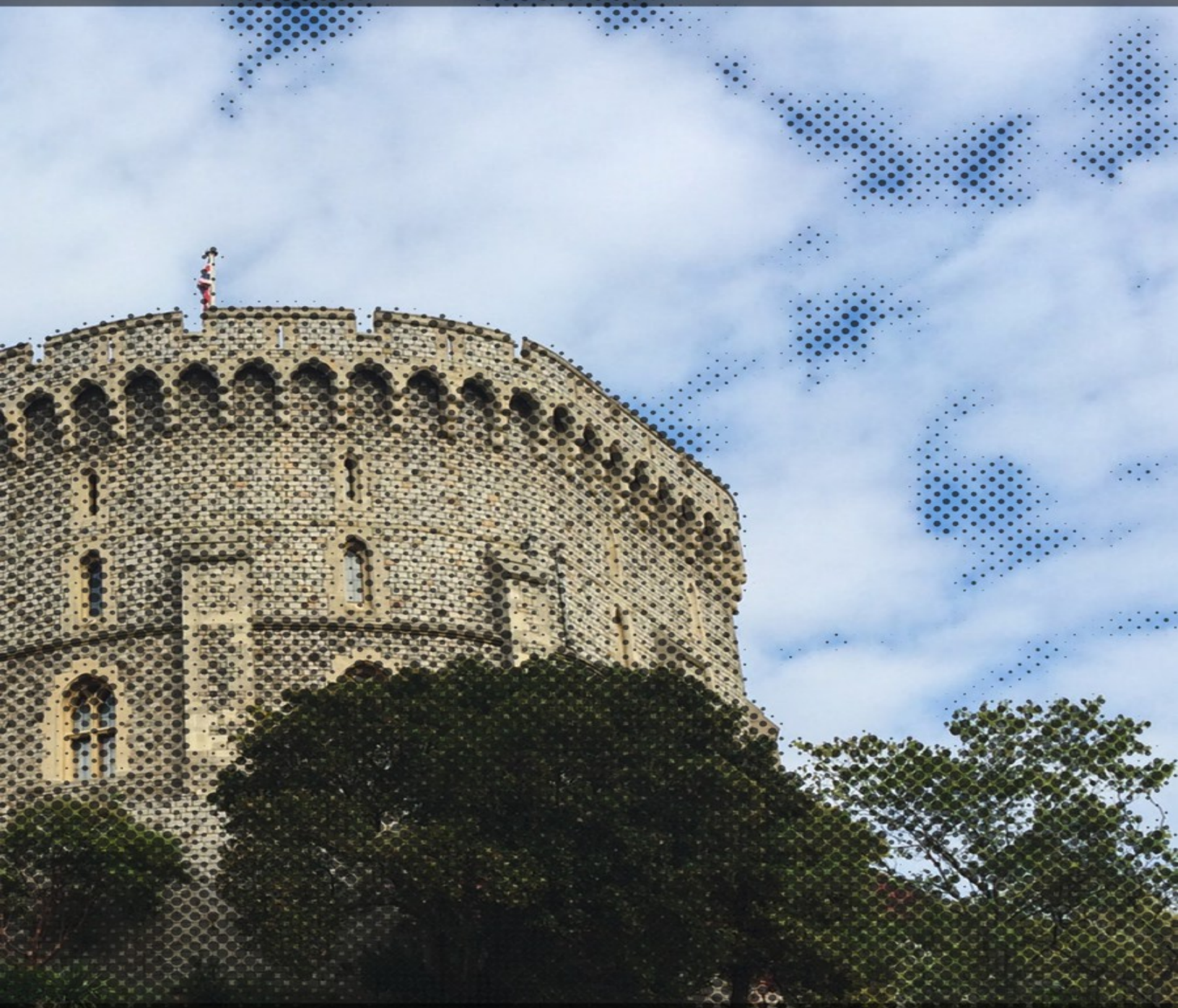
John Buchan



John Burnet of Barns

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A Romance

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BOOK I—TWEEDDALE

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CHAPTER I

THE ADVENTURE WHICH BEFELL ME IN THE WOOD OF DAWYCK

I have taken in hand to write this, the history of my life, not without much misgiving of heart; for my memory at the best is a bad one, and of many things I have no clear remembrance. And the making of tales is an art unknown to me, so he who may read must not look for any great skill in the setting down. Yet I am emboldened to the work, for my life has been lived in stirring times and amid many strange scenes which may not wholly lack interest for those who live in quieter days. And above all, I am desirous that they of my family should read of my life and learn the qualities both good and bad which run in the race, and so the better be able to resist the evil and do the good.

