The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works

YOUNG NICK AND OLD NICK

S.R.CROCKETT

First Published by Stanley Paul and Co, 1910.

The Galloway Raiders 'Complete Crockett' digital edition was part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The collection comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

In 2025 the S.R.Crockett online museum was established and the Galloway Raiders Digital Edition works are now all available for free download from https://srcrockett.omeka.net The museum offers a virtual space to contextualise and interpret Crockett's works.

To find out more about Crockett's life, literature and legacy you can also visit The Galloway Raiders website www.gallowayraiders.co.uk and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/@gallowayraiders

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This is a little-known collection from 1910 published by Stanley Paul and Co, who were a relatively new company at the time having been formed in 1906. It was a short lived venture, within twenty five years they had been bought out by Hutchison. It seems all these stories had previously been published in a range of magazines, and represent Crockett (and his agent A.P.Watt) employing some 'recycling' tactics with an eye to the market place. For the modern reader it is a boon, because the stories might otherwise be 'lost.' And there is much of interest in this eclectic mix of thirteen stories.

The majority are set in Galloway, in the Glenkens of Crockett's youth. Others are less easy to locate, being in England, with two set in the 17th century. There is also one story set in Spain and one in Provence.

The Galloway stories feature ordinary people and 'professionals'. There is a doctor. In 'The Blue Eyes of Ailie', a familiar Crockett character Alec MQhirr tells a story of Doctor Campbell 'an habitual opium-eater', his nephew Roger and their complicated relationship. It features an unrequited love story reminiscent of *The Stickit Minister* Robert Fraser (and doubtless drawn to some extent from life.) One might see this as a much earlier version of a Doctor Finlay's casebook, and Alec is always an entertaining narrator.

In 'Steil of Steilsland' the profession is the Ministry, with the young Hector Maben offering information about Crockett's own early years as a

minister. Set in the fictional 'Quarrelwood' it seems Crockett may be conflating Penicuik and the Glenkens in this story.

Another three stories feature the Glenkells area Crockett grew up in. The longest 'Young Nick and Old Nick' offers an in depth look at the social history of Castle Douglas. The 'Ardwall Arms' is the Castle Douglas Arms fictionalised, and parts of the 'story' was to be re-used in *Sandy's Love* (1913) as well as being familiar from *Kit Kennedy* (1899). This is not to underestimate it. There is always depth and beauty in Crockett's descriptions of his childhood home. For example this description of Castle Douglas High Street: *There was the thin clear silver of early morning on the long street of Cairn Edward. The sun was glinting down it from one end to the other. From the Cross it looked as if there were a mighty bonfire flaming between the Globe Inn and the Market Hill.'* One knows that many, if not all, of the characters so closely observed in this story will be from life – immortalised though anonymously by Crockett. 'The Man By the Wayside' is similar. The heroine is one Saida Lamont, and her brother gets only a mention – but he is a 'clerk at the Bank of Scotland' at Castle Douglas. He will be someone's ancestor!

'By Right of Salvage' is a Christmas story set around Laurieston/New Galloway which is stuffed with detail of farm carts, young love and the reason why The Bogle Thorn was cut down on the A762 road.

There are two 'gypsy' stories. The short 'Treasure of the Faas' and the longer 'How Elsie Danced for her Life'. This second story is told by Silver Sand and after its first publication in (1901) was

developed into the novel *Deep Moat Grange* (published 1908) It is a tour de force of a story!

The location of' Rosemary' and 'Enderby's' are less clear, but the focus is on the characters and their relationships. In the first a young married couple quarrel and are reconciled whereas in the second a man feared at work is revealed as 'under the thumb' to his own young daughter. In both instances Crockett retains a light, humorous touch – but his own experience is always there, in the margins so to speak.

Of the two 17th century stories one tells of an elopement and the other is the humorous back story of Samuel Pepys clerk.

And to remind us that Crockett was well travelled, and wrote many stories set in Europe, there is one from Spain and one from France. The Spanish story 'An Idyll of the Sud Express' takes place on slow train passing through the Basque country and the narrator gives a picture of his English and Spanish companions on the journey. Whenever Crockett uses the word idyll we know it is tongue in cheek and this story is no exception. And 'Monsieur le Maire' is also humorous, set in Provencal.

With such an eclectic mix of stories there is something to please most tastes (at least of those who enjoy Crockett's writing). For me there are some Galloway gems at the very least!

Cally Phillips
March 2022

YOUNG NICK AND OLD NICK

CHAPTER 1

NICK DON

Young Nick Don stood alone on the platform of the Bennan Station. Equally alone under the turf of the Glen Kells Kirkyard slept old Nick Don. Young Nick had succeeded to his inheritance, which consisted of eighteen pounds eleven shillings and twopence of well-proven debts, besides an uncertain "score" at every alehouse in the Clachan. He left also behind him a fine collection of "clickies" — herds' staffs of various design, simple walking sticks in heavy knotted blackthorn, smooth hazel and warm-tinted cherry-wood. Most were still! in the rough. Old Nick rarely finished anything in the way of work. A few awaited only a coat of varnish, while the simple tools which had served the artist, in handles of native manufacture, had little more value than the sticks themselves.

But Young Nick was of other mettle than his father. He had long been "boy" and then "orra herd" at the Nether Airie, Ebenezer M'Kie's big "led" farm on the moors that look over the Stroan towards Loch Dee. Here he had enough laid by to clear his father's memory and erect a decent stone to his memory. The minister saw to that, and being, as it were, in the business, got it somewhat cheaper from Tam Girmory, the local "hewer" of epitaphs.

And so having said good-bye to the Airie, to Mr M'Kie and his daughter, Young Nick stood on the platform with a bundle on his back containing his

working clothes, a change of underwear, the Bible which had been his mother's and the "Sartor Resartus" the minister had given him after last winter's Bible Class. He had also a certificate of proficiency in studies (as far as simple equations and the First Book of Cæsar's Wars) from Dominie Duncan, and a general commendation to all whom it might concern as to honesty and good character signed by the minister of the parish in his official capacity.

These were feeble weapons with which to set out to the conquest of the world. But Young Nick knew their limitations, and trusted more to his one and twenty years, his lithe robust body, his strong limbs, and the determination to "put-his-hand-to-anything" that animated his soul.

Succeed? Why — of course, it never struck Young Nick that he could fail. He was not particularly handsome. Simply wholesome rather — tall and strong, and with a quick appeal in his rare smile that somehow tempted you to smile also.

He was going to Cairn Edward, because he did not mean to go out of the world he knew. He wanted to see the hills, and the grass green at the foot of each of the three long parallel streets that run from the railway station to the loch.

Most young men leaving the Glen Kells went to Glasgow, and there sank or swam as the case might be. But Young Nick Don knew that he could do better.

"Glasgow's ower big for ye, Nick!" he said to himself, "but in Cairn Edward, if Gib the Caird speaks the truth, wages are high, and work easy to get."

Yet after he reached the little whitewashed market

town, he began to think that he had done wrong to trust to the word of a poor useless body like Gib the Caird.

"If work was that plenty at his own gate-end, what took him away up at the Airie, smearin' sheep at eighteenpence a day?"

And the question remaining without an answer brought a shadow over Young Nick's bright confident face. But not for long. He remembered the Caird's performances at the Airie and took heart.

"If he works as he smears sheep, it's little wonder that the Cairn Edward folk can do without him!"

Now the smearing of sheep with tar and tallow is almost a lost art, even in Galloway. It consisted in rubbing in these substances in such a manner that parting the fleece in long waves and getting directly at the skin, when the smeared animal escapes bleating up the hill, the traces of the smearing hardly appear.

"Gib the Caird's yowes were as black as the pot," murmured Nick Don. "Maister M'Kie wad soon have given him his marching orders if he could have got another man at a'!"

Nevertheless work seemed hard to get in Cairn Edward. The little town lived on its Mondays and kept Sunday the rest of the week. He tried all down the long half-mile of street, beginning at the stationmaster's office and ending at the tannery on the lochside common.

"Ony work, sir?"

"No!"

"Good-day to you, then!"

"*Hurrmph!*"

The brief dialogue only varied in the number of hard consonants in the growl which closed the

interview. Not once did Nick get a chance of showing his capacities, or how if you asked him how many pennies were in any sum under ten pounds he could tell you in a moment without ever making a mistake. But this accomplishment, the pride of the Bennan parish, seemed worse than useless in Cairn Edward. Young Nick had to make the town appreciate him before he could hope to win a place there.

The "trades" of the town formed little close corporations, stricter than any Trades' Union of later times.

It was clear to Young Nick that there was nothing to be done in the way of getting regular work there. Well, then, he must look for irregular.

"Ye see," said a respectable man to whom he addressed himself, "we all work pretty much into one another's hands. Ye had better try Dumfries!"

"Then I will try and work into *my* ain hand!" said Young Nick Don. And he mounted slowly through that part of the town called "Little Dublin," in search of the lodgings to which he had been referred as suitable to his condition. But the sordid look of the low doors, the rancid odours that reached him from Lucky Shag's kitchen, and the pig which poked its nose out of Biddy Cormack's shebeen, offended the clean nostrils of the lad accustomed to the scent of heather and wet bog-myrtle coming up fresh on a westerly wind over the Kells Range.

No; he would not sleep in such places. He would tramp it first, till he found a hayshed. Six o'clock had struck from the town clock, and Willie Gerrond, little, bowed, dried-up, sardonic Willie Gerrond, town's officer and server of writs, had rung a peal which filled himself with admiration. The clinkum-clank carried far up the High Street, and sent many

a shovel and pick down with a clatter in garden and furrow. It was the "Cease from labour" in summer Cairn Edward, and presently tired men tramped homeward for tea – and "til't"* in the long rows of whitewashed cottages.

*(That is to say, tea and something added thereto – bacon, egg or sausage.)

In a little while these men reappeared at the Cross, washed, snodded, lighting their pipes and glancing shyly down at their blackened shoes. Some on fine nights wore carpet slippers and were much looked up to on that account.

But Young Nick Don stood troubled and lonesome in the hum of talk. At a baker's he had bought a small loaf of bread and eaten it as he strolled along various side streets, his quick eye marking the possibilities.

In a certain ironmonger's shop, about the middle of the town, he had noticed a small man grey as a badger, with eyes like gimlets and quick jerky ways. He was ordering and stamping, letting off steam, serving customers and talking all the time, chiefly to himself. But Young Don thought that he looked kind for all his parade of impatient anger.

Accordingly he made bold to go in and ask for work. Whereupon the active little much-skipping man lifted an eyelid upon him. A grey shifting speck of black glinted humanly and Young Don felt himself taken in at one glance, weighed in the balances and, as it appeared, found wanting.

"Work," cried the little man, "work! Na; nae mair boys here! The place is fair hotchin' wi' them. I'm tripping ower them. If I had fifty legs they wad a' be dog-tired afore nicht kickin' them! Boys! — boys, boys enouch - nae mair boys."

All this time he was weighing tin tacks, giving change, discharging messengers to distant departments with oil-cans, answering customers, all the time with his sharp eye glancing this way and that, and his ears cocked for the tinkle of the till.

"It is a man's work I am seeking!" said Young Nick Don.

"Then the mair fule him that pays ye!" cried the grey ironmonger. "Man! — ye are but a laddie! Where come ye frae? The Bennan! A fool ye were to leave it; was there never a hare on the braes or a trout left in the Black Water? (Laddie, stan' oot o' my road!) A half-croon paraffin lamp? Fegs no! Andro Dunn is nae murderer. Be content wi' a decent stable-lantern, or buy a five-shillin' yin!"

So the little grey ironmonger rattled on, taking no notice of anybody in particular, but as it were addressing the world in general. Each shopboy, customer, collector for subscriptions, beggar, applicant for work lifted the phrase which fitted his case out of the unceasing pour of words and snappy anathemas.

For a long while Andrew Dunn took no notice whatever of the tall young braesman towering above the hither-and-thither of the shop. Then, though he had not seemed to waste a single thought on him, the sharp eye suddenly lifted, the little restless stubbly head cocked itself, and Andro Dunn snapped out, "Look in the morn, ye heather stot!"

Thus for young Nick Don did fortune dawn in Cairn Edward.

CHAPTER 2

THE REDDING OF ANDRO DUNN'S YARD

Young Nick Don spent his first night in Cairn Edward in the big hayloft attached to the "Ardwall Arms." You went through a big archway. Then you entered a big yard. Stable doors opened all about you. At the farther end was a most admirable hayloft, where shelter and corn sacks never failed. But – you could not take a dozen steps across the yard towards it without awaking the sleepless guardian.

That is to say, a certain huge, horny-fisted and, in his wrath, powerfully languaged man of the name of Bob Hill. He would appear from a kind of office to the left and inquire, with needless luxury of descriptive power, what you might be doing in his yard.

Nevertheless Young Nick Don had a good bed there, but, like kissing, it went by favour. Bob Hill had seen the big strapping country man pass the "Ardwall Arms" several times day: As the prettiest women are the readiest to appreciate beauty in their peers, so strong upstanding Bob liked to see these qualities in others. A resemblance haunted him, but he could not seize it. That young fellow was like someone he had known. He had a moment's struggle with himself. Some wastrel from the market hill who would only pester him. And yet wastrel drover lads had not square heads set on shoulders like those. He beckoned Young Nick.

"Where do ye come from?"

He spoke sharply, for the lad was evidently

waiting to be hired. Bob Hill had noticed Nick's peregrinations up and down the street with a curious eye, and thought none the worse of him because, after he had been so often rebuffed, he had just as cheerfully tried the next open door.

"From the Bennan," said Young Nick, looking him straight in the eye.

"Ye are never a Don, are ye?" cried the head ostler, the elusive resemblance leaping to his eyes now that he had a clue.

"Don is my name," he answered; "I am Nicholas Don's only son."

"And he's gane," said the head ostler. "Nick Don's under the daisies – a denty lad he was, a guid friend, and oh, what a fisher!"

"Have you any work for me, sir?" said Young Nick, keen to strike when the iron was hot. The ostler scratched his head.

"We are payin' off rather than takin' on," he said. "This is a bad season. But – we will see when the gaffer comes round the morn. I will put in a word for the son of Nicholas Don."

So if there was no immediate work for Young Nick at the "Ardwall Arms," at least upon promise not to smoke – a promise easily given, since Young Nick neither smoked nor drank — he was provided with a couch "fit for a king," so Bob Hill affirmed.

He laughed when Young Nick related his interview with Ironmonger Dunn, and his hopes for the morrow. But he shook his head at Nick's chances.

"Ye will be a smarter man at a bargain than ever your father was if ye make salt to your kail out o' Andro Dunn. He works his shop wi' a gilravage o' boys — and his tongue. He never paid a man's wage in his life. Mean? Andro Dunn mean? Nothing o' the

kind, but savin'. He wad run after ha'pennies wi' the laddies at Candlemas and Hansel Monday."

In his hay nook Young Nick Don slept like a stone, waking only as soon as it was light to look at the time by his father's "verge" watch. His bed was comfortable, if somewhat ticklesome. But he tied strings about wrist and ankle, laid his coat over him with the arms tucked in about his neck and his bundle under his head for a pillow.

But after daybreak Nick did not tarry in bed. For Bob Hill, entering the yard at half-past five the next morning, found the paving-stones still wet with an unexampled morning toilet and his lodger leaning on the big brush, regarding his handiwork. Entering, he found that the stables had already been cleaned, and received with astonishment the apology of Young Nick for not knowing exactly how his host liked the horses groomed. After being once told, he could be depended on for the future.

Bob Hill stood amazed at such activity. His sleepy subordinate had a bad time of it that Tuesday morning, and, as a possible rival, regarded Nick with no favourable eyes.

"I don't believe he has ever been in a stable before – look at that litter, and what a way to graith a horse!"

"Let me see *you* do it," said Young Nick, laughing. "I *do* know little. Carriage horses are scarce up on the Bennan. But I'll hold the plough handles with any man of you."

"Come, laddie," said the head ostler presently. "Ye will have well earned your breakfast." And without further explanation he led the way round by a red freestone town hall into a long white street of low one-storeyed houses – Factory Street of the police

borough of Cairn Edward.

Ostler Hill's house was the third beyond the Bank Entry, quite small, but kept neat and shining by Bob's two old maid sisters Jen and Clementina.

They were tall, slenderish women, both of them, wearing a little grey, but with the pleasant well-kept sweetness of quiet and wholesome lives. They came near to worshiping their bachelor brother. At least they spoiled him very thoroughly, hiding the fact from the world (and as much as possible from themselves) under volleys of orders to "Scrape your feet, Bob! What think ye mats are laid doon at folks' doors for?" and so forth.

"To give womenfolk something to yammer aboot," was Bob's usual answer. "Come your ways in, laddie. Lasses, this is Young Nick Don from the Bennan."

Then he turned sharply on Nick.

"Can ye sup porridge?" he demanded.

"*Can I no? Try me?*" responded Young Nick with emphasis, feeling instinctively at the loose folds of the waistcoat that had been his father's.

There was a wistful look on his face which the two old maids watched with a curious gripping of the heart. First wonder appeared on their faces, then apprehension, then both gave way to a flurry of sympathy.

"Preserve us," whispered Clementina to Jen, "I declare the laddie's starving!"

"Oh, peety!" moaned Jen. "See till him wi' thae porridge. Let him ha'e them a'. Never say a word. *We* will be doin' wi' a bite o' soda scone in the back kitchen."

"Nothing o' the sort." Said the more masterful Clementina. "I put on the pan – there's eggs and I'll

slice some ham. It will never be missed. We can fry some scone in the gravy after. Bob's fell fond o' that."

"See and gie the laddie twa, then, and but yin to Bob. He wad eat them a' up if he got the chance."

"Fegs, he had better," whispered Clementina. "I'll stand opposite him ahint the laddie's chair, and gi'e him a look."

"It will tak' mair than a look to turn oor Bob if he wants twa scones or twa eggs. He's a fair loon for eggs and fried scones. When the minister speaks aboot greed I aye think of Bob."

Remark that there was no question of either of themselves having any. The feeding of the hungry Nick and the restraining of Bob were the only matters before the house.

When Young Nick had finished his porridge (and incidentally his hostesses' also) he looked up in time to catch an exchange of sympathetic glances between the women. He did not understand this and rose to go with thanks upon his lips. He would not intrude himself for the world.

But they almost pushed him back into the big three-legged chair that had been their father's, while Bob, who scented frying ham, called out that there was better coming. Yet even he understood not all. With a guest it would be a holiday feast in the Hill dwelling, though as the day was a weekday, *he* might have begged for an hour and not a slice of ham would have been cut for him. He smiled and shook his head, thinking on the contrary nature of women and a little of his good understanding with the cook at the "Ardwall."

But he was proud of his sisters, and because of them he had never married. They had been poor all

their lives – poor, and yet never thinking themselves poor – paying ready money, living on a pound a week and owing no man anything. They gave too of what they had to the ordinances of the Kirk, to the beggar at the door, to the neighbour in time of need.

But the thought of any decent, hard-working, well dressed man being starving had never occurred to them. They did not know that Young Nick had money in his pocket, and that it was as much from wonder and forgetfulness in that strange place, as from necessity, that he had taken no food since the night before at the Airie.

But for all their kindness Young Nick most ungratefully felt a little homesick. There was a grocer's New Year almanac on the wall which reminded him of Bell M'Turk with her morning-dress on – the one in which she did her dusting. He had always liked that. He longed for the smell of the honeysuckle on the old wall by the Airie porch. It seemed as if he would never see it again. But sentiment does not resist most excellent tea, oatcake farles, and bacon-ham. So in a minute or two Young Nick became again conscious of the kind eyes watching him. After all, there were people as kind here in Cairn Edward as up on the Airie braes. It was good to sit in a decent Christian house with familiar whorls of symbol and myth on the blue whinstone flags of the kitchen. The chromo-lithograph on the wall – that too was good – a girl standing on a seaward-looking doorstep, waving an adieu to some one unseen.

Young Nick had a request to make, but first he made his manners to his hostesses. The old maids looked at each other and almost blushed. The pleasure had been on their side. Then Nick Don

asked if he might leave his bundle in the little dark recess behind the door — that is, if it would not be in their way. Clementina and Jen gave a glad assent. But no sooner was Nick gone than the two kind old maids carried it carefully upstairs and laid it away in the "press" in which their best dresses hung. So well was it cared for that when Young Nick asked for it, there hung about his garments for several days faint odours of lavender and southernwood — which were the prayers of the saints.

Then Bob Hill sped on his way with advice and heartening as to the best way of facing Andro Dunn. "Make up your mind first and foremost what siller ye want, and dinna tak' a farthing less whatever he says to you. Then maybe he'll respect ye."

It occurred to Young Nick to take a look round the ironmonger's yard before he went to his interview. He stood a long while with his hands in his pockets and stared meditatively at the heaps of rubbish.

It was, as he said to himself, "something considerable of a scrap heap." If all that were out of the way, many things now difficult of access could be stored there. That oil-store for instance ought never to be allowed in the centre of a row of houses.

In the shop as many boys as before were scuttling hither and thither, getting in each other's way, nipping and pinching each other on the sly, all under the unceasing musketry of Andro Dunn's voice, the tinkle of money dropping into the till, the heavy "dump" of iron objects upon the uneven floor.

"Weel," said the grey bristly-headed little man. "and what might ye be wantin', Country?"

"Work," said Young Nick, "ye bade me come!"

"Oh, ye are 'Bennan', the daft boy frae off the heather. Let me see your hands? Man, you have

been at the tar again, when my sheep-dip is oceans better — ay and cheaper too, forbye the cleanliness. Try a dozen cans, Bennan, and ye will never get finger nails like them again — a fair disgrace to be seen in a decent burgh toon, ornamented wi' twa bailies and a provost."

"There's that yard of yours, Mr Dunn, and the sheds" — broke in Nick, getting to business at once, "they need redding out badly. Now I'll clean the whole up for a shilling a cartload and find my own "toom"!"

