedy was gone did Wylie's eyes look to mine, and, meeting mine, announce to me, in a glance, that he was aware of Kennedy's departure.

But Wylie had a taste for such dialectics as we were presently plunged into ; and so we went on with talk and toddy till, looking up, a little warm and very ridiculously genial, I found the candles all glittering with an amazingly affable glitter, and some quite on the roguish side of festive ; and the place was nigh empty. The last

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Three Fingers Winks

two of the resident-looking drouths were just departing with a good night to the house, which I nodded back to them.

Only the man in the long riding-cloak was now left. He sat there a trifle weary-like and yet interested, biting on the peel of his lemon.

"Man," I suddenly cried, "our friends will be wondering about the jorum!"

Wylie leapt in his chair.

"Here have I been discussing the commonweal," said he, "and I havena bought a sark! I must indeed be developing the traits of the philosopher," he added, to the amusement of his hearers. "Aye," he shook his head, "but what is worse, I have kept six fellows in the gregarious hotch-potch of the commonwealth a lang time wanting a promised refreshment; and while we please ourselves wi' toddy and discussion they will be wearying——"

The man in the riding-coat rose and stretched and stepped to the door.

We made our adieux. I could see our friends were wondering mightily what we might be; but though they were curious Glasgow bodies, they restrained their questions—which must have been a sore restraint.

Of course, even Glasgow bodies learnt to ask fewer personal questions in the years about '19,

Dead Men's Bells

when they went so far forth as to the Highland line.

"Excuse me, sir," said the man in the riding-coat, "might I give you a word of counsel in return for an evening's entertainment?"

"Why, surely, sir, and welcome," said Mr. Wylie.

"A rat-faced man, with eyes that go left and right, and three rat-faced cronies, if I am no' greatly mistaken——"

Wylie waved a hand to the deserted settle.

"They left there an hour ago—I ken," he said.

The man looked almost angry, then as if he admired.

"Ah," said he, "then you were talking for their ears when ye began. Man, I couldna be sure. Ah weel—so long as ye ken. I hae done but what one man of mettle would dae for anither." He puckered his lips. "But if ye are open for another word, of whilk there is nae doot, from one wha kens the work of dodgin' and hidin' and yet being a man, even in the esteem of his enemies, I wad advise ye, so long as ye are a drover, no' to be able tae read the words on a proclamation, as weel as explaining that ye kenna Latin."

"You are right, sir," said Wylie. "And I am

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Three Fingers Winks

corrected. I must have lost my wits. But once I began to read I had to continue—though it struck me when I was half through.”

“Ah weel,” said he in the long coat, “one good turn deserves anither, and your talk this nicht mak’s me your debtor——”

“Damme!” I cried. “And here we are forgetting the jorum after all!”

I stepped over and purchased it from the red-faced Highlandman that had taken the lass’s place by now. When I stepped back the long-coated man was saying to Wylie:

“Aye—I’ll follow a whiley after—aye—that’s it—just that way—aye.”

The two merchants were at their toddy again, their wigs somewhat awry; but they were alert to give us a final wave. Riach, the dog, stretched and rose and took a proffered cake from the one who had lured Wylie into the long discussion. The candles were all a little bleary with the liquor, and inclined to scintillate more than an ordinary candle does; and, thinking that they would show a different manner to the morning sun, but smiling to them, as well as to our friends, I waved adieux, and went forth with Wylie.

It was not now drizzling, but was much blacker, and there was a sound of wind running in the night,

Dead Men's Bells

a wet, tempestuous wind ; and what was lost of darkness, in the absence of the falling rain, was made up for, and more, by the black clouds that the wind was herding along the drove-roads of the sky.

We ploughed along very doubtful. But bit by bit, little by little, we came to see more. Walls became visible instead of announcing themselves as if by some other sense—those who have blundered in the dark of an unknown village will understand this—and we stepped with more certainty.

The dog was at our heels.

“What did he of the long coat say ? ” I asked.

