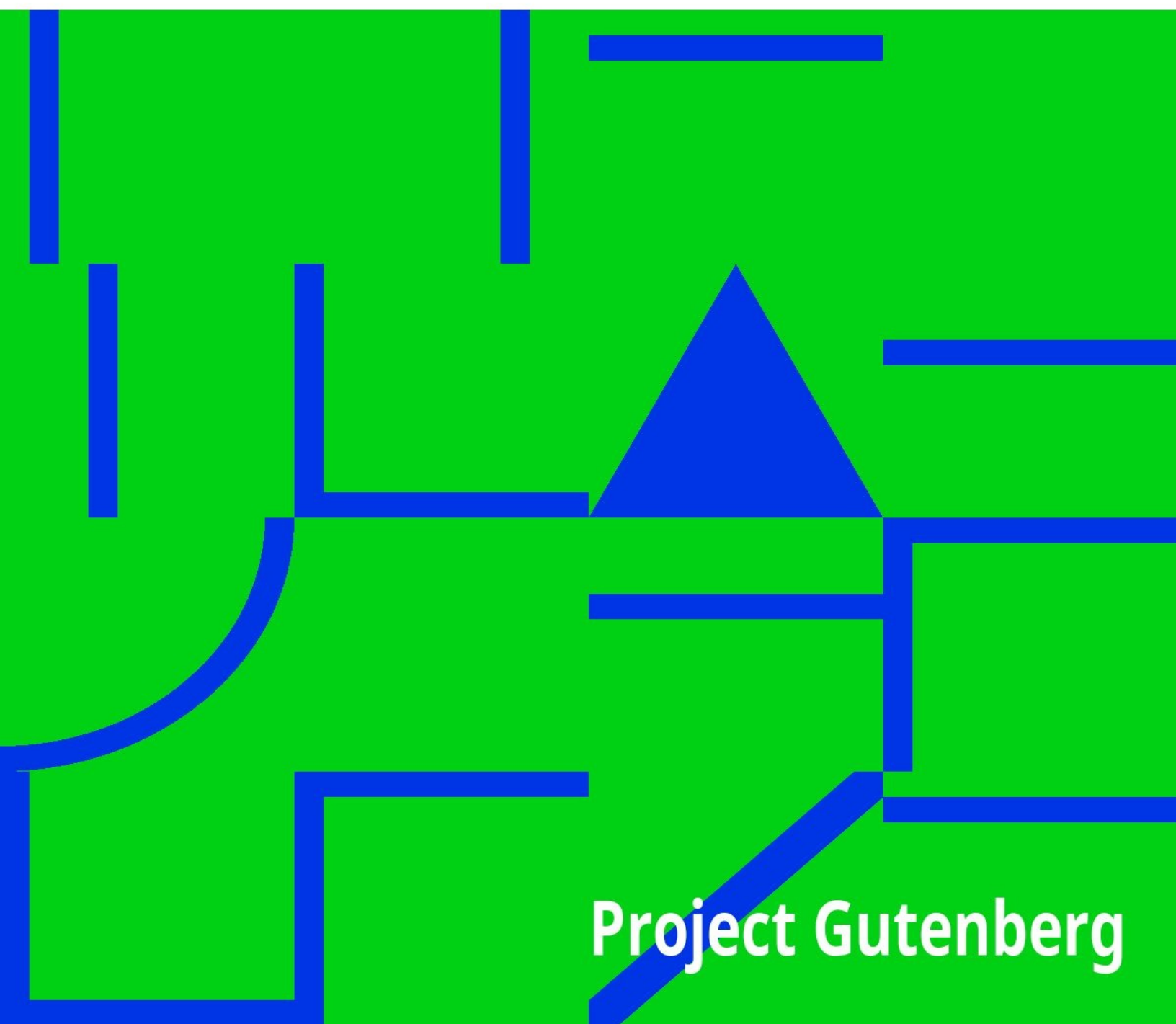


The Black Colonel

James Milne



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COLONEL ***

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THE BLACK COLONEL

BY

JAMES MILNE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE ROMANCE OF A PRO-CONSUL THE EPISTLES OF ATKINS JOHN JONATHAN AND
COMPANY NEWS FROM SOMEWHERE MY SUMMER IN LONDON THE GORDON
HIGHLANDERS

"A tale of the times
of old, of the deeds of
the days of other years."
Ossian.

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED

LONDON

MCMXXI.

TO J. T. M., WHO KNOWS THE

STORY OF THE BLACK COLONEL

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Personal and Particular

The strangest thing about this tale is that it happened, though not, may be, as I here relate it; which is merely to seek, in a humble spirit, the great company of George Washington, who could not tell—a story!

That of the Black Colonel came to me in scraps of talk from my mother when, as Byron grandly sang of himself, "I roved, a Young Highlander, o'er Dark Lochnagar," a wild landscape beloved of Queen Victoria, at Balmoral, for, you see, the eminences will come in. My mother had it from her people, a Forbes family long planted in the brave uplands of Deeside, and I was taken a

generation nearer to it in the conversation of my grandfather, whose folk were on the no less brave uplands of Donside. Nay, he could remember, what my own father, born like him, and myself, in the Forbes Country, first stirred me by saying, when the Red Coats still garrisoned the Castle of Braemar and the Castle of Corgarff, old Grampian strongholds where they had been installed to overawe the Jacobites of the Aberdeenshire Highlands.

The "Seventeen-Forty-Five," with the "Standard on the Braes o' Mar . . . up and streamin' rarely" for Bonnie Prince Charlie, saw fiery times in those remote parts, and knew times of dule afterwards, and the difficulty about any authentic tale of events, is that, in its passage down time, from mouth to mouth, it necessarily loses immediacy of phrase, even of fable, and that rude frame of living and loving, fighting and dying, in which it was originally set. But human nature does not change, we only think it does in changed circumstances, and if Jock Farquharson, of Inverey, could return from the Hills of Beyond and read our chronicle of himself and others, why, he might recognize it, which would mean, perhaps, that some of the romantic colour, the dancing atmosphere, and the high spirit of adventure of those ancient years, has been saved from them. It was little he did not know about the gallantries and the intrigues of war-making and love-making, holding them the natural occupations of a Highland gentleman, even when he had become a "broken man" and an "outlaw"; as you may now, if you please, go on to learn, with many other things of surprise, diversion and quality.

J. M.

THE CALEDONIAN CLUB,
LONDON,
Midsummer Day, 1921.

THE BLACK COLONEL

I—We Meet in the Pass

We might have gone by each other in the Pass, the Black Colonel and I, if his horse had not kicked a stone as we came together. It struck my foot and then a rock, making a rattle in the dark night. You know how noise gains when you cannot see the cause of it, and all your senses are in your ears.

"Woa, Mack!" said the Black Colonel to his beast; "can't you stand still with those mettlesome legs of yours? You may," he went on, more to himself than to the horse, "need them to-night, for our friend, Captain Ian Gordon of his Hanoverian Majesty's forces, is late, and when a man is late it generally bodes trouble; for a woman anyhow, I might confess from my experience. It is less matter if a woman be late, because it is a fashion with the sweet sex that you should wait upon it, and I am always willing to oblige out of my own warmth in gallantry, or so folk say. Eh! Mack? Kept you waiting at many a gate, have I, forgetful that it was cold outside?"

The Black Colonel and I had met before, though slightly, distantly, and I knew his habit of talking to his horse. Not an unnatural thing, because Mack was an animal of fine intelligence, coupled, it is true, with the stallion's devil of a temper, and they had spent much time alone together, which begets understanding. Were they, indeed, not a romance of the countryside, inseparable, with a friendship only found between a lonely man and his horse or his dog? They had been through a whole chapter of adventures together, and were willing to face more, or they would not have been there in the Pass.

When the stone hit my foot I stood still, knowing it must be the Black Colonel, yet wishful to be certain before I spoke. His words to Mack revealed his presence, but left me unsure whether he knew that I was within a few yards of him. Of course the horse knew, for animals of the higher order have an instinct

which is often more sure than reason in a man. It is their reason, the shield of guidance which Nature gives to all her creatures.

Suddenly communication seemed to arise between us, although no word of mutual greeting had been spoken. You know how those things come about! No, you don't, nor do I, nor does anybody else, but they do happen out of a world 'twixt earth and heaven. They call them uncanny in our land, which only means they are unknown, the mysteries of them, but some day they will grow clear and be no more black witchery, only golden light.

"Walked all the way from Corgarff Castle?" he abruptly asked, preparing the way, with the usual nothings of conversation. It is oddly difficult to get into natural talk in a dark, dividing night, when eyes, faces, gestures, are hidden, and I just answered, "Yes, walked over the hills, as I've often done before, knowing them well, without having the honour of a safe conduct from you."

"Some day," he snapped, "you'll be able to bring your red-coats by the same paths, knowing them, as you say, well, and capture me for the Lowland money your Government puts on my Highland head. Nobody is too well off in our parts in these times. Captain Gordon, not, it may be, even you, who was born, I suppose, with an eye for prosperity."

It was unfair of him to say that, and as he climbed off Mack and threw the bridle loose on the horse's neck he mumbled as much.

"A touch of temper against your royal employer, nothing worse; not bad temper, merely temper, so pray excuse it. Mostly I have, as you know, been accustomed to express myself with the sword. . . ."

"Except," I interrupted with some sharpness, for I was still nettled, "when you have confided your language to the dirk, or let it speak in silence for itself."

"Now we are even, Captain Gordon, for that is not worthy of you, if, as I take it, you suggest that, on occasion, I have struck foul. No, sir, not that, never on my honour, as a gentleman; outlawed, if you like, though that troubles me little. But the fine ethics of the broad-sword and the dirk are too nice for discussion between a Gordon and a Farquharson; met as we are with, I suspect, a Forbes to attract and divide us. Besides, I spoke clumsily, not meaning any personal insult, since I want, sincerely want, to be friendly, if that be possible. Anger is a poor hostess, believe me, and I, who have been in its way, should know better than

you who are young, amiably young."

Mine melted under his soft words, because such, even when they are not deeply sincere, may turn wrath aside like balm. Moreover, he had a wild charm of manner which, if it did not quite capture another man, as almost surely it would have won a woman, yet had its effect. Where exactly it lay I have never been able to decide, but the melody of his tongue had something to do with it, even when he spoke in Sassenach English. We could have talked in the Gaelic, I also having it natively, but the Black Colonel would always speak English if he met somebody to whom he could show his command of the language. It was one of his several accomplishments, acquired by study and travel in England and France, and he prided and guarded them all, as a woman does her graces of the person.

So we stood in the chasm of night and the Pass, one waiting upon the other, because our trouble, as in all affairs where two men and a maid are concerned, was how to begin, more particularly as we had no idea what would be the end. The Black Colonel had said as much when he spoke the name Forbes, the third of our Aberdeenshire clans, though it may not have all the lustre of the Gordons or the Farquharsons.

"Ehum," he murmured, dropping into a Scots mannerism which made no more than an overture to speech between us, and yet signified something already said.

"Your letter was urgent," I said. "It might have been a summons to another hoisting of the Stuart Standard on the Braes of Mar."

"And would you have come?" he inquired; "would you have come?"

"It is hard," I answered coldly, "to tell what a man would or would not do if his honour could always march with his inclination. But no summons from you would bring me to the colours, even of those who were our rightful Scottish kings."

"Still, you have come to-night."

"True, but it must occur to you that it is not of the first order of a gentleman to force a meeting, by wrapping a threat in a woman's Christian name, even when you send your message by so secure a hand as that of your ghillie, Red Murdo."

He turned his head and, I felt, though I could still only see vaguely, was looking straight at me, as, certainly, I was looking at him. While we looked and saw not, a quick, low whistle came from the foot of the Pass and an answering whistle, just as low, blew from the top of it.

II—Trapped by the Red-Coats

Never, in all my experience of the hills, their fragrant peace and their rude surprises, have I been so moved by an unexpected noise as I was then, standing with the Black Colonel in the black Pass. Partly this was because the surprise was complete, being unheralded by a rustle or a movement, but, still more, because it was the magic hour at which the womb of night moves to the birth of a new day.

Mingle the void of heaven and earth, and the sense of unseen spaces; the long, sleeping mountains, with the drowsy trees that guard the foot-hills; the caressing sigh of the wind, and, maybe, the murmur of a stream flowing to the sea, and out of all this catch a whistle and its answer. They sounded strangely eerie as they died into the hills, touching us like the still small voice of the Scriptures and, also, like it, carrying a note of apprehension, even of awe.

Under stress a mind moves instantly, and two thoughts leapt into mine, that a trap had been set for the Black Colonel, and that he must suspect me of it. To be sure I was, myself, within the wings of that trap, but this perfect retort was like a gun in a bad position, it could not be brought to bear. However, my own situation, peculiar as I realized it to be, troubled me less, at the moment, than did the Black Colonel's thoughts, as I conceived them, about my honour, and I do suggest that it would have been the same with any other gentleman.

Ugly thoughts have a trick of riding double, and I fancied I heard him trying his stirrup leathers and bridle, to be satisfied they were in order. Even I thought I saw his hand drop down to his right garter, where a Highlander wears his skean-dhu, or short dirk, an ornament mostly, with its Cairngoram stone in the handle, but likewise a solid weapon in an emergency, like the present.

There, probably, I did him an injustice or, if his hand did make the furtive inquiry, I could think wrongly of the reason behind it. Anyhow, he said never a

word, hating to be openly suspicious, where, as I could have sworn, on my conscience, there was no reason for suspicion, whatever might have happened among others, apart from me and my night's doings.

Thus we held our places, two unarmed men, for the Black Colonel had said in his letter that he would come weaponless, as he expected me to come, and a hose-dirk did not count, being, as I have said, in the first place, an ornament for a well-made leg, an Order of the Garter, to borrow an ancient title. We had met in the habiliments and disposition of peace, and if we were to close in strife it would not, I reasoned and hoped, be at our direct wish or bidding. Would it?

He must have been asking himself the same question, for he broke the silence in a changed voice which seemed doubly changed, because he had to keep it low, lest it should be overheard, and what he said was, "How comes all this, sir?"

"I don't know," I answered simply, naturally, truthfully, to his charge, for it was a charge in words and in directness.

"You don't," he went on, and I could not miss the tone which was like the growl of a dog, an ill-natured dog; not like that of my own little Scots terrier, Rob, whose bark is only meant to give himself confidence and never had the snap of biting in it.

"You don't!" repeated the Black Colonel. "I must believe you, though a suspicious man might read the signs otherwise. Still, why should you have kept the red-coats from their sleep this night and morn, in the castles of Braemar and Corgarff? There is no reason, for a talk between Highland gentlemen, if so we be, about a Highland lady, whose ladyship is beyond doubt, needed no garrison as audience. No, no, if the red-coats had been summoned to round-up some poor Jacobite devil, say myself, Captain Ian Gordon would have been with his men, as a soldier should, much as he might—and I put this to his credit—have disliked the mission."

It was idle for me to pretend any misunderstanding of the Black Colonel's meaning. He was taunting me with suspicions which he would not bring himself to believe, having a generous side to his nature, a state of mind that has inflicted much suffering on the human race, ever since the world began to go round. Mostly it occurs between men, for women are more elemental, more red in beak and claw, even when the claw is jewelled, which indeed may give it another

sharpness.

Could I blame him? Not to his face, at all events, because that would be to notice his challenge, to admit that it was not unnatural on his part. Events must be my guarantee, and if there were to be no more, well, let him say quickly why he had asked me very specially to meet him on an urgent private affair. Yes, although it were to have a casual ending, such as characterizes half the affairs of life.

Aye! good thinking, my friends, but our relations were cast in a sterner mould, and they were not to take the road of well-being. This became manifest when the now growing dawn lightly touched the eastern door of the Pass at its highest crag. The Black Colonel put his hand to his eyes, using them as you would a spy-glass, made a hawk-like sweep of the point I have indicated, and murmured harshly, "A red-coat, ah!"

Quickly he followed the wispy, growing light towards the western end of the Pass, and after another moment of hawkish searching growled: "A red-coat there also! It has been shrewdly arranged, this affair, Captain Gordon. My congratulations, for you have earned them well, as well, perhaps, as something else from me."

I said nothing, and indeed I was too full of surprise to think, except in a wondering fashion. It was only by an effort of attention that I heard the Black Colonel's further words, cursed out in a wrath not bred of any anxiety for himself, but, naturally enough, directed at me.

"So the moving picture declares itself, my dear, thoughtful kinsman," he hissed. "The red-coats from Braemar are at the western end of the Pass, those from Corgarff are at the eastern end, and the Black Colonel is within somewhere—isn't he?—keeping a private meeting with an officer in his Georgian Majesty's uniform, an officer and a gentleman! Shrewdly planned, as I say, shrewdly planned, and I suppose you want to intrigue me here until I cannot get away any more. Would you think of trying to hold me yourself, eh? It would be like your adventurous spirit? No!"

This was said with a rough sneer, and the Black Colonel made the sting sharper by adding, "You'll be thinking it an assured capture, with the ends of the Pass sealed by red-coats and its sides so steep that only those tough sheep over there can climb them."

"Truth," said I quickly, gaining my tongue, "will force you to eat those words, for I knew nothing of all this. It will be a bitter meal for you to digest, if I, by good chance, am there to assist you."

"A Highland welcome will be yours," quoth he arrogantly; "a welcome as warm as if I were to bring my riding whip round your shoulders now."

His words, cracking as if they were a lash, stung me beyond endurance. I made a step to strike him, and we might have been at it, like common brawlers, only he saved us from that shame. He had been waiting with his left foot in the stirrup. When I drove at him he swung on to the back of Mack, who turned half round, as a spirited horse does in the process of being mounted. This threw his big body between us, but the Black Colonel leant down and said in my ear, "To our next meeting, my kinsman! May it be soon!"

Then he rode for an opening in the undergrowth which braided the lower slopes of the precipitous Pass, and I was left alone, a man all a-wonder, for events were growing beyond me, as they do when suddenly we find our whole personal fortune, even our spiritual destiny, put to the ordeal of the unexpected.

III.—Over the Hills of Home

How shall I tell, with proper restraint and yet efficiency, what followed the going of the Black Colonel on his black horse?

The Pass, wherein we had met so sharply, lies almost due east and due west. You would have a good idea of its appearance, if you were to suppose a hill twice as long from east to west as it is broad from north to south. Then imagine its length sliced in two, and each half, by force of dead weight, falling away from the other. Heather and whins had seeded on the sliced faces, and after them the hardy silver birch and the hardier green fir had sprung up. Nature makes coverings for the sores suffered by Mother Earth, as a dog licks a bruise until the hair grows again.

The strong Highland winds and the heavy Highland rains and snows had wrinkled the riven hill in a hundred ways. Its twin faces were warted with rocks, from which most of the soil had been washed away, leaving them as though

suspended in mid-air. Waters, draining from the higher hills, had run down those faces, making ribboned scores to the bottom. There had been constant falls of earth from above, and here and there a large tree had been thrown over the abyss, and, in that position, holding on by its roots, had taken a new lease of life.

Thanks then to Nature, working for long years, the twin, or rather the divorced hill-cheeks which, at their separation, were raw earth, now had a covering of undergrowth and overgrowth. It would be dead in the winter when the sap is down, budding in the spring when the sap rises, green in the summer when it has run into leafage, brown in the autumn when the storage roots begin to call their own back again.

A sort of rough road, worn by usage, as a short-cut for the folk of the region, ran on the level between the halves of the Pass. Big rocks fallen from above lay around, and I confusedly sat down beside one of these. It broke the snellish wind which had begun to blow with the first dawn, as it often does in those parts, a blast to the parting night and the coming day.

Presently a shot was fired from one end of the Pass and I could make no mistake as to the weapon used. It was the military flintlock, a clumsy gun, better suited to scare crows than shoot straight, but it was the best we had.

A warning, a signal for some purpose, I judged, because it was followed by what I can only describe as a waiting silence. You had the echoes of the shot scattering up the heights of the Pass, and then a tense feeling in the atmosphere, as if a hundred men expected an answer. It came, in another straggling shot, from the other end of the Pass.

Next there was solid evidence that what I heard had been a pre-arranged signal, to which a plan of campaign attached. At each end of the Pass I saw the red-coats multiply until they formed faint bunches of colour. Who, I wonder, first clothed the soldier man in scarlet, for an easier target he could not offer, even to an ill-shooting flint-lock. Scarlet and the pageantry of courts, scarlet and the capturing of women's hearts, but for the soldier himself, when he gets down to his trade, it is scarlet and death.

As I waited intently and looked, I could almost count, up on the brows of the Pass, how many red-coats the sentinels of our first alarm had grown into. They made dots, moving against the skyline, and, as I next made out, they were in

concert with other knots of scarlet, active at the end of the Pass below. I did not need to be a soldier of some instinct, which I hope I always have been, to grasp the order and purpose of those doings.

Clearly the plan was to search the bottom of the Pass and its northern top with men who would meet midway, two parties below, and two above. The Black Colonel could not, therefore, get away by the western end, which led to his habitual fastness up the valley of the Dee, for the door of escape was sealed. No hope could lie south, or east, because that would be to come out into open country where numbers would capture any fugitive. There was nothing but the northern side, no possibility of escape except up its stern face, and it was a forlorn possibility, alike on account of the terrible climb and because the red-coats were already there, shaping to cut off even an attempt in this direction.

What would the Black Colonel do? What was he doing? I wondered, and two thoughts came to me, one that as an animal pursued ever makes for home, if only to reach it and die, so a hunted man will do likewise, should there be the smallest prospect of success; the other that possibly it is the sounder doctrine to face great perils in getting clear, when you are sure of an open road and a place of refuge, rather than seek deliverance by an easier door and then land in unknown plights.

True strategy in any tight place, military or civil, is based on a knowledge of human nature, what the enemy will do. That entails the gift of imagination, and there was a touch of it in the disposition going on before my eyes. The knots of red on the bottom pathway drew together, and the red strings on the northern height were also approaching each other. They progressed warily, but I could see an occasional gleam of bare bayonets against the skyline, silhouetted by the trees.

Presently a rumble of displaced stones reached my ear from the other side of the Pass. My eye searched for the spot, halfway up, where the trees grew sparser and the hard, sharp rocks gained the dominance. Out from this streak of trees and rocks rode the Black Colonel on black Mack, and I gasped at his dare-devilry.

I understood instinctively that, by cautious pilotage, probably dismounting and leading his horse at places, he had managed, undiscovered, to get thus far up that northern cliff, for it was almost sheer. But he must next make the upper, still steeper half, with little shelter from the on-coming flint-locks, and the worst kind of footing for Mack. Could any horse foaled of a mare climb that crag and bear

his rider to safety, for this was the double, doubtful issue?

When, a moment later, the soldiers caught sight of the Black Colonel they halted in mute surprise, then shouted, as a dog barks on sight of a quarry, the killing instinct in man and beast finding tongue. It was instantly a gamble of the pursued and the pursuers, to escape or to capture, the keenest yet least noble game which can be played, that with a human life for the prize. The Black Colonel, a man with a bar-sinister, but a remarkable man, was the hunted, and two companies of King George's soldiers, decent fellows enough each man of them, were the hunters. The outcome depended chiefly on a horse, but such a horse, Mack!

The King's word had gone round the countryside that our rebel and canteran was to be taken alive or dead. That is a mandate which loses its dividing line when the guns begin to shoot. Therefore, while the soldiers shouted, on getting sight of the Black Colonel, they also began to fire wildly at him. The immediate range was too far for harm to hit him, but it would shorten swiftly enough. Realizing this, he stretched himself along his horse's neck, thus showing a smaller target, and, as I felt sure, whispering words of encouragement into the great creature's ear.

The tradition is that the Black Colonel used his dirk for spur on that ride, but I, who was a witness, know better. He did not need to use it, and would not have done so in any event, loving Mack as he did. His soft Gaelic whisper of bidding was his only spur, and up, up, slowly, yet surely, went the gallant animal. Ah! you should have seen it all. It was fine.

Mack's shapely, muscular body was stretched like whip-cord against the dull grey of the broken precipice. You could fancy you heard the very cracking of his sinews as he rose foot by foot. The reins lay on his neck, and I saw the Black Colonel slip oft the bridle, with its heavy iron bit, to give him the uttermost chance. The rivulet of stones which his hoofs had set going grew into a stream, telling me that, while ever he lost a little on the treacherous ground, he more than made it good with the next stride.