My course, by the will of God, has had something of a method about it, which makes the telling the more easy. For, as I look back upon it from the vantage ground of time, all seems spread out plain and clear in an ordered path. And I

would but seek to trace again some portion of the way with the light of a dim memory.

I will begin my tale with a certain June morning in the year 1678, when I, scarcely turned twelve years, set out from the house of Barns to the fishing in Tweed. I had escaped the watchful care of my tutor, Master Robert Porter, the curate of Lyne, who vexed my soul thrice a week with Cæsar and Cicero. I had no ill-will to the Latin, for I relished the battles in Cæsar well enough, and had some liking for poetry; but when I made a slip in grammar he would bring his great hand over my ears in a way which would make them tingle for hours. And all this, mind you, with the sun coming in at the window and whaups whistling over the fields and the great fish plashing in the river. On this morn I had escaped by hiding in the cheese-closet; then I had fetched my rod from the stable-loft, and borrowed tackle from Davie Lithgow, the stableman; and now I was creeping through the hazel bushes, casting, every now and then, a glance back at the house, where the huge figure of my teacher was looking for me disconsolately in every corner.

The year had been dry and sultry; and this day was warmer than any I remembered. The grass in the meadow was browned and crackling; all the foxgloves hung their bells with weariness; and the waters were shrunken in their beds. The mill-lade, which drives Manor Mill, had not a drop in it, and the small trout were gasping in the shallow pool, which in our usual weather was five feet deep. The cattle

were *stertling*, as we called it in the countryside; that is, the sun was burning their backs, and, rushing with tails erect, they sought coolness from end to end of the field. Tweed was very low and clear. Small hope, I thought, for my fishing; I might as well have stayed with Master Porter and been thrashed, for I will have to stay out all day and go supperless at night.

I took my way up the river past the green slopes of Haswellsykes to the wood of Dawyck, for I knew well that there, if anywhere, the fish would take in the shady, black pools. The place was four weary miles off, and the day was growing hotter with each passing hour; so I stripped my coat and hid it in a hole among whins and stones. When I come home again, I said, I will recover it. Another half mile, and I had off my shoes and stockings and concealed them in a like place; so soon I plodded along with no other clothes on my body than shirt and ragged breeches.

In time I came to the great forest which stretches up Tweed nigh to Drummelzier, the greatest wood in our parts, unless it be Glentress, on the east side of Peebles. The trees were hazels and birches in the main, with a few rowans, and on the slopes of the hill a congregation of desolate pines. Nearer the house of Dawyck were beeches and oaks and the deeper shade, and it was thither I went. The top of my rod struck against the boughs, and I had some labour in steering a safe course between the Scylla of the trees and the Charybdis of the long brackens; for the rod was in two parts spliced together, and as I had little skill in splicing,

Davie had done the thing for me before I started. Twice I roused a cock of the woods, which went screaming through the shadow. Herons from the great heronry at the other end were standing in nigh every pool, for the hot weather was a godsend to them, and the trout fared ill when the long thief-like bills flashed through the clear water. Now and then a shy deer leaped from the ground and sped up the hill. The desire of the chase was hot upon me when, after an hour's rough scramble, I came to the spot where I hoped for fish.

A stretch of green turf, shaded on all sides by high beeches, sloped down to the stream-side. The sun made a shining pathway down the middle, but the edges were in blackest shadow. At the foot a lone gnarled alder hung over the water, sending its long arms far over the river nigh to the farther side. Here Tweed was still and sunless, showing a level of placid black water, flecked in places with stray shafts of light. I prepared my tackle on the grass, making a casting-line of fine horse-hair which I had plucked from the tail of our own grey gelding. I had no such fine hooks as folk nowadays bring from Edinburgh, sharpened and barbed ready to their hand; but rough, homemade ones, which Tam Todd, the land-grieve, had fashioned out of old needles. My line was of thin, stout whipcord, to which I had made the casting firm with a knot of my own invention. I had out my bag of worms, and, choosing a fine red one, made it fast on the hook. Then I crept gently to the alder and climbed on the branch which hung far out over the stream. Here I sat

like an owl in the shade, and dropped my line in the pool below me, where it caught a glint of the sun and looked like a shining cord let down, like Jacob's ladder, from heaven to the darkness of earth.

