

# OpenTheo

## **Kidnapped—Chapter 16: The Lad With The Silver Button: Across Morven**

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For the Easter season, I am posting some rather different things on this channel, in addition to my regular output, as a little gift to my followers and supporters. This is the fourth book I am reading through: 'Kidnapped', by Robert Louis Stevenson. I hope that you all enjoy!

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## **Transcript**

Chapter 16. The Lad With The Silver Button. Across Morven.

There is a regular ferry from Torresay to Kinloch Allen on the mainland. Both shores of the Sound are in the country of the strong clan of the Macleans, and the people that passed the ferry with me were almost all of that clan. The skipper of the boat, on the other hand, was called Neil Roy MacRob, and since MacRob was one of the names of Allen's clansmen, and Allen himself had sent me to that ferry, I was eager to come to private speech of Neil Roy.

In the crowded boat this was of course impossible, and the passage was a very slow affair. There was no wind, and as the boat was wretchedly equipped, we could pull but two oars on one side, and one on the other. The men gave way, however, with goodwill, the passengers taking spells to help them, and the whole company giving the time in Gaelic boat songs.

And what with the songs, and the sea air, and the good nature and spirit of all concerned, and the bright weather, the passage was a pretty thing to have seen. But there was one melancholy part. In the mouth of Loch Allen we found a great seagoing ship at anchor, and this I supposed at first to be one of the King's cruisers which were kept along that coast, both summer and winter, to prevent communication with the French.

As we got a little nearer, it became plain she was a ship of merchandise, and what still more puzzled me, not only her decks, but the sea-beach also, were quite black with people, and skiffs were continually plying to and fro between them. Yet nearer, and there began to come to our ears a great sound of mourning, the people on board and those on the shore crying and lamenting one to another, so as to pierce the heart. Then I understood this was an emigrant's ship bound for the American colonies.

We put the ferry-boat alongside, and the exiles leaned over the bulwarks, weeping and reaching out their hands to my fellow passengers, among whom they counted some near friends. How long this might have gone on I do not know, for they seemed to have no sense of time. But at last the captain of the ship, who seemed near beside himself, and no great wonder, in the midst of this crying and confusion, came to the side and begged us to depart.

Thereupon Neil sheared off, and the chief singer in our boat struck into a melancholy air, which was presently taken up both by the emigrants and their friends upon the beach, so that it sounded from all sides like a lament for the dying. I saw the tears run down the cheeks of the men and women in the boat, even as they bent at the oars, and the circumstances and the music of the song, which is one called *Lock Abba No More*, were highly affecting even to myself. At Kinlock Allen I got Neil Roy upon one side on the beach, and said I made sure he was one of Appin's men.

And what for no? said he. I am seeking somebody, said I, and it comes in my mind that you will have news of him. Allen Breck Stewart is his name.

And very foolishly, instead of showing him the button, I sought to pass a shilling in his hand. At this he drew back. I am very much affronted, he said, and this is not the way that one gentleman should behave to another at all.

The man you ask for is in France. But if he was in my sporan, says he, and your belly full of shillings, I would not hurt a hair upon his body. I saw I had gone the wrong way to work, and without wasting time upon apologies, showed him the button lying in the hollow of my palm.

A wheel, a wheel, said Neil, and I think ye might have begun with that end of the stick, whatever. But if ye are the lad with the silver button, all is well, and I have the word to see that ye come safe. But if ye will pardon me to speak plainly, says he, there is a name

that ye should never take into your mouth, and that is the name of Alan Breck, and there is a thing that ye would never do, and that is to offer your dirty money to a Highland gentleman.

It was not very easy to apologize, for I could scarce tell him what was the truth, that I had never dreamed he would set up to be a gentleman until he told me so. Neil on his part had no wish to prolong his dealings with me, only to fulfil his orders and be done with it, and he made haste to give me my route. This was to lie the night in Kinloch-Alan, in the public inn, to cross Morven the next day to Ardgarr, and lie the night in the house of one John of the Claymore, who was warned that I might come, the third day to be set across one lock at Corran, and another at Balacoolish, and then ask my way to the house of James of the Glens, at O'Garn in Dura of Appen.