"The laddie's daft," cried the iron-grey man, "first, have you a horse and cart?"

"Will you give me the job?"

"How do I ken whether ye will do it to rights?"

"How do I ken ye will pay me when it *is* finished to rights?" retorted Young Nick.

"I'm Andro Dunn, I would have ye know!"

"And I'm Nicholas Don!"

"Faith," said the little man, dancing with excitement, "Don and Dunn — we are maybe bluid kin. But for all that how am I to be sure that you winna cart away my guid anvils, and best bar iron? I ha'e the shop and thae deils to attend to. I cannot stand all day in the yard watchin' you!"

"Wait till you are satisfied with the job, Mr Dunn," said Young Nick, "then pay me."

The ironmonger looked at him cunningly.

"Easy terms," he said, "no satisfaction — no pay! Very well then, Bennan! At it ye go!"

In five minutes Nick was in the yard attacking the nearest mountains of rubbish. He divided the whole contents into three categories — the certainly useful, the questionably so, and the worthless. He made lists of the first two. By dinner-time he had finished,

and intercepted Mr Dunn on his way out.

"Will ye step this way a moment, sir?"

"Nae time, nae time," cried the little man, "daft boy, Bennan! Does he think I ha'e nocht to do but play jock-my-joe wi' him?"

Nevertheless he followed grumbling steadily as he went. Bennan would be the death of him yet or he of Bennan. He was not sure which. Young Nick led him along the three divisions aforesaid, note-book in hand.

"Please say what you want kept and I'll see to it." Said Nick briskly.

The grey hackles of the ironmonger's crest rose under his hand as he rubbed his crown in perplexity, tipping his hat at different angles to do it, so complete was his astonishment.

"Faith," he exclaimed, "between me and the black coo's tail, I never thought Andro Dunn owned so muckle trumpery in this world. Sma' wonder I ha'e nae place to store my sheep-dip and hurdles, my wire-netting and gateposts. Bid ye appear to ken as weel as me. So I'll just leave it to ye, laddie. Mind, I'll no pay ye a farthin' unless I'm satisfied."

And he hurried off to catch his apprentices skylarking, just once more before going home.

During the meal hour, Young Nick saw to several things. He ascertained that the foundry at the head of the town would buy scrap iron, and that Robson the tanner on the Loch Common was "making ground" — that is, he was solidifying a half acre of marsh meadow with a view to extending his premises. Nick also applied for a cart from a road contractor with whom it was at present slack time. But here he was compelled to show his papers, and give the name of Bob Hill at the "Ardwall Arms" as a

general reference. However he got the horse and cart. Four and six a day were the terms agreed on, and Young Nick thought with melancholy upon the fact that up at Airie, and about the Bennan generally, a horse and cart could be had for the asking.

Still he had his work cut out for him, and he went at it with vigour. He must finish in three days because the road contractor had to be settled with every evening.

But the yard was cleaned. Rusted anvils found new places under sheds. Young Nick even got time to give them a rub up. Useless and broken debris was delivered at the foundry, and paid for by the ton. A commencement was made with the tanner's half acre. Many cart-loads of stones and other weighty matters were dumped into the bog, and on Saturday night Young Nick found himself with enough on hand to pay the road contractor, but without a single sixpence more. The foundry and the tanner had met his expenses, but so far he had laboured in vain – that is, except the hasty and insufficient meals he had eaten, and the bed in Bob Hill's hayloft which he still retained.

He had made two or three calls on his friends in Factory Street, but had managed to escape without again coming on them for a meal. He had a delicacy about accepting this too often, a delicacy which cost the sisters some heart-burning and it may be even a few tears.

There was still, however, the bristly-headed ironmonger to be heard from.

At six o'clock, promptly as the bell in the steeple rang out, Young Nick stood before Mr Dunn.

"Oh, Bennan," he cried, "I'm busy — go away,

Bennan!"

"I have come, sir," said Nick, "to know whether the job has been done to your satisfaction. Will you be pleased to step round with me?"

And this time without a grumble, Andro Dunn took the road to his back premises bare-headed and smiling to himself. He had not been there so often in a year as since his acquaintance with. Nick.

"Faith, lad," he cried, after an inspection, "I have not looked upon the like of this – not since I came here to start for mysel' forty year syne. But where's my sheep-dip?"

"All properly stored where it can be got at," said Nick, "for the paraffin I have put it in a house by itself and –"

"Save us," cried the ironmonger, "Bennan, lad, are you conducting this business or am I?"

"This part of it *I* am conducting — in my spare time!" said Young Nick.

"And how much are you wantin' for a' this? Mind I pay no fancy prices"'

"Tell me first if you are satisfied."

"Perfectly – wi' the wark! It's the price I'm anxious aboot!"

"Four days, six "rake" a day, double journeys – four and twenty shillings as we agreed upon, Mr Dunn! Does that suit you?"

"Four and twenty shilling — for cleaning up my yaird. Never in my life did I pay such a wage to a laddie! Wi, man, I can get a boy for half-a-crown a week — and *his chance o' the drawer."*

"I daresay," said Young Nick, "your boys can make a yard like what this was last Tuesday when I took hold. But not as it is now!"

"Sense in that! Sense in that, laddie," cried Mr

Dunn. “They are a set o’ worthless gomerils. Well, I’ll pay ye this time, but it’s an awesome sum o’ money. Dinna gang and spend it in riotin’ an’ drunkenness! Bank it, Bennan. Bank it!”

“No fear!” said Young Nick. “I’ve other things to do with my money. But I’ll take a look in every week, and see that your premises are kept as they ought to be.”

“Weel ye may — ye may! But mind ye, nae mair siller — no anither bawbee! Ye ha’e fair ruinated me, and I wonder ye are no ashamed to look me in the face! But no you — no you! Shame’s no in ye, Bennan. Guid-nicht! Guid-nicht! Andro Dunn, ye are a ruined man. Fower and twenty shillings in wan week! Oh, preserve us!”

That night Young Nick supped with the two old maids and their brother, Bob. He had brought with him a little Stilton cheese and a dozen oranges as a thank-offering — and a job he had of it to get Jen and Clementina to take them — harder than the cleansing of Andro Dunn’s yard.

“It's for luck,” he explained, “luck on my first week’s work in Cairn Edward!”

“Better say ‘thanksgiving’ then,”! said Clementina, “and come the morn to our kirk and make proper acknowledgement to the Giver!”

“If I do will you keep the Stilton cheese?” bargained Young Nick.

Jen agreed at once. Clementina held out longer, but in the end they shook hands upon it – Kirk against Stilton

And on the morrow Young Nick Don rested from his labours and gave thanks.

CHAPTER 3

YOUNG NICK PLAYS WITH COGGED DICE

On Monday morning everybody knew that something strange had happened in Cairn Edward. There had been much talk on Sunday at all the kirks. Evidently a new force was among them. Andro Dunn had never been known to be content before — moreover "content to be done," as he said, rallying his solitary pun to meet the case.

He sang the praises of Nicholas the Younger with a constancy and vigour which put murderous thoughts into the hearts of his suffering staff. And that very day he took Nick up with him to his pretty granite house on the Drap road.

"Can you do gardening?" said he on the way.

"No; at least, not your sort," said Nick, "but I can learn."

"I have no time to pay for your learning," said the ironmonger. "Will you do it or not?"

Young Nick had really only dug "lazy beds" for potatoes on the peaty soil of a moor, but it was his instinct — the journalistic one — never to refuse a job.

" I'll do it," he said, and trusted in Providence.

Mr Andrew Dunn introduced Nick to Mrs Andrew Dunn, a sedate, sweet-faced lady with the quietest smile in the world, in whose presence her peppery husband became a different man. Mrs Dunn wanted a lawn levelled and turfed. Her husband might like to play a game of bowls upon it on summer evenings.

Nick glanced up to see if she was in earnest. But she moved tranquilly along beside him, a shawl

drawn closely about her shoulders even in the noontide warmth.

"I will do it for you, madam," said Nick, with a certain instinctive deference which he had not yet shown to anyone in Cairn Edward, "and to-morrow I shall have a proposition to put before you, Mr Dunn."

He spent most of that day in the Reference Library of the Mechanics' Institute, getting up facts as to lawn-laying. He also visited Ernilands, the nearest "big house" to Cairn Edward, for the purpose of finding out how the thing was done. There he discovered that the gardener was a fisher, and, with the assistance of a fly or two from his father's famous "book," soon knew all about it. He heard also where there was turf to be had for the carting. Sir Hector was making a new skating pond for the young ladies, alongside of his own curling link, and the work was being pushed. No time was to he lost.

The next morning Young Nick went primed to Mr Dunn, and offered to level, drain, make tight, embank, and turf the green for the sum of thirty-five pounds sterling. It was cutting the thing rather fine, but he wanted the reputation of so big a job. He showed Mr Dunn the figures.

"Faith," said the ironmonger as he gazed alternately at the young man and at the serried numerals in his hand, "your mother must have been a clever woman!"

Still he was not quite sure. For part of Nick's stipulation was that, each Saturday, a certain part of the price should be made over to him – sufficient to pay his workmen and the road contractor, as well as to enable himself to live in a reasonable way. The

cautious ironmonger finally agreed to run the risk of the job not turning out well, but made it a stipulation that the Ernilands' gardener should "step over" occasionally to see that all was right.

The question of lodgement had already arisen. Nick Don, contractor, could certainly not afford to sleep in the hayshed of the "Ardwall Arms," and go on paying his lodging by cleaning out the yard in the morning. None saw this more clearly than Bob Hill himself. And none more instantly urged the establishment of Young Nick where he would have a good home and a comfortable "meal of meat" than did the two maiden sisters in Factory Street.

Gladly would the two Hills, Jen and Clementina, have undertaken him themselves. But the little white cottage third from the Bank Entry was not even a "double house." Two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a back kitchen were all that it contained — enough for themselves, but by no means affording accommodation for an extra lodger. In these small Factory Street houses a room without a bed was accounted lost. Even in the kitchen there was often a box-bed which let down at night and had the blankets shut up within it during the day.

Discussions were frequent and even warm as to where it was best to settle Young Nick, now that he was in a good way and able to afford the comforts of a home.

"Nothing gaudy — just a decent widow, not too young to be flighty, nor so old as to be careless about his cooking." These were the desiderata as stated by Jen; Clementina added, "But no foolish lasses in the house – fillin' the laddie's head wi' nonsense."

The sisters remembered the terror that had sat

upon them, banishing sleep, too horrible for tears, when once or twice Bob, their brother, had showed signs of appreciation of this and that young female. Now they breathed freely. They had broken him of it and their home was secure.

Was it not their duty to preserve this young man from similar temptations? But yet time pressed and it seemed a difficult matter to settle. Widow Bone was clean, but having been "in a shop," her cookery was beneath contempt. Besides, she was altogether too young, and they did not approve of the set of her caps. Forty was a dangerous age — in the case of widows.

They even condescended to particulars. The Widow Lochie in Hamilton Place had a hanging eye for eligible young men. Fiery Clementina was sure there was a text about her somewhere in the Bible. The Widow M'Taggart had fair hair and wept much into handkerchiefs in church to show the minister how tender-hearted she was. But Clementina and all the feminine part of the congregation knew other causes. Against such women it was highly necessary that Young Nick should be warned. And warned he was.

Like a man, he treated the matter lightly, and even laughed, as his kind have done at warnings, all the world over, ever since it began. And so, busy all the week, he walked upon his fate, his head held high and "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen" proceeding from his lips in a mellow whistle. Up to the present time, maidens of any degree had held but little place in the mind of Young Nicholas Don.

Belonging to the most hot-headed parish of an amorous shire, he had always kept in his heart a wholesome scorn of "stravagin'" — which is to say,

farm-to-farm visitation under cloud of night. The servant lasses who had manifested an appreciation of his broad shoulders and good looks disgusted him. Bell M'Turk alone, the girl of the almanac, might have touched his virgin heart, but she was his daughter master's - in one way a sacred trust, and in another so infinitely above him that he had never thought seriously of her. Though, truth to tell, Bell herself was not at all averse to half-an-hour's talk with the intelligent young man-of-all-work when she came to the Airie with her father.

But even as Young Nick walked the streets of Cairn Edward intent on new schemes and casting up prices and reckonings, Fate was preparing his humiliation.

There was in Cairn Edward, some way below the Cross, a little shop cowering alongside of a tall red freestone barracks. The window held "trimmed bonnets," green and violet, feebly contesting the space with tinware, second-hand silver, and fly-blown fireirons. Hats and bonnets were in the fullest fashion of some two years ago, but had shared the attentions of the flies and the steady thickening of the dust cloud upon them.

These were the outward signs of the fact that Mrs Gilbert Mullans, wife of a certain Gib the Caird, presently on his travels, offered headgear to the goodwives of Cairn Edward – as well as water-cans, coffee-pots, tin cups, and all manner of caird or "Tinkler" work, the produce of her absent husband's fitful industry.

One day Young Nick finished work sooner than usual, and with a flash of memory bethought himself of Gib the Caird, by whose advice he had first come to Cairn Edward, and so widened his life's

horizon. Gib had talked much of his wife — a clever woman who could keep the house together during his absence. She had been a widow when Gib married her, and (as she was never weary of relating) had given up riches and honour for true love's sake — that she might marry Gib the Caird — a proceeding which Young Nick considered to reflect upon the lady's common-sense.

But now, with the end of the bowling-green contract within sight, and in possession, or almost, of a horse and cart of his own, Young Nick felt that he would have been lacking in common politeness if he had longer delayed calling upon this good counsellor's family.

He stepped, therefore, into the little shop, half hidden under the huge pile of Gerrond's Lands. The opening of a white-curtained glass door caused a bell to tinkle somewhere behind, and Nick had a vision of a low counter, strewn with fussy chiffons and tawdry feathers. Beyond, close to the window-screen, seated on a dilapidated piano-stool from which the stuffing protruded, a girl was seated, her head between her hands, her fair hair streaming over her shoulders and down her back in ringlets and coils. She was sobbing uncontrollably, so violently indeed that her whole body shook, so really that the tears ran out between her fingers. Young Nick noticed that she had long ear-drops of blue stone in her small pink ears, and that there was a glint in her hair like coined gold.

The girl had not moved at the tinkle of the bell. Evidently she was too deeply distressed to care. Only once had Young Nick seen a woman cry, at a funeral, when the bearers "lifted." But she was old and anything but beautiful. This was different, and

especially so when at the sound of his heavy masculine tread the girl lifted a face all "forgrutton," pearly tears still coursing down her cheeks and falling in beads upon her yellow hair.

"My lassie," said Young Nick, "what's wrong? What's hurt ye?"

The fear of some irreparable disaster swept over him. Up on the hills, even widows new-made and forlorn damsels cry but little – at least not within the ken of men, and the sight was as new as it was terrible to Nicholas Don – yet, in its abandon, somehow sweet too.

He stood awkward and stammering. His very strength and size seemed a kind of insult to such grief – and such beauty – in that small low-ceilinged room among the bandboxes and dusty corset cardboards. Most wonderful of all, h saw the tear-stained white face of the girl, lighted by the evening sunlight falling through the yellow haze of a June evening. She did not speak. But great blue eyes, swimming with tears, stayed with him even after she had risen and passed through the swinging door at the end of the dusty, overcrowded counter.

Hardly had she gone when Young Don heard the noise of voices — or rather of a voice shrill and harsh. "Well, an' have ye come to your senses, Lottie? 'Deed, and it's none ower soon - What, there's a man there? And who may he be at all?"

The swinging door opened. A round-faced, ruddy woman appeared and stood peering short-sightedly at Nick where he stood against the light.

"I don't know you, do I?" she said doubtfully, but with a confiding intonation.

Young Nick had been prepared for some terrible domestic tyrant, and now this smooth-faced smiling

housewife threw out his calculation.

"No, Mrs Mullans," he answered, quickly recovering himself, "you do not know me yet. But I am Nicholas Don from the Bennan. I have been a month in Cairn Edward, and have good work and plenty of it, thanks to your husband."

The woman laughed, a hard dry laugh of scorn.

"Work, thanks to my husband, have ye? Then it's work he is too lazy and shiftless to do himself! My first man, Mister Lyon that was, would have set his hand to anything now, same as I hear you are doing!"

"Oh, you have heard of me," said Nick, not without a certain curious pleasure. If this woman had heard of him, it was certainly likely that the girl whom he had seen go out in tears knew of him too. Perhaps that might serve as an introduction, and he would in time find out the matter of her sorrow.

"Heard of you, yes," cried the woman, coming forward and taking the piano-stool, while she pointed Nick to a certain well-worn corner of the counter on which to sit down, "but what I did not know was that you could give me any news of 'me man' — good-for-nothing rake-the-country that he is!"

"I have not heard since I left the Airie," Nick said awkwardly, "or I should have looked in before. But the truth is I forgot. I have been so pushed with work."

"And I don't wonder," said Mrs Mullans sympathetically. Then she inclined her ear to some household noises unheard by Nick. Her face took on another expression. She opened the door, and called up the stair: "Come down, Lottie, and see that ye make yourself daycent, when a friend of your

father's comes callin' on you!"

Then she closed the door carefully, and said in a soft, whining, half-Irish undertone, "Her name is Mary - she was christened so, an' a Protestant. But we call her mostly Lottie — I can't tell why, except that it goes sort o' well with her other name — Lottie Lyon."

"Mary is my favourite name!" said Young Nick automatically, with his ear towards the door.

"Is it now, sure?" said the mother. "Well now! A fine girl, Mary — the split image of my owld man, him that was — Mister Lyon, as I was telling ye. Ay, ay, a fine girl, Mary — and (with a sigh) *no man yet.*"

Young Nick looked at the Caird's wife with astonishment. This was perhaps going rather fast for a practical man, as he counted himself to be. But in another moment he saw that Mrs Mullans' mind was far away. She was solving problems with which he had nothing to do — too little, in fact, to satisfy the good opinion he had of himself.

"Ay, now," she went on in the same dreamy considering voice, "faith, that's just the rub, honey. It's a good man that is wanting to have her. Ye saw Mary the now here on this very seat, crying like a baby or a fool, and about what? Because she doesn't know which side her bread's buttered on — ay, and her mother's bread too! Worse luck!"

Nicholas Don felt that these revelations were by no means at an end. He therefore contented himself with nodding and looking sympathetic. Mrs Lyon that was had been a communicative woman and the present Mrs Caird Mullans was no less so. Nick had not long to wait.

"Bein' as it were such a friend of the family, Mr Don," she went on, "it wud not be dealing fair with

you if I were to conceal the fact that our landlord, Mr William Gerrond, town officer, has done us the honour to ask my daughter in marriage."

"But," exclaimed Nick, almost involuntarily, "he is three times her age, dry as a fir cone, and ugly! Besides which he has been married twice before – "

"And I fail to see the objection to that last," interrupted the ex-widow, instantly firing up.

"Not in your case, certainly not," said Nick, "but Willie Gerrond might be your father easily, let alone your daughter's. Besides" (he plumed himself on the inspiration), "have you considered how Mr Lyon would like his daughter marrying a sheriff's officer?"

Mr Lyon had in fact spent a short but far from monotonous life in getting out of the way of these gentry, which had caused a just prejudice against them in his heart.

"We owe him a year's rent — two terms last Whitsunday, Mr Don, and that's the truth. But I'll not hide from you that Lottie has a great partiality for marrying a young man if she marries at all. And sorrow a wan can convince her to the contrary, onless you might be so good as to be tryin' your hand!"

"In my opinion your daughter is quite right," Nick decided magisterially, "but has she set her mind on any particular young man? It seemed to be quite a personal matter with her - the way she took it to heart!"

Mrs Mullans smiled blandly and reaching out a plump hand patted the sleeve of the young man almost maternally. But she was prevented from expressing her thought by the entrance of her daughter, now apparently recovered from her sorrow. She had donned a dress of close-fitting

velveteen that showed the curves of her young body. It was of a purple hue and had lace at the neck, which to a feminine eye would have seemed tarnished and even torn. But as it was, Young Nick had never seen anything like the girl who entered, smiling a slow, sweet, easy-going smile – not a trace visible of her late agony of tears, an it were not the cheeks with faint lilac circles about them and the velvety wetness of her wide-open sky-blue eyes. Mary Lyon had been modelled after the woodcuts in an old-fashioned classical dictionary. There was something superb and Ceres-like about her which the original sculpture does not often suggest, but which comes out admirably in the black-and-white of the woodcut – a sleepy afternoon glow of health, generous limbs and waist, a lazy bloom and atmosphere as of summer beanfields – such was Mary Lyon, known everywhere as Lottie. And with all her untidiness and in the unbrushed trail of her purple gown, her hair coiled anyhow about her head, she was yet to the eye masculine, by a thousand leagues, the prettiest girl in Cairn Edward.

But the eye feminine saw not thus. Quite otherwise in fact.

Though nothing was known against her, though she was good-natured and kindly, the mere fact that young men stole from the most select family gatherings to sit in the stuffy, dusty little shop near Gerrond's Land, was sufficient to condemn Lottie Lyon in the mind of every good housewife in Cairn Edward.

But not a particle of this was even guessed at by Young Nick Don. The big eyes, blue almost as the turquoise drops in her ears, were velvet-soft and appealing. They spoke to him, and all the man in

him thrilled to their call. A plan leaped into his mind, complete and ready for execution. He was born to plan and to execute.

"I am looking for lodgings," he said. "I don't know if you have a room to let. I could take my meals with you if you liked."

The face of the mother darkened. She looked suspiciously at Nick, but the young man from the Bennan struck while the iron was hot.

"I can arrange your rent," he said confidently, his mind striking out details as he went, "and you can repay me out of my board and lodging."

"You have money then?" Mrs Mullans asked in the soft, sleekit voice of cunning, as she looked obliquely at him.

"No," said Young Nick — "that is to say, not very much just at this moment. But I have a horse and cart, good stabling, and plenty of work before me. I can *make* money, which is better."

