The highland smugglers

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THE

HIGHLAND SMUGGLERS.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "ADVENTURES OF A KUZZILBASH," "PERSIAN ADVENTURER," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
HIGHLAND SMUGGLERS.

CHAPTER I.

A PEER BEHIND THE CURTAIN—AND A PROPOSAL.

Out of my sight! thou dost infect mine eyes!

We left the party at Airdruthmore reduced in spirits as well as in numbers; and one of the ladies, at least, suffering no small anxiety regarding the welfare of those friends whose sudden retreat had not only surprised but alarmed her. It was in vain that Isabella Stewart sought to stifle her apprehensions by adverting to the acknowledged prudence of Glenvallich. There was, she conceived, a mystery in the conduct both of himself and his friend, which baffled her penetration, but which she involuntarily connected in one shape or other with the late unpleasant occurrence at Elsie's cottage.

To communicate her apprehensions to her friend, Miss Tresham, would, she felt, be equally useless and cruel, as that young lady, while she would necessarily partake largely of an uneasiness which as yet she had been spared, could in no degree aid in relieving their mutual disquietude; and the heart of Isabella was not so selfish as to seek relief in the mere participation of distress, while her delicacy shrunk from the possibility of betraying sentiments, which she scarcely felt justified
in entertaining for one, who as yet had never explicitly declared his own. Thus she bore in secret a load of doubt which was the more painful, because confined to her own bosom.

It was the fourth day after the departure of the gentlemen, before her anxiety experienced any diminution; and then it was partially relieved by reports of the purposed hunting match on Glenvallich’s estate, which at that time reached Airdruthmore.

On the evening of the sixth day the laird of Ballytully, who arrived to dinner, confirmed the truth of these reports, and added many particulars of the success of the sportsmen, which proved him to be well informed on the subject. The cheer of that gentleman was more sober than usual; and his manner was marked by an awkward approach to timidity, by no means characteristic of his ordinary demeanour. —Little did the fair Isabelle divine the cause of so palpable an improvement—little did she dream how deeply she was herself concerned in it!

Business of a pressing nature had summoned the laird of Airdruthmore abroad, at an early hour on the succeeding day: and the clear, bracing, frosty air, and brilliant sunshine, tempted the ladies to a long forenoon walk. In this, the gallant Ballytully made several urgent demonstrations of joining them; but they evinced so little disposition to accept of his services, and manœuvred so successfully—as ladies well know how to do—to stave him off without absolutely affronting him by a downright refusal, that the mortified beau was forced to retire from the attack, and trust to his own resources for the forenoon’s amusement.

That this worthy personage had something more than common upon his mind, might have been obvious enough, had any of the party taken pains to observe him; but as the reader may be more curious than they were, and as we make it a principle to satisfy all reasonable curiosity, particularly when it falls in with our own more important arrangements, we shall proceed to detail certain particulars which may furnish forth the required information.

The laird of Ballytully subsequent to the arrangement of his various business and engagements, which, whatever they were, occupied him during a large part of the autumn and the early part of winter—had, immediately previous to his last appearance at Airdruthmore, passed some time with his uncle Thomas in the Caledonian metropolis. The greeting which that worthy gentle-
man bestowed upon his nephew, though affectionate as usual, was marked with unusual gravity; and the tone of his speech was so much lower than customary, that the young man could not avoid remarking it to his relative. The observation appeared to recall that relative to himself.—"Who?—" I, replied the man of law; "a low-spirited—never more out in your life Rory!—No, no, ye'll never see me mounting suddenly up, and falling foolishly low, my lad—squaw memento as old Horace says—for I'm not without my cares, man—who is?—who is?—Aye, faith, lad," continued the uncle, as if the annoyance which was working within him had been uncorked by his nephew's remark, and insisted upon forcing its way,—"and I must say that some of them, and these not the least, have no little to do with yourself.

"Who? I, uncle?—with me?—and as how I pray?"

"Why, Rory, man, I must tell ye that plainly, ye see; an' it will not take many words neither. I must e'en say that I'm no just easy about all these Highland tro-

keries and work. I'm fear'd they're all has-beens—the profits gone and the risk remaining. De'il a much good has I seen o' them these five years back. And yet the trade was a good one once. There was Archy Whi-

thershins made weel by it— an' keepit the gear too—and there was Macnagait o' Greenock haul'd grippet a good pose, if he hadda lost all by that d—d brig o' his. —Aye, it was a good business once, de'il a doubt. But then there's ow'r muckle of the foreign trade's creepit in—and that's a thwart work that no man can control.
The chield in Holland may be a gude fellow enough—
staunch enough—but it's aye a maxim in sic like deal-
ings to take wi' the one hand and deliver wi' the other—
cash in hand, or goods in hand, and as little trust as ye like—and trade like that never breaks squares or friendships. Long accounts short friends, they say. Now in the foreign trade how are ye to keep from trusting? ye can-
na help yersel. Ye ken that, Rory—none better—and ye canna be aye skelping ow'r to France and Hol-

land as ye did the year at the risk o' being clappit up in Verdun, or some o' the out-o' the way far-off depots.