I had not sat many minutes before my rod was wrenched violently downwards, then athwart the stream, nearly swinging me from my perch. I have got a monstrous trout, I thought, and with a fluttering heart stood up on the branch to be more ready for the struggle. He ran up the water and down; then far below the tree roots, whence I had much difficulty in forcing him; then he thought to break my line by rapid jerks, but he did not know the strength of my horse-hair. By and by he grew wearied, and I landed him comfortably on a spit of land—a great red-spotted fellow with a black back. I made sure that he was two pounds weight if he was an ounce.

I hid him in a cool bed of leaves and rushes on the bank, and crawled back to my seat on the tree. I baited my hook as before, and dropped it in; and then leaned back lazily on the branches behind to meditate on the pleasantness of fishing and the hatefulness of Master Porter's teaching. In my shadowed place all was cool and fresh as a May morning, but beyond, in the gleam of the sun, I could see birds hopping sleepily on the trees, and the shrivelled dun look of the grass. A faint humming of bees reached me, and the flash of a white butterfly shot, now and then, like a star from the sunlight to the darkness, and back again to the sunlight. It was a lovely summer's day, though too warm for

our sober country, and as I sat I thought of the lands I had read of and heard of, where it was always fiercely hot, and great fruits were to be had for the pulling. I thought of the oranges and olives and what not, and great silver and golden fishes with sparkling scales; and as I thought of them I began to loathe hazel-nuts and rowans and whortleberries, and the homely trout, which are all that is to be had in this land of ours. Then I thought of Barns and my kinsfolk, and all the tales of my forbears, and I loved again the old silent valley of Tweed—for a gallant tale is worth many fruits and fishes. Then as the day brightened my dreams grew accordingly. I came of a great old house; I, too, would ride to the wars, to the low countries, to Sweden, and I would do great deeds like the men in Virgil. And then I wished I had lived in Roman times. Ah, those were the days, when all the good things of life fell to brave men, and there was no other trade to be compared to war. Then I reflected that they had no fishing, for I had come on nothing as yet in my studies about fish and the catching of them. And so, like the boy I was, I dreamed on, and my thoughts chased each other in a dance in my brain, and I fell fast asleep.

I wakened with a desperate shudder, and found myself floundering in seven feet of water. My eyes were still heavy with sleep, and I swallowed great gulps of the river as I sank. In a second I came to the surface and with a few strokes I was at the side, for I had early learned to swim. Stupid and angry, I scrambled up the bank to the green glade. Here a first surprise befell me. It was late afternoon;

the sun had travelled three-fourths of the sky; it would be near five o'clock. What a great fool I had been to fall asleep and lose a day's fishing! I found my rod moored to the side with the line and half of the horse-hair; some huge fish had taken the hook. Then I looked around me to the water and the trees and the green sward, and surprise the second befell me; for there, not twelve paces from me, stood a little girl, watching me with every appearance of terror.

She was about two years younger than myself, I fancied. Her dress was some rich white stuff which looked eerie in the shade of the beeches, and her long hair fell over her shoulders in plentiful curls. She had wide, frightened blue eyes and a delicately-featured face, and as for the rest I know not how to describe her, so I will not try. I, with no more manners than a dog, stood staring at her, wholly forgetful of the appearance I must present, without shoes and stockings, coat or waistcoat, and dripping with Tweed water. She spoke first, in a soft southern tone, which I, accustomed only to the broad Scots of Jean Morran, who had been my nurse, fell in love with at once. Her whole face was filled with the extremest terror.

"Oh, sir, be you the water-kelpie?" she asked.

I could have laughed at her fright, though I must have been like enough to some evil spirit; but I answered her with my best gravity.

"No, I am no kelpie, but I had gone to sleep and fell into the stream. My coat and shoes are in a hole two miles down, and my name is John Burnet of Barns." All this I said in one

breath, being anxious to right myself in her eyes; also with some pride in the last words.

It was pretty to see how recognition chased the fear from her face. "I know you," she said. "I have heard of you. But what do you in the dragon's hole, sir? This is my place. The dragon will get you without a doubt."

At this I took off my bonnet and made my best bow. "And who are you, pray, and what story is this of dragons? I have been here scores of times, and never have I seen or heard of them." This with the mock importance of a boy.

"Oh, I am Marjory," she said, "Marjory Veitch, and I live at the great house in the wood, and all this place is my father's and mine. And this is my dragon's den;" and straightway she wandered into a long tale of Fair Margot and the Seven Maidens, how Margot wed the Dragon and he turned forthwith into a prince, and I know not what else. "But no harm can come to me, for look, I have the charm," and she showed me a black stone in a silver locket. "My nurse Alison gave it me. She had it from a great fairy who came with it to my cradle when I was born."