"Oh, let him stop, mother," the blue eyes urged, and Nick could see the girl's white fingers knitting and unknitting nervously. "I can go into the little closet off your bedroom, mother. He can have my room! And I won't marry old Willie. I would throw myself out of the window first."

Still Mrs Mullans hesitated, pretending modesty.

"What with my man being from home," she began primly.

But her daughter interrupted.

"If you wait for Gib Mullans to come home *and stay*," she said, with the first touch of sharpness that Nick had heard in her voice, "we shall be turned on the street. We might be in the poorhouse at Kirkcudbright for all that he cares."

"And how will you settle the rent?" the mother

persisted, following up her own thought.

"If I settle it, will you take me?" he demanded in his most business-like voice. "How much is the rent? Seven-ten a year? I will bring you the receipt."

And in a moment his hat was on his head and he was striding up the street, the girl leaning out among the bonnets and tinware to watch him. He went straight to the shop of his first employer. As usual the little ironmonger was behind his counter, whirling his satellites this way and that on a score of errands at a time.

"Can I speak with you a moment, Mr Dunn?"

"Bide a wee, Bennan, lad. Bide a wee! Come doon oot o' that, boy — ye dinna ken a tenpenny nail frae a tin tack! I wonder what they learned you at the academy — *Aw-caw-demy? Hrumph!*"

are) emy? Hrumph "

He pronounced the word with infinite scorn. "Look at me," he continued, "I never had but six months' schoolin' in my life, and that maistly frae auld Dominie Wood's tawse. And look at you, sent oot by an aw-caw-demy, and nocht but a hantle o' stirks when a's dune — na, waur nor that, just fair seefers and gomerils! Haud oot o' my road or I'll be the death o' ye."

For all this the fifteen pounds which Young Nick demanded was forthcoming, and Mr Dunn refused the offer of the horse and cart as a security.

"I'll be in your debt again afore I ken," he said, shaking his head, "I hear you have been putting daft ploys into the mistress's head.

"Oh," said Nick, "the hen farm — but that will pay itself, Mr Dunn. And besides it was Mrs Dunn who asked if it was a possible thing. She wants you to have fresh eggs every morning for your health."

"Fresh deevils!" cried the ironmonger ungratefully, "ye were on the lookoot for a job, and ye put the ploy in her heid. That's the short and the lang o't. But there's your siller, and see and mak' a guid use o't. But juist write your name across that wee bit stamp there to let me see what like is your hand o' write."

In forty minutes by the town clock Young Nick was back in the little shop with Willie Gerrond's receipt for all rents due to him by Mrs Gilbert Mullans, and by eight that night he was installed. His heart was singing within him. He had not been so happy since he left the Airie, and he sat looking at the girl with the blue eyes, in a charming contagious idleness, all unconscious that he had been playing the first game of his life with cogged dice.

CHAPTER 4

THE CRUMBS UNDER THE TABLE

Not till he saw the two old maids in Factory Street did Nicholas Don realise what he had done. He began, certainly, on Sunday morning when he stepped out in his best suit of Bennan homespun, to go to the Kirk on the Hill – to which his father had belonged in Dr Sylvester's time, in the days before he had dropped churchgoing altogether. Neighbours who had heard wonderful things of Young Nick peered at the unsophisticated youth, who, after doing so well, and making himself so trusted by the great of the burgh, yet knew no better than to commit himself by taking up his abode in the house of Gib the Caird, and his wife, the widow of good-for-nothing Lyon.

Gilbert Mullans was not well regarded in Cairn Edward. His wife shared in his unpopularity, while on the other hand it was her very popularity which told against Mary Lyon.

Jealous people were ready to suspect. Suspicions had been published as certainties, and accordingly the new marvel from Bennan was reduced at once to his true proportions.

"I aye kenned how he wad turn out," said the Widow Ricketts, peering round the corner of her lace blind, "him to come to the town wi' naething, own a horse and cairt in a month or twa, and then lodge wi' the Mullans. There's honesty for ye! Ye will see the poliss after him before land – ay that will ye!"

At the Kirk on the Hill, the salute of the elder

standing stately by the plate was hardly so cordial as usual. The minister prayed for young men entering life whose innocence is in danger, or who through heedlessness peril their souls by evil communications. The congregation in general knew well who was referred to, and thought the better of the minister for getting the news so quickly.

But Young Nicholas Don was wholly unconscious.

He received a brusque nod from Mr Dunn on his way up the street from the Established Church by the lochside. There was however an inquiring twinkle in the sharp grey eye, and a lurking smile about the mouth. But he said nothing, and passed on, reassured by Young Nick's sturdy step and clear determined face as to the safety of his fifteen pounds out on loan without security.

In Factory Street, however, Nick met his doom, and knew at last how his action was regarded by the town of Cairn Edward. The little bundle of his most precious possessions, till then in store at the Hills, was lying on the kitchen table as he entered. There was an air of ostracism about its very solitude. Clementina was seated by the window, the big Bible open before her. One hand was on the sill and the other clenched magisterially on the open page. She seemed about to pronounce aim sentence without option or extenuation. Jen was nowhere to be seen, and even Bob, though he rose with outstretched hand to bid Nick welcome, dropped suddenly and dejectedly into his seat. There was a painful pause, which Bob Hill strove to carry off in a gabble of wild talk about the weather and a certain grey mare's near fore foot.

Nick turned to Clementina, and remarked that he

had not seen her at the Kirk.

"No," said the old maid without lifting her eyes from the Second Book of Chronicles. (But whether she said "No?" interrogatively or "No!" as a simple assertion Young Nick could not make out.)

"And Miss Jen?" he asked presently, after a terrible second pause of five minutes, "I trust she is well."

"They'll be missing you down at Mullans' 'mantie' shop," said Clementina suddenly.

"There's your bundle on the table!"

Young Nick gasped. This was the lash with a vengeance.

"Do you mean - ?" he began. He was going to ask whether this was equivalent to a declaration that he need not come back to the house in Factory Street, third from the Bank Entry.

"Ay, I mean just what you mean!" said Clementina, while her brother, very red in the face, caught his knee between his huge hands and rocked himself back and forth in his chair. Beads of perspiration stood on his brow.

"But I have done nothing," cried Young Nick indignantly.

"You have chosen," said Clementina, calmly turning the leaf of her Bible as if to follow the narrative.

In a moment Young Nick was on his feet. A smothered sound like a sob from the inner room startled him, and moved him more than the hardness of Clementina.

He grasped his bundle and made for the door.

"Good-bye, Jen," he said in a loud voice, as he went out, "I am glad I leave one friend in this house!"

"Och, man!" cried Bob Hill, and started up to run after him, but was intercepted by Clementina. He sat down again heavily, and, plaiting his fingers about his knees, rocked himself slowly and conscientiously till it was time for the evening service. Bob Hill did not always go to church twice a Sunday, but on this occasion he would not have missed for the world.

Young Nick went down the road angry in his soul. His father had often spoken to him of the intolerance of the good, but in his heart Nick had always thought this merely due to a difference of opinion as to the amount of spirituous liquor which Old Nicholas Don, in justice to himself and to his neighbours, ought to imbibe. But now he was quite of his father's opinion.

Yet he marched down the middle of the High Street, his bundle conspicuous in his hand. He looked neither to the right nor to the left till he came to the door of his lodging. It was only on the latch. He opened it and walked in without knocking. On the corner of the counter, where the night before he had sat talking to Mrs Gilbert Mullans, lounged a heavily built, sullen-faced young man, whom he had seen hanging about the Market Hill on Mondays and the baser sort of public-houses during the week.

"Then I suppose you think you have it all settled," he was saying, as Nick Don passed along the passage rapidly and mounted the stairs to his room. At the moment Young Nick did not know whether the youth with the jowl was addressing mother or daughter. It was not until he heard Mary singing in the little back garden — watering her flowers and occasionally standing in a dream, her eyes wide open and the rose of the watering-can dribbling over

her skirt — that he realised how great his fear had been.

He went down and asked Mary Lyon (he had resolved that never, never would he call her "Lottie") if she would come to evening service with him at the Kirk on the Hill. Mary coloured, and looked at her wet gown trailing unheeded over the dusty garden paths.

"This is my best," she said with a sigh of regret. "I would shame you."

"Certainly Mary may go, and 'tis most kind of you to be thinking of it, Mr Don," said his landlady. "Me and Gib Mullans were born Cyatholic and we will live and die Cyatholic — though Gib is nothin' but a bad one. Only Mary there is different. Her father, Mister Lyon that was, was reared a Protestant up north in Antrim. And Mary has been brought up Protestant likewise, as well as it was in me to rear her. And it's welcome ye are, Mr Don, to take her to hear the good Word this night. Now, Mary lass, go and get ready and don't be keepin' Mister Don waitin'."

And hearing this, the heavy-featured young man rose and went out noisily, slamming the door behind him.

Young Nick glanced after him furiously, wishing it were not Sunday, so that he might speak with him, as it were, in the gate. His temper grew more and more exalted. He would show the town that, so long as he kept a clear conscience, he would be dictated to by nobody. He, Nick Don, would do what he chose, and if anyone did not accept his friends, neither should they accept him.

Yet even in such a mood, he almost paled when he saw Mary's array. In his honour she had taken

one of the picture hats from among the tinware in the window, where it was fully as familiar an object to the folk of Cairn Edward as the mid-steeple itself.

It was midsummer, the time of long twilights and sauntering lovers. These were chiefly to be found down the sweet lochside walk called after them and arranged by nature for their convenience. But the church,, with Mary Lyon, in this costume! Though Nick knew little about the etiquette of such things, he remembered the decent black of the Bennan Kirk, and only that morning he had been impressed by the primitive simplicity characteristic of the Kirk on the Hill.

Mary wore her purple train. Over it was a short, fur-trimmed jacket, of the sort at that time called "Zouave." She had silver bangles on each wrist. The long turquoise drops fell almost to her shoulders. Mary had a silk shawl of her mother's over her arm – green, with a crimson border, and Young Nick was so taken up with persuading her that she would not require a wrap on such an evening that he found himself willing to overlook all the rest.

To please him Mary compromised on a scarlet parasol with a handle ornamented in Scotch pebbles.

It was sublimely ridiculous – yes, there were elements of the sublime about it. Even so travestied, decked in this heterogeneous tinselry, Mary walked the streets of Cairn Edward like an agreeable Juno descending Olympus. There was no denying it. Mary Lyon, with the taste in dress of a cannibal, could walk serene and smiling, unconscious even, among the kirkward-tending black coats, bugled bonnets, and rustling silks of Cairn Edward respectability. But Nicholas Don, more a man of the world and

forewarned by his visit to Factory Street, moved by her side, his strong rough-hewn face a trifle paler under its outdoor hale. But he had called the tune and he would face the music to the end.

In the open air Mary made a little instinctive movement of her tightly gloved hand, which Young Nick avoided by stooping to pick up his stick. In Mary's experience that was the first thing to do when anyone asked you to walk out with them in the evening. But the thought of the Hill Kirk somewhat daunted her. For Mary, though according to her mother reared with care in the Protestant confession, had not practised the public ordinances with any frequency. Yet the girl's simple nature was glad and proud. Ignorant she was, truly, and had been brought up among the worst surroundings, but at heart she was a child, with good instincts, free from all vanity, as unconscious of good and evil as if no grandmother a thousand times removed had ever had difficulties with the forbidden fruit.

"Oh, I am so glad – so glad – I could dance!" she said as they turned along by the low hedge of the bowling-green, and so up the long quiet street which led to the Kirk on the Hill. And if she had, who shall say that, like David, she would not have danced before the Lord.

At the dark place under the trees where the little bent Cameronian beadle came out to watch that nobody picked the minister's lilac blossom, Mary plucked at Young Nick's coat-sleeve.

"Oh," she said, "it is so good to be good! I do want to be good."

And from that moment the shame passed wholly from Nicholas Don, and he stepped proudly, as when for the first time he drove a horse and cart of

his own up the High Street. He did not say anything, but somehow Mary felt that the goodness of a Holy Place had descended upon her.

Now upon entering into the Kirk on the Hill, you pass first of all "the stairs to the left," which is to say "gallery." This was always more secluded of an evening. The sunlight looked sparsely in and out the ivy clambered about the wall outside. You could watch the birds in the manse garden, and sometimes a random bee would blunder up and down among the pews, creating a ripple of interest in its passage.

But Nick scorned such subterfuges. He led the way up the aisle with his accustomed length of stride, Mary swimming blissfully behind him. She seemed to walk on air. Somehow by Young Nick's side she felt all the unhappy past fall away. She was done with the post-to-pillar existence. No longer was she to be at once decoy and victim, but the very warmth about her heart threatened tears. It seemed so easy to be good — with him by her side.

The sermon failed of its usual success in the Kirk of the Hill that night. The very psalms wanted their traditional swing and go. They sounded like mere paraphrases, or even "human hymns."

The gaze of the congregation wavered, for almost the first time in history, between the minister in the pulpit, the intent austerity of Young Nicholas Don, and the expression of childish adoration (clearly assumed!) on the face of Mary Lyon.

Now the minister preached that evening on the Syro-Phœnician woman who brought her daughter to Jesus, and when turned away because the bread was for the children, pled that even the dogs fed off the crumbs which fell under the master's table.

It did not strike the minister, sowing at random his oft-sown fields, that under that outrageous picture hat which so annoyed him, covered by that purple robe, in the heart of that girl with her mouth a little open, who swallowed at intervals to keep down the lump in her throat, was the true good soil of the parable.

So the Kirk of the Hill folk, keen on all points of doctrine, infallible sermon-tasters, saw not deeply in matters of another's spiritual experience. They looked upon Nicholas Don's bringing of Mary Lyon to evening service as a bravado thrown in the face of a douce body of worshippers – little less than a direct insult to the Master of Assemblies Himself. So far had these Old testament-loving folk drifted from the gospel of the woman by the well and the "all ye that labour and are heavy laden."

They only saw – perhaps, born with their eyes short-focussed by generations of village gossipry, *could* only see – a young man making a fool of himself with Lucky Mullans' daughter.

The two walked away silent, Nicholas again taking the middle of the High Street that all might see. Clementina and her brother crossed in front of them, to follow the way which led over into Factory Street. Clementina stalked on without the quiver of an eyelid, but Bob Hill stopped shamefacedly.

"It's a fine nicht!" he said, and then fell silent. And as neither Nick nor Mary did more than nod assent, he paused a while, changing his feet uneasily on the rough cobblestones, and finally murmuring, "Ay, ay, but it's a verra fine nicht!" with which he took his way after the haughty Clementina, whose distant silhouette was just disappearing round Penman's corner.

Nick looked a little sadly after his first friend as he passed on his way with his head down. Then, with a sudden inspiration, he ran after him and caught the ostler by the arm.

"No difference between you and me, Bob?" he said.

"And what for should there, Nicholas Don?" said the head ostler. "But – " he indicated the erect flitting figure at the end of the long sparsely-housed cross street, "I cannot help the women, ye ken."

"No," said Young Nick, shaking his head, "neither can I."

Bob turned away and Nick went back to Mary Lyon and her picture hat.

Five minutes after they came out on the wide spaces of the common beyond the tannery. Young Nick was for turning towards the house, but Mary looked wistfully out towards the Isle Wood and said: "Oh, don't let us go in yet. There will be sure to be people."

Now almost any other youth in Cairn Edward would most certainly have misunderstood, perhaps even at another time Nick himself. But that night he was keyed up by the justice of his quarrel.

"Oh, Nicholas," said Mary, "your minister spoke good words, and I am so happy. I am just like other girls to-night. See, I have a book!"

And she produced out of a pocket of her purple gown a battered, brass-rimmed Book of Common Prayer — mere "black prelacy" in the Kirk of the Hill, but to Mary as orthodox as the Westminster Confession.

"Is it true every word?" said Mary Lyon, her great babyish eyes cast up at him. The lake looked at them, a dream of golden haze through which Screel

and Ben Cairn glimmed in smoky opaline ridges.

"Is what true?" said Nick, without answering the glance.

"That He will do all that – " she hesitated, "no matter who asks Him, will He?"

"Yes," said Nick sheepishly, unaccustomed to exposition, "the Bible says so."

"Even if they are not . . . counted . . . respectable?" said Mary slowly.

"But you *are* respectable!" cried Nick, ready to dare even herself to say otherwise.

"Oh, in that way — yes. That is nothing. But the people here don't think so — on account of – "

"Yes, I know," interrupted Nick hastily, "your stepfather — Gib the Caird!"

"No, my mother!" said Mary calmly. "She will not let me alone. You see she thinks I don't know. Oh, Nicholas, I am not sure that you should stay at our house. Men come there to gamble and drink — horrid they are, oh, horrid! But I can manage them — they are afraid of me. I marked one!"

"You?"

"Yes, I," said Mary Lyon quite calmly, "See!" She pulled out from beside the Prayer Book a pair of scissors, very long and narrow in the blade.

"See," she said. And with a quick jerk the two blades came apart. They were merely hinged on a pin like those which are made for surgical purpose.

"I filed the rivet," she added with a certain pride, "and if anyone dared to touch me I would kill him!"

"Kill him!"

"Yes, of course," Mary nodded. "Oh, you don't know our house yet. Some of what they say is true. You don't know mother. I shouldn't have let you come. Only I wanted you to come – to have you for a

friend. You were good, I knew – good like the minister – good like – ”

“Hush,” said Nick, awed. “No, don’t say that, please. It isn’t true.”

“Yes,” she went on; “I wanted you to come – to teach me to be good also – to help me keep good. But what if they blame you – your friends?”

“I have no friends!” said Nick sternly.

At this she clapped her hands.

“Oh, neither have I – neither have I – only enemies – my mother is the worst! Will you be my friend – my first friend?”

The picture hat, the strange dress, all passed out of Nick’s consciousness. Only the blue eyes stayed clear to him – great and wide like the morning sky.

“I *will*,” he promised, soberly and a little sternly. And somehow the words had the ring of an oath sworn before the Throne.

Young Nick had pledged his future.

CHAPTER 5

AUNT PARSLEY

There was the thin clear silver of early morning on the long street of Cairn Edward. The sun was glinting down it from one end to the other. From the Cross it looked as if there were a mighty bonfire flaming between the Globe Inn and the Market Hill. But all vanished while Young Nick was driving his cart, between the Cross and the Bank corner. Then the sunlight fell slantwise on the houses along the western side of the High Street. The shadow of the Free Kirk steeple, stretching out from its usual hurkle-backed condition, drowned Willie Gavin's house (the only one remaining of the original village) in a blue haze and lay like a pointer bar across the gardens.

Five weeks had passed. The first burst of the town's indignation had spent itself. But for all that Nick Don was very far indeed from having regained the respect of his fellows.

He remained a lodger with Mrs Mullans, however, and carried out his promise to Mary. He had spoken some plain words to her mother, and for several days there was peace. But the night before Mary had been crying again, and Nick had not seen her since to find out what was the cause. He could, however, guess well enough.

At first, Nick, with his regular weekly payments, his Church connection, his growing and thriving business, had received a great share of Mrs Mullans' goodwill and blarneying speeches. But when she found that he was still poor, and above all particular

as to his associates, she was not long in informing him that if her friends were not good enough for him, he might go elsewhere.

That very morning at breakfast she had attacked him.

"And who are you that wud undertake to say to Mister Lyon's widow, and an honest woman, who she shall receive in her own back parlour, all furnished in solid mahogany? *And I daur ye!* Ye think to steal away my own daughter, that ye do! I have had my eye on ye, ye mud-cartin' slunge! But I know that will save Mary from your clutches. There's been better men seekin' her before ye, and, faith, there will be better after ye! Troth, an' they need not be ill to find."

From these generalities Mrs Mullans would not budge. She could an she would.

Ay, ay – surely! And so he would see, that he would. Old Willie Gerrond had got his rent, and he might not be sorry to get the girl too! But there were others – yes, and better men – that could laugh and toss their glass, who never looked down on an honest woman because she was no hypocrite like some folk she could name.

And all the time Nicholas Don knew very well that Mary was crying above stairs.

Still Mrs Mullans did not at once give Nick his leave from the house. She only became more reckless as to her evening parties. She admitted more revellers. Louder oaths came to Nick in his room upstairs.

Those who, for various reasons, wished her well warned the Mullans secretly that the police would not always keep a shut eye. The word "shebeen" was pronounced, and with some reason. For it was no

secret that the liquids which the Caird's wife dispensed so freely were paid for (and that smartly) by the consumers.

This morning Nick had gone out early to finish up a job had at the waterworks — a day-long job it was. And along with it he meant to do a great deal of thinking.

He reviewed all the course of his life in Cairn Edward since he had entered it. It had been (he owned) a very good place to him. He would ill like to leave it. The

People were excellent folk in the main, and, with a grimace he owned it, it was not unnatural, that with such a mother, and seeing Mary content to go about in the flaunting dresses which were Mrs Mullans' choice, they should misjudge her.

her.

But Nick swore that before all was done he would make other people know better. And he bit grimly on a sprig of thorn he had plucked from the hedge, as if entirely conscious that his square jaw had not been given him in vain.

Mary Lyon needed care, needed teaching, needed to know. But (so he told himself) if those who judged her had been brought up like Mary, would they have been as simple and as innocent?

Young Nick thought not.

It would be a long steep road, collar-work all the way. First of all he would take Mary away. He would marry her, make a home for her somewhere, share the bite and the buffet with her. That is to say, if Mary would. And he thought — no, he had no fear of that.

All day Young Nick went about his work, in his mind already winning battles for Mary's sake. He

had never heard of Whittier's recommendation to a young man to win his spurs early by championing some worthy unpopular cause. But such to Nick was the cause of Mary Lyon. To get her out of that house, that was the first step. To marry her at once was the next. Then he would settle down and begin the slow process of educating the dour Cairn Edward folk to think as he did and see as he saw.

