

THE SMUGGLERS OF THE CLONE

BY

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'Rise, Robin, rise ! The partans are on the Sands!'

The crying at our little window raised me out of a sound sleep, for I had been out seeing the Myreside lasses late the night before, and was far from being wake-rife at two by the clock on a February morning.

It was the first time the summons had come to me, for I was then but young. Hitherto it was my brother John who had answered the raising word of the free-traders spoken at the window. But now John had a farm-steading of his own, thanks to Sir William Maxwell and to my father's siller that had paid for the stock.

So with all speed I did my clothes upon me, with much eagerness and a beating heart, — as who would not, when, for the first time, he has the privilege of man ?

As I went out to the barn I could hear my mother (with whom I was ever a favourite) praying for me.

'Save the laddie — save the laddie!' she said over and over.

And I think my father prayed too; but, as I went, he also cried to me counsels.

'Be sure you keep up the grappling chains— dinna let them clatter till ye hae the stuff weel up the hill. The Lord keep ye! Be a guid lad an' ride honestly. Gin ye see Sir William, keep your head doon, an' gae by withoot lookin'. He 's a magistrate, ye ken. But he'll no' see you, gin ye dinna see him. Leave twa ankers a-piece o' brandy an' rum at our ain dyke back. An' abune a', the Lord be wi' ye, an' bring ye safe back to your sorrowing parents!'

So, with pride, I did the harness graith upon the sonsy back of Brown Bess, — the pad before where I was to sit, — the lingtow and the hooked chains behind. I had a cutlass, a jockteleg (or smuggler's sheaf - knife), and a pair of brass-mounted pistols ready swung in my leathern belt. Faith, but I wish Bell of the Mains could have seen me then, ready to ride forth with the light- horsemen. She would never scorn me more for a lingle-backed callant, I'se warrant.

'Haste ye, Robin! Heard ye no' that the partans are on the sands '

It was Geordie of the Clone who cried to me. He meant the free-traders from the Isle, rolling the barrels ashore.

'I am e'en as ready as ye are yoursel' ! ' I gave him answer, for I was not going to let him boast himself prideful all, because he had ridden out with them once or twice before.

Besides, his horse and accoutrement were not one half so good as mine. For my father was an honest and well-considered man, and in good standing with the laird and the minister, so that he could afford to do things handsomely.

We made haste to ride along the heuchs, which are very high, steep, and rocky at this part of the coast. And at every loaning-end we heard the clinking of the smugglers chains, and I thought the sound a livening and a merry one.

'A fair guid-e'en and a full tide, young Airyolan!' cried one to me as we came by Kiilantrae. And I own the name was sweet to my ears. For it was the custom to call men by the names of their farms, and Airyolan was my father's name by rights. But mine for that night, because in my hands was the honour of the house.

Ere we got down to the Clone we could hear, all about in the darkness, athwart and athwart, the clattering of chains, the stir of many horses, and the voices of men.

Black Taggart was in with his lugger, the ' Sea Pyet,' and such a cargo as the Clone men had never run, — so ran the talk on every side. There was not a sleeping wife nor yet a man left indoors in all the parish of Mochrum, except only the laird and the minister.

By the time that we got down by the shore, there was quite a company of the Men of the Fells, as the shore men called us, — all dour, swack, determined fellows.

'Here come the hill nowt!' said one of the village men, as he caught sight of us. I knew him for a limber-tongued, ill-livered loon from the Port, so. I delivered him a blow fair and solid between the eyes, and he dropped without a gurgle. This was to learn him how to speak to innocent harmless strangers.

Then there was a turmoil indeed to speak about, for all the men of the laigh shore crowded round us, and knives were drawn. But I cried, *'Corwald, Mochrum, Chippermore, here to me ! ' And all the stout lads came about me.

Nevertheless, it looked black for a moment, as the shore men waved their torches in our faces, and yelled fiercely at us to put us down by fear.

Then a tall young man on a horse rode straight at the crowd which had gathered about the loon I had felled. He had a mask over his face which sometimes slipped awry. But, in spite of the disguise, he seemed perfectly well known to all there.

'What have we here ? ' he asked, in a voice of questioning that had also the power of command in it.

'T is these Men of the Fells that have stricken down Jock Webster of the Port, Maister William ! ' said one of the crowd.