The sight so moved me that I nearly shouted in admiration and quite forgot the pursuers. The soldiers in the hollow of the Pass had met and were loading and shooting with a certain discipline. The Black Colonel's real danger, however, was not from this fusilade but from the intercepting soldiers at the top of the

Pass. Theirs had been a longer and rougher way to travel; would they, by the time he reached the summit, if reach it he did, be near enough to capture or shoot him?

Up, up, still panted the noble Mack, almost exhausted, until, with a final effort, he gained the last ridge and, oh, what a relief! His flanks heaved, his beautiful head dropped to the heather, and I could see that his forequarters had turned from black to a lather of white foam, testimony to the great strain of the climb. The Black Colonel sprang from the saddle, walked to the edge of the crag, took his dirk from his garter and put it to his lips. He was vowing the oath of a "broken" Highlander, to be revenged, or thanking Providence for his escape, perhaps both.

He did all this, as I could follow, in the grey morning light, coolly, nay disdainfully, seeming to regard the bullets from the converging sharp-shooters as just so many bees buzzing harmlessly about him. Next, he tightened the girth, which Mack's panting had loosened, bridled the horse again, vaulted lightly into the saddle, touched his bonnet in mock salutation, and rode over the hills for home.

There were those who saw a white horse go up the strath that morning with, as they swore, the Black Colonel for rider, though all knew the actual colour of Mack to be black. There were others who said it was Death on his White Horse, and because a man died in the same small hours those mongers of destiny were believed.

IV—The Opening Road

If this were a story invented, and not a tale of true happenings, there would be an end when the Black Colonel rode triumphantly from the Pass.

But, sitting alone and lonely a few days later in my room at Corgarff Castle, and reflecting on the affair, I said to myself that it was only the beginning. A drama of real life rarely closes with the hero in heroics, the heroine a-swoon in her beauty, and the world a-clap with admiration.

No doubt the Black Colonel had got away very well, almost as if he had leapt

through a lighted window, with a resounding crash of broken glass. Well, there would be the fragments to gather up, for the fragments have always to be remembered, or they may cause harm. Here I was a fragment, and I asked myself into what basket I was to be gathered, because, you should know, the hills give those of us who dwell among them a sense of fate—of the inevitable.

I was awakened from these thoughts by the entrance of my lieutenant, who said, "Still sighing that you were out of the chase after the Black Colonel?"

I answered vaguely, "A soldier who is a real soldier, which I may or may not be, is always sorry to miss an enterprise, whether it be duty or merely an adventure."

"Well," he remarked, "you had not been long gone when word came from Braemar Castle that the Black Colonel was to be in the Pass of Ballater about midnight, meeting some unknown person, and asking us to help capture him. We saw nothing of the other person, whether man or woman."

He looked slyly at me, and I remembered having said to him that I had had a tryst to keep among the hills. You must not, I think, mislead people by telling what is untrue, but you need not tell everything if it is going to make mischief. Mostly it is poor policy to try and ram the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, down a man's throat, because your version of it may not be his, and, anyhow, it makes dry eating.

My thoughts have a habit of wandering, of dreaming dreams, often when they should be otherwise occupied, and isn't there a bunch of manuscript verse somewhere in testimony of the same? Knowing this the lieutenant lighted and smoked a pipe of American tobacco, then a novelty and a luxury in the Scottish Highlands. With a wink of the eye he asked, "Who was she, captain? Wench or maid?" And he pronounced the words in different tones, as if I needed to be instructed about the difference he implied by them. A man says nothing to an arch-pleasantry like that, unless he be no man and only a babbler and boaster of his conquests. Then he has had none, and is a liar. No sort of fellow more fills men with contempt, and women, by their woman's instinct, pass him by, for any confidence whatever, in word or in deed.

"Don't let it be one of the Black Colonel's flames," said the lieutenant with a laugh, as he went out again, without the answer he had not expected, being himself a gentleman. "It needs a long spoon to sup with that dark devil at any

time, but come between him and his rustic gallantries and you'll need a longer spoon than Corgarff Castle happens to possess."

The Black Colonel and I, as you will have gathered, were on different sides in politics, though we belonged to neighbouring clans which had many associations; he a Farquharson, I a Gordon. He was Jock Farquharson of Inverey, the last of his house, as I can say looking back on him, and doomed, so a woman of second-sight had declared, when he was born, to be the last; while I, Ian Gordon, was a cadet of the Balmoral Gordons, captain in his Majesty's Highland Foot, with no more to expect than what my commission brought me, and that was little enough.

He was a Jacobite, keeping that rebel flame alive in the Aberdeenshire Highlands, when, on the heels of the "Forty-Five," a red and woeful time, we were half-heartedly scotching it with garrisons in the Castles of Braemar and Corgarff. Yes, I wore the scarlet tunic of King George, thanks to family circumstances which had woven themselves before I was born, but the tartan lay under it, next my heart. We were rivals in war, thrown on different sides by the fates which gamble so strangely with mere men. Was there to be a still more vital rivalry? As has been hinted, I had more than rumours of the Black Colonel's strange powers among women. What if he had Marget Forbes in his dark eye?

Wherever the heart is concerned you have intuition, and that is why a woman has more of such super-sense, or rather, I would say, of wonderously delicate feeling, than a man. She needs it, being oftener heart-strung, because the wells of her heart are more emotional.

I suspected, from the first, why the Black Colonel wanted to meet me, and for no other reason would I have consented to meet him. But our meeting had been so brief, so disturbed, so futile as regards its purpose, that I had got no light from him whatever. Still, ever since then I had been seeing, in the mirror of life, the face of Marget Forbes, a daughter of the clan whose name she bore, a handsome lass with a long pedigree, heiress to the lands of Corgarff, now forfeit for the Jacobite cause, when they should come back to her line, and incidentally, but all importantly, a kinswoman both of Jock Farquharson and myself.

Memory is rarely honest with us, because it is imperfect, and unconsciously we tell the best account of things, but I fancy I was wondering on this text when there came at my door the sharp rap of bony, hurried knuckles. "Enter!" I said,

and in marched the corporal of the guard. His hand went easily to the salute. He had a message in his face.

"What is it?" said I, for I expected nothing of moment, beyond a poor devil of a Jacobite captured, or a "sma' still" raided and its rude whisky drunk by the red-coat raiders until they were merrily "fou."

"Sir," he answered in the parade voice which the regular soldier soon acquires, this, softened by his nice Scots drawl, "Sir, there's a man outside an' he says he's a letter for you and that he maun gie it to yoursel'."

"What's he like? Where does he come from? Is he friend or no friend?"

"Canna' say, sir. I should think no friend. He's short and swack o' body, red of hair and face, wears a kilt o' Farquharson tartan, and winna' say where he comes frae. He has a letter for you, sir, and is to deliver it himself, an' that's a' he'll tell."

"Bring him in," I ordered, and in came, as, by now, I half expected, Red Murdo, the Black Colonel's henchman. I had seen him before, and by hearsay was more than familiar with his repute as an excellent servant to his not so excellent master.

"A letter," he whispered in his hoarse voice, as if he did not want the corporal to hear. I took the letter, and before I could even break the seal he was gone again, without motion of salute or further word, all quite in the Black Colonel's manner of doing things.

It was addressed "To Captain Ian Gordon," and when I opened the envelope and unfolded the contents I found them to commence with these same words and no other form of ceremony. I instantly knew the strong, irregular, aggressive and yet persuasive handwriting to be that of the Black Colonel, but unconsciously, as a girl tries at the end of a story to find whether happiness be there, I turned to the signature—"your kinsman, Jock Farquharson of Inverey." What went before, when I had time to master it, was this:

"These greetings, which I am inditing in the cold safety of the Colonel's Bed, a fastness where no enemy has yet tracked me, though all my true friends in the countryside know the secret roads to it, will be delivered to you by my faithful Red Murdo, who deserves blessings, whereas I sometimes give him curses; and their purpose is to tell you explicitly why I asked you to meet me in the Pass the

other evening, since events, on which I here offer no comment, made it impossible for us to have any plain, forthright talk.

"I'll reveal the heart of my business by recalling that there is a long association between our families, who have always been friends and enemies, and that the Corgarff Forbeses also come into this association, and continue it, in a fashion which takes me to our personal quarrel of Stuart and Guelph, because, by the exercise of a little ingenuity, such as is permissible, and a kinsmanship such as is proper, there may emerge good seasoning for us all.

"Pray remember that if the Corgarff Forbeses were to fail in issue, and there is only one life between them and that failure, the life of a young unmarried lady, I, by descent on the distaff side, which I need not outline in particularity, would be heir to the estates; only as a Jacobite outlawed, a broken man, I can inherit nothing, not even possess, little as it is now, my own in peace.

"But, if I am not ill-informed, and news travels among the hills as swiftly as, we are told, it travels in the desert, King George's advisers would gladly return the Corgarff estates to the Forbes family if that family had a strong man at its head and so such an influence as would keep the region, always a key to the Highlands, I will not exactly say in order for the German king, because that would be a tactless fashion of arranging, but wean it gradually from its sympathy for Prince Charlie, and his house of misadventure and ill-luck.

"Now, if you will be good enough to assume in me qualities for this mission and the willingness to undertake it; if you will accept the circumstance that it would merely be a case of a remote legal heir coming into his own by a round-about way; and if you will set those facts in what I consider the national importance of the matter and help it forward in a form so delicate and chivalrous that I must not even hint it, why, you will be rendering a potent service to the cause which enlists you and which might, who knows, enlist me also!"

That was the letter, considered in language, crafty in purpose, really, an overture for the hand of Marget Forbes, and I sat far into the night, while my peat fire died out in Corgarff Castle, wondering how I was to answer it, and, even more, how I myself stood towards the acute personal situation which it created. For I saw that the Black Colonel meant to make love and do business at the same stroke, not for the first time, perhaps, in his life of emprise; and certainly here was no new thing in the world's queer story.

V.—*A Cairn of Remembrance*

It is a good way, when you are in doubt, to wait and let events shape a decision, and this was how I came to regard the Black Colonel's letter.

He had set me a pretty puzzle in his written words, because, contrasted with the light touch-and-go of spoken words, these always seem to have something fateful in them, as of a king's signature to a decree. Moreover, I was vaguely conscious of being the guardian of a woman's instinct for safety, an instinct which arrives with the cradle and only goes with the grave, and that made me feel somewhat helpless; a man in depths he cannot fathom, for such is the uncharted sea of womanhood.

Marget Forbes and her mother lived in the Dower House, thrown to them, as a piece of bread might be tossed from a rich man's table, when Corgarff was declared forfeit and the castle occupied by soldiery. Her men-folk had been out with Charlie and had not come back from Culloden, as the Cairn of Remembrance on the hills might have told any seeker for them. Each clansman, as he departed, had put a stone to it, and none had returned to lift that stone again, so it became a tombstone.

They were dead for ever to Corgarff and to the lands which had been the property of their forbears, almost since time was in those blood-heathered Highlands. Families rose and fell, for family reasons, or as the clans to which they belonged prospered or had adversity. Thus vital changes in a corner of the Scottish Highlands, like this of ours, were more frequent than the historians, men apt to assess on surface generalities and neglectful of the hidden human wells, usually make out.

But, as the changes took place within what I may call the ring-fence of the clan system, they really only mattered to those who were directly concerned. Corgarff Castle, however, had been held by the same Forbes family in direct, unbroken line, partly because its successive chiefs had strong right arms, partly because the domain had little to make anybody else covetous. The Sabine women whom the old Romans took, would have been the beautiful ones, and it is the same with the face of Mother Earth. What appears best is taken first!

There was no great personal bitterness in the Aberdeenshire Highlands as between clans or families who were on different sides in the "Forty-Five." The

ambition, or the greed of chiefs, often determined the sides, and a consciousness of that made lesser men tolerant with each other. Thus, an acquaintanceship between Marget and her mother and myself, although begun under a certain stress of circumstance, passed naturally into friendship, and, on my part, into something warmer. We were of the same Celtic strain, and, in the heart and mind of upbringing, blood tells all the time. But I had not seen much of them, and nothing at all since the tale of the Black Colonel's escape in the Pass had set the countryside talking and, doubtless, secretly rejoicing.

It was a fine thing, a very fine thing, that he should have escaped from the red-coats so perfectly, so dramatically. They were the living tokens of a government which, on every ground of sentiment, was alien to the Highland people, a government, moreover, that had been tactless in its plans and its acts. The Black Colonel stood for a native royal cause which had colour and flair, even if its genius for government had been exhausted.

We soldiers were only disliked for what we represented, for the dry Hanoverian salt we ate, not for ourselves, because most of us were Highland by bone and heart. The Black Colonel was liked for what he represented, rather than for himself. He had, indeed, a way of commandeering other men's goods, when he needed them, that was inconvenient to those others. But there was a strong local pride in his name and achievements, as the name and achievements of a first-rate fighting man, whose sword-handle held in its silver-work the letter "S," standing for Stuart, an allegiance and a challenge never hidden by him.

Naturally, like every other Forbes, Farquharson, or Gordon—I omit none with those names—Marget would be quietly rejoicing over the Black Colonel's success in out-manoeuvring us. I say "us," although I was not in the pursuit, a fact, I reflected, which might relieve me a little of Marget's scorn if she knew. Did she know? Had gossip carried her that news also? It could not tell her that I was out of the chase after the Black Colonel, because I was meeting him privately, and that her affairs were the occasion of the meeting.

Of the dangers wrapped in all this, I was to have an inkling when I did meet Marget, and that came about as if it did not matter, as if nothing matters! I had been up the Don valley with a patrol, was returning, and scarce a mile from Corgarff Castle, when I saw a woman's figure ahead, going my road, a very soft and gracious sight, believe me, against the hill-side. Soon, thanks either to my eyes which could then see far, or to a man's feeling of instinct for the presence of

a woman who interests him, I discovered that it was Marget Forbes. She turned round, perhaps at the approaching sound of our steady tramp, or perhaps moved by some unconscious woman's sense, and, as my men passed on and I fell behind them, she said, "Ah, Captain Gordon, where have you been these many days? Chasing the Black Colonel, eh?"

It was said easily, with a half-smile, as if she were alluding to something which had happened since we last met, as, indeed, it had. It was good, however, that the light was failing, because I could feel my face burn, not with shame, but with a confusion in which there was more than the Black Colonel.

"Oh no, Mistress Marget," I answered, "one cannot always be in the company of the Black Colonel, however interesting some of us may find him." This, observe, was intended as a delicate touch for her, but it probably struck her as clumsy, so much finer is a woman's feeling than a man's.

"You found him interesting then," she merely replied. "I'm glad to hear that, because, as a distant relative of ours, he is really one of the men-folk of the family. Perhaps he has some of the nature which, so they say, characterizes our women? His Forbes grandmother or great-grandmother, whichever she was, would have passed it on to him."

She stopped when she noticed the sweet conceit into which she had fallen, for certainly what she had claimed in name of the Forbes women, was richly present in herself. She had sparkle, bloom, charm, that witching, elusive, mixed something in a woman which nobody can describe but which every true man feels, and she looked it all in the gloamin' of that perfect Highland evening.

"My dear Mistress Forbes," I said more formally, "I could forgive the Black Colonel much if I thought he had any of the qualities of your Forbes women-folk. As it is, I envy him your championship," at which she looked at me with considering eyes.

"A woman naturally champions all her men," she said with a deft smile for me, as being also a relation, "and it would be sad if she didn't; but I have never yet seen the Black Colonel. He has not come our way, although, no doubt, we should, for what has been, make him as welcome as your men, quartered in our old castle, might permit."

"Naturally! Why not?" I said, for I understand her feelings though, somehow, the

remark stung me a little. "Perhaps," I added, "you may have your wish gratified and meet him one of these days."

"Do you mean as a prisoner," she asked quickly.

"No. I mean that when the Black Colonel wants to call on anybody, he does not let danger or ceremony stand in his path. So far, I take it, there has been no occasion for you to make his personal acquaintance, and may that continue."

"Why should you say that? Whether he be good or ill, he is a picturesque figure, a stout fighter, a man who has stood up for his faith through thick and thin, and, moreover, one of us. I have heard the things that are said about him, things no woman cares to hear about a man, but to hear is not to believe, is it? Only," and Marget laughed quietly, "here am I defending a rank Jacobite to the Georgian commander of Corgarff Castle, whose business it is to lay that rank Jacobite by the heels—if he can!"

"Oh, we'll catch him some day," I lightly, rather wryly, observed, "but his luck does serve him well."

"There's often a reason for luck," answered she; "more in it than just luck. Now, if a company of soldiers went after a man of resource, like the Black Colonel, would their chance of catching him not be less if they had no captain leading them? A boyish lieutenant may have energetic qualities, but they are hardly likely to be a match for those of the Black Colonel."

We were getting on to ground perilous for me, because Marget had evidently heard something and was determined to test it at first hand. Behind the curiosity there seemed, judging by her tone, to be a fight going on between friendliness and pique. It is a dangerous mixture for a man to have to counteract in a woman, because, responding to the friendliness, he may make admissions which increase the pique.

Therefore I sought to give our talk a turn by saying, "Everybody seems to know everything there is to be known about the Black Colonel's escape, so there's an end of it—until next time."

"But, Captain Gordon, although one knows generally, one may still keep wondering—may one not? A woman always wonders; it is one of her privileges, and often wonder is kinder to her than certainty."

"Wonder, dear lady, is a hard thing to gratify, being illimitable, like . . . !

"Like the hills," she caught me up, "when one is alone among them—alone, or going to meet somebody in the dark of the night, or the dimness of early morning."

"It would depend on the somebody," I said boldly, facing her boldness, "and whether it was a man or a woman that was to be met."

"But," she said quite softly, "it must be a man that any other man would be meeting in these parts, because . . ." She stopped abruptly.

"Because what? Tell me!"

"Nothing; only that every man needs to be mothered by a woman, a charge which any good woman, young or old, will instinctively assume, even if she knows that it may be only a cross for her to bear." Her voice was low, almost a whisper, may be a first whisper of the mother of men in her, a revelation to all women, come it when it may; and that thought kept me silent.

We had, by this time, reached the Dower House, and she said "Good-night," and I answered, as simply, "Good-night."

What I really said to myself was, "Philandering, was I, instead of soldering, on the night the Black Colonel was raided—that's the story she's heard!"

And I was concerned, strangely concerned—like Marget herself.

VI—The Finger of Fate

Here I was in a double tangle of private affairs, for I had the Black Colonel's designs upon Marget Forbes to handle, and I had her mistaken notion of my doings to disperse. It was a drumly outlook for one whose chief equipment was honesty of purpose, with, I am afraid, little of the arts of human diplomacy.

Marget had all the woman's acute anxiety when a man's act seemed hidden, or, at least, uncertain, even if he was no more to her than a kinsman. It is from those

delicate things that half our troubles spring, because, as between man and woman, they cannot be explained in words. They must be left to reveal themselves, and meanwhile they may destroy sweet possibilities or gracious relationships.

My difficulty with the Black Colonel was still more complicated, for it was as if a hair-rope of many strands, such as the Highlanders made, enwound us. We were public enemies, sworn to causes which could have no dealings with each other. Yet we had met secretly; and though that mattered little to him it might easily ruin me, or, at all events, my military career.

But, may be, I could remove that danger by a simple report to my superiors saying what had happened. Could I? No; I could not, for a woman's reputation was, all unknown to her, engaged in the affair, and that takes us directly to Marget Forbes and the Black Colonel's designs upon her name and estates.

I knew he would not stop at the sending to me of his letter, and getting no immediate answer, which was the course I had taken, if only because his last throw with affairs was involved. Therefore I looked for some further act, and, having regard to the difficulty of personal meetings, and his amiable weakness for writing, as something in which he excelled, I was not surprised when it came in the form of another dispatch, also borne secretly by the vagrant Red Murdo.

We actually had an old clanish knowledge of each other, this fellow and I, because, although he was a Farquharson, the croft on which his people dwelt was near the Gordon estate of Balmoral. We had played with each other as boys, for the feudal system of the clans was communal and democratic. It was, to take one illustration, customary for the sons of chiefs to have foster-brothers adopted from the commonalty, companions in peace time, comrades and defenders in war time.

When then, Red Murdo, who had been lurking in a peat-moss near Corgarff Castle, surprised me, out-of-doors, one day, it was with the friendly salutation, "Good-morning, Captain Ian."

"Hullo," I said, "isn't it dangerous for you to be here again?"

"Not when it's to see you, but I wis gettin' weary waitin' in this damp hole, an' the Cornel, he'll be wonderin' why I'm no' back."

"Well, my friend," said I coldly; "I won't keep you from him."

"But, I've a word to say to ye for him, and something to gie ye. I'm to say that he expects to hear from ye in satisfaction of his letter. But if you need remindin', will ye study, as conveyin' his feelin's and intents, a plain copy, made by him, which I've carried in my sporran, of my Earl Mar's known epistle to the first Jock Forbes of Inverernan, near by Corgarff."

With this mysterious message haltingly said, as if the Black Colonel had drilled it into his man, which was, no doubt, the truth. Red Murdo held me out a crumpled sheet of paper.

"Tak' it, sir," he added, "an', as advice from a humble man who wishes ye no ill, obleege the Black Cornel if you can, or he'll be tryin' other means. You an' I ken him, Captain, ken him weel, I'm thinkin', an' it disna' dae to neglect him, as I've found mysel' at various times."

It was a famous and familiar document with which I had been served, or, rather, with a fair copy of it, in the Black Colonel's best round-hand; but its use by him to convey his sentiments and intentions to me was quaintly original. Here was he, framing himself in the words of urgency and high consequence, which the Earl of Mar, when that nobleman was raising the "Standard on the Braes o' Mar," flung, like a fiery cross, at Jock Forbes of Inverernan. You will perceive the lordly egotism of the Black Colonel when I give you the missive, as I read it myself, with its new, intimate and individual bearing, immediately Red Murdo had disappeared.

"Jock," it opened, "ye was right not to come with the hundred men ye sent up tonight, when I expected four times that number. It is a pretty thing, when all the Highlands of Scotland are now rising upon the King and the country's account, as I have accounts from them since they were with me, and the gentlemen of the neighbouring homelands expecting us down to join them, that my men should only be refractory.

"Is not this the thing we are about which they have been wishing these twenty-six years? And now, when it is come, and the King and the country's cause is at stake, will they for ever sit still and see all perish? I have used gentle means too long and shall be forced to put other means into execution.

"I have sent you, enclosed, an order for the Lordship of Kildrummy, which you

are immediately to intimate to all my vassals; if they give ready obedience it will make some amends, and, if not, you may tell them from me that it will not be in my power to save them—were I willing?—from being treated as enemies by those who are ready soon to join me; and they may depend on it that I will be the first to propose and order their being so.

"Particularly let my own tenants in Kildrummy know that if they come not forth with their best arms, that I will send a party immediately to burn what they shall miss taking from them. And they may believe this only a threat, but by all that's sacred, I'll put it into execution, that it may be an example to others.

"You are to tell the gentlemen that I'll expect them in their best accoutrements, on horseback, and no excuse to be accepted of. Go about this with diligence, and come yourself and let me know your having done so. All this is not only as ye will be answerable to me, but to your King and country."

Straight writing enough! And that was why the Black Colonel had sent me the historic epistle, laughing in his sleeve, I had no doubt, at the slim originality of his method. He was for gentle means, if he could so win his ends and Marget, but if they answered not, then, like my Lord Mar with Jock Forbes of Inverernan, he would be "forced to put other means into execution." While I was the immediate target for his threat, I quite saw that the Black Colonel was aiming at a larger prize behind me.

But what could he, a "broken man," a fugitive from justice, the justice of the Hanoverian though it was, do to compel anybody to his schemes and ambitions? That was to forget his place of notoriety, which gave its own power, among the people of the Aberdeenshire Highlands. Whenever, in going about the hills and the valleys, I met a simple man of the soil he would touch his bonnet in salute to me, never to my uniform, and, after a little, remark in his soft Gaelic, "So the Black Colonel is still defying you all—a tremendous lad, isn't he?" This would be said with a gleam in the eye, to give it delicacy, a bearing of personal courtesy which I did not miss because I was liked for myself, and we all like to be liked for ourselves.

