



THE MEN OF THE MOSSES
S. R. CROCKETT
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CHAPTER XXVII.—CONCLUDED.
In Edinburgh they cast me into an inner den of the prison, where in iron were two men already. Then, when my name was made known, through the darkness and the foreboding stretch of the place, where no air had come for years, what was my joy to hear the voice of Anton Lennox bidding me be of good cheer, for that our Lord was a strong Lord, and would see me win through with credit from off the stage of life.

At this I took heart of grace at the kennel voice and face, and we fell to discussing all about Maise Lennox and how she did. He told me that for the honor of the king's service the soldiers had treated him kindly, and had given him the repute of being an honorable man above most. Nevertheless, the warrant for his execution was daily expected from London. He told me also that my brother, Sandy, was in Blackness, but that it was reported that he was soon to be examined by torture. Indeed, there was a talk among the guard that I was to share this with him, which made them the more careful of me, as one that the council had an eye upon.

But it was not long before this matter was brought to a probation. About three of the clock on the following day there came officers to the Tolbooth Port and cried my name, to which I answered with a quaking heart, not for death, but for torture. So they took me out and delivered me to the guard, who took me by back ways and closes to a little door let into the side of a great bulk of gray wall.

Along stone passages very many, all dripping with damp like a cellar, they dragged me, till at three doors hung with red cloth they stopped, and, instead of swearing and jesting as they had done before, the officers talked in whispers.

A door swung open very silently to admit me, and I set my feet upon a soft carpet. Then, also without noise, the door swung to again. I found myself alone in a cage, barred like the cage of a wild beast. It was at one end of a great room, with black oaken ceiling, carved and paneled. Before me was a strong breastwork of oak, and an iron bar across chin high. Beside me and on either hand were ranged strange looking engines, some of which I knew to be the "hoosts" for the legs, and the pricking for the bruising of the thumbs. Also there stood at each side a man habited in black and with a black mask over his face. These men stood with their arms folded, and looked across the narrow space at one another as though they had been statues.

The rest of the great room was occupied by a great table, and at the table there sat a large and dignified company. Then I understood that I stood in the presence of the Privy Council of Scotland, which for twenty-five years had bent the land to the king's will. At the head sat cruel Queensbury, with a dark face frowning with hate and guile, or so it seemed, across the bars of oak and underneath gauds of iron.

Still more black and forbidding was the case of the "Blackly Advocate," Sir George Mackenzie, who sat at the table foot, and wrote incessantly in his books. I knew one other there, save the fox face of Tarbet, called the Timeserver.

When I was brought in they were talking over some slight matter concerning a laird who had been complaining that certain ill-set persons were carrying away sea tangle from

his foreshore. And I was not pleased that they should have other thoughts in their minds when I was before them in peril of my life.

"At last, Sir George Mackenzie turned him about and said: "Officer, whom have we here?"

"The officer of the court made answer very shortly and formally: "William Gordon, son of honorable William Gordon of Earlieston, in Galloway, and brother of the aforementioned Alexander Gordon, condemned traitor from the prison of Blackness, presently to be examined."

"Ah," said Mackenzie, picking up his pen again. "The messan! We'll wait for the hound and take the lowly tykes together!" But Queensbury, as was his custom at Council, ran counter to the advocate in his desire, and desired presently to interrogate me.

"The duke asked me first if I had been at the duking of the Duke Wellwood. I answered him plainly that I had, but that it was a fair fight, and that the duke and his men had won the first onslaught.

planned the duke of York so much (because that he wanted to tar us all with the same stick), that he had them taken off, and bade give him and David Jamies as much paper and ink as ever they wanted, and to send him copies of all that they wrote for his entertainment. But in time of worship after this Anton Lennox ordered four of the strongest and biggest men to sit upon him, stroked out on the floor, as men sit together upon a bench in the Kirk at sermon hearing. And we were all silent, for we felt our plan, for this encouraged the devil more than anything, so that he acknowledged the power of the Gospel and quit roaring.

Yet I think all this rough play kept up our hearts, and stayed us from thinking of the time of that day of our bitter, final testifying which was coming so soon. To make an end now of Muckle John Gib, I had that man sent by ship to the colonies, and that in America he gained much honor among the heathen for his converse with the devil. For he did the godly men that were ever discovered Anton Lennox's method of exorcism—than which I ween there is none better, for the devil needs breath as well as another.

But for all this, there was never an hour that passed but I would wake and remember that at the sound of a trumpet, such papers and ink as ever they wanted, and to send him copies of all that they wrote for his entertainment. But in time of worship after this Anton Lennox ordered four of the strongest and biggest men to sit upon him, stroked out on the floor, as men sit together upon a bench in the Kirk at sermon hearing. And we were all silent, for we felt our plan, for this encouraged the devil more than anything, so that he acknowledged the power of the Gospel and quit roaring.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
Now that which follows concerns not myself, but Maise Lennox and others that were at this time forth of the Tolbooth. Yet because the story properly comes in here, I pray the reader to suffer it gladly, for without it I cannot come to my tale's ending, so I must speedily do. How I came to know it is no matter now, but shall without doubt afterward appear.