Then I knew the laird's son, and did my duty to him, telling him of my provocation, and how I had only given the rascal strength of arm.

' And right well you did,' said Maister William, ' for these dogs would swatter in the good brandy, but never help to carry it to the caves, nor bring the well-graithed horses to the shore-side! Carry the loon away, and stap him into a heather hole till he come to.'

So that was all the comfort they got for their tale-telling.

'And you, young Airyolan,' said Maister William, 'that are so ready with your strength of arm, — there is even a job that you may do. Muckle Jock, the Preventive man, rides to-night from Isle of Whithorn, where he has been warning the revenue cutter. Do you meet him and keep him from doing himself an injury.'

'And where shall I meet him, Maister William?' I asked of the young laird.

'Oh, somewhere on the heuch-taps,' said he, carelessly ; ' and see, swing these on your horse and leave them at Myrtoun on the by-going.'

He called a man with a torch, who came and stood over me, while I laid on Brown Bess a pair of small casks of some fine liqueur, of which more than ordinary care was to be taken, and also a few packages of soft goods, silks and lace as I deemed.

' Take these to the Loch Yett, and ca' Sandy Fergus to stow them for ye. Syne do your work with the Exciseman as he comes hame. Gar him bide where he is till the sun be at its highest to-morrow. And a double share o' the plunder shall be lyin' in the hole at a back of the dyke at Airyolan when ye ride hame the morn at e'en.'

So I bade him a good-night, and rode my ways over the fields, and across many burns to Myrtoun. As I went I looked back, and there, below me, was a strange sight, — all the little harbour of the Clone lighted up, a hurrying of men down to the shore, the flickering of torches, and the lapping of the sea making a stir of gallant life that set the blood leaping along the veins. It was, indeed, I thought, worth while living to be a free-trader. Far out, I could see the dark spars of the lugger ' Sea Pyet,' and hear the casks and ankers dumping into the boats alongside.

Then I began to bethink me that I had a more desperate ploy than any of them that were down there, for they were many, and I was but one. Moreover, easily, as young Master William might say, 'Meet Muckle Jock, and keep him till the morn at noon ! ' the matter was not so easy as supping one's porridge.

Now, I had never seen the Exciseman, but my brother had played at the cudgels with Jock before this. So I knew more of him than to suppose that he would bide for the bidding of one man when in the way of his duty.

But when the young laird went away he slipped me a small, heavy packet.

'Half for you and half for the gauger, gin he hears reason,' he said.

By the weight and the jingle I judged it to be yellow Geordies, the best thing that the wee, wee German lairdie ever sent to Tory Mochrum, And not too plenty there, either!

Though since the Clone folk did so well with the clean-run smuggling from the blessed Isle of Man, it is true that there are more of the Geordies than there used to be.

So I rode round by the back of the White Loch, for Sir William had a habit of daunerin, over by the Airlour and Barsalloch, and in my present ride I had no desire to meet with him.

Yet, as fate would have it, I was not to win clear that night. I had not ridden more than half-way round the loch when Brown Bess went floundering into a moss-hole, which are indeed more plenty than paved roads in that quarter. And what with the weight of the pack, and her struggling, we threatened to go down altogether. When I thought of what my father would say, if I went home with my finger in my mouth, and neither Brown Bess nor yet a penny's-worth to be the value of her, I was fairly a-sweat with fear. I cried aloud for help, for there were cot-houses near by. And, as I had hoped, in a little a man came out of the shadows of the willow bushes.

'What want ye, yochel?' said he, in a mightily lofty tone.

'I'll yochel ye, gin I had time. Pu' on that rope,' I said, for my spirit was disturbed by the accident. Also, as I have said, I took ill-talk from no man.

So, with a little laugh, the man laid hold of the rope, and pulled his best, while I took off what of the packages I could reach, ever keeping my own feet moving, to clear the sticky glaur of the bog-hole from them.

'Tak' that hook out, and ease doon the cask, man! ' I cried to him, for I was in desperation; 'I'll gie ye a heartsome gill, even though the stuff be Sir William's !'

And the man laughed again, being, as I judged, well enough pleased. For all that service yet was I not pleased to be called 'yochel.' But, in the meantime, I saw not how, at the moment, I could begin to cuff and clout one that was helping my horse and stuff out of a bog-hole. Yet I resolved somehow to be even with him, for, though a peaceable man, I never could abide the calling of ill names.