You will apprehend by now, perhaps, that I knew my Highland men, whether I found them digging peats in the moss, or gathering in their skimp harvest of unopened corn, so that it should escape the hungry grouse and the coming winter. They were wholly kindly, as follows from simple living, generous in their

narrow outlook, and yet strongly individual. They had, as a people, character, which is the noblest gift of the gods, for everything else depends on it, and hardly anything can be achieved without it.

They took a pride in the Black Colonel, as one of themselves, and in his deeds as a fighter who, on many occasions, had reversed the saying about being willing to wound but afraid to strike. He had, they admitted, wrong ways at times, and if these could not openly be defended, still they were almost forgiven a man with his back to the wall where a shot, or a stab, might find him any day or any night.

Withal, too, he bore about him a touch of romance, a gallant atmosphere, and your Highlander, loving to sit on a stile and look at the sun, will pardon much for that. Thus there was a general sympathy with the Black Colonel, which he could draw upon either as a veil to conceal his doings, or for active help, and it was this knowledge which caused me to be apprehensive.

For, though thirty years had passed since his lordship of Mar peremptorily wrote to the chief of Inverernan, our Highland life had not changed vitally. The same rude passion ran through it, as like mists hung over the Slock of Morvan and the gaping chasm in the side of Lochnagar. Civilization remained primitive, love and hatred could run high on the ebbing Jacobite tide, and the common round was still very much what a strong hand could do and a weak one could not do. Affections and hatreds bloom even more strongly in times of ordeal than in times of tranquillity, perhaps because the moral reins governing them have grown worn, and so become slacker.

It should be said, however, of the Scottish Highlands, that the chiefs, at least, those of the northern ridge of the Grampians, were humane in their doings, even kindly, and certainly they were never fond of taking a clansman's life on the gallows-tree. Their whole code was against that ignoble death, unless when an enemy had played them unfair, or a vassal had proved himself traitor, and then they swiftly slipped a life to the other world, holding this world to have no use for it.

Possibly, too, they found the sight of a corpse dangling from a tree uncanny, a vision armed with threats which made them hold their hangman's hand, for, while crafty enough, they were superstitious to a degree. They let the gallows-tree stand grim and expectant on the hill-side, a terror to foes and a clan discipline, and, when necessary, found a way to their desires by the short dirk or

the long sword.

Moreover, at the time of my writing, we were between the immediate butchery of Culloden, a red and rueful business, and the insecurity of tenure in life and home, which was to follow. It was a rough marking of time, when national elements were in the mill, as well as those which go to the chronicle of the Black Colonel, Marget Forbes, and myself.

Here was I, on the edge of such happenings as assail one when he finds subtle intrigue on the one side and innocent misunderstanding on the other. It is always hard enough to manage such elements, but let them get out of hand and a miracle is needed for salvation. Also you have to find the miracle, and I composed myself to search for it in the little things, the natural things of the situation. They have a knack of conducting you to the heart of a problem, if you will only have simple faith and follow them, and be not otherwise, which is presumption.

Faith and miracles go hand in hand, in story as in fact, and when one's mind, working rapidly, if unconsciously, has got an issue down to a point where it can be expressed in a word, a decision has been taken. If it be a human decision, the hills, which grow strangely mothering and kind to their people, seem to know it, for they talk to each other of everything but their own secrets; and they knew that I had decided upon my course of action.

VII.—A Parley and a Surprise

You must ride with fortune if you expect to win many of her favours. Like a woman, she sighs to be courted, even if she fears to be captured. She likes adventures for themselves, and may be good to you if you give her some. But the man who lets her ride by alone, or with somebody who has already bridled her, and then goes out in pursuit, has a long chase before him.

My affair with the Black Colonel was both private and public, and thus, in a two-fold sense, the right policy was to take the offensive. Yes, I would tell him bluntly that there could be nothing between us on the matters he had raised, and that it was war to the dirk, with such an eventual issue as God might will.

This was my decision, and it seemed to me that, as an officer and a gentleman, I

must intimate it to him at first-hand by invading his retreat, the Colonel's Bed, over there in Strathdee, near his Inverey. Singly, and alone, I would seek the Black Colonel in his den, honourably shake myself clear of his dark overtures, and tell him to cease his designs.

If I were to read this chronicle as remote from its occurrences as you may do, I should, probably, toss my head and call that a quixotic decision, but I have enough pride in being a Gordon, to wish that I may stand fairly with the future, in small as in great matters. Therefore, I beg you that you put yourself in my place, bearing in mind the difficult conditions of the time in the Scottish Highlands.

A man needs a stout heart, a clear head, and a sure hand, to hold his own in a welter of interests and antagonisms such as beset me. The eternal instinct in a full man is to get through, to achieve, to live, aye, and to love, thus making life a great, clamorous thing not a mere existence. So concluding, I took the first occasion by the hand, with what personal risk there might be, and made across the rugged bridge of mountain which both binds and divides the Don and the Dee, to interview the Black Colonel.

My mood was less heroic by the time I had done the miles of scarped hill, clinging moor, and lifting wood, with bridle-paths for roads, which took me to the locality of the Colonel's Bed. Where it was exactly I did not know, but he had friends around who kept him informed, and I counted on meeting one of them. Then I could send a message to him, saying I desired to speak with him privately, and he would guess the rest.

Things fell out like that, and I was bidden to rest in a Highland shieling, squat of form, thatched with rushes, floored with earth, and eat a bannock and drink a bowl of goat's milk, while my message went forward and an answer returned. Perhaps two hours passed, and I slept a little, for I was tired, before that answer did arrive by the eternal Red Murdo.

To be sure, I would be made welcome by his master, but I must not feel offended if I was blindfolded during the walk to the Colonel's Bed. This request, courteously put by Red Murdo, showed me the situation I had invited for myself, but, having gone so far, I was not to turn back, and I said, "Very well." He tied a coarse tartan scarf of home-spun wool, which he wore himself, tightly round my eyes, so tightly that at first it hurt a little, and we started for our destination.

We had a rough, difficult track, all up and down again, to follow, as my feet discovered, with no sight to guide them. But Red Murdo, a study in loyalty to his chief and in consideration for me, supported me sturdily, and I broke no shin on the many rocks strewing our road.

I was wondering if we should ever arrive, when I heard the rush of a stream almost beneath us. Instinctively I stopped, as one does when an unseen danger is near, but Red Murdo said, "It's a' right; we're near there." Next I felt as if I were walking in a cave, for there was a peculiar hollow echo to our tread. Then the tartan scarf was removed from my eyes, and, opening them, I saw the Black Colonel holding out his hand.

"Glad, Sir Visitor, to see you," he said, "and such hospitality as this poor place can offer is yours."

I took his hand, without holding it, bowed stiffly, and sat myself on a chair made of birch branches, to which he pointed. It was, apart from an equally rude litter-bed and a rough table, the only furniture in the refuge. This I saw by the light of a fire of broken wood and peat which burned slowly in a corner, where, apparently, the smoke found some channel of escape, because it drifted slowly upward in spirals.

My feeling had been right, for this was a cave, or, rather, a tunnel, worn in the course of centuries by the stream which had now deserted it, to flow lower down. Above us, as I judged, rose the side of a small hill, and immediately without there would be a sheer drop to the departed waters, whose noise soughed like a strong wind among pine trees.

It was a retreat made by Nature in her chance moods, and used by the Black Colonel at that straitened time of his life. Probably only he, Red Murdo, and a few others actually knew he was there, though he had boasted that many did, and I should know no more than that I had been a visitor to the Colonel's Bed. And yet I should probably know a good deal more, for otherwise why was I there?

Anyhow, after the previous hour or two of tensity, it was a relief to be face to face with my man, I able to read his, if I could, he able to read mine. It was only in the grey half-light of his hole in the rocks, but, at least, we should look each other in the eyes, as men wish to do when they are acting honestly towards each other, even if later they must fight.

You are quick, at a drawn moment, to seize the picture of a man, to sound his being, and the Black Colonel, as he stood there courteously attentive, intelligently alert, made a picture which vouchsafed a clear personality. He would have been something ripely over thirty, but ten years of adventure and philandering sat lightly on him, and he looked even younger than he was. A dark man keeps the freshness of youth well, until it begins to go in the greying of his hair, when it goes quickly; while a fair man grows middle-aged soon, but fends off old age well, or, at all events, the look of it.

The Black Colonel was dark entirely; dark of skin, or rather olive, as you find men and women among a Celtic people; dark of eye to the point of a scowl, behind which, however, there was a well of mirth; dark of hair and dark of beard. His hair he wore long, not being always within reach of scissors, and his beard had that silky texture which comes of never having known a razor.

Once, as the story went, he asked Red Murdo, so-called for sundry reasons besides his tousled red hair, to shave him with the sharp edge of a dirk. The experiment began so ill that it never actually began at all, and the Black Colonel had a virgin beard in which he took a due conceit—why not? He thought it manly, where, perhaps he was right, and he had learned in France that women thought it manly, so he was doubly right.

The Celts, wherever found, are not generally tall, and the Black Colonel was a pure Celt in body as well as in nature. He was upstanding, bore himself easily, was clean in line and tough of frame. True, he was long of the leg, among a people who, having to climb and descend hills constantly, are, in the providence of fitness, short-legged, but he was all of a part. The kilt tests a man's figure, bringing out any flaw in it, and the Black Colonel's stood the test admirably.

Moreover, he had that physical quality peculiar to the Celt which you might call elasticity, for it is comparable to a mountain ash which bends but does not break. There was, too, a fineness, a delicacy about him, such as proclaims a race which has dreamt dreams and lived with the wild glories of Nature. You cannot make common men of her gentlemen, and her women are music to the French chanson, "It's love that makes the world go round."

None knew this better than the Black Colonel, a Highlander with that venturing air which goes to a woman's heart, because she fondly wants a man who will give her the gamble of danger, and yet be strong enough to save her from herself? You might say that he was born for quest and conquest, what with his suavity of tongue, his grace of manner, his roguery of eye, and his fame as a great lover.

But I was keeping him waiting and I had no desire to do that, so I said, "You may suppose that I am not here very willingly, that it is only duty which brings me."

"Not official duty, I hope," he answered, with an acid emphasis on the words.

"No; I simply want, as between Highland gentlemen, to tell you two things: first, that I return you, point blank, your overtures touching our kinswoman, Marget Forbes, and her estate; and, second, this being done, that I, as an officer of his Majesty's forces, will unrelentingly discharge my commission, as best I can, next time we meet, be it soon or not so soon."

I fired out the words as if I had been loaded with them, which, truly, was the case, but I felt, somehow, as if the shot had not gone home. It had no outward effect on the Black Colonel, who turned the peat ashes of the fire with his brogued foot, and looked at the little spits of smoke and flame which flew up. Evidently he was not so unprepared for my ultimatum as I had expected, but I had delivered it, and the rest was for him.

"Captain Gordon," he said, putting his hands behind his back and looking hard at me, "I appreciate the sense of personal honour which has brought you here. You felt you must clean the private slate between us, before you were free to write what is to be on the public slate. You wanted to give due declaration of war, and you have done it at close quarters, which is the action of a Highland gentleman. But, Captain Gordon, haven't you begun at the end of the story, instead of at the beginning?"

"I am only concerned with the end of the story, although I have probably been foolish in thinking that I must myself bring you news of it."

"No honourable action is ever lost," he rejoined; "and, however events go, I'll always put this to your credit in the account between us."

"Thank you," said I, laconically, and he moved as if my tone had stung him, which I did not intend, because even in a war parley one may be correct—courteous.

"What I wished to say," he went on, "is this: isn't there a way out of our affairs which shall be creditable to you, nay, to us both, and, at the same time, be in the public interest? Can't this private relationship into which we have drifted, thanks to circumstances, be so managed that it shall be fair to you as a soldier of King George, as well as relieve me from my difficulties?"

"Surely, Jock Farquharson," I protested with warmth, "you forget your place when you, an outlaw by decree, the doer, by admission, of many wrongs, presume to make terms with a King's officer, even in his private capacity."

"Strong words, my young friend," and he laughed in an airy tone that stung me; "strong words don't belong to youth, but to the years when the blood grows sour. You say outlaw! Why, yes and no; I am a loyal subject of the King—the King over the water! You say I'm a cateran! Well, I do no more than tax my enemies for what I need, and I need little, holding as I do by the simple life, especially as no other is open to me."

"This," I said stiffly, "is neither the rendezvous nor the time for high-flown sentiments, especially if they have no sincerity."

"That," he added, "would be a windy business, and here the die is far too serious to be played with, anyhow for me. Let us get down to the humanities, which are the final element in solving a problem or leaving it unsolved. There need be no personal bitterness between us; merely we are in antagonism in politics and war, for the two count together just now."

"You are unusually modest to eliminate yourself like that," I cut in, thinking of the Black Colonel's record, but only striking his Highland pride.

"If it so please me," he said almost angrily, "I can afford to be modest, for I have done things. I come of good blood; I bear a name which is old among the hills; I have carved my way to a colonelcy under the Stuart flag, where promotion, like kissing, has often gone by favour, yet sometimes by merit. The Prince himself, when he gave me my rank, called me the Black Colonel in compliment to my beard, which nobody has ever singed. The Black Colonel I remained when the Stuart army melted in the bloody furrows of Culloden, and in truth I have, and

need not deny it, left my name in many quarters. I took it with me when I sought the safe retreat of my own corner of the Highlands, among friends, and I submit it with pride to you, Captain Ian Gordon."

He was aflame between wrath and egotism, and I was afraid the contagion might catch me, which was the least desirable thing, because there lies the road to a losing cause. But, next moment, he laughed and said, "No, no; temper beseems neither high nor low, being kitchen work. You are sensible enough, Captain Gordon, to let a full man have his talk, and I have not finished yet." He thought for a moment, as if he expected me to say something, but I only got up from my somewhat hard seat, as if preparing to go.

"Not yet," he said; "stay a little, because, since you are here, it would be a pity if anything remained unclear between us. I gather that you see no course for it but open war, that you refuse the road of solution which my proposal about the Forbes estate opens out. Might I ask why you are so unsympathetic to that idea, which would serve every interest?"

"I am," I declared hotly, "neither a matchmaker, especially for adventurers, nor a scheming politician, and on both grounds I decline to have anything to do with you. Your insistence compels me to speak with a plainness which I would rather have avoided, but you must blame yourself. It's a far cry to Loch Awe, and a farther cry to the pardon of the Black Colonel, but he thinks it might be contrived if he had Marget Forbes and her property for a trump card. A pretty scheme, but not one which my commission for King George instructs me to countenance."

Now I, in turn, had gone aflame, despite all my resolve to the contrary, but if I had spoken the name of Marget Forbes it was, I tried to reflect, as if it had no intimate meaning for me. That would have been to blunder doubly, because it would show me personally, nay, intimately, interested.

The Black Colonel had been silent, and, when I ceased talking, I noticed a strained, even a queer, look in his eye. Was he counting up some element of the game which, thus far, was unknown to me? For when the minds of men rub fiercely against each other, as ours had been doing, they speak quicker than words. A kind of communication springs up, vague of detail, but unfailing in its general import.

I was not surprised, therefore, when the Black Colonel put his hand within his coat and drew a paper from a pocket there. But I was surprised when he said, "I have something here which I owe to the favour of my friends in the south, and you will find that it bears upon our conversation." He unfolded the paper slowly, I seeing, as he did so, that it was an official paper, and then he handed it to me.

It was not easy to read, in the dim light of the Colonel's Bed, thanks to its crabbed orthography and its long formal phrasing, but gradually I made out its wording to be this:

"Greetings:

"Whereas, trusty and well-beloved councillors advise it in the interest of our cause in the Scottish Highlands, that influential gentlemen who have been Jacobite in sympathy, and even act, be won over to Our Settled Sovereignty;

"Therefore it is ordered that they shall, wherever possible, be installed in the headship of houses and estates kindred to them, which have been forfeit and estreated, all on strict condition of loyalty to Ourselves and our Crown for ever;

"And this wisely considered and, in our graciousness of heart, clement policy, shall, we instruct, apply to John Farquharson of Inverery, commonly called the Black Colonel, if, and when, he is able to implement its essence in reference to the Forbes estate of Corgarff in the far uplands of Aberdeenshire, where we wish to be loyally regarded by our subjects.

"In token of all which foregoing greetings and intimations on our part, herewith witness our royal signature.

"GEORGE REX."

"You understand?" said the Black Colonel, as I lifted my eyes from the document and handed it back to him.

I nodded, mechanically, for I was thinking—thinking chiefly of Marget and myself.

VIII.—The Conquering Hero

It is unbelievable how the sweet face of a lass, or her soft figure, with its air of passion song, will come between two men and make any great affairs of state dividing them, seem as nothing by comparison. The Black Colonel and I would hardly, as individuals, have quarrelled about Stuart and Guelph, knowing well the value which Stuart and Guelph would have put on us. But with Marget Forbes as prize it was another affair altogether, for, in her, a whole bouquet of calling qualities united.

Her heart, so far, was all in the open joy of living, though in the troublous times which surrounded her and her family, she found burden enough of sorrow. She was a flower of the heather, opening late, like it, but perhaps with the same red, rich bloom, for it was not hard to divine that elements of high possibility were enclosed in her young womanhood. It gave you, for all its simplicity, a sense of latent treasure, when it should fully open, even, it might be of surprise to herself.

Seventeen! they say, when girlhood is trembling, quivering on the portal of womanhood, a world of mysteries. But it is not half so dramatic as twenty-five, when a woman, if she be rightly healthy in mind and body, comes into woman's estate, feeling, desiring, some earlier, some later, but roughly then. Peril is there, as well as beauty, for then all the Margets in the wide world are pulling at the silky bonds of sex, thinking these will stretch and stretch, only to find, perhaps, that there is a strain at which they must break or surrender.

If the insurgency of newly-found womanhood can be fitly employed all is well, but remember that most women are, in thought, rebels for romance. Nature, too, runs fullest in the veins of those who live with her naturally, aloof from the veneer of society. Nature is lusty in Nature's lap, and she mothered our Corgarff without let or hindrance, in sun and in snow, Marget Forbes included.

You are to suppose a region far removed even from such a niggard commerce of life as there was then in the Scottish Highlands. It is sixty miles from the warming salt-wash of the sea, and has winds nearly as cold as those that blow from the Arctic. This is because it stands high, and is so bare of trees that they blow unbroken over its area. They catch you with their ice tang in them, untouched by long, sheltering woods, or soft, rolling dales, and they make your face tingle into red and white, the blushes of Mother Nature.

That is the winter, when the land is often covered with snow, and the little burns of the hills are frozen into snake-like icicles. If the picture is hard, it is nevertheless beautiful, looked out upon from the comfort of good clothes and a full stomach. It invites you to explore it, to follow that far track ending on the snow-line of Morven, or yon other, which dips and is lost in the riven sides of Lochnagar. The air sings through your lungs with the force of strong drink and makes you hearty. You feel monarch of all you survey, even if it be not worth having, which is the most stirring feeling a landscape can yield.

Nor would there be much to divide your monarchy; only a chimney, reeking blue into the grey sky, from a fire of peat, a few sheep, or some hardly [Transcriber's note: hardy?] cattle turned out in the height of the day to gather what scraps of food they might, a pair of wandering red deer at the same hard game of finding a living, or a hare, grown bluish-white for the winter-time, to resemble the friendly snow, scampering off before the snap of your foot on the heather. When the rigour of winter lies upon the land, men and women can do little but keep their beasts alive, and themselves sit round the fire, passing the slow time of day with what gossip may be made.

We froze within the old walls of Corgarff Castle, for they were time and weather worn. Gales had beaten them, snowstorms had driven at them, and rains had lashed them, until they were corrugated with furrows and hollows, like the face of an ancient man. It is curious how age, whether in a face or in a building, takes on the same milestones of hollow and hillock, to record the march of time and the dents in a soul.

But come the summer in Corgarff, and the far-flung ranges of hill lose their white severity and assume the kindlier mantle of sprouting heather and green grass; the ptarmigan flies back to its heights above the snow-line, content with the thin picking and the splendid peace which summer there provides; the red deer no more falls hungrily upon the lower pastures, with the roaring fight gone out of the stags and the hinds left bleating to their own company, like so many widowed women of the wild.

Instead, the thin sheep of the clansmen, each with its owner's brand to identify it, wander forth to the common grazings, glad that the bloom of living is on Nature again. That brings a panorama of scenery which lights the eye and braces the heart and mind, hills which run into mountains, mountains which run into the skies, all proclaiming the splendour of God.

Now, I have tried to tell you this, not very well, perhaps, because our surroundings in life have much to do with our actions, and the two sets of circumstance must be comprehended together, especially in a sparsely peopled countryside. You unconsciously take your dispositions from the atmosphere, and you cannot be certain always where you may either begin or end. Thus a simple Highland ball which we soldiers organized at Corgarff Castle, to while away a night, and be a token of friendliness towards our neighbours, developed a deep import in my true story.

It was natural for me to smooth and sweeten, as far as I could, the relations between those in formal authority whom I represented, and the local clan-folk. To that end I organized this dance in the ancient Castle, and made it known that anybody and everybody would be welcome. Any misgiving I had about the response, was balanced by my knowledge of the Highland fondness for dancing. It has been in the Celtic blood from the beginning of time; and gillie-callum, over the swords, the throbbing, squeezing, square reel, the sultry Highland Schottische, and the rest of the figures, will last until the last trump sounds the last morning.

You dance for the joy of life, if you are born in a land of the sun, and in a land of cold you dance for the joy which springs from warmth. It is a primal expression of feeling, and the Scottish Highlanders have always had beautiful dances, and danced them well; dances with the music of sex in them, though they might not admit it, or did not know it. Religion and dancing have often been the only things in their lives, apart from the common round of fighting and working, when they cared for work. Thus, my ball, though it might be an affair of the enemy, had a subtle call to the Highland blood, especially in the women.

My first invitation was to Marget Forbes and her mother, because, if I could only persuade them to be present everything would be well. Let the ladies of the ancient great house come, and there was no reason why the commonalty should stay away. The times had been sorrowful for mother and daughter, as the black they wore betokened, but, I wrote gently, "We must let the dead bury their dead, and try and build some bridge on which the living may meet."

So it was arranged that Marget, the young chieftainess of the Corgarff Forbeses, with her mother, should open the ball. This news was out a week before the event, and we soon learned that, as I had thought, we should have a good muster of guests. I took my soldier men entirely into my confidence, and they grew keen

to make the dance a success, being kindly fellows and open to softer adventures, as well as the other kind.

They were collectively to be hosts, and whoever crossed the doorstep on the night was to be received without prejudice and with all honour. Everybody should have what we could give to eat and drink, and when they set home again it would be from a warm welcome and a sincere good-bye. Ah! if I could only have foreseen one acceptance of that general invitation to the countryside; but I didn't, and how could I? Men are not gods in wisdom, and how dull life would be if they were; how dull especially for their women-folk who, thanks be, are not always angels, except of light, and even they know how to darken the radiance.

The famous night came, and in good time came also Marget and her mother, with their small group of servants from the Dower House. Our largest room, where the dance was to be, a sort of hall of the Castle, was filling with robust Highlanders in tartans, and with their women-folk in their best gowns. Personally I felt easy and happy when I shook Marget's hand, saying, "It is kind of you to help me, and perhaps between us we are doing good." Then I conducted her and her mother to seats on a low platform at the further end of the room and quietly ordered the dance to begin.

A brace of fiddlers, seated in a corner, were scraping their catgut into tune for the music, while, outside, a piper was playing a Highland gathering. The Scots bagpipes yield their real melody in the open air, and only then, and to me, from a little distance, they sounded loud and rarely that cold star-lit night. The piper's business was this overture, and presently, when it was completed, he would march in, as grand as you like, and pipe us the first reel, in which Marget, I had fondly thought, was to be my partner. Oh, everything was very well arranged, and nothing happened as had been arranged, which is, perhaps, the peculiarity of life, when we reflect on it as a perpetual drama.