“Oh, he is a bonny man,” cried Wylie. “He was very open wi’ me. D’ye ken what he is ? He is in the Jacobite service, and is even now stepping his way from having visited a certain famous chieftain wha is in hiding richt on the Highland borders——”

“Lack-a-day ! ” said I, “these Jacobites are a charming people. Their hearts are too big for their cause. They will give themselves away to a total str——”

“Hoots ! Hoots ! There be strangers and strangers—as he said ; he is a man of discernment, and——”

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Three Fingers Winks

Our dog growled very fiercely and leapt before us. The black shadow of him shot ahead in the gloom, and someone who had been crouching by the roadside half rose to evade the dog's leap. Two other lurking shapes leapt on us; but our dirks were out and our long plaids flung aside on the instant. A flash of a pistol leapt up, spurting at us, and blinded us, and left us puckering our eyes and waving our dirks to and fro before us, gentle and cautious.

"Crouch down!" cried a voice behind, and feet came pounding after us.

The voice was of the man in the riding-coat.

"Crouch down and look up and lunge."

We were doing so of our own sense ere his shouted advice was wholly out, and so could see our assailants against the lesser black of the sky.

Down I went in a bob like a puddock,* and saw three men up and one down—a yelling shadow, that last one, with a dog at its throat.

But I leapt at the nighest shadow even as it made at me, and lunged up, holding the long dirk sword fashion, and my blade slit into flesh. Wylie was engaged too.

Our quiet friend, who had made up for all his quiet of the evening by incontinently becoming

* A frog.

Dead Men's Bells

a bosom friend at the very end, was with us now, roaring, "Ha! the rat-faced man with the eyes that—tak' that—I hae got ye in the midriff!"

I half saw, half felt my assailant topple down as he tried to recover from his leap upon me. Then came this shout of our friend from the change-house. Then barkings from the dog, who for some cause had desisted from his attack; then two of our attackers fled off, swishing through bushes, whether in full flight, or but to sink down in the bushes, we could not be sure. Our big-hearted Jacobite was beside us. We made out two bodies at our feet; one was the man I had lunged into, the other—Wylie explained presently which he was.

"Is the dog hurtit?" he asked.

I stooped to it and felt over it. "It is wet," I began; "but the night——"

"Is moist tae," said Wylie, "and, foreby, he might hae got a splash when I drew forth. I took that man first for the dog's sake, lest it got a knife under its wame."

"His tail wags!" said I, and gave a daft laugh.

"Ye are a man after my heart," cried the man of the laced hat to Wylie. "'How's the dog?'" is your first word. D'ye think should we beat the bushes for the others, or let this suffice them? I got yin o' them in the kyte. What's yon?"

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Three Fingers Winks

Over the knoll campwards came a man with a torch held high, and two more men at his heels, and another dog leaping before in the red glow.

"It's Tavish, I believe," said Wylie.

Our helper in this tussle thrust a hand toward us.

"I think I'll best bid ye good-bye," said he, "and be stepping."

"What! Man, would ye no' join us at our bit fire and help tae empty the jorum, and accept our thanks? It's poor enough comfort, but——"

"Oh, indeed, I hae lain in the heather—wanting a fire tae—mony a time. No; it's no' that. I hae nae doot o' the trueness of your friends aither, but from what ye tell me, I think it is better just for the nonce that we dinna foregather. When a man is upon such an errand as I, deeploamacy whiles maun hae the ascendancy ower inclination, for aither a brawl or a bottle." Wylie cried out in admiration of this man who was so much after his heart. But our friend shook hands quickly. "Ye hae kept me ower lang already in the change-hoose at Balfron wi' your discussions and arguments. Good-bye, sir, and good-bye to you, sir"; and this interesting man disappeared in the darkness.

It was indeed Tavish, and two of our drover friends, who now bore down on us, with a torch

Dead Men's Bells

plucked from the fire; and the excitement of our return made us forget our apology for our dilatoriness.

The torch revealed the two men who lay there—and neither was Kennedy. One was dead. The other, whom I had run through, gulped and spat blood, and half rose. Under the torchlight, with us all thronging round, he looked more like the victim of an accident than an enemy fallen in a brawl. And I could have wept to see him sit up coughing and clutching his kidneys and spitting blood. There is a bit of me, I sometimes have thought, that might go farther than Wylie even, and be so complaisant as to let my throat be cut and have done with it, rather than go through the world cutting the throats of those who would fain slit mine. We broached the jorum and gave this wretched man a swig, I holding the jorum up to his mouth; and he had some down his throat and some spilt on his chest, so wambly was he and so uncouth the jorum to hold to him.

