
Opening Extract from...

Prester John

Written by John Buchan

Introduction by Trevor Royle

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Introduction

On 7 August 1901 during the dog days of a London summer a young man called John Buchan received an unexpected summons to a meeting at the Colonial Office. It came from Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner to South Africa who was busily recruiting 'first-class men of experience' to serve with him as he began the task of reconstruction in the wake of the Boer War. Even though Buchan had no experience of colonial administration he had read Greats at Oxford where he had taken a First and was therefore one of the young men with 'brains and character' whom Milner had singled out to work for him. In time, that select number would be known as 'Milner's young men' or, somewhat disparagingly, as 'Milner's kindergarten'.

For Buchan it was a life-changing moment. When he received the invitation he was training to be a barrister but he had also taken his first steps as a writer, contributing reviews and essays to *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Spectator*. More importantly, he had built up a circle of influential friends at Oxford and had transmogrified himself into that instantly recognisable figure of the late Victorian and Edwardian period – a Scotsman on the make. The son of a Church of Scotland minister Buchan had shone at school and then at Glasgow University before winning a scholarship which took him to Oxford and access to a wider world. As a friend from his Oxford days told him, going to South Africa was simply another spur to his ambitions: 'With your usual good fortune (like most good fortune, mainly an eye for the true opportunity) you seem to have done it at precisely the best junction.'

When Buchan left for South Africa the country was still gripped by the conflict which had broken out in October 1899 when the Boers of Transvaal and Orange Free State had invaded Natal and plunged South Africa into a disastrous war. Although large-scale military operations had come to an end by the late summer of 1901 the British Army was still engaged in a vicious counter-insurgency war against Boer commandos and the mission awaiting Milner's staff involved both restitution and pacification. It proved to be hard and unyielding work – as a rule Buchan woke at 5 a.m. and worked until 10 p.m. – but it was also intensely rewarding. Not only did Buchan gain profound satisfaction from the knowledge that he was helping to rebuild a shattered country but he also fell in love with southern Africa for its wide open spaces, big skies and above all the 'wonderful mulberry gloaming' at the day's end. Buchan quickly conformed to the dictum that you can take the man out of Africa but you cannot take Africa out of the man.

Being a writer, albeit in his formative years, Buchan also used the experience to fuel his literary talents. 'I am writing a book!' he told his friend the classical scholar Gilbert Murray early in 1903. 'I could not help it. I am so much in love with the country, and have so many things to say which I think ought to be said.' The result was *The African Colony*, an account of his experiences which appeared later that year and received respectable reviews, but by then he had already started work on a novel and a number of short stories. The most important of these fictional efforts was an adventure novel for boys which eventually saw the light of day in the summer of 1910, seven years after he returned from South Africa. Published under the title *The Black Generals* it appeared serially in *The Captain*, a magazine for 'boys and old boys' whose contributors included P. G. Wodehouse. Later that year the story was published in book form by Thomas Nelson under the title *Prester John* and then in the United States by Dodd Mead under the title *The Great Diamond Pipe*. It was an immediate success, being translated into several languages: not a bad outcome for a piece of work which Buchan admitted in

his autobiography had come about while he was working as an editor at Nelson and 'being appalled . . . by the dullness of most boys' books, I thought I would attempt one of my own, based on my African experience'.

The result, *Prester John,* is what was once known as 'a rattling good yarn', a simple but compelling story which fascinates from start to finish. From the moment that the hero David Crawfurd encounters the mysterious black stranger on the Kirkcaple shore in eastern Scotland to the same man's tragic death in the hidden fastness of the Rooirand in southern Africa the reader is invited into an exciting but entirely credible world of adventure involving fabulous treasure, violence, double-dealing, a native uprising and David's eventual triumph over the forces of evil as represented by the enigmatic Reverend John Laputa who is described as 'a second Napoleon . . . a born leader of men and as brave as a lion'. It is not surprising that *Prester John* received a warm welcome by the critics or that immediate comparisons were made with the work of Robert Louis Stevenson and Rider Haggard.