'Whither gang ye ? ' said he.

'To the Muckle Hoose o' Myrtoun,' said I, 'and gang you wi' me, my man; and gie me a hand doon wi' the stuff, for I hae nae stomach for mair warsling in bog-holes.

And wha kens but that auld thrawn Turk, Sir William, may happen on us?'

'Ken ye Sir William Maxwell?' said the man.

'Na,' said I. 'I never so muckle as set e'en on the auld wretch. But I had sax hard days' wark cutting doon bushes, and makin' a road for his daftlike carriage wi' wheels, for him to ride in to Mochrum Kirk'

'Saw ye him never there?' said the man, as I strapped the packages on again.

'Na,' said I, 'my faither is a Cameronian, and gangs to nae Kirk hereabouts.'

'He has gi'en his son a bonny upbringing, then!' quoth the man.

Now this made me mainly angry, for I cannot bide that folk should meddle with my folk. Though as far as I am concerned myself I am a peaceable man.

'Hear ye,' said I, 'I ken na wha ye are that speers so mony questions. Ye may be the de'il himsel', or ye may be the enemy o' Mochrum, the blackavised Commodore frae Glasserton. But, I can warrant ye that ye'll no mell and claw unyeuked with Robin o' Airyolan. Hear ye that, my man, and keep a civil tongue within your ill lookin' cheek, gin ye want to gang hame in the morning wi' an uncracked croun !'

The man said no more, and by his gait I judged him to be some serving man. For, as far as the light served me, he was not so well put on as myself. Yet there was a kind of neatness about the creature that showed him to be no outdoor man either.

However, he accompanied me willingly enough till we came to the Muckle House of Myrtoun. For I think that he was feared of his head at my words. And indeed it would not have taken the kittling of a flea to have garred me draw a staff over his crown. For there is nothing that angers a Galloway man more than an ignorant, upsetting town's body, putting in his gab when he desires to live peaceable.

So, when we came to the back entrance, I said to him ; 'Hear ye to this. Ye are to make no noise, my mannie, but gie me a lift doon wi' thae barrels cannily. For that dour old tod, the laird, is to ken naething about this. Only Miss Peggy and Maister William, they ken. 'Deed, it was young William himsel' that sent me on this errand.'

So with that the mannie gave a kind of laugh, and helped me down with the ankers far better than I could have expected. We rolled them into a shed at the back of the stables, and covered them up snug with some straw and some old heather thatching.

'Ay, my lad,' says I to him, 'for a' your douce speech and fair words I can see that ye hae been at this job afore!'

'Well, it is true,' he said, 'that I hae rolled a barrel or two in my time.'

Then, in the waft of an eye I knew who he was. I set him down for Muckle Jock, the Excise officer, that had never gone to the Glasserton at all, but had been lurking there in the moss, waiting to deceive honest men. I knew that I needed to be wary with

him, for he was, as I had heard, a sturdy carl, and had won the last throw at the Stoneykirk wrestling. But all the men of the Fellside have an excellent opinion of themselves, and I thought I was good for any man of the size of this one.

So said I to him : 'Noo, chiel, ye ken we are no' juist carryin' barrels o' spring water at this time o' nicht to pleasure King George. Hearken ye : we are in danger of being laid by the heels in the jail of Wigton gin the black lawyer corbies get us. Noo, there's a Preventive man that is crawling and spying ower by on the heights o' Physgill. Ye maun e'en come wi' me an' help to keep him oot o' hairm's way. For it wad not be for his guid that he should gang doon to the port this nicht! '

The man that I took to be the gauger hummed and hawed a while, till I had enough of his talk and unstable ways.

'No back-and-forrit ways wi' Robin,' said I. 'Will ye come and help to catch the King's officer, or will ye not?'

'No' a foot will I go,' says he. 'I have been a King's officer, myself ! '

Whereupon I laid a pistol to his ear, for I was in some heat.

'Gin you war King Geordie himsel', aye, or Cumberland either, ye shall come wi' me and help to catch the gauger,' said I.

For I bethought me that it would be a bonny ploy, and one long to be talked about in these parts, thus to lay by the heels the Exciseman and make him tramp to Glasserton to kidnap himself.

The man with the bandy legs was taking a while to consider, so I said to him : 'She is a guid pistol and new primed ! '

'I'll come wi' ye!' said he.