"Who told you all this?" I asked in wonder, for this girl seemed to carry all the wisdom of the ages in her head.

"Alison and my father, and my brother Michael and old Adam Noble, and a great many more—" Then she broke off. "My mother is gone. The fairies came for her."

Then I remembered the story of the young English mistress of Dawyck, who had died before she had been two

years in our country. And this child, with her fairy learning, was her daughter.

Now I know not what took me, for I had ever been shy of folk, and, above all, of womankind. But here I found my tongue, and talked to my new companion in a way which I could not sufficiently admire. There in the bright sun-setting I launched into the most miraculous account of my adventures of that day, in which dragons and witches were simply the commonest portents. Then I sat down and told her all the stories I had read out of Virgil and Cæsar, and all that I had heard of the wars in England and abroad, and the tales of the countryside which the packmen had told me. Also I must tell the romances of the nettie-wives who come to our countryside from the north—the old sad tale of Morag of the Misty Days and Usnach's sons and the wiles of Angus. And she listened, and thanked me ever so prettily when I had done. Then she would enlighten my ignorance; so I heard of the Red Etin of Ireland, and the Wolf of Brakelin, and the Seven Bold Brothers. Then I showed her nests, and gave her small blue eggs to take home, and pulled great foxgloves for her, and made coronets of fern. We played at hide-and-go-seek among the beeches, and ran races, and fought visionary dragons. Then the sun went down over the trees, and she declared it was time to be going home. So I got my solitary fish from its bed of rushes and made her a present of it. She was pleased beyond measure, though she cried out at my hardness in taking its life.

So it came to pass that Mistress Marjory Veitch of Dawyck went home hugging a great two-pound trout, and I went off to Barns, heedless of Master Porter and his heavy hand, and, arriving late, escaped a thrashing, and made a good meal of the remnants of supper.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF BARNS

The house of Barns stands on a green knoll above the Tweed, half-way between the village of Stobo and the town of Peebles. Tweed here is no great rolling river, but a shallow, prattling stream, and just below the house it winds around a small islet, where I loved to go and fish; for it was an adventure to reach the place, since a treacherous pool lay not a yard below it. The dwelling was white and square, with a beacon tower on the top, which once flashed the light from Neidpath to Drochil when the English came over the Border. It had not been used for half a hundred years, but a brazier still stood there, and a pile of rotten logs, grim mementoes of elder feuds. This also was a haunt of mine, for jackdaws and owls built in the corners, and it was choice fun of a spring morning to search for eggs at the risk of my worthless life. The parks around stretched to Manor village on the one side, and nigh to the foot of the Lyne Water on the other. Manor Water as far as Posso belonged to us, and

many a rare creel have I had out of its pleasant reaches. Behind, rose the long heathery hill of the Scrape, which is so great a hill that while one side looks down on us another overhangs the wood of Dawyck. Beyond that again came Dollar Law and the wild fells which give birth to the Tweed, the Yarrow, and the Annan.

Within the house, by the great hall-fire, my father, William Burnet, spent his days. I mind well his great figure in the armchair, a mere wreck of a man, but mighty in his very ruin. He wore a hat, though he seldom went out, to mind him of the old days when he was so busy at hunting and harrying that he had never his head uncovered. His beard was streaked with grey, and his long nose, with a break in the middle (which is a mark of our family), and bushy eyebrows gave him a fearsome look to a chance stranger. In his young days he had been extraordinarily handsome and active, and, if all tales be true, no better than he should have been. He was feared in those days for his great skill in night-foraying, so that he won the name of the "Howlet," which never left him. Those were the high days of our family, for my father was wont to ride to the Weaponshow with seven horsemen behind him; now we could scarce manage four. But in one of his night-rides his good fortune failed him; for being after no good on the hills above Megget one dark wintry night, he fell over the Bitch Craig, horse and all; and though he escaped with his life, he was lamed in both legs and condemned to the house for the rest of his days. Of a summer night he would come out to the lawn

with two mighty sticks to support him, and looking to the Manor Water hills, would shake his fist at them as old enemies. In his later days he took kindly to theology and learning, both of which, in the person of Master Porter, dined at his table every day. I know not how my father, who was a man of much penetration, could have been deceived by this man, who had as much religion as an ox. As for learning, he had some rag-tag scraps of Latin which were visited on me for my sins; but in eating he had no rival, and would consume beef and pasty and ale like a famished army. He preached every Sabbath in the little kirk of Lyne, below the Roman camp, and a woful service it was. I went regularly by my father's orders, but I was the only one from the household of Barns. I fear that not even my attendance at his church brought me Master Porter's love; for I had acquired nearly as much Latin as he possessed himself, and vexed his spirit at lesson-hours with unanswerable questions. At other times, too, I would rouse him to the wildest anger by singing a profane song of my own making:

> "O ken ye his Reverence Minister Tam,
> Wi' a heid like a stot and a face like a ram?"