Presently I heard a slight commotion, as if something had happened unexpectedly, and then the hoof of a horse stamping the ground. The sea of heads in the room, pulled by curiosity, bent towards the door, and I realized that some surprise was approaching.

At that moment the piper, a Forbes man, to whom the honour of playing had been given, struck up his reel and strode in upon us. He was big, broad, imposing, with his kilted figure, and he seemed to halt, in order that we might

admire him, for a good piper and a peacock are vain; but this was merely my fancy. What I saw, immediately following him, was no fancy but staggering truth; it was the Black Colonel!

Yes, the Black Colonel in full Highland regalia, bowing and nodding to the people about him, who courtesied back with an easy homage, for they knew him instantly; the Black Colonel as large as life, eminently pleased with himself, taking possession of the place and the occasion, as if he were a conquering hero coming into his own; the Black Colonel, Jock Farquharson of Inverey, a chief among the men of whom it has been written that:

"Brak loose and to the hills go they."

If I was stunned, the piper was not, for he walked up the room with a deliberation which the quick step of his tune did not warrant. Behind him paced the Black Colonel, and as he came nearer to myself and the ladies, I saw them turn as if to ask me whether this was in the programme. So far, the Black Colonel had not let his eyes catch ours. He gave himself to the crowd, as a well-graced actor gives himself to the house when it applauds him. He had the music on his side, too, for, at the platform, the piper stepped aside into a corner, still blowing hard, and this brought the Black Colonel full to the front, immediately beside us. Thereupon he slowly bent in salutation to Marget and her mother, while everybody watched and waited, wondering what was to happen now.

"Ladies," he said softly, but distinctly, "I hope that if to-night I have come unbidden by our friend, Captain Gordon, I am not unwelcome to you, aye, and even to him. We are all kins-folk, and I wished to manifest a kindly feeling by joining in this meeting. I also desired to make fuller acquaintance, than has hitherto been possible, with two kins-women who have suffered hardly in times which, let us hope from the promise of this gathering, are about to be forgotten. It would show my boldness forgiven if I might open the ball with Mistress Marget, for Captain Gordon, as host, will wish to conduct her mother."

Again the Black Colonel bowed, as if he were master of the situation, which, in fact, he fully appeared to be. Confident and gracious, he offered Marget his arm, and she took it mechanically, such being the force of suggestion, exercised by a strong man's mind, especially with many eyes looking on. Mechanically, also, I held out my arm to Marget's mother and, while our small world still wondered, I

found myself in a foursome reel with the Black Colonel. But he was Marget's partner!

He talked merrily to her when the drowning music would let him, even though she scarcely replied, being still in the custody of his surprise. He was out to please, and he undoubtedly was handsome, or, at all events, striking in his tartans, and he danced perfectly. Why deny it, even if it had not been patent to every onlooking, wondering eye? He made a mightily fine picture, and he knew it, though he did not spoil the picture by showing he knew it.

Marget was in a simple black gown with a ruffle of white French lace at her neck and a flush in her cheeks. Her black hair was twined naturally about her head, which she carried high, so I told myself, as if in defiance of the Black Colonel, while she had to be his partner and prisoner. She glanced at me once or twice with an amused twinkle in her eye, thinking, I suppose, of her bold capture from the host of the evening, my unlucky self. Some women are a blessing, others keep you guessing, somebody will say, and Marget, I judged, even in the whirl of that reel, could be both, if she cared to try.

Quicker time the music made it, many a foot keeping stroke, and quicker time we had to make it. You know the romp of a Highland reel at the double, how it causes the blood to sing in the veins and the feet to jig. Marget's mother had been a fine dancer, but, as she whispered to me, she was no longer young. Marget herself had inherited all her mother's ease and grace of carriage, and she had her own spirit and go. The music and the motion caught her into forgetfulness of everything else, and she danced with a grace and a swing which were bewitching.

She had, again I was bound to admit, a complete dancing partner in the Black Colonel, a fellow of natural and acquired accomplishments. He had his clean ankles and elegant uprightness from his Highland forbears, and he had got his polish of deportment when he was among the English Jacobites in France. The result was that he danced all of a piece, with as near the poetry of movement as a man might attain, and then there was the intimate, intriguing ripple of his tartans.

Myself, I was quite a good dancer, but, if I may be my own apologist, not so showy a dancer as the Black Colonel. While I could hold my own with most men in the Highland dances, probably surpass many, I could not fill a dancing floor as he did, with his natural air of drama. A woman who herself dances well, sighs

for a fit partner, but give her in that partner a personality drawing a general homage to them both, and she is twice blessed. After all, she is a woman, with the woman's prayer for attention, for being, once in a way, the centre of a picture, as she is on her wedding day, the Day of Promise, whatever follows.

An early episode in the life of the Black Colonel had associated him with the rollicking "Reel O'Tulloch," a dance originated in Strathdee. His people had gone to church, so went the tale, but, the weather being wintry, no parson arrived. Seeking warmth, they began to blow on their hands, then to shuffle with their feet on the floor, and presently, when somebody fetched a fiddler, this broke into a reel. A bottle with inspiration in it was brought from the change-house near by, and faster went the music and faster grew the fun.

When young Jock Farquharson, hearing of this, came on the scene, the "Reel O'Tulloch" was being danced "ower the kirk and ower the kirk," and voices cried:

"John, come kiss me now,
John, come kiss me now,
John, come kiss me by and by
And mak' nae mair adow."

One of the guests at our later, different dance, in Corgarff Castle, must have remembered this, for suddenly there was a sort of "soughing" of the song, then a singing of it, and it was positively roared out by the assembly when the music stopped and the dance ended. I understood the application and the invitation which were intended, and I caught a look in Marget's flushed face, as if she also understood. Her mother glanced at the roystering singers, then at the Black Colonel and, with an apology for leaving me, went and stood beside her daughter, the mothering instinct of protection called into action.

"Thank you, Mistress Marget," I heard Jock Farquharson say, in his most melodious tone, "you have been kind to me, and I will hope to thank you again. And thank you, Madame," he said, bowing low to her mother, "for letting me lift my head to-night, as it has not been lifted for long. I shall not forget to be grateful and, I hope, to deserve your good-will."

Then he made me, the official host, a last, low bow with a mockery, subtle but noticeable, in it, walked down the room, saluting and being saluted on every

side, and was gone. Our friendly ball, from which I had expected so much, died away to the clink of Mack's galloping hoofs, an unsettling rhythm.

IX.—'Twixt Night and Morn

They declare that if you are drowning, or otherwise at the crack o' doom, your whole life's record leaps through your mind in an instant. It may be so, Providence giving a man, however his balance-sheet stands, a last chance to square it fair and well.

Everybody being gone home, and I being alone, after our dizzy ball, I felt that I had to count up the position. It needed no effort to understand that the Black Colonel's purpose in invading me had been to meet Marget and her mother, to impress himself upon them, all in the interest of his designs. He had relied for safety upon the temporary state of neutrality which the ball carried with it, and he had come, he had seen, he had—what? So far my thoughts convoyed me. But my little room in the castle with its cell-like windows, its low ceiling, even, I would add, its sense of plain refinement, worried me, and I went out into the night and the spaciousness of earth and heaven. Oh, for freedom to breathe and think, and oh for it at that witching time when night and day hold their bridal of mating among the Highland hills.

It was the hour, in our altitudes, at which night sleeps her heaviest, as if to snatch the last wink from the breaking morn. Nature was superbly at rest, sloughing the worn trappings of yesterday, preparing the shining armour of the morrow. It was the hour of creation, the wonder-coming of a child into the world, magnified beyond imagining, a tender life, very, very beautiful. It cried to my soul, seeking the humblest companionship for its own great soul, playing upon mine with a touch of incomparable delicacy.

And yet, yet, the chief feeling was almost that of a paganism, of an earth-smell and an earth-worship, of a giant awakening from torpor, ravenous with hunger. It was all the grand savagery, the terrible strength of Mother Earth, the Great Protector, from whose loins I had sprung, but who is unspeakably awesome until you see her face in the rising sun. Then the nightmare of the darkness which empalls her with a cold sense of death, turns into a radiance as of gold and kindness.

Ah! it was worth while to be abroad among the heather and the fir-trees at dawn, for the virgin world, the pagan, freed from cerements and found in the twilight to be a god, was all my own, mine to enjoy. I think I know why primitive man, when he lived in lands where Nature was wild and the nights were long, was a resolute pagan. No light, no warmth of its torch, had he to set the fire of reverence in him burning, and reverence is the footstool of belief in God. I think I also know why the other primitive man of the south, dwelling in a land of the sun, would be a sun-worshipper: because it gave him reverence and drew it from him.

We fear endless things when it is dark, the stoutest-hearted of us, but, in the geniality of a shining sun, we have courage. The picture, in ancient Greek legend, of husband and wife, one of them about to die, taking a long farewell as the dipping sun-rays gilt Olympus at its highest peaks, has often seemed to me a fine linking of the night of paganism and the morn of sunlit faith.

Odd thoughts to run in a man's head as he walked the dew-damp heather, careless which track he took, conscious only that he sought a new morning. But you do think strange thoughts if you have in you any of the dreamy Celt and have been born and nurtured in the cradle of the hills. They infect you, I will not say with second sight, though there have been proved instances, but with their own moods, like a soft-falling foot, which, in our spiritual pilgrimage, is the Foot of Fate.

My step lightly touched the heather, but, even so, my way was marked by a disturbance of the birds and animals of the wild. A grouse ran with a flutter and took wing with a cry, half in protest at being wakened from its sleep, half in alarm at my presence. A rabbit rushed from a sheltering hole in such a hurry that, as I could tell by its clatter among the bracken, it nearly fell over itself, as rabbits clumsily do, making fluffy, woolly balls of themselves.

When there is danger about, Nature gives all her children of the open a chance to escape by instantly warning them, and, in this, alarming their instinct. My particular rabbit had scarcely run out of hearing when half a dozen others were scurrying hither and thither in the same expectant confusion. Poor little things! What a fluster they made, and their scare communicated itself to a crow in a solitary fir-tree, against which I nearly collided. He croaked, flapped his wings and sailed off heavily, blackly, also anxious for safety.

Now, by the sheer exercise of walking, I had spent my restlessness, and the hill air had driven the blood from my head. Moreover, I grew tired, for the road tells when you have to pick your steps in the dark, over rough ground. So, coming upon a fir-tree root, I made a seat of it, and waited for night to fully turn into day, a transformation which came swiftly.

We have all seen the first flicker of a piece of tinder, fired by a beaten flint. It is like something come, only to go again, but presently it passes into a stronger flame, and then into light. This is the awakening of a Highland day, when the conditions resemble those of that morning.

The heavy pall of clouds, lying low over the hills, seemed to take motion, for trifling rents appeared in them. The rents grew bigger, and then the stars, which had been shining all the time in the welkin above, began to look through those peep-holes. It was the sun setting to work upon the earth once more, our side of the globe returning to his rays and warmth.

Slowly I looked about me, like one roused from a half-dream, seeing the near things first, and, as the dawn grew, ranging for the far things. Beneath me lay a glen pavilioned in the splendour of the rising sun, and gilded with the praise of the hills. Browns and reds and greens swam before my eyes into a radiant landscape, along which flowed the water of Don, a ribbon of silver, whose surface the fat trout would presently be breaking. Beside it wandered the road, on which, presently, to my astonishment, I made out two figures. Who could they be, there, at that time?

When I left Corgarff Castle I had, out of habit, slung my spyglass over my shoulder, and I set it towards the men. One was in the tartan of my own regiment, the other in a tartan of darkish green with a red stripe in it, like the Farquharson tartan. I made out, by their actions, that they were quarrelling, so I started for them, and who do you think I found? My own sergeant and the Black Colonel's Red Murdo.

"What are you men doing and how are you here?" I asked abruptly, for I was breathless, as well as surprised and angry.

The sergeant's answer was a salute, for he had not time to speak before Red Murdo was launched on a torrent of indignant words. He had, he said, come over to the ball in attendance on the Black Colonel, as I might know. He intended to

depart with him, but had taken more of my hospitality—stout fellow!—than he could carry, which delayed his departure. Some of my men had old scores against him, old crows to pick with him, particularly this sergeant, who, therefore, had followed him, determined to have the quarrel out: "While I," quoth Red Murdo, "only want to go quietly home."

"What's the quarrel?" I demanded of the sergeant.

"Well," he replied quaintly, "it does na' matter what it is, tho' he kens, as lang's we settle who's the better man. He's up to every dodge, but there's no room for that wi' only the twa o's here."

"And what were you doing when I arrived? What was about to happen?" I asked.

"We were jist arguin' which was the better man," declared the sergeant, "and I was na' goin' to leave it at that. A deceesion for me; he beggit to be let awa'!"

"Beggit!" broke in Red Murdo; "beggit anything from you, my man! Na, na; I was beggin' you to return to Corgarff Castle in case something happen't to you. You wid'na', as I tell ye, be the first red-coat on whose hide I had left a mark. But I was forbearin', because I did na' want trouble to follow Captain Ian's kindness in askin' us to the ball last evening."

Red Murdo glanced at me, as if he expected me to side with him, but my thoughts were not yet for words. You can best hold a judicial air when you say little, give no reasons, and here I had to be judge and jury. For the quarrel, if it was carried to a violent end, might have unfortunate results on the general peace of the country. It would not do to have my sergeant killing Red Murdo in single combat, or Red Murdo killing my sergeant, certainly not with me looking on.

If you happen to know some legal jingle of words you can almost certainly pacify the raw man of strife, by gravely reciting it at him. Sheriffs, procurators-fiscal, bailies and others accustomed to take oaths, and sometimes to say them, will confirm this curious influence of formality. Partly it impresses, and it will surely confuse, and then the subject can be led to a better frame of mind.

So I thought of the oath banning the Highland dress, which, in the unwisdom of our over-lords, exercised by right of force, a Jacobite rebel had to take, before he could get a pardon. It had an official place among the papers of my office, and there I had let it rest, but I loathed it so much that its language had bitten itself

into my mind.

How this foully conceived oath had fired the spirit of a people proud to wear their tartans, because of the Highland sentiment which they clothed! But to use it to compass a private quarrel, to twist its possible tragedy into healing honour, that was appealing! My sergeant I must support outwardly, and my stratagem would secure this, without putting Red Murdo in peril. He, probably, had a secret inkling that I was searching for a way out, because he kept looking, looking at me, even while he talked and talked.

"You know the law?" I slowly addressed him.

"Only like my master," he said, "by breakin' it."

"You know that any man who has been in rebellion against his Majesty King George may be apprehended on sight, tried, punished and executed."

"If you say that it'll be so, but it does na' interest me; I tak' my orders frae the Chief of Inverey, nae frae King George or his officers, least o' all a mere sergeant."

"Still," I went on, "you will perceive that he was doing his duty, or what he thinks his duty." Red Murdo's look suggested that he thought I was rambling, but I went on sharply; "and in the exercise of his duty he is entitled to all the support of his superior officer."

The sergeant's face beamed with approval, as if he had been discovered in an act of great public advantage and was to be rewarded [Transcriber's note: a line appears to be missing from the book here.] that of Red Murdo simply asked, "What are you driving at?"

"Now," I said, lifting my right hand in the manner of judges, "I am going to administer an oath to you, and when you have taken it all will be well and you shall go your way."

"What sort o' oath," he asked; "what has it to do wi' me, who's only concern't wi' the Black Cornel's oaths? Tell it to me, first."

"Very well, listen," and with as much solemnity as I could muster I repeated the words of the oath:

"I do swear, as I shall answer to God at the Great Day of Judgment, I have not, nor shall have, in my possession, any gun, sword or arm whatsoever, and never use tartan, plaid, or any part of the Highland garb; and if I do so, may I be cursed in my undertakings, family and property; may I never see my wife and children, father, mother or relations; may I be killed in battle as a coward, and lie without Christian burial, in a strange land, far from the graves of my forefathers and kindred: may all this come across me if I break my oath."

Red Murdo kept looking at me, mute, perhaps impressed; anyhow, he presently asked, "What if I refuse?"

"The penalties laid down by law," I told him, still solemnly, "are six months in prison for a first offence and transportation beyond the seas for a second."

"A device o' the devil and King George," grunted Red Murdo, and I should have been glad to agree with him, only I had to play the game out.

"Will you take the legal oath?"

"Never. It's what I suppose the sergeant was goin' to cram doon my throat an' he could, the same infernal thing. Never, frae you, or him, or the pair o' ye."

This was a turn I had not expected, and I was wondering what to do next when Red Murdo said, "I'll tell ye what I'll dae. I'll wrestle the sergeant which o's will eat a copy of that ugly oath, and that'll also satisfy him who's the better man."

The sergeant did not show an instant keenness for this challenge, but it got me round a corner, and must be accepted. I declared to that effect, and desired both men to get ready, saying I would be umpire. I added that there should be only one bout because, secretly, I had no wish to see them hurt one another.

Red Murdo and the sergeant put their plaids, their jackets, their bonnets, their sporans, and their brogues, in little heaps, with each man's weapons above each man's things. Neither spoke, for action, which naturally has the effect of sealing the tongue, had now arrived, and I chose a level piece of sward where they might fall with comparative softness.

When I saw how nearly they were matched in physique, the spirit of primitive combat in me began to be interested, to calculate who would win. True to the fighting tactics he knew Red Murdo rushed to grips, but the sergeant drove him

off, and they manoeuvred round each other for the next effort. It was pretty to see them, that bright morning, with the whole picturesque valley for arena and I for the only spectator of their prowess. Moreover, they were warming to the fight, which was one between the disciplined strength and skill of the soldier and the wild agility of Red Murdo.

Those different qualities met so evenly that feint, and catch and heave as each combatant would, the other remained unthrown. Once Red Murdo got his antagonist by the waist, lifted him clean off the ground and whirled him round like a totum, only to have him alight on his feet. Once, also, the sergeant, by a supple twist of arm and leg, working together, got Red Murdo half down and no more. Really it was a toss-up who should win, or whether there would be a winner at all.

My only ground of interference would be foul play, and although they went at each other almost savagely there was no absolute act of that kind. But the strain was telling on both men, for they took no rest, and hardly waited to get fresh breath. The sinews of their legs stood out like whip-cord, their chest heaved like bellows in distress, their necks were scarlet with the tumult of the blood there. Only the unexpected would make a victor or a loser, and the unexpected did not happen, as it does sometimes.

Red Murdo tried a last torrential rush, but the sergeant withstood it, and they merely locked themselves together. Nay, they were now so exhausted that they could only hang on to each other for support, a spectacle which brought me to their side. Their bulging eyes stared at me with the pleading look which a horse has after being driven too far and too fast. When I divided them by a touch of my hand they both fell to the ground like logs and so lay.

Honour was satisfied, the hated oath of the kilt had not to be eaten by anybody, and I was glad.

X.—The Way of a Woman

Between you and me, I fancy that the average, natural woman likes to think any man who is after her a bit of the devil. It makes her pulse beat, if not her heart; it gives a fine spice to the pursuit, and she is confident there will be no capture,

unless she wills it. Anyhow, I was not going to help the Black Colonel in his schemes by holding him up as a hero of that order, and he would have made the comment that he needed not the service from me.

Marget Forbes and I had fallen into the pleasant custom of lending each other such books as came the way of our remote land, and I called at the Dower House to leave her one, a newly imprinted volume entitled "Robinson Crusoe." I did not seem to wish to make meetings with her, though I was glad of them, so I chose a time, the mid-afternoon, at which she and her mother usually walked out. However, Marget was at home, and she called to me from the parlour, would I not enter and rest a minute? Necessarily I must step inside to say I would not wait, and necessarily I found myself sitting down near her.

"Mother," she said, "is on her weekly round among the sick and old, to whom a kind word from her is like gold, of which we now have none to give. Usually I go with her, but to-day she would have it that I looked tired, and she bade me stay indoors and rest. I'm glad you called and brought me a book, especially this wonderful 'Robinson Crusoe,' of which I have heard vaguely, and which they say is founded on the adventure of a Scotsman, Alexander Selkirk. You are always thoughtful, or shall I say sometimes?" and Marget looked as if she expected me to understand the qualification.

Was it a reproach that I did not come into her company often enough; was it a playful invitation to do so oftener; or was it the woman's primal instinct, old as Eve in the Garden of Eden, just to tease the man? I scarcely asked myself those questions. They ran through my mind with the kind of physical impulse which you feel in the presence of the possible woman. You are aware, then, of feelings and shadows of feeling which cannot be expressed. There is something in you which goes on speaking to the something in her, and you let it speak, glad, wondering, expectant, never sure, never sorry. Odd, isn't it, this language of sex which says most when it says nothing by speech, which needs not speech, because it is spiritual, though springing, maybe, from the call of the blood.

Marget had been reading, and when she invited me in, and I went, she put the open book face downward on a little table, beside a half-made sampler. She saw my eye wandering to the volume, a mere mechanical curiosity on my part, and she picked it up with a laugh, saying, "There is no need to hide those pages, unless it be that they are dull."

"What is the book all about?" I asked idly.

"It is a French romance," she said, "in which a lovely heroine treads her way through an endless maze of difficult paths and a brigade of villains to what, I have no doubt, when I get there with her, if ever I do, will be endless wedded bliss. It is an over-sentimental story, for the French young girl, but, then, one must try to keep up what French one has, because it is a delightful language."

Marget had learned it as a girl in France, for she had lived there a while, seen something of the Stuart Court over the water, of the Court of King Louis also, and even heard the passing rustle of the skirts of "the Pompadour" and Madame du Barry. Already the breath of a freer day to come was blowing across that fair land, and her stay in it definitely influenced Marget's character, ripened it quickly on broadly beautiful lines, without hurting its pure scent of Scottish heather.

Hospitality was a duty as well as a pleasure in every Highland home, and, after our trifles of a few minutes, she rose and went to give some order. When she returned she said she had a small treat in store for me, and it came into the room almost with herself. What do you think it was? Why, tea!

It was a beverage then almost unknown in the Scottish Highlands, but Marget's family, as she said, had at intervals received packets of it from their friends in the south. Those gifts were hoarded as if they contained treasure, and only dipped into for very special reasons.

"It flatters me," I remarked airily, "to think I am a special reason, because that must come near being a special friend."

"Oh," quoth Marget, "but you are an official enemy, so how could you be a special friend? And still such things are possible, you know, but I shall not tell you how they are possible. You would not understand a bit"; and, as she spoke, her eyes and hands were arranging the tea-table.

"I should, I assure you, try very hard," said I, "and it would be odd if I did not succeed, with a dish of tea for stimulant. I don't remember when I tasted tea last," I added laconically, as Marget poured it out of a quaint old pot into dwarfy cups of French mould. Most of the dainty things, the bric-à-brac of households in the Jacobite Highlands were from France, just as we had come to say "ashets" and "gigots" of mutton, and generally to graft French cookery into our Scottish

meals, for the "Auld Alliance" had various harvests.

As we talked over the tea-cups, Marget and I, I thought how quickly in that Nature's cradle of Corgarff she had ripened to woman's estate. She had, at times, been in touch with the artificialities of social life, but they had not dulled her free, strong character. She had drawn her instincts, as she had drawn her blood, from the long hills, and she had no self-consciousness to dim her lights. But when I rose to leave she said merrily, "We have spoken much foolish nonsense, have we not, Captain Gordon?"

"Wise nonsense, Mistress Forbes," I answered.

"Thank you, but wise nonsense is most becoming when it is expressed as a parable."

"Then let us have the parable."

"Oh! parables are not in fashion with so many hard realities about, and there should not be three people in one. Three's never company, they say, good company, even in a parable."

"Then, dear lady, why put in three?"

"This parable, dear Captain, would need three; first, a high-minded young man who wears arms and dreams dreams, who is beloved by everybody for his good nature and qualities, who is on the other side of where he would be most welcome, and who will probably never summon courage to get there; secondly, an older man of more picturesque, more risky qualities, an adventurer in love and war, never afraid to strike, even if the stroke might wound, a personality able, on occasion, to commandeer what could not be secured by affection, thanks to an understanding of woman's nature and the imperfections of man's government; and, thirdly, between those personal forces a woman who might, to her undoing, be captured by the force of family and state circumstances, instead of by the man of her tell-tale heart's desire."