In addition to the South African background which is lovingly depicted with a countryman's eye for landscape there is much else of Buchan in the tale. The Kirkcaple shore at the outset is based on his childhood memories of his father's ministry at Pathhead, a small Fife town between Kirkcaldy and Dysart where the stark red cliffs, firm sand and rock pools became a boy's playground. David Crawfurd, the minister's son with a taste for adventure and hopes for a university education could have been Buchan himself and the story is underpinned by his powerful conviction that civilisation is a thin veneer, a sheet of glass beyond which lie the forces of chaos. Or as another Buchan character Maitland puts it in the short story 'Fountainblue' 'there is a very narrow line between the warm room and the savage out of doors'. (Coincidentally, this story was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in August 1901 on the eve of Buchan's departure to South Africa.)

This latter point is important as it colours much of Buchan's philosophy. To him imperialism was as much about imposing

civilisation as it was about creating economic or political power. Buchan's thinking was also based on an insistence that there can be no privilege without responsibility, that those who govern on behalf of others must have their best interests at heart. In such a world the figure of John Laputa is something of an anachronism. On the one hand Captain Arcoll, a typical Buchan character, part military spy, part adventurer, respects Laputa as a noble specimen, who possesses 'fineness and nobility'. On the other he regards him as little more than a half-educated savage who 'can see the first stage of a thing, and maybe the second, but no more'. Even Crawfurd is in two minds about the man, admiring Laputa's 'splendid proportions' but recoiling from the elemental cruelty which encourages him to 'wipe out the civilisation of a thousand years, and turn us all into savages'.

By any standards the character of Laputa is a magnificent creation; he also provides the link to the legendary figure of Prester John, the fabulous Christian emperor who features in the writing of Marco Polo and whose name was adopted by a later ruler in Abyssinia. This historical connection provides Laputa with his sense of destiny, the great snake necklet of the long-lost emperor being the totem which allows him to rally the tribes of southern Africa to drive out the white man. However, it also belies Laputa's position as an educated man of God who received his education in the United States and who became 'a great pet of missionary societies'. Laputa might have taken on the cloak of civilisation but as Arcoll tells Crawfurd 'at full moon when the black cock was blooded, the Reverend John forgot his Christianity. He was back four centuries among the Mazimba sweeping down on the Zambesi. He told them, and they believed him, that he was the Umkulunkulu, the incarnated spirit of Prester John.'

In that guise he cannot be allowed to survive, and Crawfurd and his friends have to foil Laputa's attempts to raise a rebellion amongst the tribes and drive out the white man. They do this both for the sake of the plot – it is after all an adventure story – and to preserve the civilising influence of colonial rule in

southern Africa. Crawfurd comes to that understanding in a key passage after he has played his part in ending Laputa's life and putting a stop to the rebellion amongst the tribes.

> I knew then the meaning of the white man's duty. He has to take all the risks, recking nothing of his life or his fortunes, and well content to find his reward in the fulfilment of his task. That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king; and so long as we know this and practise it, we will rule not in Africa alone but wherever there are dark men who live only for the day and their own bellies.

In the post-colonial world Crawfurd's words have a disturbing ring but even if they do not exactly mirror Buchan's own thinking they are an accurate reflection of the New Imperialism of the period before World War I. Imperialists like Frederick Lugard who opened up much of east and west Africa, creating British protectorates in Uganda and Nigeria, saw nothing wrong in claiming that white intervention was an 'assertion of superiority which commands the respect and excites the emulation of the savage' and he insisted that the Pax Britannica which cemented the empire was 'the greatest blessing that Africa has known since the Flood'. Lugard tempered his thinking by arguing that the British presence stopped inter-tribal conflicts and opened up Africa's heart of darkness to civilising influences but the underlying message echoes Crawfurd's words, namely that all that was beneficial in Africa was European and all that was bad was African. Applied to *Prester John*, Crawfurd and his ilk bring prosperity and order while Laputa represents the primal forces of darkness and barbarity.