So I set him first on the road, and left my horse in the stables of Myrtoun. It was the gloam of the morning when we got to the turn of the path by which, if he were to come at all, the new ganger would ride from Glasserton. And lo ! as if we had set a tryst, there he was coming over the heathery braes at a brisk trot. So I covered him with my pistol, and took his horse by the reins, thinking no more of the other man I had taken for the gauger before.

'Dismount, my lad,' I said. 'Ye dinna ken me, but I ken you. Come here, my brisk landlouper, and help to haud him!'

I saw the stranger who had come with me sneaking off, but with my other pistol I brought him to a stand. So together we got the gauger into a little thicket or planting. And here, willing or unwilling, we kept him all day, till we were sure that the stuff would all be run, and the long trains of honest smugglers on good horses far on their way to the towns of the north.

Then very conscientiously I counted out the half of the tale of golden guineas Master William had given me, and put them into the pocket of the gauger's coat.

'Gin ye are a good, still-tongued kind of cattle, there is more of that kind of yellow oats where these came from,' said I. 'But lie ye here snug as a paltrick for an hour yet by the clock, lest even yet ye should come to harm !'

So there we left him, not very sorely angered, for all he had posed as so efficient and zealous a King's officer.

' Now,' said I to the man that had helped me, ' I promised ye half o' Maister William's guineas, that he bade me keep, for I allow that it micht hae been a different job but for your help. And here they are. Ye shall never say that Robin of Airyolan roguit ony man, — even a feckless toon's birkie wi' bandy legs !'

The man laughed and took the siller,

saying, "Thank'ee!" with an arrogant air as if he handled bags of them every day. But, nevertheless, he took them, and I parted from him, wishing him well, which was more than he did to me. But I know how to use civility upon occasion.

When I reached home I told my father, and described the man I had met. But he could make no guess at him. Nor had I any myself till the next rent day, when my father, having a lame leg where the colt had kicked him, sent me down to pay the owing. The factor I knew well, but I had my money in hand and little I cared for him. But what was my astonishment to find, sitting at the table with him, the very same man who had helped me to lay the Exciseman by the heels. But now, I thought, there was a strangely different air about him.

And what astonished me more, it was this man, and not the factor, who spoke first to me.

'Aye, young Robin of Airyolan, and are you here ? Ye are a chiel with birr and smeddum ! There are the bones of a man in ye! Hae ye settled with the gauger for shackling him by the hill of Physgill?'

Now, as I have said, I thole snash from no man, and I gave him the word back sharply.

'Hae ye settled wi' him yoursel', sir ? For it was you that tied the tow rope!'

My adversary laughed, and looked not at all ill-pleased. He pointed to the five gold Georges on the tables.

'Hark ye, Robin of Airyolan, these are the five guineas ye gied to me like an honest man. I'll forgie ye for layin' the pistol to my lug, for after all ye are some credit to the land that fed ye. Gin ye promise to wed a decent lass, I'll e'en gie ye a farm o' your ain. And as sure as my name is Sir William Maxwell, ye shall sit your lifetime rent

free, for the de'il's errand that ye took me on the nicht of the brandy-running at the Clone.'

I could have sunken through the floor when I heard that it was Sir William himself, — whom, because he had so recently returned from foreign parts after a sojourn of many years, I had never before seen.

Then both the factor and the laird laughed heartily at my discomfiture.

'Ken ye o' ony lass that wad tak' up wi' ye, Robin?' said Sir William.

'Half a dozen o' them, my lord,' said I.

'Lassies are neither ill to seek nor hard to find when Robin of Airyolan gangs a-coortin'!

'Losh preserve us ! ' cried the laird, slapping his thigh, 'but I mysel' never sallied forth to woo a lass so blithely confident!

I said nothing, but dusted my kneebreeks. For the laird was no very good looking man, being grey as a badger.

'An' mind ye maun see to it that the bairns are a' loons, and as staunch and stark as yoursel' ! ' said the factor.

'A man can but do his best,' answered I, very modestly as I thought. For I never can tell why it is that the folk will always say that I have a good opinion of myself. But neither, on the other hand, can I tell why I should not.

This was first published in the collection 'Tales of Our Coast' in 1896 along with stories by Harold Frederic , Arthur Quiller-Couch , Gilbert Parker and William Clark Russell.