“Can ye rise?” I asked.

He could rise sure enough, and the thought of freedom aided him. He rose, though with difficulty.

“What had ye to do with Kennedy?” said Wylie, eyeing him in the failing torchlight.

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Three Fingers Winks

"Wi' who?"

"Wi' Kennedy."

"I didna ken so much as his name—ye mean the man in seaman's drawers?"

"Yes."

"Wi' hae been dramming wi' him, that's all—and when ye came in yonder he telt us ye were a rent-collector in disguise, one of thae collectors for the lairds in France——" He squirmed with pain, and held his side.

"Let him go," I said.

"All right—ah weel—gang your ways," said Wylie.

"Do ye ken this man?" asked Tavish, indicating the dead body.

"He's deed," said the man grimly. "It's a' ower wi' him."

"What can we dae with the body?" asked Wylie. "Man, man, it's a dirty warld." He turned fiercely to the fellow I had thrust into and who had just dodged a like fate. "What's the guid o' a vagron life when that's the end? Ye damn rogue—see, can ye bring ony o' your freends and——"

"I micht get someone," said the man, "tae—" he clutched his side again, and it was no shamming (he looked as white as this paper in the last flicker

Dead Men's Bells

of Tavish's torch), "tae see tae me, and come ower for him, if they was sure——"

"Oh, we will not tarry here," said Wylie; "rest easy on that. And if ye see Kennedy, and he lives, tell him he will fare waur the next time he tries such a ploy upon us. Come away——" And we moved on for the drovers' camp, to show the man we meant what Wylie said—that the defeated party could hide the traces of the brawl undisturbed.

So we all came back—without the sarks, as Wylie absently, and angrily, and put-out-like, observed when we sat down again to the fire.

We slept little that night, or what was left of it; wondering what would befall at dawn if the Balfron folk got wind of the scrimmage and made inquiries. But when, at break of day, we gathered the nowt and took the road, the body was gone, and it was hardly likely that any traveller had passed so early.

As the beasts moved on we scattered a little on the hill and surveyed the bushes.

There was trace of blood that the dogs smelt out and followed up the hill and into a bush above the scene of the attack, but no body there now, either alive or otherwise. We surmised that the body had been carried off from the road by some

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Three Fingers Winks

of the hedge-lurker's cronies, and that Kennedy (whether he, or the other, was the man the Jacobite had run upon) had got off.

"It's my opinion we'll hear nae mair o' him," said Wylie, limping alongside me (for the wet and the brawl had not helped his ankle). But we did, though not for some time.

It was of the other pirate, the one they called "Three Fingers," that we were to hear first.

The life of a drover upon the hills is too well known to call for a further description from me. Enough to say that we trudged slowly on, now dry, now wet, and came at length to Glasgow.

There, with pressing, we succeeded in getting Tavish to accept a purse of gold, and then very boldly we made our way to my Uncle Walter's, in whose praise I had had many a word the nearer we came to town.

We had a set-back at first; for the beginning of the end was already upon my Uncle Walter, yes, although he was to pull up again later, he was at the beginning of the spells of cross-grainedness and peevish anger that vexed his last days, hastened by the—but enough of that.

He had had some trouble of the kidneys and liver, and was the crossest man imaginable when he saw us. It seemed an effort to him to be civil, and

Dead Men's Bells

the merriment that came anon had less of spontaneity in it than of recollection of what he had had a name for ere his *bonhomie* had passed him on through conviviality to dramming.

He was not his old self. He ladled snuff to himself and forgot to pass the box. He broke off to swear at his doctor for having bid him leave off *aqua vitæ* and cried :

"Damn him! I hae gotten even wi' him. I am drinking gin noo—a puir drink!"

Which seemed a sad warping of the mind that had once been so prone to laugh, not only at its troubles, but at its peccadilloes; and to swear at his *medico* for having given him advice he had sought, and to talk thus (with no laugh even at himself) of getting even with the *medico*, to talk as if he begowked an enemy, was a sad kind of talk to hear from Uncle Walter. But he had a dram of his gin then, and anon was more kindly—asked of us all our story and heard it with real interest.

Suddenly I recalled the matter of the insurance.

"Have ye had a claim?" I asked.