"A very subtle parable!" I remarked, for no reason whatever, but the tone of it held more than this banality, although she showed no heed of that, but remarked:

"No; a very common parable; it's what every woman knows by instinct or experience, if few would care to reveal it, even in a parable."

We said good-bye without more ado, and I set off for the castle, troubled for my unreadiness in woman nature, the most puzzling, calling, captivating skein in all the universe, because it holds, behind the silken veil of its treasure-house, the eternal mystery of creation, that something divine which is nearest to God Himself.

When in trouble, my trouble, anyhow, one sighs for a song, and my heart-quaking carried me to a ballad, very familiar in our countryside, which tells of an unbridled lover laying siege to a woman he covets. Her men were absent, and she and her domestics were the only garrison of the castle when he knocked roysterously at its gates:

"The lady ran up to her towe-head,
As fast as she could drie,
To see if by her fair speeches
She could with him agree.

"As soon he saw the lady fair,
And her yates all locked fast,
He fell into a rage of wrath,
And his heart was aghast.

"Cum doon to me, ye lady fair;
Cum doon to me; let's see;
This nigh ye's ly by my ain side
The morn my bride sall be!"

It was pagan wooing, but it has often won the day, only why should I let it disturb me, whose cause stood by itself? What I must realize was that powers above me were at work, for "state reasons," on affairs in which I was concerned, privately. I must try to meet this influence without letting as much be known outwardly, because I was an officer bound by my commission to serve his Majesty's desires and commands.

Now I am no good schemer, and I merely drifted to those conclusions as a swimmer goes with a tide in which he happens to find himself. He feels that he is in its custody, but, on the instinct for life, he makes a stroke now and then and their cumulative effect probably bears him somewhere safe to land. Might it be so with me!

Unfortunately I was a swimmer in the dark, for I did not know, however I might guess, what Marget and her mother were thinking. Perhaps my heart really assured my mind as to Marget, or so I was fain to conclude. Her mother, however, might take a mother's view, the far-carrying view which thinks of daughters settled in such a manner as will continue the old line.

Every man has, deep down in him, the desire to own a little bit of land, even though most of us only get six feet for a grave. It is man's form of ancestor-worship, and in woman it finds expression in the home, and continuous olive branches to fill that home. The man likes to have his foot securely on a rood of Mother Earth, a patch to call his very own. The woman supplements that by peopling a house; and is not this service of the maternal instinct the greater, the finer of the two?

One placed in circumstances which need strong action, should not think too much, because by doing that he raises a wall of difficulties around him. Mental ghosts are no use to anybody, although, to be sure, they weren't unknown to me. So I welcomed a letter that reached me next morning from Marget's mother, but I opened it with a dread. It addressed me as "Dear Captain Gordon," and it read:

"I am troubling you for advice, because there is nobody else whom I can ask, and because the matter may interest you, both as a relative, far removed I admit, and as a soldier of the reigning king. You will guess what it is, and that makes it easier for me to explain.

"It has been made known to us in a round-about, but authoritative way, that it would give King George and his ministers satisfaction to see our house and people established again, and that Jock Farquharson, the laird of Inverey, would be confirmed in the chiefship, if as much were agreeable to my daughter and myself.

"They don't ask me will I give my daughter in ransom for the house and possessions of our ancestors, but that is what is meant, and you can judge how the idea has concerned me. You may also, however, concern and interest a mother at the same time, and I have hesitated to return a 'No,' especially as Marget said, about the letter, when I showed it to her, 'Well, the sons of the house have sacrificed enough for it. It may now be the turn of the daughter to sacrifice something . . .!'"

"That was dutifully said, but what she expects, I'm certain, is that I shall say the 'No' of my own accord, and I want your advice as to the manner in which it can best be done. I want it at once, because news comes to me, through the early channel of our domestics, that the Black Colonel means to ride over upon us one of these evenings, a friendly call, I suppose. Marget does not know of this intention on his part, and I am not going to tell her, for a mother's instinct naturally wishes to shield a daughter from disturbance.

"If you would advise me how to say 'No' without bringing further displeasure from high places upon our ruined house, you would be doing us a service. If, besides that, you were to find a means of keeping the Black Colonel away, why, you would be doing a further service."

As I read that last sentence an idea struck me, and I at once sent a note to the dear lady, saying I would solve her difficulty. Then I dispatched a pair of trusty scouts in quest of certain information I needed, and in eight hours they were back with it. After that, I felt more myself than I had done for some time, just because I was now committed to definite, perhaps even dangerous, action.

XI—The Crack of Thunder

It is fine how the spur of danger, especially danger to somebody else, dear if not near, helps a man's spirits upward. The blood flows more quickly in him, his hand is surer, his brain works better. He feels that the die has been cast, that nothing more matters, except the reckoning, and, so feeling, he sheds all timorous self-consciousness and is himself.

That, at all events, was how I felt as I took the road southward, across the hills towards Deeside, with a cracking wind to walk against. I would intercept the Black Colonel's raid on Marget and her mother, and break the whole scheme behind it—if I could!

So we scheme, we glorious little fellows of this world, bent on love or hatred, and the Great Beneficence smiles at us, at our cleverness, or it may be the Great Furies, however you will have it. Anyway, Nature has merely to move and our grandest plans may crinkle up like a feather held to a "cruisie," the rude lamp, fed with dried splinters of fir-wood, or mutton tallow and a wick, which our

Highlanders used for lighting.

But that was not in my thoughts when I came to the top of the last hill dividing our strath from the Black Colonel's. My estimate was that if I got there by break of day and waited I should, being in a high eyrie with a wide view, see him come from the opposite direction. My information from my scouts was that he would travel alone, a fit thing, having regard to his mission at the Dower House, Corgarff.

Tired and hungry, I looked about for a rock which would shield me from the wind, and got out my fodder. It consisted only of "whisky bukkie," oatmeal rolled with whisky, not delicate stuff to eat, but easily carried and sustaining. Haggis is better food for the march, because it is tastier and still harder to digest, so even more lasting, as the Highlanders, for whose war sustenance it was, perhaps, invented, knew, but on leaving Corgarff Castle I had just taken what I could lay my hand upon.

While I ate I half-marvelled at the splendour of the scene about me, half-rehearsed my catechism with the Black Colonel, when he should appear. I would put it to him as a gentleman that he must not intrude upon the Forbes ladies, and, indeed, must frankly abandon his designs there. If reason failed, then we might be driven to solve the knot by a single combat, as the custom of the Highlands permitted, and, indeed, sometimes ordered, very much like the duel in the land of France. Why not such a combat, because the test was an honest if barbaric tribute to plain manliness? Give me that rather than the snivel, the chicane, the shake-you-by-the-hand and stab-you-in-the-gloaming, which passes by the name of diplomacy, high diplomacy, I believe.

The tradition of single combat went back into the very mists of time in the Highlands; and merely the form varied. There was Cam-Ruadh, the early red-haired man of tradition, who, fallen prisoner among a batch of hostile "kern," or outlaws, was offered his liberty if he could make so many good arrow-shots. He drew and drew, with much seeming innocence, on the arrows of his captors, and wove a circle of stabs in the ground about the target, but never did he hit it; oh, no!

They jeered at him when he came to the last arrow possessed by the company, saying he had better reserve it for himself and save them the trouble of making an end to him. Instead, he sent it, as he could have sent the others, straight into

the middle of the target, and flew there almost with it. Before the outlaws could realize the logic of events he had gathered all the arrows under his arm, put one to the string of the bow and cried, "I am Cam-Ruadh, who never misses, never before until now, and you who are without arrows had better take leg-bail," which they quickly did.

Nearer in time was the duel of valiant Donald Oig with the chief of a band of "broken men" who had a grudge against him. Donald was a famous swordsman, and the chief had no active relish to try skill with him. But, again, it was the custom of the country, and the invitation could not be refused if the chiefship of the "broken men" was to be held, because here was a test of both courage and honour.

He was a slim fellow, however, this head raider, one with the false doctrine, as ancient as human nature, that if you succeed it matters little how. When, then, he and Donald Oig stood up to fight he exclaimed, "Shake hands on it, first!" But he gripped the extended right hand hard, intending, with it thus prisoned, to strike a foul blow and close, in his own favour, a duel which had not begun. Swift of instinct and eye, Donald saw this, caught out his dagger with his left hand, and stabbed the foul fighter. The rest of the "broken men," being witnesses of it all, had nothing to complain about, and Donald went his way.

While my thoughts wandered like that, and I ate and, from my pocket flask, washed my dry eating down, the weather changed with a swiftness familiar enough among the Scottish mountains. The heavens passed behind a veil of drifting clouds, through which the sun flared in red, angry bursts. The elements had declared hostilities, and when I looked down into the valley, two thousand feet beneath me, I saw a great thunderstorm on the march, the very panoply of havoc.

It moved as if it were an army going to war, with scout-like horns thrust out in front and on either side. These were constantly shot by fangs from the mass of lightning in the clouds, themselves a hell of angry colours, There was the inky black of the outer sheath, next a seam of half-black, half-orange, then a depth of iridescence which constantly changed its hues, and, finally, a molten pot boiling and rolling in august wrath.

Ah! it was a spectacle to watch, those thunder-clouds come through the glack, or rift, dividing the falling hill on which I stood, from the rising one beyond. Down

in the valley ran a stream and a track used by cattle-drovers, and, as my eye went there, I thought I saw a tall figure. Certainly, for he looked up and, during a moment, we were both silhouetted in the radiance of light which the thunder-clouds, now massed into one huge bank, drove before it. If I saw that solitary figure it was likely he would see me, as we were the only living things in the landscape, and like turns to like, even making mutual communication, although witchcraft was the word for that then, and the mention of it dangerous.

Presently the terrific cloud ate up the spot where I had seen the man, for its base was in the valley and its top above my altitude. Never had I beheld such a thunder-cloud, but it was awe, a worship of the forces of Nature, which filled me, not fear. Why should I, a young, healthy man, with good nerves, be afraid, since the excessive tumult was below me, and I was a privileged spectator. Quickly, however, the cloud must burst, and then the sluices of heaven would indeed be open. How would it fare with myself and the figure lost in the valley?

That thunderstorm and the consequent flood became events in our local history, and to me a quick personal adventure. The rain came down, first in a thick shower, then in torrents, finally in sheets. The fall was so solid that it seemed to half-scotch the lightning and half-dull the roar of the thunder. Actually, for I record truly, the drops leapt up again in splashes as they struck the ground beside me, and in an instant I was soaked, though that was no unusual experience in our adventurous climate.

The thunder-cloud had now taken command of the whole firmament, so swiftly had its violence of contagion spread. Here, verily, was a rainfall on a great scale, and as it settled to business a sort of darkness spread over the land. I must seek shelter, and I would find it on the levels rather than on the exposed heights.

Therefore, I started for the valley, picking my way as best I could in the black deluge. You will scarce believe me if I again tell you that the rain-water ran down the hill-side with me, inches deep. It took gravel and stones with it, and scoured away the bedding of large rocks which, thus released, joined in the downward plunge. Some folk thought it was the Flood of the Bible come again as prophesied, and, at all events, the comparison gives a notion of it. The stream, which I had seen an insignificant stripe below, met me, a roaring river. Its waters had already overflowed the whole valley. Now you only saw the tops of hillocks or trees, for all else was a gurgling waste of waters.

Over those waters came a cry which caught me, even in my sorry plight, because it was human. Wild birds, beaten to the ground by the storm and then engulfed in the waters, were screeching as they drowned. Hares and rabbits, and a fox, wherever he came from, all went past me on a floating tree, and they were squealing for mercy, not from each other, but from the elements. The other sound I had heard, however, was quite different, and I listened for it again.

Ah! there it was! And as I bent to the level of the flowing waters and looked towards its source, I saw a man marooned on one of the hillocks which the flood had left unsubmerged. Evidently he had seen me first, for he was waving his hands and making signs with them. He was in keen alarm about his predicament, but method governed his alarm, and it was for me to discover it.

Clearly he was a prisoner on the island, in so far that he could not wade or swim through the roaring dam which divided us. Clearly, also, the water was rising by miraculous draughts upon the rain, and soon his refuge would be drowned, and he swept from it. What was to be done by me to save him, for action must be rapid?

He was beckoning up-stream with a meaning. Searching with my eye the meeting-place of land and water, I saw what looked like a boat. Where could it have come from? There had been an old broad-bottomed craft, used for fording in spate times, on a pool a mile or so up the glen, and the flood had brought it down and thrown it ashore. Could I get it afloat, navigate it to the perishing man, and rescue him?

No sooner said than done! Not at all; things don't happen so, at least, when anything worth doing has to be done. It took me a toilsome journey to the boat, and I found it half-full of flood-water. This I emptied by hauling the boat, as the river rose, on to a shelving rock. Then I waited for it to float free, having meanwhile got hold of a long, fir sapling, which, pruned of its branches, I thought to use as a guiding pole, helm or oar, as the rushing of many waters might demand.

Thus equipped, out I sailed on that uncharted ocean with never a thought in my head whether I should again see dry land or riot. The darkness had deepened, but I could still distinguish the hillock and the man thereon, now up to his waist in the waters, and for those fading signs I steered. Quickly I was in the flood race, but I kept my head, otherwise I should not have heard the voice come to me

again in what seemed to be the words, "Hurry! For God's sake, hurry!"

Down-stream I rushed, here shoving from disaster against a tree trunk, there avoiding a smash with something else. How it was all done I have not the remotest notion—perhaps it was mere luck—but when I came level with the hillock I was only three feet clear of it on the near side.

"Jump," I roared, and the man with outstretched arms jumped strongly, and I felt a pull which almost upset me, for I had been standing in the boat. Two hands had caught the gunwale, and the pull of dead weight swung the heavy, clumsy craft round on a new course without, however, upsetting it. This took us into shallower waters, and presently the suction of the main surge got fainter and we were aground on the moorland edge.

I had not, in the dark, seen the face of my companion at all, and, trailing beside the boat, he had no opportunity for making himself known. I stepped out, knee-deep, to find him also a-foot, and seeking the land.

"Come on," I said, "whoever you may be."

"Yes," he answered; "whoever you may be, you are a friend in need."

I recognized his voice, and exclaimed, nay, shouted in my surprise,
"Jock Farquharson!"

"Yes, Ian Gordon," he said in turn. "Would you rather not have saved me?"

"God's will be done," said I.

"Amen!" said he.

Dramas of life do end laconically, like that, as death often comes by casual side-steps.

XII—Raiders of the Dark

A man does something in a natural way and it takes the world's ear and is called heroism. Another man does a like thing, to all purpose, but the world does not

listen to it, or, anyhow, sings him no praises, all of which we try to explain by saying "Luck."

It is natural for a man to show courage in extremes, for a woman to be loving, self-sacrificing. Every now and then the Great Bookkeeper records an example for the common good; and the rest are a lost legion. We do not know why, and if we did what good would it do us, though the curiosity for knowledge is inbred, like inability, sometimes, to use it?

News of my rescue of the Black Colonel from the flood got about, and I was acclaimed as a hero of sorts. He, I fancy, for his own ends, fathered a glowing account of what happened, and as it passed from mouth to mouth it grew in glory. He meant to be grateful, and his gratitude took that form. It was his airy way, for egotism, even when it is not dislikeable, must ever carry its possessor into the picture.

Perhaps he also thought to please me, and thus to win a point towards his larger ends, for I knew they would, in no wise, be modified by what had happened. By them, as he saw his case, he had to stand or fall, and thus, in this reasoning, he had no choice at all. His bonds, in that sense, were entwined with coming events, which do not necessarily cast their shadows before, anyhow when they are events of the heart.

Now, my secret hope for the Black Colonel, the inner prayer which I hardly whispered to myself, was that he should escape his troubles as a rebel, by going away to the foreign wars, and there make a new name. I thought I might help him out of the country, even if it had to be at the risk of my commission. He would be welcome wherever he found a British camp across the sea, and no questions would be asked. Truly, there would be need to ask none, because his repute as a fighting man among the Jacobites had gone far and wide. By-and-by he could return, when the feuds of Stuart and Guelph had died down to the dross they were, though they had made a bloody toll, and sit in the home of his fathers, not merely unmolested, but honoured by both sides.

I am not going to pretend that my own inclinations were not behind this plan, for they were. Why should I seek to hide them, even from the Black Colonel himself; a hopeless thing to try, anyhow. He had one scheme for getting back to the world, and it struck bitterly across my path. I offered him another, which would attain his end, and if that were so, why should he not take it and thank

me? I was not ill-disposed to him personally; certainly well enough disposed to help him—to help me. When were we to make the reckoning?

He was seeking to live up to his new pretensions as a head of a clan, and he had to find the wherewithal on which to do it. The consequence was that he used Red Murdo for taxing the country in the matter of his necessities. If somebody, early some morning while it was still dark, awoke to ask the question: "Are you come to harry and spulzie my ha'?" it would most likely be Red Murdo who gave an insolent answer. The fellow, in fact, got swollen upon the little plunderings which his master ordered, until he was hard to keep in hand. But this, again, suited the Black Colonel, because, to push his claims, he found money handy, there being always smaller fry of the other side of friendship, who have hungry purses, or none at all.

So Red Murdo, flown as he was with a lowly man's pride, which tends to an unbalancing, must launch upon an expedition of no common sort. It embellishes a ballad of which only two lines come to me as I write:

"There's four-and-twenty milk-white nowt, twal o' them kye
In the woods of Glen-Tanner, it's there that they lie."

Beyond what the lines tell of a bold piece of rieving and spulzy by Jock Farquharson's henchman, and done for him, I need not trouble to instruct you, because the event only leads into our chronicle as by a tributary wind. When there is a mystery, and you cannot fathom it by direct evidence, you are driven back on motives. They are, in fact, the nut and kernel of what lawyers call circumstantial evidence, a fitting together of suspicions which have made the coffin of many an honest Highland rebel.

I sought to keep my soldiers as unseen as a not over-great distance from Marget and her mother at the Dower House would permit. Naturally the Hanoverian uniform was a sore sight for their eyes, and even a personal grief, in that it recalled dear ones who had perished on the losing side. My desire to spare them was known to my men, who, in the same spirit, would often walk a mile round not to show themselves to the desolated inmates of the Dower House.

But it was essential, if anything unusual were to happen there, that we should know, since it was part of our charge to protect Marget and her mother from perils incidental to an unsettled country. Therefore, I had a private understanding with an old retainer of the family that he was to hasten to me, should protection at the Dower House ever be necessary.

This he was to do quietly, before giving any general alarm, as that might not prove necessary, and also because I remembered an old Highland wisdom, "Never cry fire, unless you want the heather to catch." Its bearing, as you will grasp is on strifes and feuds set alive, not on the actual burning of heather, which is done to let grass, for the sheep beasts, grow without being choked.

Well, on a night which I recall for its dense blackness, there came a tap, tap, tap, three of them, slowly and distinctly, at the small window of my room in the Castle. I knew by the method of the disturbance that it was not an accident, but I was on my feet and peering hard into the outer darkness before I realized that

here was the prearranged signal of danger at the Dower House.

A hand moved close to the window, signalling me, and I motioned back, though, on either side, all this was divined, as divination takes place in the dark, rather than seen at all. I picked up my sword, which always stood in a certain corner of my room, pulled the door gently towards me and stepped softly out on to the grass, which grew close up to the Castle walls.

"Come ye, fast, Captain Gordon," quietly said a figure gliding beside me, and without another word we made for the Dower House. When I felt myself beyond ear-shot of the sentry, I asked:

"What's happened—what's wrong?"

"I'm no' exac'ly sure," was the old retainer's answer, "but men hae been surroundin' the place, as if to attack it. They wakened me, bein' a light sleeper, because they made sounds different fae' the ordinary. It was like men crawlin' amon' the grass on a plan, and I slippit doon for you."

"What had we better do?" I asked formally, and not because I expected any answer, for I had decided to get into the Dower House without alarming anybody, if that could be done.

We managed to open a window and step through it, but then the dogs sleeping inside set up an alarm. This quickly awoke everybody, and the confusion set affairs moving outside, where I heard a voice that seemed familiarly like Red Murdo's cry hoarsely:

"Lie close, lie close!"

Presently Marget and her mother, who had both dressed hastily, came to the stair-head, holding a glimmering light over the darkness beneath. Behind them crowded their few scared domestics, and odd the whole scene looked, although, indeed, between keeping off the barking dogs and wondering what was to happen outside, I had no desire or time to study it.

"Who's there?" called Marget, in a not uncomposed but expectant voice, and I answered, telling in a few words what I knew. Quick in thought and action she thanked me for coming, and said she would just get her cloak. She took her mother with her, but in a moment was back again asking, "How can I be of

service?"

She carried a stout walking-stick, and I looked at it as she came down the stairs to where I stood in the lobby, her mother following. "Yes," she said, "my hand lighted on it somewhere, perhaps because it has been through troubles and wars and is in the presence of more. Shall we say that the fighting instinct, even in a stick, leaps to the call?" She laughed quietly, but with a concerned note in the laugh, and I knew she was thinking of her mother's safety and health, both threatened by this strange incursion of ill-disposed men.

Wishful as one would be at such a moment to magnify a trifle, in order, if possible, to occupy an anxious woman's mind, I remarked, "Oh, a stick can be a very sound weapon in a good hand."

"It's about all that the orders of search and suppression have left us Jacobites," remarked Marget; "openly confessed, anyhow, for I suppose there may be a small, concealed arsenal or two, even among our Corgarff hills."

Nothing, apparently, had happened outside in those tense minutes, and it was the strain of waiting which made us resolutely talk of nothing—but a stick. There had been no further cry since the "Lie close" already mentioned, and it, no doubt, had been a mischance on the part of Red Murdo. All was silence and black without, and within all quiet alarm, such as you get when a household suppresses itself in obedience to some demand.

It was an oppressive silence, this waiting, and I was glad to hear Marget tap the floor with her sinewy hazel and say merrily, thinking to lighten her mother's concern, "My grandfather insisted that a stick with a nob was no stick for a Highland gentleman. It escaped, he would say, when it was most needed, and that might, at times, leave the best of Highland gentlemen by the wayside." Joking, under difficulties!

She paused, for there arose a crack-cracking as of men coming closer among the scrub of heather and fern which surrounded the Dower House, only it was quite momentary. The stick which she had half-lifted, an unconscious act of readiness for defence, tapped back on to the floor, and my sword-point made a sharper rattle, though I was unaware that my hand had even moved it. The tyranny of doing nothing began to be intolerable and to insist on an issue, be it what it might.

Think of the situation for me, and although I am, I hope, neither more selfish nor more cowardly than other men, I could not help doing that. Here was I, the chief and head of his Majesty's garrison at Corgarff Castle, standing defence on the door-step of a Jacobite household. Why was I there at all? What was I there to accomplish? How was I to do this unknown something and return with composure to my quarters, secure in my loyalty to King George and his ministers?

Moreover, what had I come out for to see? A mere expedition of burglary by a band of hungry caterans who took the chattels of friend or foe indifferently? Possibly that was all. Then I could have fetched half-a-dozen soldiers and apprehended those same footpads, or, at all events, driven them to the hills again. But at the head of what defensive force did I find myself? Why, a few domestics without resource enough even to escape from the danger, a dear old lady who anxiously wanted to mother the trouble about her, and a young woman of nerve and resolve, my only stand-by.

There, for it was a new discovery in our relationship, I realized that to have Marget by me was a very welcome comradeship, and, somehow, so natural, that it made the other things of no burden. I was curiously happy, and could have left matters at that, but what to do, what to do?

There must, in all of us, be an instinct for our keeping, when we are in danger. Give it headway and you will probably win through, as a thirsty horse knows how to reach a springwell among the hills. Argue with it and it says, "Take your reasoned method, your road of the better judgment, but don't blame me, your natural guardian, if you come to harm."

With this I got the strong intuition, possibly communicated to my mind or heart by Marget's nearness, that here was no ordinary raid for spoilage. Something else of a personal and intimate sort was behind, I was sure of it, something to which acute danger attached for my dearest wishes.