While Anton Lennox and I lay in the Tolbooth, those that loved us were not idle. Wrote Kate and Kate moved Roger McGhie of Balmachie, so that he set out to London to see the king to get remission for me, and if need be to pay my fine, because there was nothing he would not do to please his daughter. But, though his intercession did

good in delaying the warrant, yet my ownings of the raising of the flag at Sanquhar was too much for the king, and in due course my warrant sped. Of which the brute came north too of Balmachie that role like the wings of the wind. But, indeed, was not greatly disappointed, for I never expected any other end.

As soon as the news came to the house of Balmachie, Maise Lennox betook herself to the woods to think. There she stayed for the better part of an hour, pacing up and down more like an aged man than a young maiden, and, as my informant tells me, came in again with a face wonderfully cleared.

"Give me a horse and a suit of lad's clothes," she said, "and I will be ready to go with you to the king, and to the drapery, closets and wardrobes at the great house of Balmachie."

"Preserve us, lass, for what was ye a doing?" she cried out in amazement. "Indeed, it was a time when men and women were not inclined to stand upon reasons, for each being supposed to have his neck deep in the tow, he had no doubt his own good logic for whatever he proposed."

It had been the custom of late, ever since the numerous affairs near the border of Berwick, that he should ride by Carlisle and Moffat to Edinburgh.

father had done for her since she remembered—the afternoon when it was the Sabbath, on the pleasant green bank at the Duches, where she sat with her father, and he spoke to her, the struggle at the cave when the cruel Mardroch was sent to his account. She did not forget one of these things, also, the words of wise counsel which he gave her, and which she may happen to me I must—I shall save my father!" she said.

She sat on a lonely place on the moors, with deep mosses and holes in the turf where men had cut peat. These were now filled with black water. She stopped, took out the warrant for her father's execution, tore it into a thousand pieces and sunk it in the deep bog. The white horse of the king's rider meanwhile stood patiently by till she mounted again, I warrant as swiftly as she used to do in the old days at the Duches.

But the tearing of the warrant would only delay and not prevent her father's death. She saw that clearly. Then there came to her the thought of the free pardon. To write a name in the blank space meant a release from prison and the chance of escape. She resolved to write it when she came to the next changehouse.

But as she rode she fell to thinking, and the question that surged to and fro in her heart, like the tide in a sea cave, was—what name would be found written on that pardon when she rode to the Tolbooth of Edinburgh to deliver it into the hands of the captain of the guard?

As she thought she urged her horse the faster, so that the sooner she might come to the changehouse and settle the question. "He is my father," she said over and over, dwelling on all that her father had been to her, and how she would not think of anything but her father. At last she came to the door of the changehouse, and throwing her reins over the hitching post at the gate, she went boldly in.

"Bring me an inkhorn and a goose quill!" she cried to the dame of the inn, forgetting that she had donned her maid's clothes again, and speaking in the hoarse voice of the birkle student. She drew a silver coin from the table with a princely air that Duches had never seen in her before, and the maid's dress. Among the matchlocks on the ribbed and rimmed deal table she squared herself to write in the name upon her free pardon.

She set her pen to the parchment bravely. Then she stopped, took a long breath, and held it as though it were the dying breath of another who had just expired. With sudden access of resolve, she began a bold initial, changed it, then wrote hastily with a soft face, but holding her hand over the writing, as though to shield the words from sight. Which being done, she looked at what she had written with a blanched and terror-stricken face.

No sooner was the ink dry than, bending again to the paper, she began eagerly to scrape at it with her finger nail, as though she would ever change her first thought. But as she rubbed the parchment, which was very fine and soft, part of it curled up at the edge into a tiny roll, like a shaving of bark when one cuts the birch. Instantly Maise saw that there were two parchments instead of one.

With a light and cunning hand she separated them carefully. They had been secretly attached so as to look like one. Casting her eyes rapidly over the second parchment, her heart leaped within her to find that it was another pardon, the duplicate of the first, and, like it, duly signed and sealed. It was a moment's work to write in the other name upon this great discovery. So, throwing in her joy a gold piece upon the table beside the birch, she mounted at the stance and rode away in the direction of the capital.

"My word!" said the good man of the changehouse, gazing after her, but that madam does not want confidence. I doot she will be after no good!"



HE CUFFED AND BUFFETED THEM UNTIL I THOUGHT HE HAD SPATTERED THEIR BRAINS OUT.

Maise answered him no—an only hair and riding to the college at Edinburgh.

"Ye'll be a braw student, no doubt." She told him so-so.

"Give warrant ye!" said he, for he was jovial by nature and warmed with Mistress Cranstoun's wine.

So they rode along in friendly enough talk till they were nearing the wood, when Maise, knowing that the time had come, wheeled about and bade him "Stand!" At the same time she pointed a pistol at his head.

"Deliver me your mair," she said, "or I shall take your life!" The man laughed, as at a pleasant jest. "Ga we' ye, ye, birkle! Name o' your college tricks we me' or ye may abinna get hurt. I am no man to tak' offense, but this passes a merrymaking!"

"But when Maise pulled the other pistol and levelled it to his head the rider hesitated no longer, but pulled out his own and took aim at her heart.

"Your blood be on your own head, then!" he cried, "I never missed yet!" and he pulled the trigger.

But the powder only flashed in the pan, with an oath he pulled the trigger, did likewise with it, but quite as fruitlessly.

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A desisting man, who had applied to us, soon after wrote:

"I am glad to say that first day is one I'll never forget. I just bubbled with joy. I wanted to hug everybody and tell them my old self had died yesterday, and my new self was born to-day. Why didn't you tell me what I first wrote that I would find it this way?"

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