"Indeed, I have," said he, "there was news from Oban of the wreck; a corpse or twa was found and identified, but 'damn me,' says I, 'if that is evidence of a wreck. And, foreby, there is something strange about a wreck so near

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Three Fingers Winks

hand'; no, I'll no' pay; I will fecht it. The owner is going to tak' the law on me."

"Let him tak' it!" cried Wylie. "We are your witnesses!"

So we put our heads together then, my uncle having another dram of his evil-smelling gin. We talked it all over—how Wylie could swear to Mr. Williams's determination to put the brig on Carsaig Beach, and how I could swear to the same.

"Aye, but this needs a guid lawyer," said my uncle. "Ye see the weak spot is that the brig was wreckit, according to you, despite Mr. Williams's intentions to wreck it."

"Oh, I'm no' so sure but it was because o't," said Wylie. "As a navigator I should say that we could, maybe, have weathered through, had he not kept ordering me in, and then lost us the service of the offshore back-wash of wind by cutting loose what sail we had. Man! Think of yon pirate ship! They didna ken the shore, nor the fathoms, nor the currents—kent naething but seamanship—Man! Yon Three Fingers was a fine navigator! And——"

My uncle broke in:

"Can ye mention your union wi' sich a man and sich a crew in the coorts? I see by the paper

Dead Men's Bells

that they are a' wanted; and ye ken the law is a queer thing. Ye micht find yoursel's brocht in as aiders and abettors o' the pirates."

"Aiders and abettors!" cried Wylie. "Did not we do our best to keep them civil in the country so lang as we——"

My uncle slapped the table and swore loudly.

"Damn ye, sir," he cried, "I'm talking about the law—and I think I ken mair o' it than you!"

We sat silent then. Wylie seemed to be in two minds, and half ready to get to his feet and throw over the matter as far as he went.

"Ye mustna mind me," said my uncle. "These kidneys o' mine would drive a saint tae distraction. I should like fine tae change them with your Uncle Tam, Robert. By God, it would learn him the story of Job."

Someone was announced in the outer office, and my uncle passed out to see him instead of having him in.

Wylie shook his head on me.

"I can see he has been a fine man, and I likit him fine when he cam' aboard the *Santona* wi' ye. We'll bear wi' his kidneys. After all he was thinking of oor ain guid at yon burst oot. Here he comes again!"

We discussed the matter of the insurance farther,

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Three Fingers Winks

and my uncle was easier on his return to it after the interruption.

We decided to procure a lawyer's advice, and next day, and the day again after that, we were closeted discussing the whole matter with a lawyer who had made some kind of position. God knows how ! He had to ask questions on the most obvious points of our case, and muddled what we told him, and he wore a great foolish air, first cousin to a combination of an auld wife and a minister in his dotage. We all lost patience with his density and unction, and his fine, pared nails, and his powdered chin. We decided he might do to recover petty debts when all that was asked of him was his signature. It was a famous name, though not made so by him, but by his forbears. So, after many patient days, my uncle told him to go to the Devil ; and, as my uncle was full of many affairs, I took the coach for Edinburgh to see a legal man there for whom my uncle had a great admiration.

Of my confab with him, more anon, in the place where its result becomes evident. All I would tell of here of my visit to Edinburgh is of what I fell into the midst of, after leaving the lawyer :

A great cheering crowd that swept round me and hemmed me in so that (by my leave or lacking

Dead Men's Bells

it) I had to go along with it. It was sweeping downhill, which made, added to a growing curiosity, my combat with the tide of it less to my mind; so I ceased to resist, and found myself joggled and running in shuffling steps amidst a stench of compact humanity, into the Grass-market.

Red coats of soldiers showed above the crowd, and there was a rattle of carts in the midst of their files. Also among the hooting and cheering came bursts of hard laughter that had a very callous and cruel sound.

What was happening in the core of the crowd was passed by one asking of another, "What is it? What is it? What made the laugh?"

And it came out my length that someone had said—I know not who—it was but "Ane of them cried out"—and a bit of blasphemy or sculduddry. Or again: "Ane of them cried"—this or that, some devil-may-care phrase. And then we came to where the gallowses stood, and, jammed in that stink-pot crowd, I had the honour of seeing the hanging of thirteen men.