When you are, in small authority, set over the people of a locality, you are apt to develop a small official mind which obscures the power of seeing, understanding, divining. Such an attitude, as I had painfully seen in various parts of the Highlands, fretted the great sore of defeat that lay upon the Jacobites, whereas the effort should have been to heal it. My own mind I had tried to keep fresh and free in all my relationships at Corgarff, impelled, may be, by a nature

which liked, possibly out of vanity, to give sympathy. From this and a mute speaking with one near and dear, I now had my personal reward, for I understood. Marget was the trophy sought in this dark raid, and she was to be the Black Colonel's trophy.

"Action, front!" I said to myself, in one of the drill-book commands. Offence is always a soldier's best defence, although it is a sailor's phrase, so I would go out and make a reconnaissance from the back of the Dower House. This should cause the invaders to show themselves, and might, if they thought the move stood for any force, even alarm them into a quiet retreat, which, for several reasons, was what I most desired.

Quickly I told Marget of my intention, and the need for it, and asked her to remain on guard where she was. She answered briskly, a woman determined to be brave and not a burden, that nobody should enter the place without feeling the weight of her grandfather's stick. She added, and here came in the other woman, that I was not to be long absent. This touched me sweetly, for it showed that Marget was thinking less of her own safety, or, at the moment, even of her mother's, than of mine in the night outside. Honestly, I went dancing from her side with a wine of joy in me that I had never tasted, for she had shown that I was something to her, perhaps more than something. I might have been drunk, and if I had I could not have been more lost than I was in the darkness behind the Dover House, because it instantly swallowed me up.

There is a darkness to which, after a little, the eye so accustoms itself that it can see trees and rocks and even faces in contour. There is another darkness which seals the eyes and numbs the mind and even weights the feet as with lead. This was that night's darkness, so pall-like that I was simply lost in it.

Nevertheless, calling up all my sense of locality, and feeling the way lightly with my bare, ready sword, I started to make a circle of the Dower House. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty cautious steps, with my sword-point probing the way, and it touched something soft and yielding. That something a-sort of whimpered, as a dog caught poaching would, or as a man might who felt a quick pain. A sword-prick stings, and the something leapt erect and with a curse turned at me, when I instinctively fell on guard. Another sword struck at mine, my blade slid up this other, caught in the handle and wrenched it from the unseen hand. The weapon fell among the bracken, but my man thought more of getting away than of looking for it, so he doubled round a tree and was gone.

Evidently I had struck the investing circle, and I went on cautiously, but never another figure did I perceive, though, before me, ran many soft noises of as many retreats. Finally there was a suppressed rush away, and with that I arrived at the front door of the Dower House to hear a mother's cry of distress, "Marget, Marget! oh, Marget, Marget!"

"Where is she?" said I anxiously.

"She grew alarmed for you," answered her mother more anxiously, "and went out, although I tried to keep her. Hardly had she gone when I heard a smothered sob, and then there was a hustle of feet as if she were being carried off by force."

There was a boding of ill in her cry, like a coronach, and the domestics took it up in sympathy, as Highland women will. "Marget! Marget! Mistress Marget!" rose the cry, and we became aware that all the inmates of the castle were stirring to it. But never a response came from Marget, never a token from the raiders, and it was forced on me that she and they were both gone from us.

We called on her, and searched for them until the dawn came, but only found the sword which I had encountered, and I knew it as one the Black Colonel had long worn, and then, when he himself got a better, that with the "S" for "Stuart" on its handle, had given to Red Murdo. The larger knowledge, brought by the dawn, was that the raiders had vanished as secretly as they had come, and that they had, beyond doubt, taken Marget with them. For though—

"We sought her baith by bower and ha',
The lady was not seen."

XIII—The Wound of Absence

You will probably know what it is to lose somebody who by physical fragrance, the mystery of a common spirituality, or both, has become essential to you. The wound is twice as bitter if, until the parting, you were unaware how much that presence really meant. It is as if you had come into a new world of your own and then found it vanish, before you could take possession.

I had no doubt, thanks to the hearing of his voice and the leaving behind of his

sword, that the raiders were headed by Red Murdo, the Black Colonel's henchman. Actual light came during the morning, in the form of a message by word of mouth: "I am a prisoner in the topmost room of Lonach Tower, and Red Murdo and his men are camped below."

When the Highland woman who brought it had said that, she melted away again without taking bite or sup. She lived in the ruin of Lonach Tower, and that was how Marget had been able to send her with the message. She could not be too long absent, however, or she might be missed by Red Murdo, whom, she said, she had left snoring out his lost night's sleep.

I found a Highlander who had engaged in relations with Red Murdo, though their nature need not be mentioned, and who was anxious to score them off for a settled life. Working on that, I told him to go to Lonach Tower, where he would find Red Murdo, and say the Black Colonel was waiting at a fold of the hills, which I named—waiting to hear how the night's work had fared! That, as you will mark, was the nice significance of the message, which I hoped would move Red Murdo and his merry men—his master waited "to hear how the night's work had fared!"

If the Black Colonel was behind the business it would seem a natural message, nay, a command, and my messenger went off with it. When he had gone, I picked out a dozen of our best soldiers, and, hinting the mission, without explaining it, we followed at a distance. We halted behind the last peak of the hill which looks down on Lonach Tower and awaited events.

We saw the receding Highland figure wend slowly towards the bare, lean turret, and, when he reached it, my eyes lifted to its queer little windows, seeking to look through them. They gave no sign of anybody inside, and, indeed, the mullioning of time had so dimmed them that, perhaps, the outside world could hardly be seen from within.

My Highlander hammered at the one entrance door, and he had to hammer a while before it opened to him. Then it only opened partly, as if the guardian kept a shoulder to it, while he spoke the visitor. Next it shut again, leaving my man outside, but evidently the colloquy had not finished, for he waited.

Ten minutes more and the door drew wide, as we could see, and Red Murdo came out, his comrades with him, and there was more questioning of the bringer

of news. Evidently he played his part well, perhaps because, knowing nothing of what lay behind, he simply stuck to the terms of his delivery, for presently Red Murdo's party set off towards the meeting-place I had named for them.

Here was my time to act, and I only waited until the coast, or rather the valley, was clear. When the tartans of Red Murdo's party had fluttered out of sight, in obedience, as they fancied, to the commands of their chief, I got my fellows quickly a-foot for Lonach Tower and she who was a captive there.

The heavy oaken, iron-clasped door had been locked by the departed raiders, and no sign of any tenant within fluttered out to us. Half-measures are no more useful in opening bolted doors, of which you have not the key, than they are in accomplishing other difficult things. So, finally, we put our collective weights against it, pushed hard and steadily, and when the weather-worn bars and hinges gave way, tumbled headlong into the old keep.

Nobody was in the ground-room floor, nothing, except the untidiness left by half-a-dozen rough men, and I mounted the narrow stair and tried the room above. Again we had to use force, and when the door flew inward I almost landed in the lap of Marget Forbes. There she was, bound to a rough seat, in the middle of the room, with a cravat tied round the lower part of her face, to keep her silent. Gently but swiftly I undid the gag, and after that cut the rough tow which bound her to the seat. Being thus freed, she told me, with an agitation which I tried to still, what had happened just before we came and on the previous night.

Red Murdo, she said, when she could speak, had told her, with awkward apologies, that he did not want to be unchivalrous but that he and his men were called away for a little and that he must make siccar about her custody, and no alarm giving, against his return. She had ceased asking him why she had been forcibly abducted and what was intended for her, because on that he would say nothing except, "You are quite safe, my young lady, quite safe. We may be plain fellows, but we are Highland men towards a woman, especially towards Mistress Marget Forbes of Corgarff." "But how," I asked, for she had now somewhat recovered her nerve and composure, and the agreeable surprise our arrival had caused her, "how did you fall into their hands at the Dower House?"

"Oh," said she, "that was simple. You went out to reconnoitre, and, hearing in the stillness, words and a noise like a passage of swords, I became anxious about

you. Under this impulse I opened the front door and stepped out a few yards when a Highland plaid fell round my head, silencing me effectually before I could shout an alarm, and I was borne swiftly away by two men. My astonishment was so great that I am not sure if I attempted to resist until I was some distance from the Dower House. Then two other men relieved my captors in carrying me, and by stages, for I absolutely declined to walk a step, I was brought here and placed in this room."

"Where you have been unable to give any alarm?"

"That you can see, and all I knew was that Red Murdo was the leader of my captivity, because he grumbled about having been stabbed in the leg and about losing his sword. 'What,' I asked, 'could he and his master, the Black Colonel, want by spiriting me away?' But Red Murdo wouldn't answer the question, and I haven't been able to answer it myself. Somehow I have felt that no personal harm was intended me because my captors, if not exactly friends, were not strangers, but men in some relationship to our own people. Mostly I have been anxious for the anxiety of my mother," and her eyes looked concern at me.

"Well," I said, "we shall relieve that anxiety very soon now; you have probably had enough of Lonach Tower, which, I notice, is sadly in need of the repairer. Let us go home!"

I said that last word out of my heart, and I thought Marget answered with a gleam which comes into a woman's eyes only when her heart is somewhere behind it. We went down the slender, creaky stair, the soldiers following, and came to the door, where, if you please, we ran slap into the Black Colonel, Red Murdo, and the other caterans. In the unexpected lies drama, and here, indeed, was a dramatic confronting. We stared at each other for a moment as if asking who was to speak first, and, like himself, the Black Colonel managed to do it.

"I heard only an hour ago," he said, "of a lady in distress in this old house. I have come, at my best speed, to help her, as who would not, when that lady is Mistress Marget Forbes."

"Would it not have been better," I cut in, "if you had heard of her distress before and come earlier to remedy it?"

"Possibly," he answered, "but if I had been earlier, Captain Gordon, I might not have met you here. So you see," he added challengingly, "there are

compensations, although these are things, as far as my experience goes, with which we could often dispense."

"Well," said I, "I have been able to render first aid to Mistress Forbes, but it would be a satisfaction if you could explain to us how she came to need it."

"Explain! How can I explain?"

"You have cultivated a name for gallantry, Colonel"—he bowed—"and it would be gallant to a lady if you would say why Red Murdo invaded the Dower House last night and carried its young mistress away?"

"Did he, the villain? He did not tell me of that, when I ran into him and his following this morning. He said he came to where we met, in response to an order from me. There was no such order, though it is true that I was keeping an open eye for Red Murdo, a habit I have when I know he is abroad, lest he might have anything for me."

By this time it was clear that the Black Colonel had commissioned Red Murdo to kidnap Marget in order that he might rescue her, and, by the act of so doing, advocate his plans towards her. He was denying it now that he found in Lonach Tower not Marget alone and a captive, but Marget with a good, stout bodyguard to look after her.

She had not spoken so far, partly because she had not been directly addressed, partly because, as I could see, she was in a hot fury with the Black Colonel. But the strange fascination of the man was working on her, as I could also see, and, woman-like, speak she would or die.

"If," she demanded of him quietly, slowly, for she had herself in hand, "you had anything special, even private to say to me, why did you not come to the Dower House instead of sending your handy men to scare us all and run off with me? Whatever you hoped to gain, that, you must know, was not the way to gain it."

The Black Colonel looked at her composedly for a moment and said, "Mistress Marget, I am the last person in the world to think that any form of duress would influence your actions. On the other hand, since the opportunity has come, I make bold, even in the presence of Captain Gordon and our respective followers, to say a word in frankness, out of regard for you and your house. There are events pending which might go far to re-establish your family, and you should

know about them, not merely indirectly but directly from me, who am deeply concerned in the business."

Marget blushed and flushed and glanced at me, as if asking me to protect her from what was very like a manifesto for public knowledge, thrust upon her when she could not help it. Her unconscious appeal warmed my heart like the sun, but I held back, preferring she should give the word which would, once and for all, put the Black Colonel in his place.

"By what right," she said with dignity, "do you address your proposals to me as you have done? You have schemed them in an underground way. Must you commit the affront of offering them to me in public, after using force to bring me here?"

"I have told you," broke in the Black Colonel, "what I know of Red Murdo and his doings on this morning, and if you do not believe me, why, I cannot help it. It may be that I had a plan for meeting you face to face, but no plan like what has now emerged."

"No," said I, intervening, "your plan was to find Marget alone in this eerie place, to work on her woman's feelings, her anxiety for her mother, her regard for her house, all that you might commit her with the Crown authorities as assenting to the secret negotiations which you are ripening."

"Doesn't that reflection come oddly from an officer of the Crown," he retorted, "because I have not heard you have resigned your commission? You should leave it to us who are not honoured with service under the foreign king, to flout his Majesty."

"There are moments, Jock Farquharson," I hotly replied, "when one's first duty is to be a man, and this is such a moment. I tell you if you do not drop your persecution of this lady you will have to count on a forthright quarrel with me."

"A pretty speech, my Captain Gordon," he said, adding: "Pretty speeches have a habit of coming from those whose tongues are their boldest weapons."

"You credit me," I said warmly, "with an accomplishment which I may or may not have; you assail me for want of a quality which I beg you to permit me to prove here and now."

There was no mistaking that, and he and his men looked their understanding. My feelings were what you can imagine, but I spoke deliberately. Perhaps I realized the need for quiet resolution rather than temper, which is ever too brittle a weapon to work well. As I understood, the Black Colonel, having failed to get Marget into his hands, with the object of mentally coercing her, now wanted to break me, if he could, in her presence. There was no end to the man's resource when the bad side of his character got going, and no measure at which he would stick.

His insult to me had been spoken in a voice loud enough to be heard by everybody. He so meant it to be heard, but my reply, an instant acceptance of his challenge, surprised him for a moment. He looked at me, hesitating what to say, and I looked at him with a perfectly clear purpose in my face. We both looked at Marget, at his Highlanders and at my men, knowing that with all these for witness of what had happened, more must follow.

Deep down in my heart I felt relief, because I was sure that some day we must fight out the odds between us, and when you come to that pass with any man, it is best it should be settled. They say that delay is fatal in love and deadly in war, and with me the two risks combined, for mine was both a question of love and a question of war.

"Is it elegant," the Black Colonel said in a purring voice of which I knew the worth, "that two men who are kinsmen in a degree, should fight, in the presence of a young lady who is a kinswoman?"

"You should have thought of that before," I quickly retorted.

"I agree with Captain Cordon," said Marget, interrupting us, "for I come of a people who have never been afraid to see trouble through, and I beg of you, Colonel Jock Farquharson, not to let me stand in the way. Nay, if you will accept me, I shall be referee!"

I bent my head to thank her for this, and he bowed in the over-polite fashion which he had learned among the French. By this time our respective followers, now taking a fight for granted, had lined themselves up to watch it, one set of men in one row, the other set in another, with space between them. A spirit of the love of combat for combat's sake, shone in their expectant eyes and echoed in their suppressed, excited talk.

There had once been a small garden attached to the Tower of Lonach, but it had been so overgrown with grass, and the grass had been so industriously eaten by sheep and deer, that now it was a rough, hard green, an entirely good place for swordsmen. On it, as the sun began to dip behind the hills, we took our stand, with my sergeant for second to me, while Red Murdo filled the same office towards the Black Colonel.

Things had happened so swiftly that I had scarcely time to think, and perhaps that was well, for thought never nerves you in such business as I had before me. There was I confronted with one of the best swordsmen in the Highlands, while I was—well, passably good. He was bigger, stronger, a more heroic, more impressive figure altogether than I was, and these pictorial attitudes count by the impression they make. I had to rely on a cool head, a nimble wrist, and I must in no wise depart from the style of fighting by which alone, as I well knew, I could hope to hold my own.

The Black Colonel would be sure, following the untutored Highland manner, and keeping his French training in reserve, to attack furiously, hoping so to destroy me at the beginning. My plan, based upon the barracks and camp training of a regular soldier, was to parry with him, to hold him off, to wear him down, and then, if I had the luck, which Heaven give me, get a blow home.

Marget, for all her courage, had walked over to a far corner of the green, where, however, she could still see us, because my soldiers and the Black Colonel's men stood aside to let her do that. Their common instinct for a fight flamed while they waited, but I knew that there would be no interference from either party of retainers, however things fell out, and so I had no anxiety as to the quarrel going beyond the Black Colonel and myself. All men of Highland degree were brought up to believe that honest disputes could be settled better by combat than anyhow else, and, indeed, they almost have a traditional reverence for the broad-sword of their country.

Nobody called on us to begin, but when the Black Colonel and I, our few preparations made, had looked at each other for a minute from the measured distance which divided us, we both advanced. As I had expected, he came with a rush, and if it had not been for my sound training in defence he might have smitten me at once. As it was, by a turn which seemed new to him, I caught his sword under the point and lifted it lightly upward into the empty air. He almost flew past me with the motion which he had gathered, and we both had to face

squarely round in order that we might continue.

This time, apparently, he meant to be more deliberate, thinking, perhaps, that if he missed me again with one of his wild lunges, he might meet the sting of my thrust. He played with me, and I responded to his caution, so far as he could be cautious, in the same spirit. Our swords were of equal length and about the same weight, but he had a longer arm than I, as well as a stronger one. Still, I made up for this, as he began to realize, by quicker work in what might be called the smaller craft of fighting. I could be here and there and somewhere else with my sword, while he was making a parry or a lunge or a level stroke, for he tried everything.

Now his sword ran safely under my left arm where I guided it, and the point of mine caught the breast-high edge of his kilt, where the cloth is closely plaited and therefore very resisting. My blade bent so that if it had been other than the finest steel it might have snapped. Then the grip in the cloth broke, the sword was free again, and we were without hurt, only the battle was growing warm.

Its contagion had agitated the men looking on, to a point where, forgetting themselves, they began to shout encouragement to us severally, the Black Colonel's men to him, mine to me. Red Murdo was urgently demonstrative, and my sergeant, as he afterwards told me, kept an eye on him lest he should be tempted to intervene. In the distance Marget, as I saw momentarily, stood still and quiet, but there was a fixed anxiety in her face, and the woman's horror of two men seeking to take each other's life on her account!

Now came the third bout, and knowing the limits of my strength I determined to make it the last, if I could. The Black Colonel, it encouraged me to notice, had also grown a little tired. His rush and dash were less strong when he came at me, and I thought I caught in his eye a new doubtfulness of success. He was famed for the quickness with which he could finish a duel, and probably he had also decided to settle this one at the third time of asking.

We parried and thrust, sword to sword, and I was driven to give way a few paces by the Colonel's onslaught. This led him to take risks, as I had hoped he might. Let him tire out his sword arm with heavy lunges and elaborate recoveries, while I kept myself on guard, and then, perhaps, my turn would come, for getting him. It did come, but it came, as most things come, in an unexpected fashion.

Sweating like a man in a fever, with his eyes wild and savage, the Black Colonel at last fairly flung himself on me. My face was also streaming with perspiration, but my head remained cool, perhaps because I felt that Marget was looking on. A warm heart and a cool head should neighbour an ordeal, and, in that assailing of me, my maintenance of this combination was everything.

As he leapt forward, purposing to overwhelm me, the Black Colonel's foot appeared to catch an uprising tuft that had been left unnibbled by the sheep, possibly on account of the coarse toughness of its grass. He lost his balance and shot heavily at me, holding his sword straight out, as if to drive it through me. Here was my chance, for he could not, in this act of falling, change the position of his weapon. I did that for him by a mere touch, and it ran by me, near, it is true, but without hurting me. Mine, on the other hand, pierced the muscle of the Black Colonel's right arm, and instantly his sword fell from his hand, rattling close to my foot. The blood spurted from him to the cry of the onlookers, "Ah, he's ill hit," for he looked it, lying there on the ground with a long, red gash in his arm.

"No," he said, slowly rising, "I am not ill hurt, but I am hurt in a measure which will keep me from fighting any more this afternoon. Here I am with a useless right hand, and I have never learned to use the left, so we must stop."

By this time Marget had come up, offering to bind the Black Colonel's wounded arm, and staunch the bleeding, a task which Red Murdo had already begun, only his hands were clumsy at it. Marget made him take off the strip of tartan which he was twisting tightly round the forearm and put her linen handkerchief nearest the wound. This tender and thoughtful attention seemed to soften the field of battle, and presently I found myself picking up the Colonel's sword and returning it to him.

"Thank you," he said; "I can only carry it in my belt at present, but I would not like to lose it, for it has proved you a better swordsman than I had expected."

Handsomely said, was it not? But we are always inclined to think a compliment to ourselves fitting, especially when it comes from an enemy as formidable as Jock Farquharson was.

"I hope, sir," I answered without undue gravity, "that I have earned the compliment and I accept it, as I accepted your challenge, without reserve. Now, I

suppose, our meeting is finished, and so we may each go our own way. Mistress Forbes, will you allow me to see you home?" and I turned towards her.

She took my arm and we walked quietly from Lonach Tower and quietly across the hills to the Dower House, neither of us saying much on the way, possibly because our thoughts were not for the six soldier men who strode behind us.

XIV—The Cards of Love

A man who serves the cause of a good woman is serving well, her and himself, even if he only waits in the garden of the emotions. He is probably helping that woman in subtle, beautiful ways, to be herself, to realize the full majesty of her womanhood, which otherwise she might miss. I had the highest wish to help the interests of Marget, and if my heart beat an accompaniment, that was only another test of my sincerity.

There, perhaps, I have written as if I had grown sure of Marget, which I had no right to be, which no man can ever be of any Marget, else romance would perish. Typical of other youth and maid stories was ours, a story without a beginning, a middle, or an apparent ending; a sort of skein of hope and unspoken understanding such as links two people, until they come closer or drift apart, ships that pass in the night that should be the morning.

When did we begin to care for each other, if that state of regard as between us was to be assumed, because people do ask themselves such questions, and if they do, why not admit it? When does a flower begin to bloom? Who can tell? You see it, one unheralded high-noon, as if it were just ready to burst beautifully upon its world. So it is, still much depends on how the world is going to treat it. The flower blows, if sunshine greets and warms it. But let the sky be grey, sombre, leaden, and that flower cometh not to its full kingdom—cometh not, she said.

We had not spoken, Marget and I, to each other of love; we had not called it by a name to each other; we had only felt and dreamt it. Possibly, that is the natural course of a simple, true love, for it is undemonstrative. It likes the half-lights of the dusk, to live in the shadow of its silvery clouds, and to arrive round corners, if only that it may have a safe way of escape, should it be frightened. Ever it

likes running away, and, better still, it likes being pursued!

All this goes with one dark little story of my love for Marget, and I would only tell it under the compulsion of a full-breasted honesty, because I judge it to be sacred to her as well as to me. It was when I first felt as if something hitherto unknown to me had come into my life at Corgarff. I had seen Marget once, with interest, because she was good to look upon, the second time with pleasure, because she seemed to see me, the third time with a sense of awkwardness, as if a mysterious contact had arisen between us.

Words will not take me nearer to the uncanny, covetous feeling than that, for they are bald, empty contrivances invented of this world and not, like love itself, the fruit of the spirit world. But perhaps you will understand, certainly if you have experienced yourself, and, understanding so much, you will be able to follow what came next.

Marget had been going somewhere, taking a mere walk, perhaps, and I had said, "May I not come," and she said, "No, there is really no need," and I did not go.

Unknowing youth! I saw my condemnation in her eye as she went her path resolutely, turning neither to the right nor to the left, a maiden determined to give me a lesson in this; that love, even when it is only dawning, loves to be assailed. That was a chapter of the spiritual story which lay within the outer story of our doings in Corgarff. You may say that it was a trifle, a thing not worth recalling, and that would be true for everybody except Marget and myself, who knew better then and confessed it to each other afterwards, because it was a first flicker of realization.

And, indeed, behind my marchings and counter-marchings around the grim old Castle of Corgarff there lay a mystery of feeling nearer to me than any call of arms could be. It was always present, the most potent influence that can exercise a man, born of one woman and in love with another. No doubt Marget and I shirked any admission, but it was in our bearing towards each other, that whisper of the heart's throne which calls and is answered.

This feeling was my settled comfort now that a cloud of events, as I assessed them, was hurrying the Black Colonel into a new necessity towards his personal aims and so towards Marget and myself. The "rough, raging, roaring, roystering, robustious rascal" side of him, and the description is not mine but taken from an

extant document, had long been filling up. Presently it would overflow in happenings urgent enough to sweep our pilgrimage along like a high wind on the high hills of Corgarff.