So busy was Nick that he quite forgot his "nooning" spell — and it was only the slackening pace and occasional reproachful eye of Grey, his sturdy cart horse, that reminded him. As soon as that load was laid down, he went across to the farmsteading of Stroyan to stable Grey, and give him his dinner. No one was to be seen about the courtyard. The men would be at the hay and the goodwife within doors at her baking. But Nicholas, having been born free of all farmhouses, naturally did not stand upon ceremony. He opened the stable-door, lifted Grey's harness off, rubbed him down roughly, brought out his own bag of oats and poured the due quantity into the manger. Then he looked out for a bucket that he might go to the well. He cried in at the house-door as he passed, whereupon the goodwife came out to make him welcome.

If he had not used the place as his own it would have been a sign that he was the offended person. Buxom Mrs Watson invited him in, introduced him to her aunt, and they all conversed amicably together, as he ate his dinner of cold beef and fourpenny loaf, with a pat of butter and a cube of cheese stowed away in the midst of it. It had been Mary who put it up for him. He knew her way of tying the string, though it was her mother who had thrown it at him as he went out through the door.

Mrs Hannah Watson, now sole owner of the little farm of Stroyan, on the crest of the hill overlooking the loch from which Cairn Edward folk get their water, was not a young woman, yet she had beside her in the house the elder sister of her mother, who was known through all the country (as distinct from the town) by the name of Aunt Parsley.

Aunt Parsley ruled Mrs Hannah Watson, and through her the farm. It was indeed owing to her money that the widow had been able to pay off the encumbrances on the little freehold contracted during her husband's too easy-going lifetime, and this the old lady did not allow her to forget.

The autocrat of Stroyan was an austere old dame who sat as straight up and down in her high-backed chair as if she had been part of it. She scorned easy-chairs as inventions of the devil.

"Mischief-breeders for idle hands to do!" she called them. "And you, Hannah," she added, "I defy you to say what else you can be doing in those easy-chairs of yours. They are a very temptation to sinfulness. And you to be putting suchlike in the way of this young man, with half his day's work yet before him."

Aunt Parsley thrust her silver-rimmed spectacles off her brow with a quick jerk. Her black eyes snapped when cleared of the modifying crystal. She had been busy with a patchwork quilt, fragments of which lay all about her in ordered little hillocks, each colour by itself.

Then ensued a pause of contemplation, during which she seemed to consider Nick in all his facets, angles, everything about him from his morals to his table manners.

"So you are the son of — Well, he's dead and, let

us hope, in a better place, where being of no account doesn't matter. He was ill-fitted for this abode of sin and sorrow. But they tell me you are a worker, young man."

"I work," said Nick a little drily, "when I have work to do."

"And when you haven't?"

"I go and look for it," said Nick.

Question and answer shot out prickly as flashes from an electric machine — crackle and return snap. Having no midday meal for menfolk to prepare, and her baking being finished, Mrs Watson sat down with a sigh of relief in the low rocking-chair which her husband had bought her when she was first married, a contrivance for wasting time which was particularly anathema to Aunt Parsley.

This time, however, she was thinking of Nick's sharp reply.

The old lady took her silver spectacles off and wiped them carefully. Then she laughed a rippling laugh with the ghost of an ancient youth lurking somewhere about it.

"Ye are no right Don," she said. "We may well say that Young Nick is better than Old Nick."

"My father is dead," said his son gravely. "He was a good father to me. Did he ever do you any harm, madam?"

"Hoot—toot," said the old lady, "what's the fuffin' aff like a pioye for? Did I not ken his faither for more years than ever you did? And can ye stop an old wife's tongue frae waggin'?" Ye are a clever callant gin ye can." She wiped her glasses again before putting them astride her nose. She wore a white-frilled mutch with only a little better lace and a higher "mob" behind to distinguish it from the

costume of the country women about. This she did partly because she was conscious that it became her and partly because it gave an external excuse for denouncing the black-beaded "kep" of "Englishy" appearance which her niece wore when not actually at work about the farm.

Presently Mrs Watson went out to feed the calves, which had been moaning their hungry sorrows at the yard gate for quite half-an-hour.

Aunt Parsley and Young Nick were left alone. He had not been eating much. Even the jug of milk brought to him by the mistress of the house had hardly been touched.

"In love, Nicholas Don?" rapped out the old lady. "Your father always was. Maybe that part of his weakness has come down to you."

"In love," said Nick doubtfully, "no – but – "

"But what?" demanded Aunt Parsley, watching like a cat at a mouse-hole.

"I am in a strait, that's a fact," said Young Nick, "and" (in a burst of confidence) "I haven't anybody to advise me."

"That's like your father at last," said Aunt Parsley. "Have not *I*, spinster, able-bodied, with all my faculties, and some which other folk lack, kept my eyes open all my life – and – *I knew your father*. Now tell me – what is it, Nicholas Don?"

Then there came to Nick the Younger one of the great marvels of his life. He opened his mouth to speak of love with as much surprise as Balaam's ass must have felt at finding itself speaking Hebrew, and he told this stern, independent, forceful old lady all about Mary.

Aunt Parsley listened gravely, but there was fire in her eyes. She was of the country. She lived

near to the red earth. Reared on Calvinism and Assembly's catechism, she thought no evil greater that the original sin inherent in all mankind. One phrase she noted as it occurred over and over in Nick's narrative: "*She never had a chance*."

But when the old lady heard of Mary's evil mother, all the spite, anger, plottings, blows she had to suffer in Gerrond's Wynd, she started up crying, "I would burn such women alive!" And she struck her staff on the flagged floor till it rang.

But when all was told Aunt Parsley came over to where Nick was sitting by the table, his head on his hand.

"No," she said; "no running away to get married. Let all be done decently and in order. I will take the white pony and go down to the town to-morrow. If the lass be ready and willing, I doubt not we will agree for a wage, and I will bring her to the Stroyan for six months. By that time we will all see further into things."

"But her mother?"

"Leave her mother to me – the girl is of age."

"And – and Mrs Watson?"

"Hannah – oh, that is nothing."

She stepped to the door. Her niece was coming slowly back from the calf-feeding, an empty "luggie" in her hand, her eyes vague and contented.

"Hannah," she said, "I am going down to-morrow to the town to get you a house-lass. I have just heard of her. She does not know much yet, but she will learn."

"Very well, Aunt Parsley," said Mrs Watson placidly, and took out another "rake" of milk gruel to the calves. For in this house it was Aunt Parsley who planned. Also, being a strict observer of the

letter of Scripture, she saw to it that "yea" was "yea" and her "nay" "nay."

"If you wonder at all this," she said, "ye can put it down to the meddlesomeness of old age. Forbye, I kenned Nick Don when he was as young as you and a deal dafter."

The scene on the morrow at Gerrond's Buildings is still remembered in Cairn Edward. Aunt Parsley came dodging along in the little low phaeton with the yellow wheels, her stout, cream-coloured pony with the long whisking tail between the shafts. Mary was ready – her scanty belongings all done up into one wicker basket. Instructed by Nick she had slipped out to buy a plain black hat. A light waterproof covered the garish splendours of the trained purple robe, which for once Mary had managed to pin up about her. She was in an agony of excitement, now laughing with the tears in her eyes and anon weeping with strange spasmodic sobs that hurt her throat.

To the last her mother thought she would give way. Willie Gerrond was coming that night for his final answer — and then there was that other, whose offer (if Mary could be brought to agree) would really be far more advantageous to Mrs Gilbert Mullans than merely wedding Mary to their old landlord, who, as it was, had a grown-up family and would therefore need to be closely watched as to will-making and so forth.

Mary was already mounted on the back of the phaeton, her little package beside her, when her mother appeared at the door, wiping her mouth with her apron. She stood transfixed.

"Mary, come down out o' that! Into the house wi' ye this minute, ye sorra!"

"Do not interfere with my domestic," said Aunt Parsley, taking the reins into her mittened fingers.

"Your domestic — why, she's my daughter," cried the angry Mullans.

"Doubtless," said Aunt Parsley calmly, "but she is of age and has engaged herself to me as an indoor servant for the space of six calendar months. In token of which she has accepted from me, in the presence of witnesses, the sum of one shilling, legal arles. Come up, Midge!"

But before Midge could "come up," the bereaved mother had launched herself at the phaeton and seized Mary by the arm. With the other, Mary clung to the back of the seat. The phaeton rocked to and fro, Aunt Parsley all the time sitting erect and calm.

"Yonder's a policeman!" she cried. "Run, Nicholas Don, and fetch him."

But the very name of the law was sufficient to make Mrs Mullans let go. The pony started forward, Aunt Parsley applied the whip firmly for the first time in Midge's experience. He was so astonished that he actually turned the corner at a gallop. Mary's carefully arranged waterproof fell apart in front and Cairn Edward from its windows and doors took its last view of the famous purple velveteen. But in front, vouching for all, sat Aunt Parsley from Stroyan, strong by reason of a lifetime of spotless reputation.

So the inhabitants of Below-the-Cross had perforce to turn to the less interesting spectacle of Young Nick piling his possessions into his cart and driving away to Gray's stables, in the loft of which, up a ladder, he had prudently installed a camp bed and a washstand during the day.

Here, with his cart in a shed, his horse munching

and stamping beneath, he had everything under his hand, and was, as it were, self-contained - that is, except for Mary.

CHAPTER 6

AUNT PARSLEY'S NEW CREATION

Two days more, and Young Nick was again at work upon Stroyan Waterworks. He looked often across at the white square of the farm, yearning for "lowsing time" at the hour of noon. It was not (so he asserted) that he wanted to see Mary – only he did wish to be assured that she was happy.

All the same, the long, low-set ranges of out-buildings were curiously attractive, and Nick neglected Gray to watch the dark breaks in their white defences, the arch of the cart-shed, the granary steps, the milking-gap over the bars of which the cows came and called twice a day for permission to enter.

But there was not a soul stirring, and Young Nick almost wore out his watch-pocket owing to the tardy creeping of the minute hand. He grew certain that it had stopped. No? – Well then, was stopping and going again. Yet in spite of the sharpest attention he could not catch it at it.

At last he could wait no longer. It was still a full quarter to high noon when he turned Gray's head towards the Stroyan. But as he bent to unhasp the lych-gate he found himself face to face with the silver spectacles of dame Parsley. There was a look of resolve on her face and she tapped his fingers, still fumbling with the hasp, smartly with the knob of her cane.

"Let that alone, Nicholas Don," she snapped. "You bide that side and I'll bide this. I have a word or two

to speak with you, Nick Don."

Nick gave Gray his head among the grasses on the bank and stood up facing Miss Parsley. He was so astonished that he did not speak a word, and his look of amazement made the old lady laugh grimly. But if young Nick took this for a good omen he was quickly undeceived.

"The lad's oot o' his mind!" cried Aunt Parsley, barring Nick's way by laying her own thread-mittened fingers upon the latch. "Does he think that Priscilla Parsley will turn her decent house o' the Stroyan into a place o' rendyvows and veesitations? Bide on your ain side o' the dyke, young man, and in sax months, maybe – if there's onything in the lassie I will bring it oot – ay, if I ha'e to gang through her wi' a dark lantern to find it."

"And am I not to see Mary at all?" demanded young Nick. "She will maybe weary and – "

"Faith, but ye are your father's son after a', and I ha'e wranged your Minnie," said the old lady; "the conceit o' the craitur! See Mary Lyon – ow ay, ye will see her – in the Stroyan seat ilka Sabbath forenoon. But ye are no to speak word o' mouth. For mind you, I, Pricilla Parsley, have taken this thing in hand at my proper risk and peril. Do ye think I dinna ken that I am defying half Cairn Edward to its face. And while the threems are in the reddin' oot, I'm no gaun to ha'e you on my hands, my lad. There's guid in the lass — I doubt it not — maybe mair nor ye wot o' that saw little but simplicity. But she has lain lang amang the pots, puir thing, and it will tak' her a whilie to preen her feathers."

Here Young Nick looked so pitiful that the old lady's heart was touched.

"I can see ye frae my chair, at your wark doon at

the waterside. I'll be here or here-abouts at the hour o' noon when the field-folk are indoors at their broth. If ye ha'e ony questions to ask aboot Mary ye can ask them. Then I'll see whether I will answer them or no."

"Is Mary contented?" Nick demanded, instantly leaping upon the privilege.

"She hasna had muckle time to find oot yet whether or no. She's rather busy the day. Ay, she's workin', and the fruit thereof shall appear in due season. Guid day to ye, Young Nicholas Don. Here's something for your dinner."

And she handed across the gate to the youth with the downcast eyes a black reticule from which proceeded a goodly smell.

"Tak' care when ye open it," she said; "there's a knitted petticoat I made mysel' aboot it to keep it warm. Ye can set basket roond the corner o' the dyke when ye hae dune."

When she was half-way up the brae she turned to Young Nick, "When ye ken me some better, my laddie, ye will find oot that putting your trust in Aunt Parsley is like honesty – it's the best policy. Ay, it is that!"

* * * * *

It was late that night when Nick turned Gray's head towards the stable in Cairn Edward. For the last hour a sense of injustice had been rising in Gray's slow-working equine intelligence. He had rolled his eyes often upon his master, and once had even snuffled a moist nose against the breast of his sleeved waistcoat. But Nick, absorbed in thought, had only given a tug to the reins and bidden Gray

"Mind where he was going!"

His own eyes were but seldom off the glimmering rectangle of the farm, behind which the gold band of a lingering sunset was slowly changing to the purple of — yes, of Mary's old velveteen.

"I don't think I cared so much about going there when I could," he murmured, "but now, when

Aunt Parsley says I must not, I simply can't get her out of my head."

And Nick, being new to such things, marvelled at the contradictions he was discovering in his own nature. He could almost have sworn once that he had seen Mary come through the milking-gap and turn into the orchard. He had a moment of wild temptation, but, being bound in honour to Aunt Parsley, he turned away with a sigh, clicked to Gray, and both master and servant put their best foot foremost in the direction of home and supper.

On the main road Nick took off his hat and stood a while as the night air cooled his brows. It was very still save for a corn-crake that was crying discontentedly among the corn. Nick leaped lightly upon the "shibbin," whose corner made the driver's seat. As he did so a dusky form, which a moment ago had been only one of the many pollard willows along the route, detached itself and ranged alongside Nick's cart.

"Can you gi'e me a licht, lad?" said a voice which made the young man start.

"Caird!" he cried, "Gib the Caird — is that you?"

"Wha ither?" said Gib, taking the friendly tone for permission to mount into the waggon. "And wha may ye be that has my name so ready on your tongue tip?"

"Nicholas Don."

"Nick Don — save us! But wha's horse and cairt ha'e ye ta'en the lend o'?"

"My own," said Nick proudly as Gray stepped out, catching the first glint of the lights of Cairn Edward, conglomerated about the station, and then streaming out in three long parallels towards the loch.

"Lord's sake," cried the Caird, "did onybody die and leave ye siller?"

"No, said Nick, "I bought them both with my savings."

"Savin's!" cried the Caird. "Talkin' o' savin' and him no twa and twenty. It's a fair disgrace to humanity - and me here, a man o' sixty, and have not enough to buy a glass at Lucky Cormack's!"

They went on for some distance without more being said. Nick was struggling with himself whether to tell the Caird or keep silent. The Caird was weak and handless, certainly, but he had done him a good turn. Nick resolved to speak his mind.

"Caird," he said, "when you go home you will certainly hear some ill of me. Don't believe it, Caird, even if it is your own wife that says it."

"The less on that account," said the Caird. "But what is't, ava?"

"It's Mary," said Nick.

"Ah!" was all that the Caird answered in a non-committal voice. He was awaiting developments.

"Mary is at Stroyan, with Miss Priscilla."

"Aunt Parsley!" cried the Caird.

"Yes," said Nick, resolved to go to the end of it now, "I lodged with your wife after I went to Cairn Edward. I saw what was going on. I could not let Mary's heart be broken — so – I spoke to Miss Priscilla — and she has taken Mary into the house

of Stroyan."

"I suppose," said the Caird drily, "that is where you are coming from so late?"

"Then you suppose wrong," retorted Nick. "I come from my work at the embankment. I have promised that I will not try to see Mary for six months!"

"And what says the auld wife down at Gerrond's to all that?"

"I don't think that she dares say much to Miss Priscilla," said Nick, "you see she has hired Mary properly, and – there is the police!"

The Caird hitched uneasily on his "shibbin."

"That's very well for you," he said, "an' I doubt not weel for Mary Lyon, but what sort o' a welcome am I likely to get, think you, this nicht in my happy home?"

"Why, you have nothing to do with it!"

"No, but – oh, man, Nick, see here, I've spent my wages, every rap – and if she's in a tantrum – faith, I darena face her, and that's God's truth. She's an awesome woman. Ha'e ye never five shillings ye could lend me, Nick just to put a face on things?"

A coin changed hands and the Caird, leaping down nimbly for a man of his reputed age, disappeared over the hedge in the direction of Lucky Cormack's.

Nick, knowing that he had been done, laughed. The Caird had had his percentage, however, and on the whole Nick was content. The Caird and his wife had the necessary and inevitable explanation the following evening, to the extent of mutual assault and battery, causing a crowd to collect, and the breaking of his Majesty's peace. They reposed that night in the police of office, in separate cells, and the Caird wondered whether

Lucky Cormack's whisky or his wife's three-legged stool gave a man the worst headache.

"Thirty shillings or twenty-one days!" was the verdict. Mrs Mullans paid her own fine, but the Caird, less fortunate, served out his time under the legal guardians of the county gaol. But he did not object. Anything was better than Gerrond's Lands at the foot of the High Street and the society of the widow of Mr Lyon that was.

The six months went slowly. Each Sabbath day in the Kirk on the Hill Nicholas saw Mary, but a Mary that he had some difficulty in recognising. In sober black, just touched at the neck and sleeves with lace, a demure bonnet on her head, the luxuriance of her locks austerely curbed, and the great blue eyes veiled and downcast, Mary Lyon did honour to Aunt Parsley, next whom she sat. The old lady handed her the Bible and psalm-book to "look out the places.'" Mary did this so quickly and effectively that, more than anything else, it proved to the town of Cairn Edward what strange things were going forward at Stroyan.

"What is she makin' o' the lass ava, that auld birsy body up at the Stroyan?"

Good Tanner Robson asked the question of Ironmonger Dunn in the middle of the High Street on the evening of a blowy March day. They had turned their backs to the blast that drove the tails of their coats stiffly out in front of them in the direction of the town clock face.

"That's a bensil," said Andro. "Well, may it do good to the farmer bodies, for it makes our shops as fu' o' sand as the very Sahara! Oh ay, the laddie Nicholas and his bit lass — it strikes me that the Cairn Edward folk, wha think themsel's sic

Christians, may ha'e been throwin' stanes at the wrong folk. For me, I see nothing wrang wi' Young Nicholas Don. He serves me weel and has dune frae the first. And as for the lassie Mary — she's maybe no the first guid egg that's come oot o' an ill nest! And onyway, Elder Robson, if she's guid eneuch for the auld leddy up at the Stroyan, I'm thinkin' it's neither you nor me that can afford to be castin' the first stane at her!"

* * * * *

It was a fine still April gloaming, all primrose and lavender, when Nick, now entered upon his own furnished house, was returning from his day's labour at the waterworks. As usual, he turned aside at the loaning-end for a word with Aunt Parsley. He had seen her looking out for him on the knoll by the barn-end. Then she had dipped down into the orchard, where the earliest blossoms were appearing sparsely on the apple-trees. So he knew that it was time to stop work, and with a sigh betook himself to his nightly interview with Aunt Parsley. It was not all he could wish, but it was something.

Now Gray, on the other hand, thought but ill of these thriftless and hungry stoppages. His thoughts were on his distant stable and the double ration of oats which he would not be long in nosing moistly up into the corner of his manger.

The dyke to the right of the Stroyan road-end took a turn sharply over a steep craggy knoll, edged down the steep descent and ended in the granite pillar of the gate-post, rough-hewn from Craignair. On the other side were undrained meadows, tufts of bent, and a rustling darkness of alder bushes.

Aunt Parsley was late. Yes certainly Nick had seen her on the little craggy knoll above the orchard. Had she not crossed the stile? Had she been detained? Was anything wrong? Gray stood patiently a while, and then began to tug for more head liberty. But he found little comfort even then. He had shaved the sweet young "braird" of the grass as clean as with a razor.

It was dusking fast now. The primrose sea in the west had sunk to a little handful of deep orange set between trees. The lavender had retreated to the zenith, and was slowly turning into the greyish amethyst of spring night in Galloway.

Yet no Aunt Parsley!

But from the dusk of the alders came one whom Young Nick, for a moment, did not recognise – a figure full yet slender, shawled and short-skirted like a country maid, but with all that careless ease intact, that matchless carriage which even the purple velveteen could not disfigure. She let the shawl fall back, and –

"Mary!" he cried, and was over the gate in a moment, he knew not how.

Meanwhile Gray tranquilly took his way homewards, traversing the streets as sagely as if Nick had been at the reins. Yet he gained but little, for he had two good hours to wait with his nose to the flush latch of the stable door before his master came seeking him.

* * * * *

So the consequence was that they were married.

And what the people said was of no

consequence to Nick and Mary Don.

As for Aunt Parsley, she rested from her labours, and found the little world she had made very good.

THE MAN BY THE WAYSIDE

Saida Lamont had suffered on account of her name at school, where she had been the cleverest of all the girls - and the prettiest. Her father knew as little as she did why she had been so named. When asked, he scratched his head, and remarked that it had come to him in the night. Her mother knew nothing about it at all, except that her husband had so decreed it.

I think it was to escape being called "Saida" in a country of "Mary Janes" and "Jane Anns." That Saida Lamont decided to go to "learn a business." She went first to Carlisle, where she "learned the dressmaking" — such being the phrase of the countryside.