Inevitably judgments of that kind have attracted the criticism that Buchan was a racist or was guilty of using racist language – throughout the novel the word 'kaffir' is given free rein. Originally an Arabic word meaning 'infidel' or 'unbeliever' it was used by the British and the Dutch as a blanket description

for African natives and initially was not particularly derogatory. Only during the later apartheid period in South Africa did it become a term of abuse but it is doubtful if it would have been recognised as such by Buchan's main characters. On the other hand the use of the word 'nigger' by Tam Dyke, the nephew of the provost of Kirkcaple, is offensive, a point made by H. M. Fowler in his authoritative *Modern English Usage* (1926): 'It [nigger] was felt as an insult by the person described, & betrays in the speaker, if not deliberate insolence, at least a very arrogant inhumanity.' However, just as the unwholesome adventurer Henriques is anathematised as a 'Portugoose Jew' and 'whose skin spoke of the tar-brush' the comments are made not by Buchan but by his creations and to a certain extent are very much in character. In a later age we might deplore the racist sentiments but in a novel which deals with the empire as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century the vocabulary is symptomatic of that period.

Those question marks aside, *Prester John* is a wonderfully solid achievement. Not only did it give Buchan the confidence that he was a natural teller of tales but its fast-moving action looks forward to later adventure novels such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916) and *Huntingtower* (1922). It was the prentice piece on which all his future fiction was constructed.

Trevor Royle
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ONE

The Man on the Kirkcaple Shore

I mind as if it were yesterday my first sight of the man. Little I knew at the time how big the moment was with destiny, or how often that face seen in the fitful moonlight would haunt my sleep and disturb my waking hours. But I mind yet the cold grue of terror I got from it, a terror which was surely more than the due of a few truant lads breaking the Sabbath with their play.

The town of Kirkcaple, of which and its adjacent parish of Portincross my father was the minister, lies on a hillside above the little bay of Caple, and looks squarely out on the North Sea. Round the horns of land which enclose the bay the coast shows on either side a battlement of stark red cliffs through which a burn or two makes a pass to the water's edge. The bay itself is ringed with fine clean sands, where we lads of the burgh school loved to bathe in the warm weather. But on long holidays the sport was to go farther afield among the cliffs; for there there were many deep caves and pools, where podleys might be caught with the line, and hid treasures sought for at the expense of the skin of the knees and the buttons of the trousers. Many a long Saturday I have passed in a crinkle of the cliffs, having lit a fire of driftwood, and made believe that I was a smuggler or a Jacobite new landed from France. There was a band of us in Kirkcaple, lads of my own age, including Archie Leslie, the son of my father's session-clerk, and Tam Dyke, the provost's nephew. We were sealed to silence by the blood oath, and we bore each the name of some historic pirate or sailorman. I was Paul Jones, Tam was Captain Kidd, and Archie, need I say it, was Morgan himself. Our tryst was a cave where a little

water called the Dyve Burn had cut its way through the cliffs to the sea. There we forgathered in the summer evenings and of a Saturday afternoon in winter, and told mighty tales of our prowess and flattered our silly hearts. But the sober truth is that our deeds were of the humblest, and a dozen of fish or a handful of apples was all our booty, and our greatest exploit a fight with the roughs at the Dyve tan-work.

My father's spring Communion fell on the last Sabbath of April, and on the particular Sabbath of which I speak the weather was mild and bright for the time of year. I had been surfeited with the Thursday's and Saturday's services, and the two long diets of worship on the Sabbath were hard for a lad of twelve to bear with the spring in his bones and the sun slanting through the gallery window. There still remained the service on the Sabbath evening – a doleful prospect, for the Rev. Mr Murdoch of Kilchristie, noted for the length of his discourses, had exchanged pulpits with my father. So my mind was ripe for the proposal of Archie Leslie, on our way home to tea, that by a little skill we might give the kirk the slip. At our Communion the pews were emptied of their regular occupants and the congregation seated itself as it pleased. The manse seat was full of the Kirkcaple relations of Mr Murdoch, who had been invited there by my mother to hear him, and it was not hard to obtain permission to sit with Archie and Tam Dyke in the cock-loft in the gallery. Word was sent to Tam, and so it happened that three abandoned lads duly passed the plate and took their seats in the cock-loft. But when the bell had done jowing, and we heard by the sounds of their feet that the elders had gone in to the kirk, we slipped down the stairs and out of the side door. We were through the churchyard in a twinkling, and hot-foot on the road to the Dyve Burn.