To me my father was more than kind. He was never tired of making plans for my future. "John," he would say, "you shall go to Glasgow College, for you have the makings of a scholar in you. Ay, and we'll make you a soldier, John, and a

good honest gentleman to fight for your king, as your forbears did before you." (This was scarce true, for there never yet was a Burnet who fought for anything but his own hand.) "No damned Whig for me. Gad, how I wish I were hale in the legs to be off to the hills with the Johnstones and Keiths. There wouldna be one of the breed left from Tweedwell to the Brig o' Peebles." Then he would be anxious about my martial training, and get down the foils to teach me a lesson. From this he would pass to tales of his own deeds till the past would live before him, and his eyes would glow with their old fire. Then he would forget his condition, and seek to show me how some parry was effected. There was but one result; his poor weak legs would give way beneath him. Then I had to carry him to his bed, swearing deeply at his infirmities and lamenting the changes of life.

In those days the Burnets were a poor family—a poor and a proud. My grandfather had added much to the lands by rapine and extortion—ill-gotten gains which could not last. He had been a man of a violent nature, famed over all the South for his feats of horsemanship and swordsmanship. He died suddenly, of overdrinking, at the age of fifty-five, and now lies in the kirk of Lyne beneath an effigy representing the Angel Gabriel coming for his soul. His last words are recorded: "O Lord, I dinna want to dee, I dinna want to dee. If ye'll let me live, I'll run up the sklidders o' Cademuir to a' eternity." The folk of the place seldom spoke of him, though my father upheld him as a man of true spirit who had an eye to the improvement of his house. Of the

family before him I had the history at my finger-ends. This was a subject of which my father never tired, for he held that the genealogy of the Burnets was a thing of vastly greater importance than that of the kings of Rome or Judah. From the old days when we held Burnetland, in the parish of Broughton, and called ourselves of that ilk, I had the unbroken history of the family in my memory. Ay, and also of the great house of Traquair, for my mother had been a Stewart, and, as my father said often, this was the only family in the country bide which could hope to rival us in antiquity or valour.

My father's brother, Gilbert, had married the heiress of a westland family, and with her had got the lands of Eaglesham, about the headwaters of Cart. His son Gilbert, my cousin, was a tall lad some four years my senior, who on several occasions rode to visit us at Barns. He was of a handsome, soldierly appearance, and looked for an early commission in a Scots company. At first I admired him mightily, for he was skilful at all sports, rode like a moss-trooper, and could use his sword in an incomparable fashion. My father could never abide him, for he could not cease to tell of his own prowess, and my father was used to say that he loved no virtue better than modesty. Also, he angered every servant about the place by his hectoring, and one day so offended old Tam Todd that Tam flung a bucket at him, and threatened to duck him in the Tweed; which he doubtless would have done, old as he was, for he was a very Hercules of a man. This presented a nice problem to all

concerned, and I know not which was the more put out, Tam or my father. Finally it ended in the latter reading Gilbert a long and severe lecture, and then bidding Tam ask his pardon, seeing that the dignity of the family had to be sustained at any cost.

One other relative, though in a distant way, I must not omit to mention, for the day came when every man of our name was proud to claim the kinship. This was Gilbert Burnet, of Edinburgh, afterwards Divinity Professor in Glasgow, Bishop of Salisbury, and the author of the famous "Bishop Burnet's History of his Own Times." I met him often in after days, and once in London he had me to his house and entertained me during my stay. Of him I shall have to tell hereafter, but now he was no more than a name to me, a name which my father was fond of repeating when he wished to recall me to gravity.