But for all this she had special qualifications. Perhaps it was some hereditary strain of that imagination which had caused her father to be called Salem and her grandfather Eschol — an old-world, Old Testament strain which in Saida's case came out in "keeping herself to herself" among the turbulence of the other apprentices and "improvers." Also, what was worth more in her business, it enabled her to tell infallibly - it were by a sixth sense – where to place a bow of ribbon on a dress — her own or a customer's – and what colour would make the best and most striking facing, lining, overlaying, or trimming. Her nimble fingers could arrange the fall of a skirt to a figure as easily as if it were running water.

So in time it came about that Lady Malcaster asked first for "that tall girl who fitted me last time" (which angered the ordinary head of the

department). Then, afterwards, she and all her friends only said: "Send Saida here" – without so much as a "please" or a "by your leave!"

Whereupon Miss J. Ormithwaite signified to the acting-manager in Simson & Murphy's that if "that minx did not leave," *she* would! And for reasons which do not enter into this history the acting-manager preferred to retain the services of Miss Ormithwaite – perhaps because he considered her Christian name of Jemima a prettier one than Saida.

So it came about that our Saida went to London. But, being a girl of sense, she went first to Lady Malcaster at Cliffe Castle and asked if she knew of any London house in want of a good designer and fitter. She would be glad of an introduction.

Lady Malchester sighed.

"It will be a great loss to me, Saida," she said simply – almost as if to an equal; "you were so much under my hand here, and I shall never get anything made for me again as you make it – that is, except at famine prices. Besides it was something to do. I weary so here! I almost wish I were in business like you!"

Then, because there is much good in the world – as well as the other thing – Lady Malchester and her friends took council together and they decided to set up Saida in a little street between Regent Street and the Park – you know the one past which the carriages drive. They would lend her money to start and pay the rent of the house. Then, to begin with, they were to take payment out in a first charge upon Saida's time in the designing of their own dresses.

The earliest sign of the firm was a plain brass plate with the simple inscription:

SAIDA LAMONT,

Modes

But when Lady Malchester came to town she altered the door marvellously; and in the midst of blue and gold hammered plaques shone out the name and style of :

SAIDA LA MONTE,
Court Dressmaker.

* * * * *

Then, after Saida became a little better known, when her simple life, and her creations the reverse of simple, began to veil and unveil the fairest shoulders in London, the fame of the bright little house in Curzon Lane became so great (led by fate and Lady Malchester, the one as inexorable as the other), that the firm migrated into Regent Street itself! Here the rental fairly affrighted the simple mind of Saida. There was a league-long notice-board in keeping with the scheme of decoration of the new facade, and in addition the doors and the windows trumpeted forth the name and style of a certain hitherto unknown:

SAIDA ET CIE.

Of the marvels to be found there the sky flamed nightly from one side of shopping London to the other.

By this time Lady Malcaster and her friends knew that they had made a very good investment in Saida. So they gave her assistants, cashiers and magnificent showrooms, so that Saida sometimes feared that it would all turn out to be a dream. But she pinched herself in vain. She would not waken, and all day long titles were waiting in the ante-room till she could receive them, and receiving

appointments with gratitude - and all because she knew how to put style into a frock and pose a ribbon of the right colour in the right place. A simple thing, but her own!

It was a hard life, and at first it is small wonder that Saida wrote home only occasionally. Her father replied oftener. Her mother not at all. She was not "gleg with the pen," she said. But Saida was a good girl, and sent registered letters often to the little farm of Willow Bank, where it looks in one direction towards the village of Clachan, and in the other down upon the wooded basin of the Loch of Grennoch.

Now Saida had a brother, though as yet we have not mentioned him – a certain Paul Lamont - who ought to have been named Reuben, because he was unstable as water and would in no way excel. He was a clerk at the Bank of Scotland in the town of Cairn Edward.

He, too, benefitted by the money which came to Saida, his successful sister. But even that did not suffice him; and — he used money which, as usual, it was easier to take out of the bank than to put back again.

So there came one day to Salem Lamont's door the chief agent of the bank. He had driven over to know if Salem had heard anything of his son. He had run away — disappeared – or at least he was not at his post, and – what was worse — there was a deficiency of two thousand pounds in his accounts.

Here Paul Lamont passes out of the story, which, after all, is not his. The snug little farm of Willow Bank passed also, and with it every head of nowt, every "horse-beast," cow, sheep, lamb, wedder, pig, and pigling — indeed all that was Salem Lamont's,

to the very hens, that had been the pride of his wife's heart.

He took a small house down in the village, - "but-and-ben" they call them thereabout – and with a heavy heart went forth day-labouring. But — and here comes the man — he wrote as usual to his daughter, giving her the wonted information — how that her mother was "fraily," but "still able to be about." How he himself was never in better health, and how they had been "some deal put to it" by Paul's sudden decision to emigrate. He dated the letters from "Willow Bank" as of old, and arranged with the postman as to the replies.

"I will not trouble Saida," he said to his wife. "It would shame her. She is earning her bread hardly, in the fear of the Lord and the sweat of her brow!"

He even sent back the contents of one or two registered letters, saying that her mother's needs and his own were but small, and that in a great city like London, Saida — his Saida — had far more need than he, living among all these grand folk for whom she made dresses.

Ah, a great heart had Salem, and in the midst of trouble his soul went up daily (like King David's) to the Mountain of Peace, where was his tabernacle.

So for two long years he was able to put off the evil day when his daughter should know the family shame. He, a farmer and the master of men, took odd jobs here and there. He broke stones on the king's highway in little square nooks, with his daily provender lying at the corner under a bush of broom.

To Saida's offer to come to see them, repeated every year, he found always some reply which would keep her away — though his old heart ached for her

as for the light of his eyes. And if he thought of Paul at all it was in the night watches, but he never spoke of the prodigal even to his own wife.

"Mother was thinking of going to the seaside for a bittock," he would say; or, "maybe there would be repairs about the place"; "another year it would doubtless be different." And so he passed it over. Saida also, wondering a little, passed it by, too. For, indeed, there was not much time for thought in Regent Street or in the great warehouse of "*Saida et Cie*" which she directed.

Nevertheless Saida kept all these things in her heart, and while she made others fairer, she herself grew fairest of all – but so gradually that, strange as it may seem, she never even noticed it. For why – she had her customers to think of.

But there was one fine young fellow, Mr Eugene Curzon, who had been put in by Lady Malcaster to look after the finances of "*Saida et Compagnie*," because he was a far-away cousin of her own and wished to earn some money. Also he had some shares in a certain new firm just registered:

SAIDA'S LTD.

Now Eugene Curzon, though within measureable distance of a coronet, gave himself up with joy to the earning of his own living. He had time, however, to watch the graceful figure of Mademoiselle Saida gliding about, never in a hurry, never idle. And gradually there came a great emptiness into his heart.

For he wanted his share in *"Saida's" to be Unlimited!*

And, as to this, after a year or so, Saida did not say him nay. I will say nothing about the courtship, or what they told one another, though that, too, was

strange and interesting. Far from the busy haunts of earls and countesses they went together each Saturday afternoon. They heard the band play on Clapham Common alone, with ten thousand other people, and found it all very good. They went in a penny steamer to take photographs at Kew, and had their camera taken from them at the gate because they did not know the Director. They came out, regained their camera, and had a sixpenny tea in one of the little houses by the river, where the landlady, a woman with a very red and seafaring countenance, persisted in declaring that they made a fine couple. They also thought so themselves.

So, there being really no one to say them nay, one morning they went off together to the registry office and were married officially, Then, doubly alone, they stood among a throng of others on Easter Tuesday in an East End church.

As to this they told no one at all, till it was time to go off for the summer vacation, which they intended to take together. Eugene ordered a car – on hire – for the purpose, and (being a careful man) tried the chauffeur beforehand. The chauffeur privately thought that Eugene was running away with "Saida's Ltd.," and on that account was devoted to him, hoping that some such luck might befall him one day. His mind had been poisoned by books about the things which happened to good-looking chauffeurs, of whom he was one. He did not know what a difference dropping his "h's" made.

They went northward. And all the way Saida told her husband, as she had done a score of times before, of her noble old father, of her mother, and of the comfortable little house of Willow Bank. She described the view down the loch, the marsh-

mallows that *would* peep in through their best bedroom windows – and to Eugene it seemed a paradise with the rivers of Eden meandering through it.

Finally they drew near to the Clachan. The swift car forded the hill streams and set the school children cheering, as it passed up the brae in a silver shimmer of dust. Yonder! Yonder! On that little woody knoll! Willow Bank was before them. The car was stopped at the foot of the loaning, and Saida sprang out and ran quickly up between the lines of trees that almost met overhead. She longed to hear the barking of old Yarrow, lying in his niche by the door of the stable. Yarrow did not bark. Could he be dead?

She watched for her mother coming serenely to the door, white-capped and smiling, with, mayhap, a bit of knitting between her tranquil old fingers. Most of all she longed for her father. He would be out in the fields — but (she was sure) somewhere within cry. And how gladly he would come!

There was the door. She sought the back door first, because of the threshold stone won by her own infant feet. There was the slate on which she had sat, a little way up among the branches of the beech-tree, to learn her lessons. But — the always open door was shut and the slate cracked through the middle with the ingrowth of the wood!

But what took her eye, after she had a little recovered from the shock of finding no one about the old farm, was a white placard affixed to the door, with the mysterious words upon it:

"Displenishing Sale."

It appeared that the "effects of a certain Salem Lamont, tenant of Willow Bank," had been sold by

public auction! With a vague and terror-stricken eye she recognised on the bill the familiar names of the cows: Fleckie, Mysie, Brownie — also Jess, the grey mare, and even the light cart in which she had often been driven to school on wet days, and in which her father had been wont to wait for her at the "school skailing."

Coming behind her, Eugene read the great, unwonted trouble in her eyes. She turned upon him, and said: "What if they are all dead?"

But her husband reminded her that less than a week ago she had had a letter from Salem Lamont, her father. She drew it forth from her pocket and read it carefully over. It was dated from Willow Bank, near Clachan!

But the date on the weather-worn notices of Public Auction on the door was already two years old! Here was a mystery. Saida, a woman of resource, at once resolved to go back to the village. At the post office, if not before, someone would clear away the fear, and at least tell her what had become of her father and mother. By some instinct she thought not at all of her brother Paul – nobody did, indeed, except the mother who had borne him.

At the corner of the road they took a short-cut with close-set hedges between which the chauffeur had to move gingerly, owing to rapid curves and hidden descents,

"Stop!"

There in the deepest shadow was a man bending to his task of stone-breaking in his little square niche. Something in the upward heave of his shoulders struck Saida to the heart. She was out, and Eugene after her, dimly conscious of some tragedy about to befall the woman he loved, but, like

a man, not knowing clearly what to do.

Saida stood a moment to gaze, and then with a cry from her heart, and a quick out-fling of her arms, she cried: “Father! My father!”

But the man in the barnacle giggles straightened himself up, and stood sternly leaning on his hammer, regarding her. Perhaps a little shiver ran through him. But he answered gravely: “My lady, I am not your father – you are mistaken. Go your way! I have my work to do.”

Thus Salem Lamont, for the sake of his daughter’s good repute in London, had denied his Saida.

But Saida was not to be denied. She tore away the stonebreaker’s goggles, and the man stood before her, his lips still quivering with his good lie, but all the father, as of old, looking from his ashamed eyes.

“SAIDA!”

And the next moment she was hanging about his neck, while an unknown young man was shaking him vehemently by the hand.

“Eugene, my husband!” Saida explained; “but where is mother?”

Ten minutes later the turn of that mother came. And before Saida fitted on another dress or Eugene cast up the accounts of the summer quarter of the great house of “Saida’s Ltd.,” Willow Bank was in the full and perpetual ownership of his wife. Paul had arrived in a colony with a new chance given him, and a drastic agreement (dictated by Eugene) that, if he failed again no more would be done for him!

And Salem Lamont promised, as he loved her, not to write to his daughter Saida any more lies.

BY RIGHT OF SALVAGE

The time, by chance, was Christmas Eve. But it was in the Scotland of thirty years ago, so the fact made no difference. The Scriptures had not declared it unto them. The minister was silent on the subject, or spoke only to fulminate against prelatic Englishers, and others who 'regarded times and seasons.'
But it was the field-night of the 'Choral Union,' and the little Whinnyliggate school-house had never been fuller. There was a light snow on the ground – a sprinkling only, for the frost of December had been long and black.

Many a man there had a back stiff with the slow lift and drive as he sent the channel-stone up the rink. But the 'Singing School' Concert – ah, that brought out all in the upper end of the parish who were neither deaf nor bedridden

If you had gone up to the four little steps that led up to the steep schoolhouse brae, you would hardly have seen the light from the windows for the heads clustering without and within. The younger men, who had had to take care of the horses and see them safely stabled at the smithy or at the Gatehead farm, arrived late, and mostly found themselves without seats. But in revenge they stood about the windows, and even threw conversation lozenges in the direction of the half circle about the precentor, where the singers were fluttering the lace sleeves of their best gowns and shaking their ringlets, one on each side falling low on the shoulder, rebelliously, and tossed back with the prettiest shake of the

head.
They were only awed by the waving baton of Robert Affleck of the Garioch, noble-hearted man and excellent musician, who only looked ridiculous when he began to sing. That is – to those who did not know him.

Those who did thought nothing of the strange screwing of the mouth, the twitching nostrils, or the rise and fall of the shaggy black eye-brows, as he twanged the tuning-fork and prepared to attack the fortress of 'Ring and Bell, Watchman!' or even the 'Watch by the Rhine.' For it was the time of the Franco-German war, and, in English versions, warlike songs ravaged the remotest country parishes, otherwise haunts of ancient peace. Here and there a greybeard elder shook his head and confided to his brother in office: 'If they were to sing the Hunderdth Psalm it wad fit them better than a' that clinkum clankum! Hear to thae craitures. 'Ring, ring, ring!' Ye wad think it was a smiddly. I tell ye what, Drumglass, I'm no on wi' thae vain sacrifices.'

There's the harps,' suggested Drumglass in the speaker's ear. 'If you and me are on the road Up Yonder, we had better be getting' accustomed to the like o' that!'

But the Hallelujah Chorus, murdered wilfully, in the first degree and without extenuating circumstances, silence both office-bearers. They remained, critic and apologist, with dropped jaws till the final 'Amen' seemed to escape through a broken roof. The little stove in the centre on its red sandstone

foundation was growing ruddy when at last the benediction was said, then the door was opened, and those nearest it fell out as turnips fall from an over-full cart when both pins are out and the back-board comes away with a clatter.

Mr Goodlison the minister was going from group to group, buzzing compliments. His wife was shaking her long side curls at him from the doorway as a signal to be done and come away home to his supper. She held ready in her hands the minister's white knitted comforter. Abraham was so sensitive to colds, so forgetful and careless, and withal so cunning that (will it be believed?) he would sometimes sneak into the soiled linen cupboard and get out a worn shirt and collar, which she had put away, alleging as an excuse (when taxed with the crime), that 'a stiff one choked the word of God in a man's throat.'

But the young people were all outside early arranging their affairs. Those who could walk home had generally their companions trysted long beforehand. The moon was at its full of course. Indeed Christmas Eve had been chosen for the festival entirely on this account.

Those living at greater distances drove. One or two well-to-do married farmers had their gigs. But such hurried homecomings by no means satisfied the young people. The longest farm carts had been covered with a thick felting of sacks along the shelving sides. The cart bottom was deep in straw, while all the rugs and coverlets in the house had been requisitioned for the homecoming.

There was much laughter. Invitations, audacious and mock tender, rang through the air. Young men who were to sit in the corner to drive, offered more quietly special accommodation by their sides, and promised to be 'douce.' There was but one of all the singers who stood aloof, showed no preference, accepted no invitation of all those laughingly or wistfully extended to her.

Alison Cairns called from her rebellious looks 'curly,' pouted disdainfully apart. Roy M'Farlane asked her, 'majorin' the worth of his turnout like an auctioneer. He retired snubbed. Andro Crossmyloof ventured in, was refused and fell back amid the muttered jeers of his comrades.

But the other girls, who envied Curly her good looks and her position as premier soloist, said loud enough for each other to hear, 'Oh, Will Arnott has gone home with Lizzie Baker.' It was not true, but Alison Cairns turned her face away towards the sheeted hills that stood up white on the farther side of the loch. She did not believe it of Will. Of course not. She knew why these girls said it, and she smiled pleasantly at the nearest, Bell Burns, ruddy even in the moonshine.

'I will wait,' she said, 'there's never a lad in this end of the parish worth the snap of a finger!' 'Come with us Ailie,' cried Jeannie Begbie, more tenderhearted than the others, reaching a hand to help her up.

'Let her bide if she's sae upsettin' the proud madam!' murmured the more jealous.

'Drive on Roy!'

Now there was enough of truth in all this to hurt, and Alison Cairns felt very angry indeed to be thus publicly shamed. Will Arnott had promised to be there waiting for her, and – No, no, it was impossible. She knew Will. There must be some accident. She was sure there must be some accident. All the same a sudden resolve came to her. The little strongly shod feet stopped tapping the hard beaten snow on which the wheels of many gigs and carts had executed fantastic curves and circles in turning.

In another moment the minister and his wife came out. Mrs Goodlison was busy rectifying the set of the white comforter about her husband's neck, for well she knew that in Scotland at least, a minister's throat is his fortune.

'Bless me,' said the minister, 'is that not one of the maids I see going alone round the turn at the smithy?'

Well he knew that it was not good Whinnyliggate custom to permit anything of the kind. The young men ought to be ashamed of themselves. Now in his time –

'Should not I -?' he stammered. 'Should not we, Marion – that is, I do not like any of the young women returning home alone at this time of night.'

But Marion pulled him round sharply. The comforter was not yet entirely to her mind and she gave it an

extra twitch because he was talking nonsense. 'We will do no such thing, Abraham,' she said. 'You will go doucely home with this old woman here present, and then you will take your milk-gruel while it is hot. Then to bed you will go like a decent man! As for the lassie, it will only be Jess Kelly from the Greystone, she has only the corner to turn at any rate. And yonder is Will Arnott with an empty gig following her up!

'Good night, Will,' the minister called out. 'Good night, sir,' said a voice from the gig, with an unusual strain in it.

'Why, what's the matter, Will?' cried the minister, stopping in spite of the forward tug of a wifely hand on his arm, 'what's that on your face? Blood?' 'Only a bit of a spill, sir,' said Will Arnott. 'Someone let fall a lantern in front of Bess as we drove out of the innyard, and before I could get her mastered she tumbled me out at the Well corner.' 'Come your ways into the Manse, Will,' said Mr Goodlison, 'it's well that these things should be seen to at once.'

'No thank you, sir,' said Will, 'it's nothing and – there's the mare – she's not to be trusted even yet – and- '

'What, Will?'

'Did you happen to see - ' (Will had a delicacy in mentioning names) – 'a young lady waiting?' 'Who was to go home with you, William?' said the minister's wife, who loved to get to the point in such

matters.
'Ah, well – that is to say, I hoped, I expected Miss Alison Cairns,' the youth stammered, occupying himself with the mare's restlessness to hide his own growing confusion.

'Alison,' said Mrs Goodison reassuringly, 'oh of a certainty she will have found a seat in one of the long waggons. I saw Roy M'Farlane speaking to her before she left the schoolroom.'

'Oh, thank you – no doubt,' said Will Arnott, as little reassured as possible. 'Good night, madam; good night, Mr Goodison!'

For Will had been at College and was accounted by far the most mannerly young man in the parish. He was a favourite also with the minister's wife, who thought him much too good for any of the village or even for the farmer's daughters. But the minister, in spite of fifty years and a strict regime of comforters, had a warm spot in his heart for honest swains.

'I saw somebody that looked like Ailie Cairns,' he called out as Will drove off, 'going round the smithy turn a minute or two ago!'

'Nonsense – it was only the Kelly lass from the Greystane!' interrupted his wife. But Will had whipped up the mare, and by this time was rounding the turn himself.

'Oh, these young people,' said the minister's wife, 'they think of nothing else but lovemaking!' I wish

they were more awake to their higher duties. 'Remember the Long Loaning, Marion!' said Mr Goodison, giving his wife's arm a quick squeeze under his.

'For shame, Abraham – think of your age and position.'
'I am thinking!' said Mr Goodison, and they walked all the way home, silent both of them. Meanwhile Will Arnott was on the trail as hard as the mare could go, and indeed she laid herself well down to her work, as if she knew her master's heart. The corner came. They flashed round the quick turns about Greystane and up the long alley of beech and birch, their naked twigs winnowing in the moonlight. No Ailie was to be seen. The avenue to the bridge and beyond it as far as Willowbank, white on its hill, glimmered pearly pale, delicately patterened by the branch shadows, all the way to the knoll from which you look down on the loch. Instinctively Will laid the whiplash along the mare's glistening side. Bess bounded forward, and, eager on his chase, Will let her go.

It seemed as if he reached the top of the Urioch brae in a dozen strides. As they topped the rise something moved behind a broom bush on the steep face from which in summer the children dig pignuts. Bess, quick to resent anything after the sting of the whiplash in the avenue of birches, laid back her vicious ears, set her head between her knees, and went down the steep hill at a gallop. Now at the foot was the smallest sort of burn, twinkling and murmuring half-hidden in summer, but now, of course, frozen stiff. Then came three

awkward turns, where already more than one man had found his end. A little beyond Bess swerved to the left, where was only a steepish rough bank, down which the wheels skidded. She struck the ice of the Bogle Thorn Pool, which broke beneath her weight. Then a black column of water rose churning in the frosty air. It was crested with white – the broken snow-covered ice of the pool. It sank, and all was still. To the watcher, behind the whin bushes on the brae only a little black patch broke the white uniformity of the lake, a blot irregularly shaped but, as it seemed, no bigger than a man's hand. How Alison Cairns got out of her hiding place, how fast she crossed the crisp meadow-grass, hard as iron underneath, how she found herself standing on the verge of splintered ice, she never knew. She saw a whiplash floating, that which had done all the mischief. The butt was still held down under the water. Something told her there was a chance. She dared not hesitate. Still less dared she pull. For she knew that the whip might be her only guide to the hand that held it.