They began with a fall out between the Black Colonel and his Red Murdo, some little time after the duel at Lonach. To get his injured but recovered sword-arm in trim again the Colonel had taken to practising on his man, also a sufficient swordsman, though always liable to make a foul stroke. This time he had to defend himself from a sudden, half-angry, half-playful, wholly energetic assault on the part of his master, and that without a sword in hand.

What do you think he did, this Red Murdo, when the Colonel's provoking blade had positively pinked him in the leg, above the garter and drawn blood? He picked up Jock Farquharson's pet dog, a wise and lively Scots terrier, and flung it, a protection against further pinking, on the sword-point, with the remark, "A good soldier never lacks a weapon."

The Black Colonel was fondly attached to his dog, and its death, for it died from the wound, upset him into other troubles. It is often the way, when one thing goes wrong that many things go wrong, time getting out of joint generally. Naturally, too, if we remember that life is a delicate machine which a small first unbalancing will throw into disorder, as take the Black Colonel in witness.

It became necessary for him to "raise the wind," as he spoke of the process, and to that end he sent Red Murdo on a foraging expedition. This worthy, wishful to do the business with as little trouble as possible, went after the first batch of cattle he could find. He planned to get them away in the dark of night, have them at a safe distance by morning, and then, at his leisure, drive them to a southern market and bring back to the Black Colonel what he got for them, less his own expenditure on victuals and drink, and the due entertaining of other gentlemen of the same kidney, met on the road, because its comradeship had to be justly handselled.

Now, shrewdly, as a matter of precaution against raiders high, or kern lowly, the owner of the grazing kine had put a white beast among them. Consequently when he was wakened by a loud lowing and came forth to find the reason, he saw that his cattle were being stolen away, for there walked the white one, a guiding star to his eye. He followed the drove quietly at a distance, summoning friends as he passed their several homes, and when he had gathered recruits

enough, and while it was still dark, he set upon Red Murdo and his thieves, gave them the heartiest beating you could fancy, and re-captured the cattle.

This attempt to steal the kine was laid at the door of the Black Colonel, rightly so, and when he heard of it and its failure he swore at Red Murdo, saying he had lost all a henchman and provider's artistry. He was one of those men, very numerous in the world, who could ill-support a failure made by himself, and could not bear it at all when another failed who was acting for him.

"Why," he rated Red Murdo, "you can neither steal nor lie, as a Highland gentleman's ghillie should. You would have me do those petty things myself, and they are not for me, although, mayhap, I'd be equal enough to them."

Red Murdo answered nothing to his enraged chief, but perhaps made up for his silence by some hard thinking. When a rebuke is taken silently the wrath behind it is apt, in average human nature, to simmer out, but the Black Colonel's black fire burned on.

"Why," he roared, "didn't you think of an expedient to keep those cattle, the white one and all, for very probably it was a beast to fetch a good price? Where were your wits? You recollect when, for an act which has since been counted brave, I had to fly with half-a-dozen men on my heels, and how, coming to a mill, and nobody being there, I put on the miller's dusty suit. I was asked by my pursuers, sure that they had seen the man they pursued disappear into the mill a few minutes before, 'Did any one enter here?' 'Only the miller is here,' I told them, and, as it seemed so, they went their way, and, after a while, I went mine."

"But," said Red Murdo, "they wid na' hae believed me if I had sworn a score o' oaths that I was the miller. I'm nae sae good at swearin' untrooths as some folk you ken!"

"Possibly," quoth the Colonel loftily. "To be believed one must, after all, look one's words and you might find it a difficulty. But still a ghillie of better strategy would have kept those cattle and, what is worse, my friend, saved the suspicion which has fallen upon me."

"Nae for the first time," Red Murdo shot at the Black Colonel.

"It's not first times that matter," he retorted more quietly, being pleased, in a manner, with Red Murdo's spirit; "it's last times that count, and the need is to

take care of them."

Possibly the Black Colonel might have met his material troubles for a while longer without having to fly from them, because he was full of stratagems. But on the sentimental side he fell into an affair of much sadness for a comely lady who, at her mid-age, should have known better, though, indeed, the forties have their storms, like the sea latitudes sailors call the "roaring forties." Delectable as detail might be, and desirable to illumine what all befell, I must, for I am no scandal-monger, be content to give you the romance and the tragedy in three snatches of verse begotten by the same.

First, you must make what you like of—

"She kept him till mornin', then bade him begane,
And showed him the road that he might na be ta'en."

Next, you have the news let loose, for—

"Word went to the kitchen
An' word went to the ha'."

Finally, when my lord of the lady rides home from a far journey and hears that news, and meets her, he goes red, wud mad and—

"O bonnie, bonnie was her mouth
And cherry were her cheeks;
And cleir, cleir was her yellow hair
Whereon the reid blude dreips."

There the Black Colonel had found a tangle which he could not cut through, and he sought a side-way out. How he discovered it he was good enough to inform me, though I had no claim to his confidence, in an epistle drafted in his best style, which reached me at Corgarff, hard on the tidings of what had made the necessity for it.

"To Captain Ian Gordon, for his privy knowledge only," it opened, and it continued, in his usual, even manner, for, mind you, he had the trick of writing,

as well as the odd weakness towards it already remarked on, all of which appears in what follows, so:

"It may oblige your calculations that I have a proposal through proper channels to go on a special mission to New France, where a state of war now exists between the British and the French. Ordinarily I should have hesitated to take a step which would remove me, even for a time, from my most particular affairs here, these being familiar to you.

"The offer is put to me, however, as part of earlier overtures in those same affairs, and that recommends it. Moreover, there are urgent private reasons, not here to be gone into, but perhaps to be j'aloused by you, which favour an early change of air and scenery for yours dutifully. Accordingly I am departing for North America by the first government ship on to which I can be smuggled, that, as I grimly note, being the elegant word used in a dispatch of instruction to my hand.

"You cannot fail to be curious as to the nature of my mission, and I shall inform you thereon so far as its delicate nature permits. I am offered by Government—your Government—a free pardon for the past and a captain's commission in Fraser's Regiment of Highlanders, now in Canada with General Wolfe, if I succeed in the undertaking which is this . . . but its delicacy tries my power of pen.

"Briefly I, a proscribed Jacobite, am to depart from Scotland, find my way to Canada, and offer my sword and service to the Marquis Montcalm commanding his French Christian Majesty's troops for the defence of Quebec. There I am to keep an open eye, and a close tongue, for all and every information of possible use to General Wolfe, and transmit the same to him personally, by what safe channels I can devise. He is to be informed of my mission, and he alone, and that's all, though it may be enough for you to digest, as it has been, I beg you to believe, for me.

"Will you, I pray, make my humble excuses to Mistress Marget Forbes and her mother, and accept them for yourself, and you may rely upon hearing from me oversea, because I have no intention to relinquish a shred of my attachment to my native Highlands and the well-being of the name I bear; whereof it is the purpose of this epistle to inform you, as between one man of honour and another."

News indeed, intensely personal, therefore intensely interesting news, and I let it be known without delay at the Dower House, taking care, in delicacy, not to seem curious as to the impression it made there. Somewhat later I had intelligence of the actual sailing of the Black Colonel for New France, across the Atlantic, with his inseparable Red Murdo, whom, I was sure, the adventure would suit grandly, though he probably would not be told its secret meaning.

Then came a long silence, and I began to wonder whether the Black Colonel had not, somewhere and somehow, been caught in the last kink of his pre-destined hair-rope. While I wondered, off and on, in this sense, and our small world of Corgarff drifted uneventfully on, a much-worn, salt-sprayed letter reached me, and I recognized in it the Black Colonel's writing.

What account had he to give of himself?

XV.—News from Somewhere

"Quebec," the Black Colonel had written above the first sheet of his letter and he had forgotten to put any date, so I was left to guess how long it had taken to reach me. Nor did it bear any form of address to myself, but just began abruptly, "I do not suppose you will be specially glad to hear of me in this land of New France. There was, however, an understanding that I should write you, and I am doing it by a sure and confidential messenger." Then it went on as follows, for I transcribe it fully, as is needful for the conveyance of its atmosphere and even a certain quality of elegance natural to the writer:

"No man is happy who has had disappointments like me, but, at least, I survive and am usefully occupied. If I may say it, my not inconsiderable fame in our native Highlands had gone ahead of me to this country. That made it easy to secure service in one of the French corps in Quebec, for I speak the language, as you know, with no undue stranger accent, and it always brings me gay memories of hours in Old France.

"The regimental wages are not great, and they are not paid with exact punctuality, because there are too many empty hands waiting between his French Christian Majesty's coffers and his soldiers in Canada. But that, to a man like myself who wants little of the so-called comforts of life, and has, moreover,

other sources, is no great hardship, and there are comfortings, sometimes, in unexpected quarters.

"The French, who know the art of romance, and how to spin it to the last drop without getting to the dregs, have already peopled this new land of theirs with colour, but I doubt me if it will last, which is their affair, not mine, or yours. King Louis himself is indulgent to the human colouring of his dominion, in that he sends out shipments of wives from the Old Country for the French settlers.

"Therefore they are called 'King's girls,' and being flowers of a kingdom which has bloomed rarely with women, they are in much demand. It is a joke, when a ship-load arrives, that the plumpest are married first, and this, I gather, for two reasons: Being less active, it is thought they will more readily stay at home, as honest married women should, and, being well covered—not fat, oh no! not that—that they will the better resist the icy cold of New France in the winter. For myself they do not interest me, not on account of the reason which drove my late Count Frontenac here, he having in the Old Country a shrewish wife whose temper he could not bear, but because I have found attractions more to my taste, of which you shall know something.

"I may admit, with some assurance, that my luck in the regard of the sweet sex, holds amid the altered conditions in which I find myself. Those French women have not the freshness, and I am certain not the innocence—you will admit me a judge on both counts—of my own country-women in the Scots Highlands. But they have a wondrous charm, a quality of attractiveness which is as deadly to a Highlander as if a dirk slit his heart. I speak, you may think, in poetry numbers, but you must do that, if, speaking of women, you would do them justice, and, incidentally, yourself. We have all sorts and most conditions of women, and the trade in laces and ribbons and the gew-gaws with which they adorn themselves, is wonderful for so small a place as Quebec. No sooner does a consignment of finery come in than it is snapped up, and the men, too, are admirable dandies, ruffling it, some of them, as if Louis Quatorze himself were here with his Court.

"Now, only last night I was at the party of the Intendant Bigot, and a gay crowd we were until the small hours of the morning grew again. His Excellency, the Marquis Montcalm, has the Frenchman's natural love for pleasure, but he is a serious, honest man who resolutely puts his duty before it. Monsieur Vaudreuil is more the gentleman of pleasure, a governor with a large token of the gallant in him, but for chicane, knavery and devilry commend me to this fellow the

Intendant Bigot. They say he grows richer every day by robbing his gracious master, the King, first, and the King's subjects next. I cannot speak with authority of that, and it matters not, but I can tell you of what goes on at his chateau, the Chateau Bigot, because, as I write, I am scarcely cool from its doings.

"There was Bigot himself as master of the revels, a short, stout, awkward man of more than middle-age, who did not well become the part. He is, I must add, coarse for my taste, and by his appearance you might judge him capable of any venture in the getting of money. He would say in his cynical, loud way that the end justifies the means, and with him the end is Angélique des Meloises. She is probably going to be the Delilah of New France, the woman who is shearing it of its upholding strength, but she is fine.

"Ah, ha! the name of Angélique is fresh to you, has no meaning, and I see you halting and asking me to tell you more of her. But here she is a household word—or, should it be, by-word?—and I, a stranger, am counted fortunate in having come close to the rustle of her skirt. That skirt, you can believe me, is in many fabrics, and ever of the best, and, though I cannot confirm it, the other women of Quebec say that no parcel of lace, or silk, or satin, freshly sent by Old France to New France, is free of being tampered with by Bigot in the pleasuring of his mistress. Without that news in your ear, you would not, my friend, comprehend the Chateau Bigot.

"Angélique was not the first flame with whom the old sinner has lit his fires in Canada, for there was Caroline, the Algonquin maid, not to mention others. Bigot, the story goes, had been hunting and, be it conceded, he is, for a Frenchman, a sound shot, and had lost himself in the wilds. Presently, while he pondered on his course, there appeared a fascinating Indian girl, and he made her guide him to his chateau and there kept her. The woman pays in such affairs, be she white, brown, or black, all the complexions I have seen, and that Indian lass came to a sad end, being found stark one morning in bed, with a knife through her lissom body.

"But that was Bigot of the Garden of Eden, the primitive savage of passion who would have his apple without having to eat the punishment, so far, anyhow, though, I suppose, the devil, who has seven-league boots when he likes, will overtake him. If he were to do it now he would find him engrossed in the smiles and, maybe, the caresses of Angélique. I have, myself, pretended to be some

judge of woman-folk, and Angélique pleases me in divers manners. That is an admission I would not mind making to herself, though, to be sure, I have found it the silent gallantry towards women which reaps most harvest. She is, by marriage, Madame Pean, wife of a creature whom Bigot uses, and she is a note of lovely abandon which a man with half my insurgency would like to pluck an' he could.

"We have been introduced, Madame Angélique and I, for here all goes by the most correct form on the surface. We have even drunk from the same cup of wine, because she preferred me hers yester-night, saying, 'To our gallant recruit Monsieur Inverey, and to his gallant nation, les Ecossais.' Ah, the laughing witch! You should have seen the languor in her eyes, the blushing red of her lips, the delicate contour of her arm, as she raised her glass to me and then bade me empty it.

"'Ah,' said I, bowing and taking it from her hand, against whose baby pinkness the champagne sparkled; 'ah, it is good to see, chère Madame, that you know the ceremony of the Loving Cup, and how, elegantly, to express it.' My phrase of the Loving Cup took her, I saw, it and my significance in using it, and her dark eyes, her pouting lips, and the turn of her lovely head, all had a new meaning as, saying, 'To our Lady Venus, in New France,' I emptied the glass and set it on the table beside her.

"We fell a-talking, Madame Angélique and I, and she was good enough to praise my French, and I said that, alas! it was not sufficient to do justice to her charms. She flushed with pleasure, and said archly that she wished her husband, Monsieur Pean, or even her very good friend the Intendant, would pay her like compliments. 'But,' she added, 'you Scotsmen are so gallant and so truthful,' and in her sweet French the token rang true. With it she raised her eyebrows, expecting me to confirm her raillery, which I did, for I said, 'Madame, truth is the only gallantry that tells twice, and so I am content to employ it, for I hope we are to be friends.'

"It was a bold measure to take, but Madame Angélique, I judged, with her on-coming air, was precisely the woman who would respond to bold measures. She is none of your woo-me-slowly ladies, her bosom, as it rose and fell in her French laces, being eloquent of that. She is a singularly fine animal to whom Providence has, by an unusual generosity, given a soul, though mostly, maybe, it hides in the silken dalliance which is the note of Angélique.

"You will perceive, my old friend and, I hope, old enemy, that I present to you a whole bouquet of charms: beauty of form, the radiance of a personality, and brains with an edge to flatter or flout. Very rarely does Providence dower so many graces to one woman, but they are all in Madame Angélique. Moreover, she has the subtlest of sex strategy, for in greeting me she made a stumble with her lace petticoat so that I might catch the daintiness of her foot and ankle. She also has the swiftest, as well as the softest of glances, and I felt it travel from my brogues to my head, approving the journey, I fancied.

"I have been particular about Madame Angélique because she is a woman in a thousand, this frail beauty of New France, its Madame de Pompadour in brilliance, however the comparison may hold in virtue, and because, if I prosper at all in the friendship, I hope to hear from her the inner news of events here which, by its usefulness to General Wolfe, is to lead me far in my home desires. When I left Scotland I had a sore heart, for truly it fills that heart, but you will gather that I have found a fresh land which also has its milk and honey.

"How much of them shall I sip? That's the gamble, and time will tell, but it is a great gamble in which I am enlisted, and, by my faith, I like a gamble. It stirs the blood in me, makes it run as it ran when I made love to my first sweetheart, and a strapping lass she was, though, alas! I have almost forgotten her very existence. Poor Carrie! I wonder, I wonder, but hi, ho! what use to ask of the flowers of yesterday, where are they?

"Only, my dear Captain Gordon, I wish I could have taken you with me last evening to that romp at the Chateau Bigot. Yes, I remember, your tastes are different from my own—less elastic, shall we say?—and you might not have come. Well, set love and gambling and sport, all done with abandon, in a choice, beflowered fold of this New France country and you may realize what you have missed and I have seen.

"Revelry! That is not the word for the night, and it took all the seriousness in me to recall that I had other interests among the revellers besides theirs. My elegance in our Highland dress, for to be sure I wore it, cost me many a temptation, and if Madame Angélique, late in the evening, had gone a minute longer with her whimsical measurings of my leg where it garters, why, sir, I should have made a fool of myself. But she merely said she wanted to test whether I was not modelled to perfection for dancing the Highland dances, and wouldn't I oblige her and the company?

"Monsieur Bigot, lolling in a chair, beslippered, be-hosed in the fatness of his limbs, be-waistcoated round his windy paunch, wearing velvet knee-breeches and a plum-coloured coat, what should he do, for his ears miss little, but catch this remark and, wishing, I suppose, to keep me from any further impressing of Madame Angélique, he cried, 'Surely, surely, let us have a Scottish dance from our gallant friend, Comte Farquharfils!'

"He ennobled me in one breath, and in the next made French of the ancient surname I bear, but that was of no consequence, and his cry was taken up instantly by his guests: 'Beautiful ladies and gallant gentlemen,' he went on, 'the Chevalier Ecossais—more ennobling of me!—will entertain us with a dance of his native country!'

"For a moment I was abashed with confusion, yes, sir, believe it or not, because this was a thing which had not come into my plans. But I have not lived for ten years by my wits and my sword without learning to make rapid resolutions, and I decided to dance, not alone! The gallants and the ladies had now formed a circle, and I said very quietly, 'I am honoured, Monsieur L'Intendant, and your desire will be to me a pleasure, if Madame will permit.'

"A glance of curious inquiry went round the circle as I looked at Madame Angélique, a radiant and bewitching picture, standing at the end of the room, eager to see the Scottish dance for which she had made measurements—yes, yes! Perhaps some of the company had penetrated the real purpose of Monsieur Bigot's interference as being what I have said, and in that case they saw a challenge in my acceptance of his invitation.

"But he was prompt to the occasion, for he said in his lordliest fashion, 'Madame, I am sure, will be happy to permit,' and he bowed to Angélique, who, in turn, bowed to me her gracious permission for a dance Ecossais. Neither had counted on what was to happen, for I quietly walked over to her, invited her to take my arm, and, while every one wondered, led her into the middle of the room. I did this amid a buzz of surprise, and I heard one gallant say, 'Parbleu, this Scotsman asked the lady's patronage and takes herself.' Neatly put, I thought, and the French mind is neat, as well as swift.

"The music struck up as I passed my right hand about the responding waist of Madame and lifted her elegance through a Highland round-dance. There was no need to lift her through it a second time, because the god of dancing was in that

woman's feet, and between us we fairly wove poetry on the polished floor. Never, after the first moment, was there such a partner as Angélique; never, perhaps, if I may be allowed the conceit, such a pair of partners, a picture, my friend, a picture!

"As we warmed to the dance we lost all sense of an audience, and only drank the intoxication of the music. At first there had been a cold silence around us, but we infected it with our own sultry spirit and melted it. 'Bravo!' shouted the Frenchmen, and 'Divine!' said the ladies, and I took the praise of the women and Madame Angélique the praise of the men, a fair division, pleasing to us both.

"Monsieur Bigot alone remained aloof from praise, and as we turned once very close to him—so close that he wilted in the hot draught made by our wrapt figures—I saw a hard look come into his eyes and a hard expression cross his coarse mouth. When we finished at last and I had conducted Madame Angélique to a chair and thanked her, a huzza rang to the roof, but the Intendant took no part in it. He did, however, approach me with what others thought to be words of congratulation, only you shall judge when I repeat them.

""You dance like the devil himself,' were his words, 'but you had better not dance again with Madame Angélique or you may find yourself in the devil's company. We have other uses in Quebec for you than this, and your native Scottish wisdom will convince you of it without more ado.'

"Well, the thing was done, the harm or good of it, for one cannot always act with deliberation, and never, I should say, when Madame Angélique beckons, for she is a witch incarnate. Rarely is it any use revising what has been done, and, frankly, I would not have missed that dance even if it were to have cost me my head. At the moment I am not sure whether or not it has cost me my heart; temporarily, shall I say, keeping on the safe side of truth?

"Anyhow, my dear Captain Ian Gordon, you will be made aware by these greetings, should they reach you in the goodness of time, and the friend who carries them, that I am having an experience which agrees with me, and so I sign myself with the more heartiness,

"Your very faithful

"JOCK FARQUHARSON OF INVEREY."

XVI—The Woon' O't!

There are two kinds of people who make a difference in our lives when they leave us: those we like and who like us, and those we do not like and who dislike us, for that is one way in which the world wags.

We feel, in the first case, a quick sadness, we dwell on happy memories, now tinted to a soft melancholy, and we ask ourselves, "Have we been all to them we could have been, and they the most to us?"

Our feeling in the second case is one of relief, coupled with the passing of an influence which, if not sympathetic, may yet have been a stimulus to us. Something that has been roused in our nature, goes back into its hidden place with the cause which unhappily called it out, rivalry, perhaps. It is a whip that may carry you to the top of a hill when otherwise, tempted by a warm sun and a soft wind, you might recline on a half-way bank of heather. Ah! it is good to day-dream at the sun, our Highland sun, which plays hide-and-seek with the sailing clouds.

But, may be, the incomplete parting is the best, that which has many things unsaid, silences which are not silent; because it leaves room for the imagination, lets us gild the picture in the roses of hope.

The going of the Black Colonel had meant a difference for myself certainly, and also, I could suppose, for Marget and her mother. But it was a mixture of the two feelings which I have suggested, because, in a fashion, I had a regard for the man, as well as something else, and to the ladies of the Dower House he was both the kinsman and the venturer who wanted to be more. I admired his manly qualities and was willing to clothe the others in a veil, as long as he did not make that impossible. They had the bond of family with him, a quiet pride in his championage of the Stuart side, which had been theirs, and, well, they wished no more of him. But what, perhaps, we mostly felt, Marget and I, without daring for a moment to confess as much, was that some element which kept us apart, and might, unhappily, even divide us, had passed across the sea to the New World with the Black Colonel.

We began unconsciously, and then, I suspect, noticeably, to grow closer, to live the vital little things of life nearer to each other, as it this were natural. That, perhaps, is the most critical period in the mating of two young people, as you

may learn from the delicate nurturing of Mother Nature herself in the spring-time, when the earth grows warm. They are so in the thrill of emotion, that they have no thought for the building of the permanent house of the spirit in which they are to dwell. But it goes forward about them and otherwise the prospect would be bleak for them, sad for them, and sadness should not come to lovers in the honeymoon of their hopes.

"I suppose," Marget said to me one evening while we chatted in the Dower House and her mother, tempted by the long summer light of the north, read in the garden, "I suppose you really have nothing to do now that the Black Colonel is gone, and his disturbance—for you—with him."

"Oh," answered I, "there are still things to do, things, some of them, which I don't like, as my military superiors down there in Aberdeen town may be suspecting, for only last week, you know, they sent up a troop of horse to make a special search of Corgarff for any hidden Jacobite powder and shot. What happened you also know. Our friends of your Stuart faith heard of this expedition long before it arrived, filled their knapsacks with bannocks, and went to the hills. The troopers came, found, by persistent search in deserted homes, a few barrels of Spanish powder, some hundreds of bullets and a broken cannon, and threw them all into the Water of Don. It was not very exciting, especially to me, because it was a kind of censure; but nothing worse happened than the breaking of a drunken trooper's neck, by a fall from his horse. Here was one more way of death, not a pretty way, for the man's commanding officer said jocosely, 'The idiot, he must have come upon bad drink in his searches, and a bad woman is less dangerous.'"

"Your statement," said Marget, "is, I see, a confidential apology to me for the ongoings of those set over us and you! I hope you don't spend too many hours in reflections as unprofitable as the subject of these," and she made, with this advice, to be a very serious young woman.

"What," I asked, "would you have me do with my spare time?"