Tam Todd, my father's grieve, who managed the lands about the house, deserves more than a passing word. He was about sixty years of age, stooped in the back, but with long arms and the strength of a giant. At one time he had fought for Gustavus, and might have risen high in the ranks, had not a desperate desire to see his native land come upon him and driven him to slip off one night and take ship for Leith. He had come to Peebles, where my father met him, and admiring his goodly stature, took him into his service, in which Tam soon became as expert at the breeding of sheep as ever he had been at the handling of a pike or musket. He was the best story-teller and the cunningest fisher in the

place, full of quaint foreign words, French, and Swedish, and High Dutch, for the army of Gustavus had been made up of the riddlings of Europe. From him I learned to fence with the rapier, and a past-master he was, for my father told how, in his best days, he could never so much as look at Tam. *Bon pied bon oeil* was ever his watchword, and I have proved it a good one; for, short though it be, if a man but follow it he may fear nothing. Also, he taught me a thing which has been most useful to me, and which I will speak of again—the art of using the broadsword or claymore, as the wild Highlanders call it. My school was on a strip of green grass beside Tweed, and here I have had many a tough encounter in the long summer nights. He made me stand with my back to the deep pool, that I might fear to step back; and thus I learned to keep my ground, a thing which he held to be of the essence of swordsmanship.

My nurse, Jean Morran, was the only woman body about the place. She and Tam did the cooking between them, for that worthy had learned the art gastronomical from a Frenchman whose life he saved, and who, in gratitude, taught him many excellent secrets for dishes, and stole ten crowns. She had minded me and mended my clothes and seen to my behaviour ever since my mother died of a fever when I was scarce two years old. Of my mother I remember nothing, but if one may judge from my father's long grief and her portrait in the dining-hall, she had been a good and a gentle as well as a most beautiful woman. Jean, with her uncouth tongue and stern face, is still a clear figure in my

memory. She was a kind nurse in the main, and if her temper was doubtful from many sore trials, her cakes and sugar were excellent salves to my wronged heart. She was, above all things, a famous housewife, keeping the place spotless and clean, so that when one entered the house of Barns there was always something fresh and cool in the very air.

But here I am at the end of my little gallery, for the place was bare of folk, and the life a lonely one. Here I grew up amid the woods and hills and the clean air, with a great zest for all the little excellencies of my lot, and a tolerance of its drawbacks. By the time I had come to sixteen years I had swam in every pool in Tweed for miles up and down, climbed every hill, fished in every burn, and ridden and fallen from every horse in my father's stable. I had been as far west as Tintock Hill and as far south as the Loch o' the Lowes. Nay, I had once been taken to Edinburgh in company with Tam, who bought me a noble fishing-rod, and showed me all the wondrous things to be seen. A band of soldiers passed down the High Street from the Castle with a great clanking and jingling, and I saw my guide straighten up his back and keep time with his feet to their tread. All the way home, as I sat before him on the broad back of Maisie, he told me tales of his campaigns, some of them none too fit for a boy's ear; but he was carried away and knew not what he was saying. This first put a taste for the profession of arms into my mind, which was assiduously fostered by my fencing lessons and the many martial tales I read. I found

among my father's books the chronicles of Froissart and a history of the Norman Kings, both in the English, which I devoured by night and day. Then I had Tacitus and Livy, and in my fourteenth year I began the study of Greek with a master at Peebles. So that soon I had read most of the "Iliad" and all the "Odyssey," and would go about repeating the long, swinging lines. I think that story of the man who, at the siege of some French town, shouted a Homeric battle-piece most likely to be true, for with me the Greek had a like effect, and made me tramp many miles over the hills or ride the horses more hard than my father permitted.

But this book-work was, after all, but half of my life, and that the less memorable. All the sights and sounds of that green upland vale are linked for me with memories of boyish fantasies. I used to climb up the ridge of Scrape when the sun set and dream that the serried ranks of hills were a new country where all was strange, though I knew well that an hour of the morning would dispel the fancy. Then I would descend from the heights, and for weeks be so fiercely set on the sports of the time of year that I had scarcely time for a grave thought. I have often gone forth to the lambing with the shepherds, toiled all day in the brown moors, and at night dropped straight off to sleep as I sat in my chair at meat. Then there was the salmon-fishing in the late spring, when the blood ran hot at the flare of the torches and the shimmer of the spears, and I, a forlorn young fool, shivered in my skin as the keen wind blew down the water. There was the swing and crackle of the stones in winter when the

haughlands of Manor were flooded, and a dozen brown-faced men came to the curling and the air rang with shouts and laughter. I have mind, too, of fierce days of snow when men looked solemn and the world was so quiet that I whistled to keep me from despondency, and the kitchen at Barns was like a place in an inn with famishing men and dripping garments. Then Tweed would be buried under some great drift and its kindly flow sorely missed by man and beast. But best I remember the loosening of winter, when the rains from the moors sent down the river roaring-red, and the vale was one pageant of delicate greenery and turbid brown torrent.