It was the fashion of the genteel in Kirkcaple to put their boys into what were known as Eton suits – long trousers, cut-away jackets, and chimney-pot hats. I had been one of the earliest victims, and well I remember how I fled home from the Sabbath school with the snow-balls of the town roughs rattling off my

chimney-pot. Archie had followed, his family being in all things imitators of mine. We were now clothed in this wearisome garb, so our first care was to secrete safely our hats in a marked spot under some whin bushes on the links. Tam was free from the bondage of fashion, and wore his ordinary best knickerbockers. From inside his jacket he unfolded his special treasure, which was to light us on our expedition – an evil-smelling old tin lantern with a shutter.

Tam was of the Free Kirk persuasion, and as his Communion fell on a different day from ours, he was spared the bondage of church attendance from which Archie and I had revolted. But notable events had happened that day in his church. A black man, the Rev. John Something-or-other, had been preaching. Tam was full of the portent. 'A nigger,' he said, 'a great black chap as big as your father, Archie.' He seemed to have banged the bookboard with some effect, and had kept Tam, for once in his life, awake. He had preached about the heathen in Africa, and how a black man was a good as a white man in the sight of God, and he had forecast a day when the Negroes would have something to teach the British in the way of civilization. So at any rate ran the account of Tam Dyke, who did not share the preacher's views. 'It's all nonsense, Davie. The Bible says that the children of Ham were to be our servants. If I were the minister I wouldn't let a nigger into the pulpit. I wouldn't let him farther than the Sabbath school.'

Night fell as we came to the broomy spaces of the links, and ere we had breasted the slope of the neck which separates Kirkcaple Bay from the cliffs it was as dark as an April evening with a full moon can be. Tam would have had it darker. He got out his lantern, and after a prodigious waste of matches kindled the candle-end inside, turned the dark shutter, and trotted happily on. We had no need of his lighting till the Dyve Burn was reached and the path began to descend steeply through the rift in the crags.

It was here we found that some one had gone before us. Archie was great in those days at tracking, his ambition running

in Indian paths. He would walk always with his head bent and his eyes on the ground, whereby he several times found lost coins and once a trinket dropped by the provost's wife. At the edge of the burn, where the path turns downward, there is a patch of shingle washed up by some spate. Archie was on his knees in a second. 'Lads,' he cried, 'there's spoor here'; and then after some nosing, 'it's a man's track, going downward, a big man with flat feet. It's fresh, too, for it crosses the damp bit of gravel, and the water has scarcely filled the holes yet.'

We did not dare to question Archie's woodcraft, but it puzzled us who the stranger could be. In summer weather you might find a party of picnickers here, attracted by the fine hard sands at the burn mouth. But at this time of night and season of the year there was no call for any one to be trespassing on our preserves. No fisherman came this way, the lobster-pots being all to the east, and the stark headland of the Red Neb made the road to them by the water's edge difficult. The tan-work lads used to come now and then for a swim, but you would not find a tan-work lad bathing on a chill April night. Yet there was no question where our precursor had gone. He was making for the shore. Tam unshuttered his lantern, and the steps went clearly down the corkscrew path. 'Maybe he is after our cave. We'd better go cannily.'

The glim was dowsed – the words were Archie's – and in the best contraband manner we stole down the gully. The business had suddenly taken an eerie turn, and I think in our hearts we were all a little afraid. But Tam had a lantern, and it would never do to turn back from an adventure which had all the appearance of being the true sort. Half-way down there is a scrog of wood, dwarf alders and hawthorn, which makes an arch over the path. I, for one, was glad when we got through this with no worse mishap than a stumble from Tam which caused the lantern door to fly open and the candle to go out. We did not stop to relight it, but scrambled down the screes till we came to the long slabs of reddish rock which abutted on the beach. We could not see the track, so we gave up the business of scouts,

and dropped quietly over the big boulder and into the crinkle of cliff which we called our cave.