The first one to go up I seemed to mind in a way; but he was blindfolded. And then, suddenly, I knew one for certain—he was one of the pirate lads with whom we had come across Scotland. I went cold and shuddered in that strangling crowd

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Three Fingers Winks

that surged this way and that, *en bloc*. I would fain have got out, and instead I was thrust nearer the gallows and the red-coats that held back the rabble.

Then, very nimbly, mounted up that great rogue, ThreeFingers, and waggled the stump of his forefinger to the crowd.

The lower sort gave him a cheer; and indeed the lower sort predominated in the crowd there—the gentry, so called, sitting at windows in stalls for which they paid. I heard the cries go round me:

“Oh, there is the lad that was caught his lee lane.”

“He gaed them the go-by and headed off for Dumbarton.”

“Ye’re a leer! Glasga’!”

“They got him, onyway!”

Three Fingers was now having his hands tied afresh. He had evidently wriggled them free on the way. He refused the cloth over his eyes, shaking his head this way and that, like a dog that will not let you put the leash upon it—but he took the rope round his neck with a very mad bravery or braggadocio.

His eyes roved in the crowd; he thrust out his tongue. Some touch of my early training gave

Dead Men's Bells

me a horror, and I tried to cry out to him to think upon his Maker and his imminent end. The minister he spurned, to the great joy of the folk. I tried to cry out ; my tongue was dry as tinder. But, as if by the attempt to cry out he had somehow been drawn to look my way, he looked, as if searching, quickly, saw me, and started. The rope was on his neck. Our eyes met, and his mouth opened in a gasp of amazement. Then he gave a grin and winked upon me.

At that the cart moved away, and he dangled at the rope's end. And I can see that wink still. Whiles I sit (when I am idle, or tired after the day), my head in my hand, and looking before me, I see the scene, and take my breath a spell, and then give a great sigh, minding of it all.

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Chapter XXI: *The End of that Sang*

THE scene in the court made me regret as little that I had not gone in for the law, as little as ever I regretted that I had fallen from grace and strayed from the pathway to the pulpit. The law is, in a way, better. There is great opportunity for alertness of mind. A poor lawyer is the silliest body, and all his air of legal acumen, and pursing of his mouth, and looking wise as he misses the bones of your case will drive you near to distraction, and avail little with Scottish judge or English jury. These grimaces make but an additional gowk of him, like a fool's cap on his head. But an able lawyer is a man to remember—with his quiet listening, and his leaping into the interstices of his opponent's case, like Samson between the pillars, or like the mouse in Æsop's fable, to the gnawing of the lion's bonds. Such is a man to hearken to, and if he sometimes play to the emotions he plays to the mind too, and chiefly to the mind. The preacher is nigher the mummer, seeking to put a panic in

Dead Men's Bells

what is called the soul, to endow it with a leaping incontinent thing like lust. His own reading has carried him beyond what his hearers ask of him; and if he tell them, like a man, his beliefs, and the result of his studies, they dub him heretic, and unfrock him. He is, half his time, if he has not compromised that which is called the soul, tongue in cheek to his hearers, and in his own secret heart in torture; and if he seek to still the moan of his honour by saying to it, "This is all they can comprehend, better this than naught," another voice will say to him: "They are like pecking pigeons, and if you strew a little hempseed in the hope that they may eat the corn, you will find that they eat no corn, but fire themselves with the hemp." A lawyer, on the other hand, is free of tampering with what is called the soul. But even so there are too many byways about the law, crooked turns and queer lanes and cul-de-sac.

The trial, when at last it came, was like a play in which we were participators. It affected me as a game of the chess.

Evidence was heard on both sides to begin; and there stood the scales swinging up and down, and then the counsel for the prosecution rose up and sought to bring down his side, and very

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admirably he did it. Then up leaps our man and fell to the work of pulling down our side of the balance, and hitting up our opponent's into the bargain, in such nimble sentences, and all glittering like diamonds, that I wanted to cheer his periods and huzza over his home-thrusts.

The heckling of Wylie by the oppressor was a droll business. That person had clearly got his wits to work, and was trying to connect us with the pirates. It was as well that we had been so open with the whole story to our man.

"This other ship on whilk ye escaped, what was she called, by the way?" asked the prosecutor.

Up jumps our lawyer and cried out: "My lud, I protest that we have here nothing to do with aught but the *Santona* up to the leaving of her by this witness."