Often I would take my books and go into the heart of the hills for days and nights. This, my father scarce liked, but he never hindered me. It was glorious to kindle your fire in the neuk of a glen, broil your trout, and make your supper under the vault of the pure sky. Sweet, too, at noonday to lie beside the wellhead of some lonely burn, and think of many things that can never be set down and are scarce remembered. But these were but dreams, and this is not their chronicle; so it behooves me to shut my ear to vagrom memories.

To Dawyck I went the more often the older I grew. For Marjory Veitch had grown into a beautiful, lissom girl, with the same old litheness of body and gaiety of spirit. She was my comrade in countless escapades, and though I have travelled the world since then I have never found a readier or a braver. But with the years she grew more maidenly, and

I dared less to lead her into mad ventures. Nay, I who had played with her in the woods and fished and raced with her as with some other lad, began to feel a foolish awe in her presence, and worshipped her from afar. The fairy learning of her childhood was but the index of a wistfulness and delicacy of nature which, to my grosser spirit, seemed something to uncover one's head before. I have loved her dearly all my life, but I have never more than half understood her; which is a good gift of God to most men, for the confounding of vanity.

To her a great sorrow had come. For when she was scarce thirteen, her father, the laird of Dawyck, who had been ever of a home-keeping nature, died from a fall while hunting on the brow of Scrape. He had been her childhood's companion, and she mourned for him as sorely as ever human being mourned for another. Michael, her only brother, was far abroad in a regiment of the Scots French Guards, so she was left alone in the great house with no other company than the servants and a cross-grained aunt who heard but one word in twenty. For this reason I rode over the oftener to comfort her loneliness.

CHAPTER III

THE SPATE IN TWEED

The year 1683 was with us the driest year in any man's memory. From the end of April to the end of July we had scarce a shower. The hay-harvest was ruined beyond repair, and man and beast were sick with the sultry days. It was on the last Monday of July that I, wearied with wandering listlessly about the house, bethought myself of riding to Peebles to see the great match at bowls which is played every year for the silver horn. I had no expectation of a keen game, for the green was sure to be well-nigh ruined with the sun, and men had lost spirit in such weather. But the faintest interest is better than purposeless idleness, so I roused myself from languor and set out.

I saddled Maisie the younger, for this is a family name among our horses, and rode down by the Tweed side to the town. The river ran in the midst of a great bed of sun-baked gravel—a little trickle that a man might step across. I do not know where the fish had gone, but they, too, seemed scared by the heat, for not a trout plashed to relieve the hot silence. When I came to the Manor pool I stood still in wonder, for there for the first time in my life I saw the stream dry. Manor, which is in winter a roaring torrent and at

other times a clear, full stream, had not a drop of running water in its bed; naught but a few stagnant pools green with slime. It was a grateful change to escape from the sun into the coolness of the Neidpath woods; but even there a change was seen, for the ferns hung their fronds wearily and the moss had lost all its greenness. When once more I came out to the sun, its beating on my face was so fierce that it almost burned, and I was glad when I came to the town, and the shade of tree and dwelling.

The bowling-green of Peebles, which is one of the best in the country, lies at the west end of the High Street at the back of the Castle Hill. It looks down on Tweed and Peebles Water, where they meet at the Cuddie's Pool, and thence over a wide stretch of landscape to the high hills. The turf had been kept with constant waterings, but, notwithstanding, it looked grey and withered. Here I found half the men-folk of Peebles assembled and many from the villages near, to see the match which is the greatest event of the month. Each player wore a ribband of a special colour. Most of them had stripped off their coats and jerkins to give their arms free play, and some of the best were busied in taking counsel with their friends as to the lie of the green. The landlord of the Crosskeys was there with a great red favour stuck in his hat, looking, as I thought, too fat and rubicund a man to have a steady eye. Near him was Peter Crustcrackit the tailor, a little wiry man with legs bent from sitting cross-legged, thin active hands, and keen eyes well used to the sewing of fine work. Then there were carters

and shepherds, stout fellows with bronzed faces and great brawny chests, and the miller of the Wauk-mill, who was reported the best bowl-player in the town. Some of the folk had come down like myself merely to watch; and among them I saw Andrew Greenlees, the surgeon, who had tended me what time I went over the cauld. A motley crowd of the odds and ends of the place hung around or sat on the low wall—poachers and black-fishers and all the riff-raff of the town.