Taking firm hold of the branch of a scraggy thorn which overhung the pool, Alison let herself down into the water. She did not feel the chill. She only felt herself sinking. The branch snapped and she swerved in the direction of the outer edge of the ice. She felt her feet entangled. Then suddenly they rested firm. Down the whip handle a hand had come as if by magic into hers. She pushed violently shorewards, striking what was beneath her feet to give her an impetus, and the face of Will Arnott had come up close to hers, starkly white and wet under the moon

.
She laid her hand on the branch – a stronger branch, then on the roots of the whins. There was a long struggle, but Will was out on the snow – silent, cold, and it seemed dead, on the steep, rough bank. Then quite suddenly Alison's courage deserted her. She threw her arms about his face, crushed it against her, crying out, 'Oh Will, Will, forgive me, do forgive me.'

At that moment she felt this horror was all her fault, and she wept over him, chafing his hands and wooing the life that would not come back into her sweetheart's body.

'I have killed him. I – I – who loved him!' So busy was Ailie that she had not heard the jingle of horse-accoutrement on the road above. Two men slid down the embankment, leaving another in the waggon.
'What's this, what's this, Ailie?' said her father, standing tall and grave beside her.
'It's Will,' she sobbed, giving way completely now that all was over. 'I frighted the horse and drowned him!'

Her father was bending over Will Arnott. He was a quick, brusque man, and generally ordered everybody about, but he was gentle that night. 'Let us get him first to the mill,' he said, 'and then you, Rob, drive Alison home as fast as may be - '
'I shall stay with Will,' she cried. 'I must – I killed him. But I only meant to frighten him. He had made me wait at the school gate. Oh father, I am not wet – or cold! Indeed I am not!'

Her father sucked a little, low, comprehensive whistle between his lips.

'Whew-ew!' he murmured. 'So, Master Will!' And in ten minutes all were safe in the millhouse – Will in bed and the miller's wife bustling about to find dry clothes for Ailie out of her daughter's store

*****

The next morning David Cairns strode into the room, flicking his high riding-boots free of snow. Alison sat with Will's hand in hers, and, strangely enough, did not seem in the least abashed. 'Now, young people,' said her father, 'be good enough to tell me the meaning of all this.' With a faint smile and happy eyes Will referred him to his daughter.

'If it had not been for Ailie,' he said, 'I would have been lying beside Bess in the pool at the Bogle Thorn.'

STIEL OF STIELSTRAND

CHAPTER 1

AN HIGH DAY AT QUARRELWOOD

It was sacrament Sabbath day at Quarrelwood. Donald Ae of Bog Hall had just handed the cup of Communion to his chief enemy, Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand. They were side by side in the elders' seat under the little double-decked pulpit, from which but a moment ago minister and precentor had alike descended each in his turn.

There had fallen that awe-stricken pause when the mystery of the faith is consummated. The people were bowed and silent. The minister had sat him down, his hand over his eyes. Now he was only one among his peers, for his "action" sermon had been completed, and he had been reverently "served" first by his ruling elder, Donald Ae. The minister was still thrilling with the electricity of his solemn "fencing of the tables," but the touch of the bread he had blessed in the Higher Name calmed him mystically.

Then it became the turn of the brethren of the Session to serve each the other. Donald Ae passed the bread to Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand, next on his right hand. The eyes of the two met for the smallest fraction of second. One had wronged the other, and at once the eyes of the wrong-doer fell away. The holy bread, the commanded symbol, slipped from his hand. Then, suddenly recovering, he erected himself to his full height, squared his shoulders, and strode out of church, muttering with pale lips

the word he had been hearing – "Eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."

Now though all heard, so well were the Quarrelwood Cameronians trained that not an eye was lifted, nor a head moved. The elders, Donald Ae their skilful captain, moved slowly and decently about among the narrow little, pew-ends with the salvers of bread set out on fair-bleached cloths scenting of meadow grass, and the wine in the single tall silver goblet that had been hidden in a moss-hole all the time of the Covenanting troubles, when Lag and Douglas rode the moors, and the Society Men flitted like swallows from Eskdalemuir to Friarminion, and from Wanlockhead to the "wild lands 'twixt Dee and Cree."

It was already the nineteenth century (or I should not have been there to see). Yet somehow deep in their hearts the Quarrelwood Cameronians kept the memory of these old days. It was chiefly on Communion Sabbaths that they were conscious of their high citizenship. Theirs was no mean city. Their calling and election were sure. Whoever else might dwell on the borders of Philistia, theirs was the spiritual Jerusalem.

So much was not a matter of dispute, but of fact, not a source of pride, but of humility. So when Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand strode out of the kirk of Quarrelwood between the breaking of bread and the partaking thereof, all present knew what had happened.

Achan had been in the camp. One had sat at meat them who was not of them. And though they were sorry for Achan, they were glad that he had gone out from among them of his own accord. It saved trouble. Not one of them - not even the

minister, who was most affected - thought of the amount of "stipend" which must be slipped into the half-yearly envelope, or of how Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand could, an it liked him, double the contribution of the whole congregation. No, what if their treasury were empty? It should at least be swept and garnished.

But as the minister rose to speak the final words, heavy with holy consolations and promises, Donald Ae, ruling elder, instead of proceeding to the vestry with the Communion cup and platter, turned to the right. And there at angle of the kirk where the ivy grew thickest on the wall found his enemy leaning with his brow on his hand, his elbow sunk deep in the rustling leaves.

"Stephen!" Donald said softly. But the man moved not, frozen in the chill of his own spiritual fears.

"Stephen Stiel!" said the ruling elder again.

The man's eyes, glassy and fixed, fluttered a moment as he turned them upon Donal Ae. The earthly came back reluctantly. The moment of inward communion was chilled. The angel of Repentance, perched a moment on his shoulder, fled away.

"I have brought you," said the ruling elder "the symbols of the Body broken and of the Blood shed!"

They were solemn words and solemnly spoken. Yet the skarrow of a fierce anger shot upwards into the eyes of Stephen Stiel. He thrust out his hand to ward off the Communion elements. His clenched fist, thrust palm foremost, touched Donald Ae's shaking arm, and the wine was spilt upon it in a broad splash of purple.

For a long moment the two men stood thus, the one offering, the other refusing. No word was

spoken.

At last Stephen Stiel found utterance.

"I know you, Donald Ae," he said, bending from his height over the lesser man, "you would kill the soul of your enemy. Did you not hear the minister yonder saying the word – 'Eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.' Well ken ye that I discern it not. Ye wad gar me eat and drink damnation to mysel'. That is your heart's wish, Donald Ae. And as for the High Croft and the Annfield Ley and the green braes o' Kirkmahoe off whilk I turned your sheep! Had I not the right? They were mine – bought at a fair price, mine own hard-earned siller!"

"Stephen Stiel," said the ruling elder, "if in anything I have offended, I crave your forgiveness. If in aught you have done, me wrong I forgive you. But let this be the Lord's ain day of peace between you and me."

But Stephen Stiel tossed his head hopelessly upward.

"This is never what I am seekin'," he cried, "the forgiveness of man. I seek the forgiveness of God, and - His face is set as a stone against me!" Then, turning sharp on his heel, he stepped, lightly as a young man, over the low kirk dyke, and set his face towards his own house, glinting white upon its knoll in the distance.

Very sadly Donald Ae took his way back to the little vestry. At the door he turned to look at the tall figure of the man who had refused the Bread and the Wine. Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand was still clearly visible under a sun of July hot and high. His black figure cut itself clean and sharp against the light yellows of the dried bent grass on the slopes.

And as Donald Ae opened the inner door of the kirk a triumphal psalm of thanksgiving broke forth and, running wide over the moor, overtook and smote Stephen Stiel so that he fled from it, his face between his hands, stumbling as he went.

He could not hear the words, but the grave sweet lilt of the singing recalled them to his mind, till they seemed to burn in fire upon his brain. It was the stated "after-Communion" psalm at Quarrelwood -

"Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such,
As worship him in fear."

"No - no - no!" cried Stiel of Stielstrand; "was Judas forgiven, who dipped his hand in his Master's dish?"

And catching a glimpse of a ragged thorn-tree which trailed its shapeless limbs over the fell towards him he cried out in an agony – "The Potter's Field! The Potter's Field!" And falling, he lay motionless, the sun beating down upon him on what had once been Donald Ae's pasture.

He lay there long. The clouds piled up, copper and blue-black along the horizon verge. First came a growl from the distant Galloway peaks. Then flash upon flash, so quick that the thunder had not time to catch them up, but stumbled awkwardly after, tripping and lumbering over the hills.

Stephen Stiel was soon beaten over by rain, which threshed down not in drops but in handbreadth splashes. He neither heard nor felt. But God was not in the thunder that circled about him as if to rend the mountains.

The waters rushed down brown and frothing about him. Of these he was not afraid. A deeper terror throned in his heart. Every gully and burn roared Nithwards. But Stephen Stiel lay still, his hands clasping the heather, the agony of his soul shutting out the swirl of the tempest.

In the blink of stiller weather which followed the final crash the wind, too, hushed. It was the silence which the centre of all great storms makes about itself. Something thin and faint and appealing struck in on the ear of The Man Under Conviction.

Gradually his grasp on the stiff thongs of the heather flexed and loosened. He raised himself slightly upon his palms, his head bent, listening. Yes, there was something. He stood upon his feet, and his eyes fell on the figure of a little girl, crouched behind a square-built stack of peats on the face of the moorland. She was crying bitterly, all the while holding in leash a lamb that strained and stamped at the cord.

Stephen Stiel went towards her, his head bare - for he had neglected to bring his hat from the kirk of Quarrelwood. But she wept only the more bitterly at his approach.

"Oh, dinna, dinna!" she cried, pulling the reluctant lamb towards her. She was so small that she staggered under the assault of the Ingrate.

Stephen Stiel put out his hand as if to help, but the little girl swiftly evaded him, dragging the pet lamb after her. She put the square of peats between them before she stopped.

"Who are you?" said Stephen Stiel, "and why do you think I would harm you?"

"Ye are the Ill Man," said the girl, dashing a lock of wet hair out of her eyes. "Ye turned my

grandfather aff the muirs, an' they telled me ye wad kill me and Donald if ye catched us here!"

"I am indeed the Ill Man," Stephen Stiel answered very gravely, "but none so ill as that."

"Then we will do none so badly yet," said the girl, brightening visibly. "I'm wee Janet Ae, ye ken. I was born up yonder at the Annfield, but I bide wi' gran'faither noo – since - "

She did not continue the phrase, but Stephen Stiel caught its meaning perfectly, and took to himself the implied reproach.

"Since ye were driven out of Annfield by the Ill Man," he said. But with womanly deftness Little Janet Ae turned the matter.

"Since my faither had to gang awa' to the, wars," she said, a little wistfully. Then, catching herself sharply, she added – "But he's comin' hame wi' a medal - and a red coat!"

The storm, which had rumbled off to the other bank of the Nith, suddenly swept across an arm, anchored its blue-black masses upon the upper table-lands of Kirkmahoe, and from their entrenchments hurled bolt after bolt at the foot hills and the wide river valley as far Netherholm and Holywood. A moment more and they were caught in the full northward drive of the storm.

Janet Ae held out her hands. The lamb's rope trailed on the ground, but he made no attempt to escape, for poor draggled Donald also had his own fears of the Unknowable. He crouched close in to the scanty wet skirt of his mistress. She had given way entirely, beating her hands together and weeping bitterly.

"Eh, Ill Man," she said, "ye may be ill, but this is waur. Kep me!" And she cast herself towards him,

rather than ran. Stephen stooped and catching her in his arms moved towards the march-dyke. The white flame girt them as with a cincture, a fiery heaven over black earth. Donald bleated disconsolately after them.

Janet Ae hid her face on his shoulder, and through the thunders of Sinai he heard the small still voice in his ear —

"Ill Man, ye are nane sae ill! Ye are guid – guid to Janet."

Then, after a pause -

"Ay, and guid to Donald!"

She meant her pet lamb, but Stielstrand thought of her grandfather.

* * * * *

That night Donald Ae and his most ancient enemy faced each other across the board.

They ate and drank, while in the corner near the peat fire on the kitchen hearth little Janet lay asleep with her head pillowed on Donald's flank.

Both knew that this was the real communion of the day, that of forgiveness. And ere Stephen Stiel, clothed and in his right mind, took his way across dykes and swollen waters to Stielstrand, he went over and lifted Jane Ae's head to kiss her brow. "Blessed are the peacemakers," he said. She blinked sleepily up, but recognising the speaker she smiled -

"Ye are him that was good to Donald," she murmured, "good be wi' ye, good man!"

CHAPTER 2

THE SORROW 0N THE MINISTER'S FACE

Stephen Stiel had once owned a well-filled house, kept a bien fireside, and a well-swept hearth. Bairns clung about his knees. Now, however, his wife was long dead, his children scattered or estranged. All, that is, save one – the youngest and by a great deal the most patient of his brood. Black Bess of Stielstrand – of her years nineteen, with hair and eyes blue-purple like the over-ripe blackberries of the woods, and of a temper redoubted by all the world. Yet wherein her father was concerned, she seemed dowered with an incomparable patience.

Of Stephen's children, one, the eldest, had served the Queen in the Nor'-West Mounted Police. He had not written home for years. Or at least only once, when his father, after a single glance, had thrown the many-stamped envelope behind the fire.

Dick, owing to a misunderstanding with Stephen Stiel; Will, after one too complete with a village lass, had quitted the bounds of the parish, and were severally seen no more. The girls, all save Bess, married young. But, while waiting, they took the best of care to find a way to earn their own living honestly.

Bess alone remained, dominating the old man by the force of a nature to which even Stephen Stiel's was as autumn sunshine on ripe corn.

But, without her knowledge, as he thought, the old man kept a jealous eye upon the last left daughter – spying upon every visitor, glooming at the men as possible suitors, upon the women as

probable ambassadors. So Stielstrand became a place of perpetual comings and goings. Hardly ever did one meet the same faces in the parlour or about the kitchen fire. Yet Bess bore all with astonishing patience, her lips only a little more tightly compressed, a quickly vanishing smile lurking about the corners of her mouth. Not that Bess was really patient. Far from that, as many knew to their cost.

When Stephen Stiel entered his own house at Stielstrand that afternoon of the summer Communion at Quarrelwood, he found the yards and byres swept clean, the lambs bleating for their mothers in the home pastures – all, shepherds, ploughmen, orra lads of the field and hill, having gone off early to the Sacrament at Quarrelwood. Only Bess, silent by the little parlour window, looked over her open Bible at the low sunlit hills across the valley.

For in the morning Stephen Stiel, the black dog already on his back, had forbidden her to stir from the house all that day. Bess was now, so he counted, his only child – nay, more, his only relative. All he had was hers. What wonder, then, if some land-louping ne'er-do-weel in search of wife and fortune should cast

Wolf's eyes upon his Black Bess? Forewarned, Stephen Stiel was also forearmed.

But there were many things in the heart of this daughter to which the master of Stielstrand remained a stranger. For instance, there was his minister, Hector Maben - with whom, notwithstanding his late outcast with his Maker, and the fiasco of the Communion, Stephen had no fault to find.

A grave man was Mr Maben, speaking little, hard

to interest in the weather or the crops. Even the late lambing and whether it would prove a bad season for “mauks” scarce awakened his tongue. And this in a parish like Quarrelwood, where the sheep is a sacred animal, caused at first a certain coldness between the Reverend Hector and his store-farming congregation.

What else were the rough-coated men, abruptly called off the hill by the minister's visit, to talk about? They could not begin right away upon effectual calling and the mysteries of free grace and freer will.

No, that was too much to be expected even of a Quarrelwood “herd.” Besides, what “the wife” driving at a man to wash his face in the middle of the afternoon - nay, even to shave on a week-day (the enormity!), a minister, who, on his stated visitation, could not offer to an embarrassed member of his flock the “yowes” or the “craps” as a stepping-stone to higher things - why he did not know his business! So much was clear.

Yet all the more because of this certain it is that Black Bess of the Stielstrand and the silent minister, her senior by eleven years, found time and made opportunity to be much together in the long summer days on the moors, or sheltered from the rush of winter winds in the sitting-room of Stielstrand. They spoke of things great and high - of the Wars of Religion, of young Hugh M‘Kail and that early boyish testimony of his - of those little scattered companies of earnest students, here at Leeuwarden, there at Groningen, wise virgins of the light, trimming their lamps and making them ready against the great day dawning in Scotland. And the insight of the woman overtook and passed by the learning of the man.

For according to his lights Hector Maben was a learned man - nay, even a very learned man. But the lights remained those of Calvin and Turretin. He opened his mind with difficulty to truths and ideas which to the unblanketed mind of Bess Stiel seemed absolutely self-evident.

"The truth is in you, Hector," she would say, "but College and books have sodded it down so that often you are hard put to find it yourself!"

Certain it is that in the days which succeeded the "high day at Quarrelwood," Hector Maben was frequently to be seen mounting the braes towards Stielstrand. Not that anyone in the parish thought the worse of him for that. He was just doing his duty. For it was admitted by all that, though certainly lacking in the anise, mint, and cumin of the district - that is to say, in neighbourly talk on subjects purely agricultural - no man the parish ever saw was in the least to be compared with "oor Maister Maben" when it came to wrestling with the sinner and turning him from his evil way.

Nevertheless, the minister of Quarrelwood, besides his duty, had certain other fish to fry, and his "calling" to mount the braes of Stielstrand was acknowledged even by his own lusty conscience not to be exclusively connected with the saving of souls.

Usually Bess met him at the "muir slap," where there was a break in the seven-foot march-dyke, a roadway closed with bare poles set in solid gate-posts of pine. She walked out swiftly, assuredly, in a business-like fashion, and in sight of all the world to intercept and confer with Hector Maben. It was as natural as natural could be. And, as a matter of fact, they did converse about Stephen Stiel - and the strange trouble, like to demonic possession, which

kept him in the bond of iniquity. The spilt wine-cup, the half-healed quarrel with Donald Ae, were to the minister only symptoms of a deeper ill. In his opinion, Stephen was a man at odds wills the Almighty and sure to get the worst of it. But the outcast's daughter thought not so. She knew her father as no minister could know him. She knew his faults and that they could not be eradicated by the reasoning man, be it ever so sound. Worse still, Stephen Stiel denied the right of a printed page to dictate to his conscience.

When Hector Maben posed him with some great text the ex-elder would thrust back him savagely with "Christ wrote nothing; but he left his people free!" And all through that autumn the minister laid up prayers the solemn quiet of his heart for the man who had slammed the door upon God, barring it in His face. In the hours of his private "duty," when the boards of his closet – his house of prayer - wore sleek and shiny almost as soon as the knees of his clerical "blacks," Mr Maben cumbered the "clearing house" of heaven with petitions for his friend and for the father of his friend. Hector Maben was a righteous man, and doubtless his prayers availed much. But ever the master of Stielstrand held his head the higher, like a man defying God, daring the thunderbolts. He took the winter rains in his face, as it had been, joyfully, as if they had been the anger of God blattering down upon him from the slate-blue November hills, on which Stephen walked in the pride of an open rebellion. Of all in the parish only his daughter Bess understood him.

Even they spoke little. Mostly Bess sat with her book or a tangle of knitting upon her knee. Stephen Stiel stared at the fire, sometimes muttering low to

himself and at others starting hastily up to stamp his way noisily outside, leaving Bess knitting away as serenely as ever.

The minister grew discouraged. Often he would have given up the task but for one who knew Stephen Stiel far better than he. He would come in off the moor, his shoulders soaking, the half-frozen snow draggled and lumpy in his beard and hair. Then Bess took him in hand on the moment, ordering him to sit down, and with a towel rubbing his head, hands, and face till they glowed. After that she would scold him.

"Why could he not leave them alone? Did he not know that they were accursed, the Stiels of Stielstrand?"

But the young man would hear no reason. Indeed, he would have deserved no mercy if he had. Who knew all about such things if not he? Hector Maben had been an undesired babe. His childhood was singularly savage and solitary among great granite hills and the six-foot tresses of heather in which in a moment Hector could lose himself like a hunted Covenanter within half-a-score of yards of the peat stack. At College he supported himself on a starvation "bursary," inhabiting the fifth storey of a tall South Edinburgh "land," where he set himself grimly to his studies. He sat late to conserve the last red ashes in the grate. He rose early in the morning, wrapping his single overcoat about his feet. And so, in the ghastly dawn of an Edinburgh December he made his mind into a storehouse of useless lore, so that at the long and last his translations from the vernacular into the Hebrew became a thing for even the Professor of Oriental tongues to wonder at. At the grind of premises an syllogisms he distinguished

himself still more. And so in time he rather tore than worked his way to the first theological prize after he had taken his degree.

There were cleverer fellows in the class, who, from the height of a "manse" ancestry and more wide but far vaguer culture, were at first inclined to look down on "The Heatherbred." But it was no long time before the Heatherbred taught them "other of that." There was his famous opening address to the "dialectic" on "The Ignorance of Philosophic Writers," which took the breath away from some and established a reputation. After that they knew the Heatherbred for a man good to let alone. So, with the highest honours of his small sect, Hector Maben left the College in Candlemaker Row. He came to Quarrelwood. He saw. He conquered. His Bannockburn was a discourse in which he swept the board of every heresy of which Quarrelwood had ever heard, and introduced several others, till that moment undreamed of, to the notice of the parish. This settled the question of his election, and (incidentally) caused the blacksmith, Rob Steenston, to declare himself a "Neonomian" and so above all law! For this word Rob was heartily grateful to the new minister, being by nature a wild lad and often in difficulties three deep with the Session. Than Rob Steenston Hector Maben had no more determined supporter.