The judge was of his way of thinking.

Then again the heckler tried to get the matter in, after a space of other talk.

"Here is a queer story," said he. "Is there any witness here from the ship ye were rescued by?"

"Leapet on to," Wylie corrected abruptly.

"Were rescued by!"

"Leapet aboard!"

Dead Men's Bells

"Were rescued by."

The judge said: "Try some other way," and a smile went round.

"Did anyone see ye that ye could give the name of, leaving the *Santona* in mid-seas?" asked our opponent's lawyer.

"If Mr. Williams was here he might maybe be——" Wylie began.

"I am not talking about Mr. Williams. I am speiring about this matter, whilk, my lud, you will agree, is like a romance——"

"The high seas mak' romances!" cried Wylie, and he was called to order.

"I protest," says our man. "This is irrelevant to the brig *Santona*. Foreby—I have a witness to Mr. Wylie having leapet aboard this ship."

The heckler looked taken aback; and I was somewhat amazed, till I found that I was that witness!

I sat down, after my heckling, hot as if I had been running, but as triumphant as it is advisable to be with the law hanging over you as the sword hung over Damocles.

But you should have heard our man crack up Mr. Wylie's bravery and honour, and the terrible plight he was put in between obeying the captain and obeying the unwritten laws of a seaman.

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The way that lawyer showed his thoughts that caused him at last, when he saw the master was determined to wreck the ship, to leap up at that bowsprit sent providentially over our heads, how he took this frail hope of escape rather than stay under a captain who would be traitor to the code of the sea, was as fine a piece of exegesis and dialectics as ever I heard. If there had been letters forthcoming that passed between the owner and Mr. Williams, it would have been as black for the owner as for the presumably dead Williams.

I do not know where our lawyer got the news he had, or if he chanced it, as the phrase is, and had no news.

The great score, at any rate, was made by him when he questioned the owner who was making the claim.

The brig had been wrecked—that was admitted—there was enough of proof of that—whether by Mr. Williams's intention or not.

But: "Now," says our man, "you were on bad terms with Mr. Williams surely?" And he spoke suddenly.

"No," cried the owner, "I was not!"

"Oh!" says our man, "I was seeking an excuse for him wrecking your brig." Even the judge had one of those twitches of the lip that denote

Dead Men's Bells

observation of a new trend and further possibilities opening up.

"Ye were not bad friends?" said our man.

"No; I said so," said the owner.

Our man looked up at hearing this tone, and then he looked down a moment at some papers and glanced at them.

"Sir," said he, "I ask you a simple question. And think well before you reply. Was Mr. Williams in partnership wi' you?" he asked. "Was he not part owner in the brig *Santona*?" And he looked again at these papers.

The soft side of me that had tolerated so much at Wester Mearns was still in existence. I felt a kind of pity for that owner's face, cringing and paling.

"He was," says he thickly.

Our man selected a paper from the bunch of his papers. "And you had some knowledge——" He paused and turned about, and looked to my uncle, then turned back. "Let me," said he, "as my clients are of forgiving temperament (which is their affair and not mine), put it to ye in an easier way. Let me say this, for example: Had you some understanding with Mr. Williams——"

The owner's lawyer was up on his feet to object to this.

The End of that Sang

Our man whipped out two dirty papers from his sheaf, and out shot his finger at the owner :
“ Why did you call yourself the owner of the *Santona*, and nae word of Mr. Williams, who was going to tak’ her out, being part owner ? ”

The judge in his queer grumbling voice said :
“ Now, just a minute.” And he looked at the insurance papers on his desk, read aloud the part relating to the owner. “ Yes,” said he, and our man went on :

“ I may ask the question ? Well, sir, why did you mislead upon these insurance papers ? ”

No answer. The owner’s man was scrawling a note. The judge was waiting.

Our man leant quickly back to my uncle and Mr. MacWhirl, and round again.

“ I think this is enough,” says he. “ My clients are not urgent for the next step, which would be a turning of the tables ; they prefer to sit quate and honest at theirs.”

The decision was easy to see then. And the end of it was that we went down the street from the Civil Court, shaking hands with ourselves and mightily rejoiced, to the “ Saracen’s Head ” for the maddest dinner that ever was served and washed down in that fine hostelry. The owner of the *Santona* would go his ways to gather together

Dead Men's Bells

his costs, and consider that if he wanted another ship insured in Glasgow, the premium would have very amazingly and incomprehensibly increased.