There was nobody there, so we relit the lantern and examined our properties. Two or three fishing-rods for the burn, much damaged by weather; some sea-lines on a dry shelf of rock; a couple of wooden boxes; a pile of driftwood for fires, and a heap of quartz in which we thought we had found veins of gold – such was the modest furnishing of our den. To this I must add some broken clay pipes, with which we made believe to imitate our elders, smoking a foul mixture of coltsfoot leaves and brown paper. The band was in session, so following our ritual we sent out a picket. Tam was deputed to go round the edge of the cliff from which the shore was visible, and report if the coast was clear.

He returned in three minutes, his eyes round with amazement in the lantern light. 'There's a fire on the sands,' he repeated, 'and a man beside it.'

Here was news indeed. Without a word we made for the open, Archie first, and Tam, who had seized and shuttered his lantern, coming last. We crawled to the edge of the cliff and peered round, and there sure enough on the hard bit of sand which the tide had left by the burn mouth was a twinkle of light and a dark figure.

The moon was rising, and besides there was that curious sheen from the sea which you will often notice in spring. The glow was maybe a hundred yards distant, a little spark of fire I could have put in my cap, and, from its crackling and smoke, composed of dry seaweed and half-green branches from the burnside thickets. A man's figure stood near it, and as we looked it moved round and round the fire in circles which first of all widened and then contracted.

The sight was so unexpected, so beyond the beat of our experience, that we were all a little scared. What could this strange being want with a fire at half-past eight of an April Sabbath night on the Dyve Burn sands? We discussed the thing in whispers behind a boulder, but none of us had any solution.

'Belike he's come ashore in a boat,' said Archie. 'He's maybe a foreigner.' But I pointed out that, from the tracks which Archie himself had found, the man must have come overland down the cliffs. Tam was clear he was a madman, and was for withdrawing promptly from the whole business.

But some spell kept our feet tied there in that silent world of sand and moon and sea. I remember looking back and seeing the solemn, frowning faces of the cliffs, and feeling somehow shut in with this unknown being in a strange union. What kind of chance had brought this interloper into our territory? For a wonder I was less afraid than curious. I wanted to get to the heart of the matter, and to discover what the man was up to with his fire and his circles.

The same thought must have been in Archie's head, for he dropped on his belly and began to crawl softly seawards. I followed, and Tam, with sundry complaints, crept after my heels. Between the cliffs and the fire lay some sixty yards of debris and boulders above the level of all but the high spring tides. Beyond lay a string of seaweedy pools and then the hard sands of the burnfoot. There was excellent cover among the big stones, and apart from the distance and the dim light, the man by the fire was too preoccupied in his task to keep much look-out towards the land. I remember thinking he had chosen his place well, for save from the sea he could not be seen. The cliffs are so undercut that unless a watcher on the coast were on their extreme edge he would not see the burnfoot sands.

Archie, the skilled tracker, was the one who all but betrayed us. His knee slipped on the seaweed, and he rolled off a boulder, bringing down with him a clatter of small stones. We lay as still as mice, in terror lest the man should have heard the noise and have come back to look for the cause. By and by when I ventured to raise my head above a flat-topped stone I saw that he was undisturbed. The fire still burned, and he was pacing round it.

Just on the edge of the pools was an outcrop of red sandstone much fissured by the sea. Here was an excellent vantage ground,

and all three of us curled behind it, with our eyes just over the edge. The man was not twenty yards off, and I could see clearly what manner of fellow he was. For one thing he was huge in size, or so he seemed to me in the half-light. He wore nothing but a shirt and trousers, and I could hear by the flap of his feet on the sand that he was barefoot.

Suddenly Tam Dyke gave a gasp of astonishment. 'Gosh, it's the black minister!' he said.