Nevertheless it came about that there was an abiding sadness upon the face of the minister of Quarrelwood.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL

Bess met the minister at the stile, to the right of the big Tornorrach wood, where the pines began to lift themselves up big and solemn. Her mind was divided betwixt the hush as of heavenly spaces, and the delicious odour of wet fir cones rotting on damp ground. In that wood she felt as she had done when a child.

It was almost by instinct that, as he leaped the stile. Strong, masculine, and vigorous, Bess of Stielstrand held out a hand to the minister. This day they did not discuss the Trinity. Indeed, for a while they did not discuss anything, but continued walking together through the green aisles still hand in hand as though the vistas which opened before them would never end.

Hector Maben was not of those who knew the heights and howes of love. To him it was a factor entirely negligible. He had, indeed, observed its ravages among his flock. But so had he those of measles and chicken-pox. It generally happened a year or two later, that was all. He gave his young people the best advice which even the most utter ignorance could produce. He had looked into Luther for information, but found there sentiments which he thought quite unworthy of the great reformer.

But from the first Bess of Stielstrand seemed somehow quite different. Different with a difference which marked itself on his brain as he annotated the margins of his Bible. A woman of good counsel, sound, sweet, and wholesome, with the grave

directness of a man and equal to the most terrible dangers - such Hector Maben pictured Bess Stiel to be.

Nor was he far wrong. She had seen her brothers and sisters flee one by one before her father's tempers. She alone had stood his worst anger unflinching, unsmiling, unafraid. She looked Stephen Stiel in the eye with the glance he had known for his own father's, and at the thought of that stern taskmaster, whose severity had made him what he was, the laird of Stielstrand stood uneasy and vaguely dismayed. Not that Bess ever said anything to alter or curb her father's unreason. Only in her great dark eyes there glinted something blue-black and thunderous like the gloss on her hair, something behind which his angers went out as the sun does behind storm cloud advancing by the way of the Atlantic.

"Is there any change of heart?" the minister inquired at length, removing his hand so as to talk professionally. The leaves were whispering strange things, blood-stirring things in his ear. It was safer to get back to the safe ground of convention and the discipline of the kirk.

Bess of Stielstrand shook her head. Mechanically she broke off a branch of rotten pine, and snapped it into dust between her fingers as she walked.

"My father," she answered thoughtfully "has stood the thunder and the earthquake. It remains only to wait for the still small voice!"

And had she known it a still small voice of quite unusual sound was speaking to Stephen Stiel at that moment. Janet Ae, on the border of the late disputed territory of Annfield, was ordering him to get down on his knees and dig pignuts out of a bank

with his knife.

While his strong, wise daughter, walking with the man learned in all the law and the prophets, discussed the case of the master of Stielstrand, little Janet Ae was "solving it by walking" as the logicians say, and as for Stephen Stiel he was climbing the bank on fours!

If the first pair talked wisely on the verges of the wood, a discreet childish austerity touched the commands of Janet Ae.

What did he mean by not having his knife with him?

No, she would by no means lend him her scissors. They were her only pair. But a man without a knife - she had not imagined that so useless a thing could exist. Why, even Will Murdoch, the stupidest herd on all the hills, always carried a knife for the use of Janet Ae. True, he also cut tobacco with it, slicing and cross-cutting in the palm of his hand. This was Janet's favourite feat of legerdemain, and she was never tired of seeing it repeated, always hoping against hope that Will would cut himself, yet shuddering at the possibility even as she looked.

But a man without a knife - Janet Ae had never heard of such a thing. She was just informing Stephen Stiel of his unworthiness in the matter of digging pignuts with his fingers, when a narrow opening in the pinewood of Tornorrach revealed these two seekers of treasure.

Hector and Bess stood transfixed. Instinctively she had put her hand on his sleeve as if to prevent his speaking. Silently they watched the small girl perched on a crumbling dyke-end, her thin red-stockinged legs crossed, her feet dangling, her eyes snapping with good humour, as she issued her

orders to the great man so strangely become her slave.

They paused a while regarding the scene, and then stole away, the tall, heavy-footed minister making himself step light as pussy among the fallen leaves of the wood.

Beyond the bounds of the morass, when there was nothing but cultivated fields between them and the homestead of Stielstrand, the need of laughter came upon Bess, but the minister's hand was upon her shoulder, and as she looked up, his grave eyes on hers, she would have laughed at the spectacle her father presented.

"'Dust the knees of your trousers, you a not fit to be seen!'" she quoted from the field orders of Janet Ae. "My father must have fallen demented."

"Fear not," the minister answered gently "we have been too much the thunder and the earthquake - you and I, the elders and folk of Quarrelwood. Perhaps Janet Ae is the still small voice. And, moreover, is it not written 'A little child shall lead them'?"

* * * * *

Bess of Stielstrand had perforce to yield herself to this higher reasoning. Hector Maben was capable of continuing in this vein all morning, and her time was limited. Bess began to see her way clearer - even as the deep forest arches had given way to the high cloud-sprinkled sky, full of sunshine and the clean-scented stir of winds, so she saw her father once more with a smile on his face as of old.

She held out her hand to the minister to help her over the final pasture bars. He wanted to come in

with her, but she had need of silence and time in which to bethink herself.

"Not to-day, dear," she said, half unconsciously. And pressed his hand a little with pensive quiet eyes directly upon those of Hector Maben. And so, with a single backward glance at the minister standing sentry by the hill gate, she was gone, while a happy loneliness settled down upon the man's heart.

For the whispered monosyllable told him more than he had ever dared to hope. He had no previous love story. No past returned to him when sleep unlocks the treasures of the dark. Hector Maben took his way homeward with a warm hearth-fire glowing in his heart, the promise and token of that which was one day to be lighted in the gloomy manse of Quarrelwood.

As he went he thought of many things - of Ruth among the golden corn, of the Shulamite, whose love was better than wine. And somehow the mystic interpretation for which he had combated so long seemed to lose a great part of its force. Yes, he still believed in the Holy Bride, the elect Church, as coming within the meaning of that "excellent song" which was Solomon's. But (said he to himself) as he covered the miles towards the manse of Quarrelwood with long steady strides, the new note arising in his heart was the same as in the ancient "Song of Songs," there was even in the midst of the triumph a new note of pain. It said to him – "Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse. Thou hast wounded my heart with one of thine eyes."

CHAPTER 4

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES AND SUCKLINGS

In the meantime, while the minister of Quarrelwood was rejoicing over the single monosyllable let fall by Bess of Stielstrand, Stephen himself, the outcast from the flock, the unruly evil whom not even grace could tame, was taking his marching orders from Janet Ae. She had been well taught at home, and tiring soon of the pignut play, was now putting Stephen Stiel through his facings in Scripture and general knowledge.

"Two and two?" she demanded, with her wand of correction raised over her shoulder.

"Six!" he replied, unabashed.

Down came the rod. Again and again more severely as he persisted in his statement. She ceased only, touched with pity, when he pretended to weep. She even threw her plump arms about his neck, weeping also and declaring that two and two might very well be six, if he would only be good and not cry.

"How many persons are there in the Trinity?" came next.

Stephen Stiel shook his head sadly, and Janet Ae demanded fiercely where he had been brought up - not to know that.

"Your father must have been a bad man," she said, fiercely stamping her foot.

Stephen Stiel feebly defended his parent, taking the blame upon himself. But Janet Ae would have none of this. She knew him. He was a good man. He

did what he was told, dug pignuts when so desired, and carried Janet on his back according to order. She would not have him say that he was wicked. It was the fault of a bad upbringing, but let him not despair. She would give him the benefit of her own good instruction.

"There are three persons in the Trinity," she dogmatised, imperious as Tertullian. "Repeat after me – 'Three persons in the Trinity!'"

"'Three persons in the Trinity,'" said Stephen with docility.

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!" prompted the lips from which when not occupied with goodies, dropped the wisdom of babes. "I suppose," she sighed, "it is no use asking you what they all do. So I will tell you. You are bad. I am bad. We are all born bad." (The little Calvinist!)

Janet Ae watched her pupil narrowly for any sign of dissent.

"Yes, bad, bad!" she repeated with emphasis as he nodded his head. "Well, then, since you know that, I will tell you what the Trinity is. The Father is God, and He forgives us for the sake of His Son, who is God too. But the Holy Ghost doesn't live with the other two up in heaven, but in there!" And she gave Stephen Stiel a smart and sudden poke in the chest, in the region where she believed his heart to be situated.

"Yes, in there!" she repeated. So that He can tell you when you are naughty, and when God forgives you. And my father says that – 'If you don't listen to God in there, it will be much worse for you than if you threw stones and cried bad words against God up in heaven."

Stephen Stiel had paled gradually. The play was

becoming serious and personal.

"Did your father bid you come here and tell me that?" he queried hoarsely.

"My father," laughed Janet Ae, showing all her little close-set baby teeth in a ravishing smile, "no, indeed! Why, that is the way I teach the collies when there is no one else. I like teaching, you see, and when I say 'pray' they both put up their paws, like that - so funny. And maybe God hears the doggies' prayers. Anyway, they do their best, and when I say 'Who made you?' up go their heads, their noses point to the sky.

"'Youch!' they say. And that in doggie speech means God!"

"The beasts that perish!" murmured Stephen Stiel, deeply impressed.

"Don't be so sure," retorted Janet, "if everyone in the world did their best to worship God, like our two sheep-dogs, maybe it would be better for them on the Judgment Day!"

"Amen!" said Stephen Stiel. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings – " "I had a stickling last spring - oh, you saw him. He was a lamb before he grew up, such a darling. I called him Donald after my father. But he would not learn like the doggies. He only knocked over the collection plate at the door of the kirk!"

"What kirk?" asked the ex-elder, interested in these confidences.

"Why, our kirk! Mine and the doggies, in the little orchard behind the barn where nobody ever comes, and it is always so nice and quiet for God to hear in quite easily without bothering Himself."

"Ah, I see!" said Stephen Stiel, speaking with reverence. "I think that I too should like to come to

the doggies' kirk behind the barn where nobody comes but God, and it is so quiet that He is sure to hear!"

CHAPTER 5

A DAUGHTER OF MIDIAN

The schoolhouse of Quarrelwood was one the few in Scotland which belonged by right of legacy to the small Cameronian "body." Not that they used it for its original purpose. But considered as a dwelling-house it figured on the yearly statement of accounts as a steady source of income and the eight pounds which it brought in helped to increase the minister' slender salary.

But it had sat empty for two years, and the finances of Mr Maben were by so much diminished. The minister and Stephen Stiel of Stielstrand had formed the "Letting Committee." Now it fell to the minister to act alone.

"A comfortable six-roomed cottage in a convenient position within a few yards of church privileges" had long formed a conspicuous advertisement in the county paper, and the well-accustomed eye in search of "lamb sales" and "roups" naturally skipped it, so familiar had it become.

A board with TO BE LET upon it - the minister disapproved of Scotticisms not included in the Geneva Bible - had stood at the front gate through storm and shine, grey in the misty drizzle, cracking and peeling in the fierce July sunshine, and at all times pockmarked by stones flung by common Erastian schoolboys on their way home from the parish school. It sagged a little to the side as if tired of the whole ungrateful business. It had looked the public long in the face, and heretofore had received nothing but abuse - one well-known poacher "under

the influence" having climbed the wall and proceeded to personal violence with his fists. This, however, proved the one victory of the dejected signpost, even Joe Elphinstone standing no chance against the knotted Cameronian oak of the notice-board "upright."

The minister's housekeeper met him in the little lobby with a scared look on her face. "There's a leddy-body waitin' for ye, sir! I put her in the study."

"Who is she?" The minister's voice was stirred also, The thing was so unusual and so unforeseen. He called upon so many people, and so few called upon him, save for the purpose of inviting him in his official capacity to greater exits and entrances of life, that Hector Maben stood a while on the study threshold with the unturned knob in his hand. At last, conquering the shyness which grows upon bachelors in the unstirred silences of their houses, Hector Maben opened the door and went in. The evening sunlight fell kindly and sweet on the desk of rough pine, at which, standing erect, or now and then walking a few steps to and fro, it was his custom to write his sermons. Often he had bowed his head up it in prayer. Often he had shaded his brow with his hand and continued to write when the sun looked in level over Wee Queensberry. The books on the shelves, tomes solemn and self-respecting for the most part, even in their familiarity, now gave Hector confidence.

A lady rose from his hard sofa, and lo! in moment his eyes were dazzled again. She was small in stature, but to Hector she seemed like one of the towers which look towards Damascus. Everything seemed shining about her. Her hair shone. Her eyes also shone. And the sunshine was on her face when

she smiled.

"Mr Maben?" she said, putting her hand up quickly to pat her hair with an instinctive movement at his entrance.

Hector Maben simply bowed. "I am minister of the little Cameronian congregation here!" he said.

The little lady clapped her hands with a gesture never before seen in Quarrelwood.

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "I knew it. The sent me to you!"

"You had thoughts of joining yourself to our community?" he stammered tentatively

But inwardly he was thinking what a strange figure she would make on the worn brown benches and narrow square pews of the Quarrelwood kirk.

But the little lady unexpectedly rippled out a gay trill of laughter.

"Oh no!" she said. "I am English, you see – a widow - I have some money - just sufficient, and they told me that you had such a pretty house to let - so retired, trees all about, and a view –oh, don't say you have let it while I was making up my mind to come all this way!"

"You mean the school cottage?" said Hector practically. "I fear – "

"No, don't say that," she cried. "I looked over the hedge as I came. Such a love of a place! Don't say you have let it, or that you consider me an - yes, that is the word – an eligible tenant!"

"The schoolhouse is still unlet and not likely to be otherwise," said honest Hector. "It will need a good deal of money laid out upon it before it is habitable, and, so far as I can speak for the Kirk Session, I think I may say that they have not the means to spend upon reparation at present."

But the lady only smiled and put aside the Kirk Session, that august body, with one wave of her little gloved hand.

"If you let me come, Amelia and I - Amelia is my maid, and I am Mrs Merrick's sister-in-law from Dumfries - I will do all the repairs we shall need. We are plain people, and I have come through a great trial" (she touched the breast of her black dress). "I want to find a quiet place to live in and grow calm - and forget."

She put to her face a little white handkerchief, which to Hector's eyes seemed to shine also.

"But I must not be silly, or trouble other people," she said with a smile that shone the brighter for the tears through which it had percolated. "Must I?" she appealed to him as to an elder brother.

Strange feelings, hitherto unknown, were at work in the heart of Hector Maben. First a kind of numbness, through which pierced gradually a memory and a shame. The memory was that of Bess of Stielstrand, strong, gracious, incapable of deceit or lightness or wrongdoing. The shame was the knowledge which came to him in a moment, definite and certain, that he had never loved her - never indeed known what love meant.

But Mrs Merrick recalled him to himself. She had taken a seat on the sofa while he remained standing.

"Why don't you sit down?" she said, still smiling up at him, quite as if the house were her own. And as there was no reason, or at least none that occurred to the tall, grave minister at the moment, Hector sat down, and looked steadfastly at his visitor. He had never seen such a woman before, young, yet not a girl, fair to see like some of the pictures in the old Books of Beauty he had seen in

the sixpenny box at Grant's and Brown's on the Bridges in his College days.

"You know my brother-in-law, the doctor?" she said, to break the silence, awkward for him, not at all for her.

"Ah, yes!" Who, indeed, within a radius of twenty miles, did not? There were other doctors, but the sight of Dr John Merrick, his great body swaying over his gig, his "man" in blue coat and black buttons squeezed tightly by his side, set all the uplands to cataloguing their aches and pains. He was getting old now, and wont only to undertake difficult surgical operations, or to go out at night in cases of the utmost need. He had a wife of his youth who ruled him with a rod of iron - that is, to the breaking point - but knowing how to halt just a moment before the big man burst forth like a flood insufficiently dammed.

Could they go and see the cottage? Amelia was outside. She would soon tell what was to be done. Not that it mattered. Nothing mattered so long as she had taken a fancy to the house and wished to hide herself away in Quarrelwood.

They walked out together, where they were almost immediately joined by a tall, gaunt, bony woman, with a strong greyish face and thin lips which pressed tightly against each other.

"This is Amelia," Mrs Merrick said, and the tall woman seemed to wrap her about in a sort of determined motherly kindness. Mr Maben she hardly looked at at all.

However, the minister and Amelia shook hands, at which Mrs Merrick laughed. "Do you know," she said, "you quite forgot to do that to me!"

They arrived at the cottage, which, overgrown

with creepers, and with its long alleys of the old playground transformed into garden plots, took on a sort of mysterious beauty in the long shadows of the close of day.

The minister conducted them from room to room. All had been kept aired, for Hector had made a conscience of that, while Willie Kelly, minister's man and kirk officer, had kept the empty rooms duly swept and garnished.

Mrs Merrick exclaimed at everything with little clappings of the hands. Indeed it was all her fancy had painted. Yet she hardly gave a look to the apartments themselves, but went at once to the windows.

"Oh, that tall pine! How noble it will look by moonlight! Those distant Galloway hills with the sun just peeping over them, smiling broadly before he says 'good-night!' The garden, so quaint, self-contained, and tree-shadowed, the funny bushy walks all grow soft and green, where once children's feet had beaten the earth hard!"

All these pleased her. While behind, a notebook in her hand, strode Amelia, jotting down what each room would need in the way of furniture, wall-papers, decorations. It was the full warm gloaming when they came out, Hector Maben and the shining little lady first, Amelia a couple of steps behind with the key of School Cottage already in her bag, her brows knitted, mentally comparing measurements and wondering how the furniture and carpets of that "other house" would fit these more confined spaces.

They walked back to the manse under the light of a young moon marching with an equal serenity through the high dappled cloud-drift and the nearer velvety splashes of the Scotch firs overhead.

As they turned towards the manse door they heard the bellowing of a loud voice, a voice drowned in good living and yet rich with the fullness of manhood within.

"My sister-in-law, if you know what that means, Bell Morton! I'm asking you. Do you understand a question? Has she run off with your minister, or your minister with her? Speak the truth, woman, or I will never bring you into the world again. And little ye have done for John Merrick ever since to prove your gratitude for all the trouble I took - a yelling, sprawling handful ye were!"

"Here they come!" said the minister's housekeeper, glad to escape from the torrent of reminiscence to which (as she well knew) half the village was listening with delighted ears.

"And small thanks to them, keeping a busy man waiting here with a hungry stomach and four-wheeled dog-cart. Myra, I am ashamed of you! You are half-an-hour late. Wait till you have need of me in a hurry and I'll keep you double the time. Woman, you should have married a doctor with the door-bell going every quarter of an hour, and then you might have had some idea of the value of a man's minutes."

"John," said Mrs Merrick, getting up beside him, without heeding in the least, "I have taken the house. This is my new landlord!"

"Then the more fool both of you," said the doctor. "You, Myra, want to go to a nunnery, but I feel sure your idea includes a stray man or two. You, Maben, have set the heather on fire, and I'll wager that Quarrelwood will be no misnomer in six months. Heaven help me to keep out of it – an old man like me and fat but honest. How can I be bothered with

young widow women in the height of the fashion. Ah, it is my brother who is the lucky man – I saw him comfortably boxed in oak and tucked away under the daisies. But the rest of us, now that Myra has taken it into her head to rusticate at Quarrelwood, heaven help us! Get up, there, you good-for-nothing beast!"

And so Hector Maben, a little dazed, was left standing alone on the doorstep of the manse. He stood there bareheaded and as if fulfilling a vow, the moon looking magisterially down from aloft, till Bell Morton touched him on the arm and bade him to come ben to his supper.

CHAPTER 6

GOD'S TRUE MINISTER

The early days of Myra Merrick's tenancy of the School Cottage ran very swiftly, especially for Hector Maben. He seemed to be breathing a new air. He went forth into a world filled with a gladness that gave him wings. He was, in fact and without knowing it, in love. But when on a long-deferred Monday he found his way, halting and shamefaced, over the holms and up the the braes to Stielstrand, Bess Stiel knew all about it at the first glance of his face.

She had, indeed, heard rumours, but it had seemed to her more honourable, more worthy to disregard them. Now she took her blow without flinching. Not for a moment would she let anyone see, least of all him.

So she smiled and spoke of her father, at present out on the hills towards Annfield, most probably with little Janet Ae or her grandfather Donald.

She was obliged for the book he had lent her. It had given her new thoughts, though (she added) the problem of human sorrow was much more difficult than the writer imagined. It was a vain thing to speak of "leaving all to God" in a world where men and women had to rise at six in the morning to earn their daily bread.

Hector Maben found little to say, though Bess, observing his pain, talked incessantly to ease him of it. Never had the dark regularity of her features, crowned by the massive coils of hair, seemed so noble and so simple. Vaguely Hector Maben felt that

something great and true, something above rubies, was escaping him.

Yet at that very moment there came back to him the memory of the cottage in the valley, the glint on Myra's rebellious curls, the smile that welcomed him, chiefly felt in the kindness of her eyes, above all the ripple of her laughter. And in a moment, so strange and inconsequent a thing is man, Hector Maben grew conscious of the tall, strong beauty of the girl-woman before him. For the first time he grew conscious that his frequent visits to Stielstrand might have been misinterpreted. In some measure he was bound to Elizabeth Stiel.

True, no word had passed between them – no promise, no ring such as (Hector had heard) that with which people of the world plight their troth. Their commerce had been higher, in the world of ideas and quick instinctive comprehension. Yet something stirred vaguely within him, the powerful rebound of the man spiritually trained.

"I will do the right!" he said to himself, and after one glance down the valley he turned to Bess with his soul firmed to the intention of duty, and his eyes on the dark limpidity of those of Bess of Stielstrand.

"Elizabeth," he said, "I am a poor man, and yet there have been times when I have been bold enough to think that you might share that poverty. Bess, will you marry me?"

The eyes of Bess of Stielstrand flinched. They became stiller, sweeter, stronger, more mysterious with the mystery of a deep, untroubled, and yet sheltered sea.