On the way the lawyer turned to me.

"Have ye seen the London paper?" he asked.

"I have not," said I. "I have only seen the *Courant*, and did not lift it. I was too excited with the case."

He held me a paper with his legal finger to a place, and I read, as I walked, how one Kennedy, a keeper of a brothel in the Ratcliff Highway, had been blown upon by one of his trulls, and arrested on a charge of piracy in connection with certain doings of the notorious Captain Bartholomew Roberts; and how there were plenty of witnesses and proofs, so that he had been strung up in Execution Dock.

I gave a gasp.

"I thocht it might interest ye," said our lawyer.

I handed it forward to Wylie to read, falling in step with my uncle while Wylie read. And Mr. MacWhirl, who had been bobbing back and forth, fell in step with the lawyer.

We turned into the "Saracen's Head" and fell back, each to give the other precedence at entry, all very gay.

The End of that Sang

As we did so Mr. Wylie sighed, handing back the London paper, and says he :

“Ah weel—even so—that is the end of that sang.”

It is a song that little has been heard of, because other songs were being made at the same time of far wider import—songs of kings instead of masterless pirates.

A week later Mr. Wylie and I were bound down the firth for the Carolinas, to embark, with our savings, and a third part of the insurance which my uncle did not have to pay, and pressed upon us, in the planting business.

I would have liked a glisk of my mother, but I kent that she would now be carried far from me by my sister, and by our dour Lowland God, as conceived in the minds of the people, and by that other Christ, he of Saint John and Saint Peter, who, under the patronage of ministers and priests, hangs ever on the cross. I would have liked to say good-bye to Effie, but it would have been difficult to have seen her without news of it trickling to my mother that I was so near hand, and my sister would have made another severing dyke of that between my mother and me. So I chose to re-

Dead Men's Bells

member my mother just as she had been when last I saw her. I would have liked to have sat upon Ballygeoch, if it was but for half an hour, and looked again into the Highlands, over Glasgow. But there are things that we can, as the Scots phrase is, train ourselves to "dae wanting."

So—as Mr. Wylie says—"that is the end of that sang."

THE END

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Widdershins

By OLIVER ONIONS

MR. JAMES DOUGLAS' CRITICISM IN *THE STAR*

(REPRINTED BY PERMISSION)

EVERYBODY loves a lover and everybody loves a ghost story. Good ghost stories are rarer than good love stories. The advance of science and the decay of the faculty of wonder make the task of the teller of eerie tales very hard. The age of the motor-car and the aeroplane is not the age of the occult. Even children nowadays are less subject to nightmares than they were in the last generation. The man who wishes to make our flesh creep has to be very crafty and very cunning. All the old tricks are outmoded.

I have been prostrated and pulverised by "Widdershins," by Mr. Oliver Onions. I warn all weak-minded persons to give these stories a wide berth. I am pretty tough, yet nothing but my iron will and steadfast incredulity saved me from going about mopping and mowing, raving and gibbering, after I had read "Widdershins." What are Keats? said the ingenuous person who was asked to go to a lecture on the young poet whose name was not "writ in water." What are Widdershins? you may reasonably inquire. Well, Mr. Onions explains that the horrid word means "contrary to the course of the sun." Widdershins, then, are things that ought not to be, things that fly in the face of nature and order and law and neatness and tidiness and routine. In order to put us in the proper frame of mind for supping on horrors Mr. Onions prefixes to his tales of terror this Scottish contribution to the Litany: "From Ghaisties, Ghoulies, and long-leggity Beasties, and Things that go bump in the night—Good Lord, deliver us!" Having induced us to put up that prayer he proceeds to scare us to death with Ghaisties, Ghoulies, long-leggity Beasties, and Things that go bump in the night. Of all the nerve-racking horrors my favourite is "The Beckoning Fair One." It is a good test of self-composure. If you can read it at midnight and then sleep soundly, there is not much wrong with your conscience or your nerves.