The jack was set, the order of the game arranged, and the play commenced. A long man from the Quair Water began, and sent his bowl curling up the green not four inches from the mark.

"Weel dune for Quair Water," said one. "They're nane sae blind thereaways."

Then a flesher's lad came and sent a shot close on the heels of the other and lay by his side.

At this, there were loud cries of "Weel dune, Coo's Blether," which was a name they had for him; and the fellow grew red and withdrew to the back.

Next came a little nervous man, who looked entreatingly at the bystanders as if to bespeak their consideration. "Jock Look-up, my dear," said a man solemnly, "compose your anxious mind, for thae auld wizened airms o' yours 'll no send it half-road." The little man sighed and played his bowl: it was even as the other had said, for his shot was adjudged a *hogg* and put off the green.

Then many others played till the green was crowded at one end with the balls. They played in rinks, and interest fell off for some little time till it came to the turn of the two acknowledged champions, Master Crustcrackit and the miller, to play against one another. Then the onlookers crowded round once more.

The miller sent a long swinging shot which touched the jack and carried it some inches onward. Then a bowl from the tailor curled round and lay between them and the former mark. Now arose a great dispute (for the players of Peebles had a way of their own, and to understand their rules required no ordinary share of brains) as to the propriety of Master Crustcrackit's shot, some alleging that he had played off the cloth, others defending. The miller grew furiously warm.

"Ye wee, sneck-drawin' tailor-body, wad ye set up your bit feckless face against a man o' place and siller?"

"Haud your tongue, miller," cried one. "Ye've nae cause to speak ill o' the way God made a man."

Master Crustcrackit, however, needed no defender. He was ready in a second.

"And what dae ye ca' yoursel' but a great, God-forsaken dad o' a man, wi' a wame like Braid Law and a mouth like the bottomless pit for yill and beef and a' manner o' carnal bakemeats. You to speak abune your breath to me," and he hopped round his antagonist like an enraged fighting-cock.

What the miller would have said no one may guess, had not a middle-aged man, who had been sitting on a settle

placidly smoking a long white pipe, come up to see what was the dispute. He was dressed in a long black coat, with small-clothes of black, and broad silver-buckled shoon. The plain white cravat around his neck marked him for a minister.

"William Laverlaw and you, Peter Crustcrackit, as the minister of this parish, I command ye to be silent. I will have no disturbance on this public green. Nay, for I will adjudge your difference myself."

All were silent in a second, and a hush of interest fell on the place.

"But that canna be," grumbled the miller, "for ye're nae great hand at the bowls."

The minister stared sternly at the speaker, who sank at once into an aggrieved quiet. "As God has appointed me the spiritual guide of this unworthy town, so also has He made me your master in secular affairs. I will settle your disputes and none other. And, sir, if you or any other dare gainsay me, then I shall feel justified in leaving argument for force, and the man who offends I shall fling into the Cuddie's Pool for the clearing of his brain and the benefit of his soul." He spoke in a slow, methodical tone, rolling the words over his tongue. Then I remembered the many stories I had heard of this man's autocratic rule over the folk of the good town of Peebles; how he, alien like to whig and prelatist, went on his steadfast path caring for no man and snapping his fingers at the mandates of authority. And indeed in the quiet fierce

face and weighty jaws there was something which debarred men from meddling with their owner.

Such was his influence on the people that none dared oppose him, and he gave his decision, which seemed to me to be a just and fair one. After this they fell to their play once more.

Meantime I had been looking on at the sport from the vantage-ground of the low wall which looked down on the river. I had debated a question of farriery with the surgeon, who was also something of a horse-doctor; and called out greetings to the different players, according as I favoured their colours. Then when the game no longer amused me, I had fallen to looking over the country, down to the edge of the water where the small thatched cottages were yellow in the heat, and away up the broad empty channel of Tweed. The cauld, where salmon leap in the spring and autumn, and which is the greatest cauld on the river unless it be the one at Melrose, might have been crossed dryshod. I began to hate the weariful, everlasting glare and sigh for the clouds once more, and the soft moist turf and the hazy skyline. Now it was so heavily oppressive that a man could scarce draw a free breath. The players dripped with sweat and looked nigh exhausted, and for myself the sulphurous air weighed on me like a mount of lead and confused such wits as I had.

Even as I looked I saw a strange thing on the river bank which chained my languid curiosity. For down the haugh, swinging along at a great pace, came a man, the like of