It was indeed a black man, as we saw when the moon came out of a cloud. His head was on his breast, and he walked round the fire with measured, regular steps. At intervals he would stop and raise both hands to the sky, and bend his body in the direction of the moon. But he never uttered a word.

'It's magic,' said Archie. 'He's going to raise Satan. We must bide here and see what happens, for he'll grip us if we try to go back. The moon's ower high.'

The procession continued as if to some slow music. I had been in no fear of the adventure back there by our cave; but now that I saw the thing from close at hand, my courage began to ebb. There was something desperately uncanny about this great Negro, who had shed his clerical garments, and was now practising some strange magic alone by the sea. I had no doubt it was the black art, for there was that in the air and the scene which spelled the unlawful. As we watched, the circles stopped, and the man threw something on the fire. A thick smoke rose of which we could feel the aromatic scent, and when it was gone the flame burned with a silvery blueness like moonlight. Still no sound came from the minister, but he took something from his belt, and began to make odd markings in the sand between the inner circle and the fire. As he turned, the moon gleamed on the implement, and we saw it was a great knife.

We were now scared in real earnest. Here were we, three boys, at night in a lonely place a few yards from a great savage with a knife. The adventure was far past my liking, and even the intrepid Archie was having qualms, if I could judge from his set face. As for Tam, his teeth were chattering like a threshing-mill.

Suddenly I felt something soft and warm on the rock at my right hand. I felt again, and, lo! it was the man's clothes. There were his boots and socks, his minister's coat and his minister's hat.

This made the predicament worse, for if we waited till he finished his rites we should for certain be found by him. At the same time, to return over the boulders in the bright moonlight seemed an equally sure way to discovery. I whispered to Archie, who was for waiting a little longer. 'Something may turn up,' he said. It was always his way.

I do not know what would have turned up, for we had no chance of testing it. The situation had proved too much for the nerves of Tam Dyke. As the man turned towards us in his bowings and bendings, Tam suddenly sprang to his feet and shouted at him a piece of schoolboy rudeness then fashionable in Kirkcaple.

'Wha called ye partan-face, my bonny man?'

Then, clutching his lantern, he ran for dear life, while Archie and I raced at his heels. As I turned I had a glimpse of a huge figure, knife in hand, bounding toward us.

Though I only saw it in the turn of a head, the face stamped itself indelibly upon my mind. It was black, black as ebony, but it was different from the ordinary Negro. There were no thick lips and flat nostrils; rather, if I could trust my eyes, the nose was high-bridged, and the lines of the mouth sharp and firm. But it was distorted into an expression of such terror and devilish fury and amazement that my heart became like water.

We had a start, as I have said, of some twenty or thirty yards. Among the boulders we were not at a great disadvantage, for a boy can flit quickly over them, while a grown man must pick his way. Archie, as ever, kept his wits the best of us. 'Make straight for the burn,' he shouted in a hoarse whisper; 'we'll beat him on the slope.'

We passed the boulders and slithered over the outcrop of red rock and the patches of sea-pink till we reached the channel of the Dyve water, which flows gently among pebbles after leaving

the gully. Here for the first time I looked back and saw nothing. I stopped involuntarily, and that halt was nearly my undoing. For our pursuer had reached the burn before us, but lower down, and was coming up its bank to cut us off.

At most times I am a notable coward, and in these days I was still more of one, owing to a quick and easily-heated imagination. But now I think I did a brave thing, though more by instinct than resolution. Archie was running fast, and had already splashed through the burn; Tam came next, just about to cross, and the black man was almost at his elbow. Another second and Tam would have been in his clutches had I not yelled out a warning and made straight up the bank of the burn. Tam fell into the pool – I could hear his spluttering cry – but he got across; for I heard Archie call to him, and the two vanished into the thicket which clothes all the left bank of the gully. The pursuer, seeing me on his own side of the water, followed straight on; and before I knew it had become a race between the two of us.