I know one very sane and sensible woman who stuck fast in the middle of this most diabolical tale, and refused to be horrified any more. I don't blame her. It is a study of madness and murder. Nothing that Poe has done makes my flesh creep quite so satisfactorily as this really artistic bit of bizarre uncanniness. I have always to work myself up in order to get thrills out of Poe. I have to play up to his inventions. I have to pretend as hard as I am able. If I do not toil desperately Poe leaves me cold and calm. The truth is that Poe is a greatly overrated artist in horror. The moderns have beaten him at his own game. Mr. Onions has a wonderful power of invention. He can invent little horrors that make you shudder. Take, for example, the little tinkling tune that Oleron hears while he is listening in the lonely house to the dripping of the tap. The tune of the tap turns out to be an old air called "The Beckoning Fair One." It was sung to a harp. Now, Oleron in his rummaging discovers a large bag, made of an ancient frieze-like material. In shape, it is an irregular triangle. This large bag provides the chief horror of the tale. It is a harp-cover.

There is nothing precise or definite in the influence that drives Oleron out of his wits. We get vague hints and suggestions, but there is no solid ghost. All we know is that a

shadowy woman is playing tricks with Oleron's mind, but we do not know whether the shadowy woman is only a figment of his decaying brain. What we see is the slow decomposition of his sanity. For example, he hears a sort of soft-sweeping rustle that seems to hold an almost inaudible minute crackling. We cannot guess what the silky rustle is. At least, I tried to guess and failed. "There was only one noise in the world like that," Oleron thinks, but we are carefully bamboozled as to what the one noise is. Then suddenly, without warning, we are told that it is the sound of a woman brushing her hair. Now it strikes me that this is the finest piece of eerie invention ever compassed by any artist in terror. For there is no noise like it. And the noise produces a mental picture. When we imagine the noise we see the woman. Could anything be more dramatic than that? But Mr. Onions carries the thrill further. Oleron not only hears this horrid silky rustle: he stalks it. He places himself before a picture so that he can see in the glass of it the steady flame of the candle that burns behind him on the chest of drawers. He can also see the little glancings of light from the bevels and facets of the objects about the mirror and the candle. But there is one gleam that has motion. It is fainter than the rest. It moves up and down through the air. What is it? It is the reflection of Oleron's black vulcanite comb, and each of its downward movements is accompanied by a silky and crackling rustle.

Now, this invention of the visible comb plied by invisible fingers upon invisible hair by an invisible woman seems to me a very wonderful achievement. It gives you a perfectly beautiful shock. You may say, if you please, that ghosts don't comb their long hair, like the Spartans before the battle of Thermopylae. But you can't prove that they don't. You remember Charles Lamb's famous question "Can a ghost laugh?" Nobody can demonstrate that ghosts are agelasts. If there be ghosts, I for one refuse to believe that they can't laugh and can't comb their hair. But, after all, that is not the point. It is not necessary to assume that the ghost that Oleron heard combing her hair was a real ghost. It is sufficient to know that Oleron thought he heard her combing her hair, and thought he saw the comb moving up and down vertically in fairly regular sweeps, from a point rather more than five feet from the ground to another point a few inches below the level of the chest of drawers. The mongoose may not have been a real mongoose, but it was real for him.

The other terrors of the story I absolutely decline to discuss. All I wish to say is that the gaps and gulfs in the mind of the mad murderer are most artistically contrived, so that everything is hinted at rather than recorded. The culminating thrill is the discovery made by the inspector in the powder-closet. It is done so discreetly and so reticently and so evasively that you simply gasp and choke and take to your heels. Mr. Onions picks the words that freeze your blood, and he knows how to let well alone. "The Beckoning Fair One," it seems to me, is the only modern tale that rivals "The Monkey's Paw" in sheer horror.

The other tales in this book are not quite so appalling, but "Room" is a new idea in mental collapse. Room is a man who is haunted by the obsession that somebody is always behind him. He is an engineer, and the climax of his obsessions comes when he tries to run down his pursuer on the skeleton line of a travelling crane. He drives the engine up and down its thirty yards of rail, bringing it up within a yard of the end, while the fall-blocks swinging like a kite-tail, crash like a ram into the broken house end. Here, again, the dramatic invention is superb, and when the madman runs along the rail . . . well, one has to shut one's eyes and try to think of something else. I hope Mr. Onions will turn his genius for dramatic inventions to some other field of art, for no living writer can invent situations like these.

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and on the seat a riding-hood of peacock blue that to-day
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