"Faith, sir, all you have said is true, but then the re-

turns are so good."

"Aye, lad,—good when ye finger them; but let me see what ye have to show for the last big lump o' an outlay; or even for the twa last cargoes from the West coast. The never a word, that I have heard, at least, have ye got of their proceeds.
"But we shall, sir—we shall—they talked of excellent prices."

"Aye, there ye are again—talked—what signifies talking? No, but that the trade's a good trade when it cuts in wi' other work, and ye make a barter o' it, but out o' naething, naething comes, ye ken. And see ye, Rory, that ye dinna lippen ow'r much to that black Hieland rascal. He's a sad louper yon—a greater scoundrel there is na this day unhang, atween this and John o' Groats' house; though if he's true to you and does his work weel, that's neither here nor there. Saul and body, man, but he has a hantle in his power, thy—

It's little work when ye maun trust sae muckle to the dirk an' the tartan!"

"Well sir, I do believe the fellow is honest—it's his interest to be so; he knows what I have against him, if he were to play me false: all I can do, is to look sharp after him. There will be a good deal to do one way or other this year, they say—a brisk demand and large orders, it is said. It's true there's too much outstanding: but I hope we shall come tumbling in—brought up with a wet finger, as they say. But how comes your own concerns on, sir?"

"Hum—well, I hope—well, to be sure—ye have heard no soughs to the contrary—no foolish talk!"

"O no, sir, not a syllable. But there is some report of a fall in wool, and oak bark; and it's said there will be a large importation of corn admitted, in order to lower the price of bread for the poor, who are roaring out at the exorbitant rate it sells at."

"Aye, curse them—so they are—so they do, and things are falling in spite of all our manoeuvres; we can't keep up prices as we used to do, and as should be the case. And faith there's two or three of my specs, that don't promise so well as I could wish. There's that kelp affair; this confounded bollard will ding it down four pounds a ton; and the wood of Glen Fintra, that should have all been at market before now, that lazy chield Macinlay has kept it back so long, that bark's down too. De'il has me but I'm thinking he's had his own gude reasons for the delay; but I bae him weel in hand; the labour's a' to pay yet: and the laird will neither take it off my hands, nor gie time—but I may gie him a cast yet too. But these are trifles—trifles no' worth speakin' o'," continued the W. S. passing his hand over his brow, as if to brush away the tell-tale wrinkles, which care was fast
imprinting there, and which told their story in spite of his admirable self-possession.

"What are things like these to—but I wish—I wish we could, that is—By the bye, Rory, how stand you of late at Airdruthmore?—How looks the fair Isabelle on you? Here's her health, my boy, in a bumper. I say—when are we to call her Mrs. Macaskill, eh?"

"Why, faith, sir, that's a question I can hardly answer—you know I've been but little at Airdruthmore this summer—that stir in the trade kept me so much abroad. Isabelle and I were on the usual terms—civil, quite civil; but there was nothing that tempted me to precipitate matters. On the contrary, when I was there last there came a young fellow—Tresham, I think his name was, an Englishman—an officer too—as fine and as high as a lord. Confound the puppy!—I hate him like a brock or a founart; and there he stuck like a leech, while I was forced to trot; and by heaven! the girl seemed to eye the fellow just kindly enough. He's a smooth-faced, oily-tongued chap, and the Lord knows what mischief he may have done all this time. When the cat's away, ye know—but the cat may be on them sooner than they're thinking for."

"Aye, Rory, but suppose the cat were to meet with her match. Saul and body, man! she's been just long enough away by yere own account; ye ha' na any time to lose. So be off at once, man; press matters home, and if they dinn go on briskly, it's time for me to open my battery; for truth, it wouldna please me to see much more delay. I'm getting owd now; I want to see things squared and roundit in, afore I'm gathered to my fathers; an' if I dinn see it, Rory, I'm feared ye never will, lad—for ye haena the gripping airt. Catch was a gude dorey, they say, but Handfast was a better; ye may have the getting, but ye want the keeping airt.

"But, Rory, lad, the thing must not be let sileep; the ould man's safe noo—his head's under my belt; he canna say 'no,' if he would, when I say 'aye;' an' the girl wunna cease against his word when she kens that her own word will save or ruin him. As for this English chap, this Tresham, we must take order wi' him; he belongs to the army it seems—couldn't we find means to get him sent off to his regiment? We must see about this—we'll find out his agents. But be ye ooff to Strath Eriort, man—lay close siege there, and bring the garrison to terms without delay; there's more depends on this, maybe, than ye ken off."

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