I was hideously frightened, but not without hope, for the screes and shelves of this right side of the gully were known to me from many a day's exploring. I was light on my feet and uncommonly sound in wind, being by far the best long-distance runner in Kirkcaple. If I could only keep my lead till I reached a certain corner I knew of, I could outwit my enemy; for it was possible from that place to make a detour behind a waterfall and get into a secret path of ours among the bushes. I flew up the steep screes, not daring to look round; but at the top, where the rocks begin, I had a glimpse of my pursuer. The man could run. Heavy in build though he was, he was not six yards behind me, and I could see the white of his eyes and the red of his gums. I saw something else – a glint of white metal in his hand. He still had his knife.

Fear sent me up the rocks like a seagull, and I scrambled and leaped, making for the corner I knew of. Something told me that the pursuit was slackening, and for a moment I halted to look round. A second time a halt was nearly the end of me. A

great stone flew through the air, and took the cliff an inch from my head, half-blinding me with splinters. And now I began to get angry. I pulled myself into cover, skirted a rock till I came to my corner, and looked back for the enemy. There he was scrambling by the way I had come, and making a prodigious clatter among the stones. I picked up a loose bit of rock and hurled it with all my force in his direction. It broke before it reached him, but a considerable lump to my joy took him full in the face. Then my terrors revived. I slipped behind the waterfall and was soon in the thicket, and toiling towards the top.

I think this last bit was the worst in the race, for my strength was failing, and I seemed to hear those horrid steps at my heels. My heart was in my mouth as, careless of my best clothes, I tore through the hawthorn bushes. Then I struck the path and, to my relief, came on Archie and Tam, who were running slowly in desperate anxiety about my fate. We then took hands and soon reached the top of the gully.

For a second we looked back. The pursuit had ceased, and far down the burn we could hear the sounds as of some one going back to the sands.

'Your face is bleeding, Davie. Did he get near enough to hit you?' Archie asked.

'He hit me with a stone. But I gave him better. He's got a bleeding nose to remember this night by.'

We did not dare take the road by the links, but made for the nearest human habitation. This was a farm about half a mile inland, and when we reached it we lay down by the stack-yard gate and panted.

'I've lost my lantern,' said Tam. 'The big black brute! See if I don't tell my father.'

'Ye'll do nothing of the kind,' said Archie fiercely. 'He knows nothing about us and can't do us any harm. But if the story got out and he found out who we were, he'd murder the lot of us.'

He made us swear secrecy, which we were willing enough to do, seeing very clearly the sense in his argument. Then we found the highroad and trotted back at our best pace to

Kirkcaple, fear of our families gradually ousting fear of pursuit. In our excitement Archie and I forgot about our Sabbath hats, reposing quietly below a whin bush on the links.

We were not destined to escape without detection. As ill luck would have it, Mr Murdoch had been taken ill with the stomach-ache after the second psalm, and the congregation had been abruptly dispersed. My mother had waited for me at the church door, and, seeing no signs of her son, had searched the gallery. Then the truth came out, and, had I been only for a mild walk on the links, retribution would have overtaken my truantry. But to add to this I arrived home with a scratched face, no hat, and several rents in my best trousers. I was well cuffed and sent to bed, with the promise of full-dress chastisement when my father should come home in the morning.

My father arrived before breakfast next day, and I was duly and soundly whipped. I set out for school with aching bones to add to the usual depression of Monday morning. At the corner of the Nethergate I fell in with Archie, who was staring at a trap carrying two men which was coming down the street. It was the Free Church minister – he had married a rich wife and kept a horse – driving the preacher of yesterday to the railway station. Archie and I were in behind a doorpost in a twinkling, so that we could see in safety the last of our enemy. He was dressed in minister's clothes, with a heavy fur-coat and a brand new yellow-leather Gladstone bag. He was talking loudly as he passed, and the Free Church minister seemed to be listening attentively. I heard his deep voice saying something about the 'work of God in this place'. But what I noticed specially – and the sight made me forget my aching hinder parts – was that he had a swollen eye, and two strips of sticking plaster on his cheek.