"I'm afraid I don't know."

"Well, if you don't, who does?"

"I think I see a compliment in what you say, but I'm not quite sure."

"It's against rules, isn't it, to repeat a compliment? It would be no compliment then."

"The more need to make it clear at first."

"I thought I had."

"Men think such a lot of things which are too unsubtle, too clumsy, for a woman to comprehend. Yes, it is so."

"Men—myself—the Black Colonel?"

"He is far away; why bring him back?"

"Only because it may concern you, and anything which concerns you . . . is not to be spoken."

"It is more interesting to speculate on what might have happened if he had stayed, instead of running from his guns—no, I mean to his guns, for he was no coward. Discount a good deal from him and he remains a taking man. It flatters any woman to be coveted by a man of parts, good or bad. She likes the homage thus implied, and if she did not she would be no woman. She says to herself, 'What a pity that man should be in love with me because I would not have him at all.' With her next breath she says, 'A resolute lover, something like a lover, a great lover.'"

"The unconventional lover—and more," said I; "that's it, all down time, the primitive trait of sex, he who can lift a woman out of her groove into a surprise."

"Well," said Marget, "the Black Colonel has the right blood for an unconventional lover. You cannot make a Farquharson respectable by force, and I'm not sure about the Gordons!"

She looked at me with amusement in one eye and the rebel woman in the other and I laughed, and that was all. No; not all.

Such talks between Marget and myself may have seemed to lead nowhere, but actually they did. The unspoken side of them was full of those secrets which cannot be put into language, because they would perish in the effort. What is

spoken may be good, but what is unspoken in love is still better. Behind the word, there hides the speech of the soul. You say one thing, and with the eye mean another, or you say it in a fashion only intelligible to a particular person. There is a telegraphy of souls, as well as of hearts and minds, and the lesson is never to believe your ears.

Things came to be understood between myself and Marget, and the Black Colonel had a part in this, far away as he had taken himself and his troubles. He was not out of the picture, because he might return to it, but we could paint him in or out as we liked, and that left us canvas room. One day he was returning to set us all by the heels again; another day he was gone, to return no more, leaving us to fashion our own lives, as we were doing.

"Marget," I asked, "suppose the Colonel comes back, is he to find us just as he left us?"

"Not very friendly—or more friendly?" she replied vaguely, teasingly. And then a little anxiously, as I thought, "Did you and the Black Colonel make any bargain about our old Forbes property which need ever call him back?"

"Dear me, no! But if it would give you pleasure to see him again soon, why, let us pray for his coming."

Marget was hurt at this, for she said, "I was only wondering whether the Black Colonel will renew the quest here, if he does not reach his ends through the New France venture."

That question was to be answered by a last long epistle from him, which came to me about this time, and which tells his further part in our story, a wandering story, like Jock Farquharson.

XVII—A Song of Other Shores

"Quebec, North America.

My Worthy Kinsman,

"You have not written me in reply to a previous letter of mine, nor did I expect you would, but I hope you have not lost all interest in my fortunes, and I make sure that the great events which have happened here, in New France, must interest you, when told with some particularity by me.

"You will be well aware, before this reaches you, that the *fleur-de-lys* of his Christian Majesty, King Louis, no longer flies over the citadel of Quebec, and that in its place there blows the flag of His Britannic Majesty—whom God bless, I suppose! But of how all this happened you will only have general intelligence, and none about my own fortunate part in it.

"Well, it was not mere fortune, because I did exert myself strenuously to discharge the mission confided to me, and General Wolfe said privily, before he marched to a glorious victory and a glorious death, that I had succeeded beyond his expectation. But I should tell you that I had necessary audiences of him more than once, while I served with the French in Quebec, and these we managed with perfect secrecy, thanks to methods which I may not disclose, except that the high esteem felt by the French for the Black Colonel, and their faith in his honour, alone made them possible.

"Saying so much of General Wolfe, I wish to set down my own monument to his evident high parts as a soldier and a man. I found him modest in demeanour, graceful of manner, reasonable in attitude, altogether a gallant gentleman. He was simple and to the point, and when he had finished with you he dispatched you courteously, pleased with him and with yourself.

"His excellency, the Marquis Montcalm, who also did me the honour of various conversations, and who likewise fell gloriously, had qualities not dissimilar. He was a French gentleman with the grand manner, meaning he carried his air so quietly that you hardly knew its presence, except by feeling it. I will further say, in token to his attributes, that he was of a moral stature in whose presence I felt ashamed of my secret trade, a trade which a man can only follow once in a life time, and then because he must.

"Perhaps you will scarce believe that several times my tongue was bubbling to deliver all to his knowledge, and to throw myself on his mercy. His very trustfulness made that impossible, because in each of us there is a natural refusal to destroy confidence, wherever we find it. That would be uprooting a plant which does not grow strongly enough anywhere, and I, for one, love to cultivate

it. 'So, so,' I hear you say, my friend!

"Certainly at times I wished that my Lord Montcalm would treat me with less consideration and not ask me questions about the British invading forces, because I gathered information from those questions, and, in truth, here was the basis of much I imparted to General Wolfe. He asked, did Monsieur Montcalm, in some detail, about the Highlanders of Fraser's Regiment, and said that, far away as he had seen them from the ramparts, they appeared so picturesque in their tartans as to be hardly associable with the even, undeviating, outward English character.

"I answered that there were greater similarities between the Highlanders of Scotland and the French than between those same Highlanders and the English, both having Celtic blood in them, and that this resulted in a natural brotherhood which even the hazards of war could not disturb, or only temporarily. Nay, I said once to his excellency that we Jacobites still look more over the water to France and to our Stuart King than we look, or ever may look, over the Scottish border to England.

"You will mark how I sprawl between my native land and this New France, as it was termed until the other month. A man's heart can be in many places, a woman's only in one, and my affections, I confess, have mostly been a divided allegiance. They have gone out and come home again, and now, thanks to my prosperity here, they have a tendency to abide where my epistle finds me. For there is grateful comfort in Quebec, and a freshness glad to experience, and the society remains merry, though the *fleur-de-lys* has perished for ever. All the French women here in Quebec did not see, in its changed governors, a burial for the living, and some of them said, 'It is destiny; let us make the best of things.'

"But I anticipate events, and that would be to miss their drama and my own little share in them, a share with which, in the result, I am satisfied, although I could sincerely have wished the ways and means to be more aboveboard. However, you cannot remain the complete gentleman and make history, and my justification lies in this signal fact: that I inspired and counselled General Wolfe to his scaling of the cliffs at the one place where that was possible, a matter on which I beg you will see that right credit and justice be done towards Jock Farquharson of Inverey, commonly called the Black Colonel. He and I alone knew beforehand where exactly the escalade was to be, and it was a singular joy to share a large, potential secret with another able to make it good, as General

Wolfe most handsomely did, though, once being shown how, no great difficulty remained.

"When, in the hurry of Quebec that fated morning, I heard Fraser's Highlanders had climbed the cliffs, swinging from foothold to foothold like the wild cats of their native mountains, I said to myself, 'This is, indeed, my venture, and it is fitting my own people should carry it out.' But how odd it is that two Highland threads should come together in such a fashion, only we Celts have been destined to weave many of the red warps of story. I had knowledge of the part my kinsmen were to play in the bloody gamble between General Wolfe and the Marquis Montcalm, and, without desiring to appear on the field of battle, which was no part of my diplomacy and not hard, with my privileges from the French, to avoid, I sought an elevation where I could behold the kilted Frasers drawn up in battle array.

"My certes, they made a brave picture, with the sun shining on the colours of their kilts and the cool Canadian breeze waving them as in a rhythm of martial motion. Ah! the heart aye warms to the tartan, and I could have given my soul, if it be left me, which I must hope, to stand in front of that red and green line, an officer of the Fraser's, as I have now become, by virtue of the successful completion of my contract. They awaited orders with impatience, for the headlong charge has ever been the natural form of battle with Highlanders, only the appearance of General Wolfe, fearlessly wearing a new, conspicuous uniform, and the entire confidence of his step forward and backward while history boiled in the pot, held them in like a rein.

"It was the French who joined battle first, making some confusion among themselves as they did so, because their several units fired differently. This wasted and scattered their salvoes, but they advanced gallantly to within forty yards of the British lines. Then General Wolfe ordered 'Fire!' and before its solid stroke the French reeled like trees stricken by lightning. Swiftly, then, the Highlanders leapt forward with bayonets gleaming, and in what I say of them—my own people—I say of the British army as a whole: it caught the French before they could reform, and thus the issue was already decided.

"Now here was a change on the message, my Comte Frontenac, in earlier years, returned to a British admiral who demanded his surrender. 'The only answer,' he swore, 'I will give will be from the mouth of my cannon and musketry, that he may learn that it is not in such a style that a man of my rank may be summoned.'

It was a change, too, from the ill-success of General Wolfe's assault on Montmorency, over beside the little river falling into the big one, where the very elements were unfavourable.

"Montcalm won then, very fairly won, for his fire upon the British was of a nature which none could overcome. Monsieur Vaudreuil, the Governor, who, like the Intendant Bigot, had an eternal desire to reap where he had not sown, was so patronizing as to say after the Montmorency fight, 'I have no more anxiety about Quebec. Monsieur Wolfe, I am sure, will make no progress.' 'La, la,' as Madame Angélique would say when she teases me, what a poor prophet was his excellency Vaudreuil, but, indeed, prophecy has a trick of falling into incapable hands and I, being, I trust, capable, have rarely tried it.

"You needed my broad account of events in Quebec to do me justice, and that is why I have lingered over it. I have given you hints enough for the proper fitting of me into those events, as when, most casually, I hope, I mentioned my advising of General Wolfe precisely where to make his ascent to the Plains of Abraham. However, there are small personal items you cannot know, without they are told you, and very chiefly that refers to the ingenuity with which, my mission, as compacted, being done, I passed from the ranks of the vanquished French to those of the conquering British, where I had been expected.

"There was such confusion everywhere, such a tearing up of things, that I could do what I wished, and have it go unchallenged. Moreover, there was a want of bitterness between the contending parties, for one reason, possibly, because the deaths of Wolfe and Montcalm had softened enmity: and nobody has yet hurled the words 'traitor,' 'spy,' at me, and I feel I am not truly open to them, my task having been that of an intelligence officer on the highest scale. As much is recognized in the affability which I have continued to find among the French since the close of the siege, but they are by nature surprisingly agreeable, as I would wish, with my heart to subscribe.

"Why, man, and this will make you curious, if envy there be in you, young French ladies take pains and pleasure to teach British officers French, with what view I know not, if it be not to hear themselves praised, flattered and courted, without loss of time. To praise comes natural to me, to flatter is not amiss, and, as to courting, I judge you have always appreciated that in me. You may have doubted me in some respects; you had no doubts I fancy, in that particular.

"This quality of mine—I claim it a quality—has made me take, with growing kindness, to where I am, and the idea of coming home again, when it arises in my mind, I rather put aside. My natural dream is that I shall return, but mostly I am content to play with the fancy, to catch it up, put it aside, and again catch it up, and once more let it rest.

"There I am backed by the circumstance that I have no tidings whatever touching my plans, as declared to you, in regard to Corgarff, and I suppose that your thankless rulers have forgotten me. They were willing to use me as a pacifier, and when that did not promise an immediate result they found me of use in the war of New France. This service being completed, faithfully, honourably, I dare aver, and to the very letter of the bargain, I am, I repeat, for much I repeat, given my commission in Fraser's Highlanders. But, of a settlement in the larger spirit which the inclusion of Corgarff would have implied, I have no intelligence, and it is conceivable that I may get none.

"Therefore I may remain at Quebec with the Fraser Highlanders so long as they continue here, and, when they go hence, still remain as an independent gentleman, provided I were, by happy chance, shall I say? to find genial companionship. I am not old, not of the sort ever to grow actually old, but the excursions of life have wearied me, and I begin to sigh for a permanent holding ground, the anchorage of rest which should come to us all.

"That desire, if I may make you a great confidence, would satisfy itself in a woman of the qualities of Mistress Marget Forbes. I do no more than quote her because she is known to us both, and therefore she makes clear the exact shade of my meaning. But I imply no freedom with her name, except what the honouring of it carries, and if any man implied anything more she would know how to answer him. She has, I will say, the tang of the Forbes blood full in her, and I have always thought it warmer in its flow of both love and pride than the Gordon blood, although of that you should be a better judge than I am.

"One needs a wife of parts if one is, as I hope, to found a new clan in a new country, for, mind you, many of the Fraser Highlanders, when they end their period of enrolment, will prefer to settle in this lush, virgin country where the days go by like a dream. They will sit down on the untilled lands, and out of them find a competence of food and raiment, and they will marry French women who are buxom and healthy and will be good wives and mothers.

"Granted all this, and it follows that there will be materials for a new house of Inverey in some valley by the River Saint Lawrence, where the Red Man at present reigns in indolence. He who can sit on a knoll for an hour and let old Mother Earth spin her tune to the fathering sun, is ever a friend of mine. But the Red Man carries the pastime beyond me, unless when he is on the warpath, and then he is a devil. It would give me no compunction to reign with a hundred or more Fraser Highlanders, in a strath from which the Red Man has to be persuaded away, or driven by force. Perhaps I could even hold out a helping invitation to smaller 'broken men' still in the Aberdeenshire Highlands or elsewhere in dear Scotland, and that would please my self-importance.

"I renounce nothing, give up no legitimate claim that I have put forward for hand or land in our native country, but I see that I am come to leaving them unclaimed. Madame Angélique, to whom, mayhap, I have confided those consolations and aspirations, and who has a comely sense as well as comely looks, says very properly that changed circumstances carry other changes, and that even a Highland gentleman may recognize as much without loss of self-respect.

"Madame has, in the crash which sank Bigot's fortunes, come to plain faring, but I have made no difference in my friendship to her, and she, I feel, has increased hers towards me. She tells me she has no clamant ties left in Old France, any more than in New France, where the lustre of her powerful French friends has set, and my heart goes out to her in sympathy, and, I know not what more, except that she is a very fine woman and would adorn the home of. . . . Why give a name?

"You must make what you can of this scattered epistle and read it into my future because you may not hear from me again, or, if you do, only briefly in unlikelihoods. I am no practised writer, though I might have acquired the trade, and it is only out of a felt duty, combined with a personal regard of some durability, that I have set down, for you, those epistles of my doings far across the sea. Farewell, if it be farewell, and to Mistress Marget Forbes the like salutation, if she will accept it, as I am sure she will, when presented through you; and similarly to Madame Forbes, her mother, my humble duty.

"Always your well-wisher,
"JOCK FARQUHARSON, late of Inverey."

XVIII—My Garden of Content

"Said Edom o' Gordon to his men
We maun draw to a close."

That close, whether to a love story or a life, should come in the quiet, natural way which Providence orders, unexpectedly almost, not in tumult and trappings.

I am of a family which has been accustomed to storm through the world, sometimes with all the world could give, at other times with mighty little. This element has got into our blood, become, you might say, a habit, and often, myself, I have felt its prickings. After all, it must be a finely insurgent thing to drive to the devil in a golden carriage built for two, or more; and the Gordons have never been accustomed to count their guests, so long as they made good company.

Then I had grown up at a time in our Highlands when the kettle of history was about to boil over, scalding a great many people in the process. The fiery cross of war carried its message from one valley to another and left its embers on new graves wherever it went.

You are asking what this excursion in deep waters has to do with Marget and myself and the Black Colonel, Jock Farquharson. It has everything to do with us, because it is the lamp of the road along which we journeyed. Anybody can count turnings in a path, but it is harder to catch the other-world glow which sees us past them to our desired haven.

We were in sight of it, and, although we said little, I knew that we both rejoiced exceedingly over the news which the Black Colonel sent in his last letter. When we met I looked at Marget as much as to ask, "Shall I say it?" And she looked at me answering, "No, you need not, because I understand."

It is a curious state this which, at some time or other, exists between two loving people cast for each other's welfaring. A delicate mystery lies in it, and that is an essential strand in every true affection, but it can readily be destroyed. Break it rudely, even shock it a little, and a chasm may yawn where, before, there was a silken thread of union, tender in its fibre, but beautifully elastic.

You may exclaim, when you read these confidences and remember others to

which I have confessed, that I was not so awkward a lover as I sometimes appeared to be. No, I was not awkward in thought, but I could be, I know full well, very awkward in its expression as deeds. Often I would go wrong in form, rarely in feeling, if you can assume a man built on those colliding lines.

Marget has told me, in raillery, that she was more than once tempted to give me "a good shaking," as the woman's saying goes. It was not, perhaps, that she expected to shake much out of me, or to shake me out of myself, but that she would herself have been relieved by the exercise, for women, you see, are like that.

My reflection has to do with a day when we spoke of it as settled that the Black Colonel would never come back, that the whole episode which he represented was over, and that an open road, undisturbed surely by any more surprises and alarms, lay before us. How could I forget the scene, for it was to open out our true life, our deep, full love.

She looked at me as much as to ask had I been planning a stratagem, I the unsophisticated, which I had not. She looked again, and I saw she knew, that at long length, we were face to face with the soft realities which, hitherto, had remained dumb, or only whispered. I waited to take her in my arms, and she told me later her instinct expected me to do it, and I didn't. What poor fools men may be, to miss so much, and to place a good woman in the position of having her consent rebuffed, for that is to outrage her sex-respect.

I seem to remember that Marget turned her head away in despair with me, only she pretended to be watching the sun and the clouds as they dipped the hills in light and shadow. This threw her face into profile, and I thought I had never seen it quite so beautiful. There was an expectant vibrancy in it, from the fair forehead to the dimpled chin, but its flower of expression was in the flowing eye, the ripe mouth, and the tremulous lips.

"A wonderful scene," she said, her look lost in the river and the hills; "a scene which makes one think in parables, as the old men of Scriptures did."

"Parables," I replied, remembering, as I saw she did, "are very unuseful."

"Why do you say that?" she asked gently, still looking at the dance of sunlight and shadow upon the heather and the water.

"Oh, because they are," I said absurdly enough.

"That's a woman's reason," she observed, "and it should be left to a woman. Have you nothing more original to say?"

"Well, if I were to tell you a parable, a parable of my own, as you once told me one of yours, what would happen?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she laughed, "but why trouble about what may happen? A little risk gives a spice to life, and, anyhow, it can mostly be run away from at the last moment!"

"Then," said I, fairly and warmly hit by that, "it is the parable of a maid and a man, the old, old story, in a new setting. They met under cross circumstances, when things around them were difficult and their families took separate sides in politics and war. But if it had not been those very troubles they might never have met, or, what is even worse, have met too late, as maids and men often do. Perhaps trouble, because it brought them together in sympathy, also began to bring them together in heart, that being one road to affection. Love at first sight? Yes, for a winning face, an elegant figure, a silvery voice, or even a shapely foot. But that, surely, is the stuff of passion which may bloom in the morning and fade at night, not love the enduring as, I promise you, in my parable."

Marget nodded her head, unconsciously, as if some far voice were calling to her from the spreading country of red heath and green fir-trees, of dancing sunshine and rippling stream, that lay beneath us. She did not speak, and I went on:

"You do not in parables say much of people, and never by name, but I must tell you of my maid, the man, and of the other man who came between them—nearly! She was all simple charm, yet also of pulsing womanliness, the healthy product of a country life, a fair survival of many ordeals. Deep in her nature was that intense power of feeling which belongs to complete womanhood, as music belongs to an ancient fiddle. There were strings so sweet and subtle, so strange and strong, that she herself feared to play on them, and when the man appeared she greeted him as a friend, nothing more."

Marget waited as I paused, for when one's heart is in one's mouth words are hard to find, and I am not much in command of them at any time.

"The man," I resumed, "what shall I say of him, for he had no personal history.

He had an old name, however, which he hoped not to sully, and he bent himself quietly to duty, as, crookedly and undesirably, it came his way. He found no call to do great things of the world, but rather to straighten out the small things of a wee corner of it, and there to keep the peace. The maid just came into his life, and he, in his plain way, thanked Providence and held his tongue, except when secrets would half slip out and tell-tale acts come about."

Marget made no sign as to whether or not she recognized the portrait, and thus I was brought up abruptly against the other man of our parable.

"He," I said, "had all the ruder qualities admired by women, those of manliness, which good women may like, and the others which the other women secretly like. It was not difficult to see him, both as a hero and as a villain, and either way the pull of romance lay about him. He had particular ambitions which brought him between the maid and the first man, and there was, thanks to certain elements in human ties and high affairs, a strong influence favourable to those ambitions. But, as chance or Providence would have it, he was translated to another land, and there he found such comfort and companionship that he decided to stay. This left the maid and the man who feared too much, free to be to each other what they desired; and there ends my parable."

"But," asked Marget with unsteady words which betrayed her agitation, "where is its moral? A parable must have a moral."

"Has it none?" I boldly asked her, taking her hand in mine, before she or I knew it, and kissing it and then her rosy, rebellious lips.

By-and-by she looked at me through wet eye-lashes and asked, "Shall I tell you a parable which had a moral, though maybe it has lost it," and her tears laughed.

"Do," I said; "I can stand the moral now, whatever it may be."

"It should be a severe moral for you," she whispered, "because you have been so foolish, so little understanding with me, yet I'll try and make it light. It also concerns a maiden and two men, but she only cared for one of the men, never at all for the other. Nor would all the family interests in the world have made her marry the other. The real man, well, he seemed not to know that there is a precipice of influences, of circumstances, for every woman, over which she may be let slip by his hesitation; and this without possibility of return, for, even if she could return, her sex pride would not let her."

"Ah," I whispered, "and the moral?"

"That you deserved to lose me; and that it would have broken my heart if you had."

We sat very close, hand in hand, mind in mind, heart in heart, and watched the sun go down behind the silent hills of our beloved Corgarff, both of us silent, like them.

Years have gone by since then, and they have proved to us how sure a conduct is the heart alike to happiness, and, though it matters less, to prosperity. March where the tune of its soft beating calls, and you are blessed. Traffic with it, and you miss the real lift of life, that which makes life good, whatever betides.

Marget and I had learned this in the school of sweet-hearting, and now we knew it in the joy of confiding words. Nothing else mattered, because it mattered all, but when the inner world is well the outer world responds to it in kind. The private happiness which we had won made a larger good fortune for us without, or at all events, we saw the morning radiance, not the morning mists.

Our poor ruined Highlands still lay under their covering of sorrow, as grass grows indifferently upon a grave. But they were mending, even while they suffered, for they had spirit in them. Virile men and womanly women do not cry all the time, but give thanks to God for his mercies and go forward.

It was my fortunate destiny to be helpful beyond myself at Corgarff, and I will tell you how. When gossip of a purpose of marriage between Ian Gordon and Marget Forbes reached high quarters, friends in the two political camps got to work on our behalf. The outcome was that before Marget Forbes became Marget Forbes, or Gordon, as the Scots legal form has it, the lands which were her peoples had been returned to her, a sort of wedding gift.

Good and bad news like not to travel alone, and what must a kinsman of my own, an aged bachelor Gordon, do, but say that instead of waiting for his estate until he was dead, and his will read, I should come into it and its perquisites at once, if only because there must be acre for acre exchanged, as between a Gordon and a Forbes. Thus our heart's house of joy was dowered with worldly goods, though I should, in justice especially to Marget, add that we laid no stress on that, apart from the usefulness towards others which it carried.

At such usefulness, I can fairly say, we laboured whole-heartedly from the hour when we took each other for better, and never a minute for worse, in the Castle of Corgarff, with Marget's mother saying, "Children, you have all my poor old heart, to keep the fire of your young hearts warm."

She was a gracious lady, and she dwelt with us until we bore her to the little churchyard on the hill-side, where there is a clump of trees to break the cold sough of the winds into a lullaby. By that time another Marget, beautiful of face like the Forbeses, lithe of limb like the Gordons—we never could agree whom she most resembled!—had been given to us. She was our guerdon of the reverent gospel of home, which is the high altar of this world, the source and sanctuary of our well-being as men and women.

We have tried to live up to that ideal, and none can do more, unless, indeed, it be to seek the perfect heights of the Sermon on the Mount itself. It is good to look upward there, even if one cannot hope to reach the golden peaks of that world without an end—Amen!

THE END

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