There was a good deal of ferrying, as ye hear, the sea in all this part running deep into the mountains and winding about their routes. It makes the country strong to hold and difficult to travel, but full of prodigious wild and dreadful prospects. I had some other advice from Neil, to speak with no one by the way, to avoid Whigs, Campbells, and the Red soldiers, to leave the road and lie in a bush if I saw any of the latter coming, for it was never chancy to meet in with them, and in a brief to conduct myself like a robber or a Jacobite agent, as perhaps Neil thought me.

The inn at Kinloch Allen was the most beggarly vile place that ever pigs were stied in, full of smoke, vermin, and silent Highlanders. I was not only discontented with my lodging, but with myself for my mismanagement of Neil, and thought I could hardly be worse off. But very wrongly, as I was soon to see, for I had not been half an hour at the inn, standing in the door most of the time to ease my eyes from the peat-smoke, when a thunderstorm came close by, the springs broke in the little hill on which the inn stood, and one end of the house became a running water.

Places of public entertainment were bad enough all over Scotland in those days. Yet it was a wonder to myself, when I had to go from the fireside to the bed in which I slept, wading over the shoes. Early in my next day's journey I overtook a little stout solemn man, walking very slowly with his toes turned out, sometimes reading in a book, and sometimes marking the place with his finger, and dressed decently and plainly in something of a clerical style.

This I found to be another catechist, but of a different order from the blind man of Mull, being indeed one of those sent out by the Edinburgh Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge to evangelise the more savage places of the Highlands. His name was Henderland. He spoke with the broad South-Country tongue, which I was beginning to weary for the sound of, and besides common countryship we soon found we had a more particular bond of interest, for my good friend, the Minister of Essendine, had translated into the Gaelic in his by-time a number of hymns and pious books which Henderland

used in his work, and held in great esteem.

Indeed, it was one of these he was carrying and reading when we met. We fell in company at once, our ways lying together as far as to Kingerloch. As we went he stopped and spoke with all the wayfarers and workers that we met or passed, and though of course I could not tell what they discoursed about, yet I judged Mr. Henderland must be well liked in the countryside, for I observed many of them to bring out their mulls and share a pinch of snuff with him.

I told him as far in my affairs as I judged wise, as far, that is, as they were none of Allan's, and gave Ballycoolish as the place I was travelling to, to meet a friend, for I thought Archan, or even Dura, would be too particular, and might put him on the scent. On his part he told me much of his work, and the people he worked among, the hiding priests and Jacobites, the disarming act, the dress, and many other curiosities of the time and place. He seemed moderate, blaming Parliament in several points, and especially because they had framed the act more severely against those who wore the dress than against those who carried weapons.

This moderation put in my mind to question him of the Red Fox and the Appen tenants, questions which, I thought, would seem natural enough in the mouth of one travelling to that country. He said it was a bad business. "'It's wonderful,' said he, "'where the tenants find the money, for their life is mere starvation.

You don't carry such a thing as snuff, do you, Mr. Balfour?' "'No, well, I'm better wanting it.' But these tenants, as I was saying, are doubtless partly driven to it. James Stuart in Dura, that's him they call James of the Glens, is half-brother to Ardshiel, the captain of the clan, and he is a man much looked up to, and drives very hard. And then there's one they call Alan Breck.' "'Ah!' I cried, "'what of him?' "'What of the wind that bloweth where it listeth?' said Henderland.

"'He's here in a wharf, here today and gone tomorrow, a fair heather cat. He might be glowering at the two of us out of Yon Wynbush, and I would nay wonder. You'll no carry such a thing as snuff, will you?' I told him no, and that he had asked the same thing more than once.

"'It's highly possible,' said he, sighing, "'but it seems strange you should nay carry it. However, as I was saying, this Alan Breck is a bold, desperate customer, and well-kent to be James's right hand. His life is forfeit already.

He would boggle at Nathan, and maybe, if a tenant body was to hang back, he would get a dirk in his wame.' "'You make a poor story of it all, Mr Henderland,' said I. "'If it is all fear upon both sides, I care to hear no more of it.' "'Nah,' said Mr Henderland, "'but there's love too, and self-denial that should put the like of you and me to shame. There's something fine about it. No, perhaps Christian, but humanly fine.

Even Alan Breck, by all that I hear, is a chill to be respected. There's many a lying snack-drawer sits close in Kirk in our own part of the country, and stands well in the world's eye, and maybe is a far worse man, Mr Balfour, than yon misguided shedder of man's blood. Ay, ay, we might take a lesson by them.

You'll perhaps think I've been too long in the Highlands,' he added, smiling to me. I told him not at all, that I had seen much to admire among the Highlanders, and if he came to that, Mr Campbell himself was a Highlander. "'Ay,' said he, "'that's true.

It's a fine blood.' "'And what is the King's agent about?' I asked. "'Colin Campbell,' says Hendeland, putting his head in a bee's bike. "'He is to turn the tenants out by force, I hear,' said I. "'Yes,' says he.

"'But the business has gone back and forth, as folks say. First James of the Glens rode to Edinburgh, and got some lawyer, a steward, no doubt. They all hanged together like bats in a steeple, and had the preceding stayed.

And then Colin Campbell came in again, and had their upper hand before the barons of Exchequer, and now they tell me the first of the tenants are to flit to-morrow. It's to begin at Dora under James's very windows, which does nay seem wise by my humble way of it.' "'Do you think they'll fight?' I asked. "'Well,' says Hendeland, "'they're disarmed, or supposed to be, for there's still a good deal of cold iron lying by in quiet places.

And then Colin Campbell has the soldiers coming. But for all that, if I was his lady-wife, I would nay be pleased till I got him home again. They're queer customers, the Appen stewards.' "'I asked if they were worse than their neighbours.' "'No, they,' said he, "'and that's the worst part of it, for if Colin Roy can get his business done in Appen, he has it all to begin again in the next country, which they call Mamaw, and which is one of the countries of the Camerons.

He's king's factor upon both, and from both he has to drive out the tenants. And indeed, Mr. Balfour, to be open with you, it's my belief that if he escapes the one lot, he'll get his death by the other.' So we continued talking and walking the great part of the day, until at last Mr. Hendeland, after expressing his delight in my company, and satisfaction at meeting with a friend of Mr. Campbell's, whom, says he, I will make bold to call that sweet singer of our covenanted Zion, proposed that I should make a short stage, and lie the night in his house a little beyond King Gerlock. To say truth, I was overjoyed, for I had no great desire for John of the Claymore, and since my double misadventure, first with the guide, and next with the gentleman skipper, I stood in some fear of any highland stranger.

Accordingly we shook hands upon the bargain, and came in the afternoon to a small house, standing alone by the shore of the Linniloch. The sun was already gone from the

desert mountains of Argyll upon the hither side, but shone on those of Appen on the farther. The loch lay as still as a lake, only the gulls were crying round the sides of it, and the whole place seemed solemn and uncouth.

We had no sooner come to the door of Mr. Henderland's dwelling, than to my great surprise, for I was now used to the politeness of highlanders. He burst rudely past me, dashed into the room, caught up a jar and a small horn-spoon, and began ladling snuff into his nose in most excessive quantities. Then he had a hearty fit of sneezing, and looked round upon me with a rather silly smile.

"'It's a vow I took,' says he. I took a vow upon me that I would nay carry it. Doubtless it's a great privation, but when I think upon the martyrs, not only to the Scottish covenant, but to other points of Christianity, I think shame to mind it.

As soon as we had eaten, and porridge and whey was the best of the good man's diet, he took a grave face and said he had a duty to perform by Mr. Campbell, and that was to inquire into my state of mind towards God. I was inclined to smile at him since the business of the snuff, but he had not spoken long before he brought the tears into my eyes. There are two things that men should never weary of, goodness and humility.

We get none too much of them in this rough world among cold, proud people, but Mr. Henderland had their very speech upon his tongue, and though I was a good deal puffed up with my adventures, and with having come off, as the saying is, with flying colours, yet he soon had me on my knees beside a poor old man, and both proud and glad to be there. Before we went to bed he offered me sixpence to help me on my way out of a scanty store he kept in the turf wall of his house, at which excess of goodness I knew not what to do, but at last he was so earnest with me that I thought it the more manly part to let him have his way, and so left him poorer than myself.