She put out her hand and took his, as it had been, compassionately. Something like the soft glow of moonshine was in her eyes as she paused a

moment before answering. She shook her head. She might have answered he had come too late, but because of her great soul, even that she spared him.

"No, Hector," she said very quietly, "friends, always friends - that is, if you do not forget me - and Stielstrand - and my father. But nothing else!"

"But why - why?" he persisted, with the half anger of a man who considers he has made some great sacrifice and finds himself unexpectedly rebuffed, even to his own advantage.

Bess of Stielstrand smiled upon him as on a child, with the same high serenity with which she was wont to conquer her father, but with an added gentleness which was almost motherly. She loved him too well to give the true reason. Yet she thought, if he had not been a man, he might have guessed.

"I cannot marry you, Hector," she said, with her hands still in his, without in the least seeking to withdraw them. "My place is here – with my father. He has the more need of me!"

"But," said Hector, searching for a commonplace, "he will have two children instead of one!"

The dark grey eyes glinted with a sort of sad humour.

"I think he would prefer the one," she said, almost tenderly, and loosened her hands from his.

"You are not angry with me?" groaned the minister, his heart speaking loud reproaches within him.

She bent towards him, quietly and gravely. She set her lips to his brow, and led him to the door, from which the view of the valley opened with a surprise that never grew old.

"Go in peace," she said; "the blessing of God and

the blessing of all about Stielstrand go with you!"

"And your blessing also, Bess?" he stammered.

She spread her hands suddenly abroad, a sob caught in her throat stranglingly. She had only time to push him outside, shut the door, and flee like a bird to her chamber, her ears already buzzing, and all the world turning in that long merciful chill which is so like to death.

At first "the bonny Englishy woman" was looked on with some fear and much suspicion by the good people of the upper end of the parish. But the regularity of life at the School Cottage, the growing flowers, the hearty call of friendliness over the hedge to the passer-by – the same for gentle and simple - eased the mind of Quarrelwood.

And then, when anyone was sick, "the Englishy leddy" had store of medicines by her. She cared not at what hour of the night she might be called to dispense her skill. She would don a shawl, and with Amelia, faithful as the shadow, close behind, speed away towards houses of sickness. Then best of all, she had the great Dr John at her beck and call. And the very sound of that thunderous voice on the narrow village causeway or in the littered farmyard was a cure in itself.

"He came in ragin' like Scaur Water in spate," the relatives of the patients would say with a kind of pride, "he just bent his head and looked at Willie, bade him be a guid boy and tak' his medicine like a man or else he wad thrash his father with his big stick. And the boy laughed and got better from that hour. And then away he went routin' and ragin' like a bull o'er a dyke. But, oh, man, what a doctor! He wad gi'e a man confidence to rise and dig potatoes - ay, if he were on his very death-bed!"

And no inconsiderable portion of this fame went to the little lady with the silken hair that glinted in the sun like running water. She remained a wonder, but still rather something to be proud of – especially in other neighbouring villages. Kirkton, for instance, possessed no such marvel. Dr John did not bellow there once in six months. It was not worth his while. When anyone was ill in Kirkton, even the Established Kirk minister, he sent his assistant. But he visited old Betty Howden at Quarrelwood himself, and scared her so that though she had been bedridden twenty years, she got up and made him a cup of tea. This could be sworn to by all Quarrelwood, and they also mentioned that Betty, being a poor woman, now took in washing.

But the minister, and Stephen Stiel, and little Janet Ae – what of them?

Of Stephen Stiel first. He appeared at the summer Communion of the following year, and sat in the elders' seat beside Donald Ae. He drank reverently of the cup which Donald passed to him next after the minister, and at the sight there came a long sigh from the congregation.

They knew now that the quarrel was over, the prodigal come home. The only pity was that Bess of Stielstrand was absent. Could it be that she was hardening her heart, because of Annfield, and Donald Ae and little Janet? She was always a proud girl, and pride was the deadly sin of Quarrelwood – at least among those who had the name of money.

But the year after the minister had married "the Englishy leddy" it was Bess of Stielstrand who came down to nurse the young mother after an ordeal during which even Dr John had talked in whispers, and glowered at the hailstones which a December

gale rattled against the panes of the manse window as if he had a crow to pick with Providence.

Last of all, her ministration being over, Bess of Stielstrand went back up the fells wrapped in her cloak, her face beaten by the tempest (and not by that one alone), but calm and sweet and glowing with the inner light which God gives only to His own self-consecrated, suffering, conquering angels upon the earth, of whom the world is not worthy.

THE BLUE EYES OF AILIE

When first I went to Cairn Edward as a medical man on my own account, I had little to do with the district of Glenkells. For one thing, there was a resident doctor there, Dr. Campbell — Ignatius Campbell — and in those days professional boundaries were more strictly observed than they have been in more recent years. But in time, whether owing to the natural spread of my practice, or through some small name which I got in the countryside, owing to a successful treatment of tubercular cases, I found myself oftener and oftener in the Glenkells. And, indeed, ever since I began to be able to keep a stated assistant, it has been my custom to take day about with him on the Glenkells round.

But in what follows I speak of the very early years when I had still little actual connection with the district. The Glenkells folk are always in the habit of referring to themselves as a community apart. They may, indeed, in extreme cases include the rest of the United Kingdom — but, as it were, casually. Thus, 'If the storm continues it will be a sair winter in Glenkells, and the rest o' the country!'

Or when some statesman conspicuously blundered, or a foreign nation involved themselves in superfluous difficulties, you could not go into a farmhouse or traverse the length of the main street of the Clachan without hearing the words: 'The like o' that could never hae happened i' the Glenkells!'

So there arose a proverb which, though of local origin, was not without a certain wider acceptation: 'As conceity as Glenkells,' or, in a more diffuse form:

'Glenkells cocks craw aye croosest an' on a muckler midden!'

But Glenkells wooted little of such slurs, or if it minded at all took them for compliments with a solid and irrefutable foundation. On the other hand, it retorted upon the rest of the world in characteristic fashion, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. As thus: 'Tak' care o' him. He's no to be trustit. His grand-faither cam' frae Borgue!' Or, more allusively: 'Aye, a Nicholson aye needs watchin'. They a' come frae Kirkcudbright, where the jail is!'

One peculiarity of the speech of this country within a country struck me more than all the others — perhaps because it came in the line of my own profession.

More than once an applicant for my services would say, in answer to my question: 'Have you called in the doctor?' 'Oh, no, it has no been so serious as that!' Succeedantly I would find that Dr. Ignatius Campbell had been in attendance for some time, and that I ought to have consulted with him before, as it were, jumping his claim.

Dr. Campbell was a queer, dusty, smoky old man who, when seen abroad, sat low in a kind of basket-phaeton — as it were, on the small of his back, and visited his patients in a kind of dreamy exaltation which many put down to drink. They were wrong. The doctor was something much harder to cure—an habitual opium-eater. Somehow Dr. Campbell had never taken the position in the Glenkells to which his abilities entitled him. He came from the North, and that was against him. More than that, he sent in his bills promptly, and saw that they were settled. Worst of all, he took no interest in imaginary

diseases.

He openly laughed at calomel — which in the Glenkells was looked upon as a kind of blaspheming of the Trinity. But he was a duly certified graduate of Edinburgh like myself. His name was on the Medical List, and only his unfortunate habit and the dreamy idleness engendered by it kept him from making a very considerable name for himself in his profession. I found, for instance, after his death (he left his books, papers, and instruments to me) that he had actually anticipated in his vague theoretical way some of the most applauded discoveries of more recent times, and that he was well versed in all the foreign literature of such subjects as interested him.

But Dr. Ignatius Campbell, with his great pipe, his low-crowned hat, his seedy black clothes with the fluff sticking here and there upon them, was not the man to impress the Glenkells. For in Galloway the minister may go about in fishing-boots, shooting-jacket, and deerstalker if he will — nobody thinks the worse of him for it. The lawyer may look as if he bought his clothes from a slopshop. The country gentleman may wear a suit of tweeds for ten years, till the leather gun-patch on the shoulder threatens to pervade the whole man, back and front. But the doctor, if he would be successful, must perforce dress strictly by rule. Sunday and Saturday he must go buttoned up in his well-fitting surtout. His hat must be glossy, no matter what the weather may be (for myself I always kept a spare one in the box of the gig), and the whole man upon entering a sick-room must bring with him the fragrance of clean linen, good clothes, and personal exactitude. And though naturally a little rebellious at first, I hereby subscribe to the Galloway view of the case.

Nance converted me.

'Is that a clean collar? — no, sir, you don't! Take it off this instant! I think this tie will suit you better. It is a dull day and something light becomes you. I have ironed your other hat. See that you put it on! Let me look at your cuffs. Mind that you turn down your trousers before you come in sight of the house. John' (this to my driver), 'see that Dr. McQuhirr turns down his trousers and puts on his hat right side first. There is a dint at the back that I cannot quite get out!'

It is no wonder that I succeeded in Galloway, having such a — I mean being endowed with such professional talents!

I had not, however, been long in Glenkells before I found out that there was another medical adviser on the scene — a kind of Brownie who did Dr. Campbell's work while he slept or dreamed his life away over his pipe and his coloured diagrams, whose very name was never mentioned, to me at least — perhaps from some idea that as an orthodox professional man I might resent the Brownie's intrusion.

But matters came to a head one day when I found the bottle of medicine I had sent up from the Cairn Edward apothecary standing untouched on the mantelpiece, while another and wholly unlicensed phial stood at the bed-head with a glass beside it, in which lingered a few drops of something which I knew well that I had not prescribed.

'What is this?' I demanded. 'Why have you not administered the medicine I sent you?'

The woman put her apron to her lips in some embarrassment.

'Oh, doctor — ye see the way o't was this,' she

said. 'Jeems was ta'en that bad in the nicht that I had to caa' in — a neebour o' oors — an' he brocht this wi' him.'

I lifted my hat.

'Good morning, Mrs. Landsborough,' I said, with immense dignity; 'I am sorry that I must retire from the case. It is impossible for me to go on if you disregard my instructions in that manner. No doubt Dr. Campbell.'

The good woman lifted up her hands in amazement and appeal. Even Jeems turned on his bed in quick alarm.

"Deed, Dr. Ma Whurr!' she cried, 'it wasna Dr. Campbell ava. We wadna think on sic a thing.'

'Your faither's son will never gang oot o' a Mac-Landsborough's hoose in anger, surely?' said Jeems, making the final Galloway appeal to the clan spirit.

This was conjuring with a name I could not disavow, and strongly against my first intentions I continued to attend the case. Jeems got rapidly better, and my bottle diminished steadily day by day. But whether it went down Jeems's throat or mended the health of the back of the grate, it was better, perhaps, that I did not inquire too closely. On my way home I considered my own prescription, and recalled the ingredients which by taste and smell I discovered in the intruding bottle.

'I am not sure but what — well, it might have been better. I wonder who the man is?' This was as much as I could be brought to admit in those days, even to myself. The doctor who in the first years of his practice does not think more of the sacredness of his diagnosis than of his married wife and all his family unto cousins six times removed, is not fit to be trusted — not so much as with the administering

of one Beecham's pill.

Yet I own the matter troubled me. I had a rival who — no, he did not understand more of the case than myself. But all the same, I wanted to find him out— in the interests of the Medical Register.

But the riddle was resolved one day about a week afterwards in a rather remarkable manner. I was proceeding up the long main street of the Clachan, looking for a house in which Dr. Campbell (with whom of late I had grown strangely intimate) had told me that he would be found at a certain hour.

As I went I noticed, what I had never seen before, a little house, white and clean without, the creepers clambering all over it. This agreed, so far, with the doctor's description. I turned aside and went up two or three carefully reddened steps. A brass knocker blinked in the evening sunshine. I lifted it and knocked.

'Is the doctor in?' I said to a tall gaunt woman who opened the door an inch or two. As it was I could only see a lenticular section of her person, so that in describing her I draw upon later impressions. She hesitated a second or two, and then, rather grudgingly as I thought, opened the door.

'Come in,' she said.

With no more greeting than that she ushered me into a small room crowded with books and apparatus. The table held a curious microscope, evidently home-made in most of its fittings. Pieces of mechanism, the purpose of which I could not even guess, were strewn about the floor. Castings were gripped angle-wise in vices, and at the end of an ordinary carpenter's bench stood a small blacksmith's furnace, with bellows and anvil all complete. In the recess, half hidden by a screen, I

could catch a glimpse of a lathe. There was no carpet on the floor.

The door opened and a small spare man stood before me, the deprecation of an offending dog in his beautiful brown eyes. He did not speak or offer to shake hands, but only stood shyly looking up at me. It was some time before I could find words. Nance often tells me that I need a push behind to enable me to take the lead in any conversation — except with herself, that is, and then I never get a chance.

'I beg your pardon, doctor,' said I, 'I was seeking my friend Campbell. I did not know you had settled amongst us, or I should have been to call on you before this.'

I held out my hand cordially, for the man appealed to me somehow. But he did not seem to notice it.

'No, not 'doctor,'' he said, speaking in a quick agitated way. 'Mister — Roger is my name.'

'I beg your pardon, I am sure,' I stammered; 'in that case I do not know how to excuse my intrusion. I asked for the doctor, meaning Dr. Campbell, and your servant.'

'My mother, sir!'

There was pride as well as challenge in the brown eyes now, and I found myself liking the young man better than ever.

'I beg your pardon — Mrs. Roger showed me in by mistake, I fear.'

'It was no mistake — I am sometimes called so in this place, though not by my own will; I have no right to the title!'

'Well,' I said, as I looked round the room, 'won't you shake hands with me? You don't know what a pleasure it is to meet a man of science, as it is

evident you are, here in these forlorn uplands!'

'Will you pardon me a moment till I inform you exactly of my status?' he said, 'and when you clearly understand, if you still wish to shake my hand — well, with all my heart.'

He stood silent a moment, and then, suddenly recollecting himself, 'Will you not sit down?' he said. 'Pray forgive my discourtesy.'

I sat down, displacing as I did so a box of tools which had been planted on the green rep of the easy-chair cover.

'You may well be astonished that I wish to speak to you, Dr. McQuhirr,' he said, beginning restlessly to pace the room, mechanically avoiding the various obstacles on the floor as he did so; 'but I have long wished to put myself right with a member of the profession, and now that chance has thrown us together, I feel that I must speak.'

'But there is Dr. Campbell— surely it cannot be that two men of such kindred tastes, in a small place like this, should not know each other!'

He flushed painfully, and turning to a stand near the window, played with the flywheel of a small model, turning it back and forward with his finger.

'Dr. Campbell is the victim of a most unfortunate prejudice,' he murmured softly, and for a space said no more. It was so still in the room that through the quiet I could hear the tall eight-day clock ticking half-way up the stairs.

He resumed his narrative and his pacing to and fro at the same moment. 'I am,' he went on, 'at heart of your profession. I have attended all the classes and earned the encomiums of my professors in the hospitals. I stood fairly well in the earlier written examinations, but at my first oral I broke down

completely — a kind of aphasia came over me. My brain reeled, a dreadful shuddering took hold of my soul, and I fell into a dead faint. For months they feared for my reason, and though ultimately I recovered and completed my course of study, I was never able to sit down at an examination-table again. After my father's death my mother settled here, and gradually it has come about that in any emergency I have been asked to visit and prescribe for a patient. I believe the poor people call me 'doctor' among themselves, but I have never either countenanced the title, or on any occasion failed to rebuke the user. Neither have I ever accepted fee or reward, whether for advice or medicine!'

I held out my hand.

'I care not a brass farthing about professional etiquette,' said I; 'it is my opinion that you are doing a noble work. And I know of one case, at least, where your diagnosis was better than mine.'

More I could not say. He flushed redly and took my hand, shaking it warmly. Then all at once he dropped the somewhat strained elevation of manner in which he had told his story, and began to speak with the innocent confidence and unreserve of a child. He was obviously much pleased at my inferred compliment.

'Ah!' he said, 'I know what you mean. But then, you see, you did not know James MacLandsborough's life history. He was my father's gardener. I knew his record and the record of his father before him. It was nothing but an old complaint, for which I had treated him over and over again — working, that is, on the basis of a recent chill. In your place and with your data I should have done what you did. In fact, I admired your treatment

greatly.'

We talked a long while, so long, indeed, that I forgot all about Dr. Campbell, and it was dusk before I found myself at Mr. Roger's door saying 'Good-night.'

'If I might venture to say so,' he stammered, holding my hand a moment in his quick nervous grasp, 'I would advise you not to mention your visit here to your friend, Dr. Campbell.'

'I am afraid I must,' I replied; 'I had an appointment with him which I have unfortunately forgotten in the interest of our talk!'

'Then I much fear that it is not 'Good-night' but 'Good-bye' between us!' he murmured sadly, and went within.

And even as he had prophesied so it was.

***

'Sir,' said Dr. Campbell, 'I shall be sorry to low your society, but you must choose between that house and mine. I have special and family reasons why I cannot be intimate with any visitor to Mr. ah, Roger!'

I had found the doctor lying on his couch, as a custom, his curious Oriental tray beside him, and an acrid tang in the air; but at my first words about my visit he shook off his dreamy abstraction and sat up.

'To tell you the truth, Campbell,' I said as calmly as possible, for, of course, I could not allow any one (except Nance) to dictate to me, 'I was singularly interested in the young man, and — he told his tale, as it seemed to me, quite frankly. If I am not to call upon him, I must ask you as to your reasons for a request so singular.'

'It is not a request, McQuhirr,' said the doctor, passing his hand across his brow as if to clear away moisture. 'It is only a little information I give you for your guidance. If you wish to visit this young man — well, I am deeply grieved, but I cannot receive you here, or have any intercourse with you professionally.'

'That is saying too much or too little,' I replied; 'you must tell me your reasons.'

Then he hesitated, looking from side to side in a semi-dazed way.

'I would rather not — they are family reasons!' he stammered, as he spoke.

'There is such a thing as the seal of the profession,' I reminded him.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I will tell you. That young man is my nephew, the son of my elder brother. His name is not Roger, but Roger Campbell. His mother was my poor brother's housekeeper. He married her some time after his first wife's death. This boy was their child, and, like a cuckoo in the nest, he tried from the first to oust his elder brother — the child of the dead woman. Indeed, but for my interference his mother and he would have done it between them; for my brother was latterly wholly in their hands.

'Finally this lad went to college, and coming here one summer after the breaking up of the classes he must needs fall in love with Ailie — my daughter, that is. What? — You never knew that I had a daughter! Ah, Alec, I was not always the man you see me—I too have had ambitions. But after — well, what use is there to speak of it? At any rate, young Roger Campbell fell in love with my Ailie, and she, I suppose, liked it well enough, but like a sensible girl gave him no immediate answer. Then after that

came his half-brother, who was heir to the little property on Loch Aweside, and he too fell in love with Ailie. There was no girl like her in all the Glen of Kells; and as for him, he was a tall, handsome, fair lad, not crowled and misshapen like this one. Well, Ailie and he fell in love, and then Roger's mother moved heaven and earth to disinherit Archie. It was for this cause that I went up to Inchtaggart and watched, my brother during the last weeks of his life. The woman fought like a wild cat for her son, but I and Archie watched in turns. It was I who found the will by which Archie inherited all. In three months Ailie and he were married. Roger Campbell failed in his examinations the same year, and the next mother and son came back here to her native village to live on their savings.

'The mere choice of this place showed their spite against me, but that is not the worst. Ever since that day they have devoted themselves to discrediting me in my profession. And you, who know these people, know to what an extent they have succeeded. My practice has shrunk to nothing — almost. Even the patients I have, when they do call me in, send secretly for my enemy before my feet are cold off the doorstep. Yet I have no redress, for I have never been able to bring a case of taking fees home to him. Ah! if only I could!'

Dr. Ignatius fell back exhausted, for towards the last he had been talking with a vehemence that shook the casements and set the prisms of the little old chandelier a-tingling.

'And that is why I say you must choose between us,' he said. 'Is it not enough? Have I asked too much?'

'It is enough for me,' I said; 'I will do as you wish!'

Now I did not see anything in his story very much against the young man; but, after all, the lad was nothing to me, and I had known Dr. Ignatius a long time.

So I asked him how it came that the young man was called Roger and not Campbell.

'Oh!' he said, 'that is the one piece of decent feeling he has shown in the whole affair. He called himself Campbell Roger when he came here. You are the only person who knows that he is my nephew.'

***

I was glad afterwards that I had made him the promise he asked for. I never saw him in life again. Dr. Ignatius Campbell died two days after, being found dead in bed with his tiny pipe clutched in his hand. I went up that same day, and in conjunction with Dr. John Thoburn Brown of Drumfern, found that our colleague had long suffered from an acute form of heart disease, and that it was wonderful how he had survived so long.

The body was lying at the time in the room where he died. The maid-servant had gone to stay with relatives in the village, not being willing to remain all night in the house alone; for which, all things considered, I did not greatly blame her. I asked if there was anything I could do, but was informed that all arrangements for the funeral had been made. It was to be on the Friday, two days after.

I drove up the glen early that morning, and found a tall young man in the house, opening drawers and rummaging among papers. I understood at once that this was Mr. Archibald Campbell of Inchtaggart. I greeted him by that name, and he responded heartily enough.

'You are Dr. McQuhirr,' he said; 'my father-in-law often spoke about you and how kind you were to him. You know that he has left all his books, papers, and scientific apparatus to you?'

'I did not know,' I said; 'that is as unexpected as it is undeserved, and I hope you will act precisely as if such a bequest had not existed. You must take all that either you or your wife would care to possess.'

'Oh!' he cried lightly, 'Ailie could not come. She has been ill lately, and as for me, I would not touch one of the beastly things with a ten-foot pole. Come into the garden and have a smoke.'

There Mr. Archibald Campbell told me that he had arranged for a sale of the doctor's house and all his effects as soon as possible.

'Better to have it over,' he said, 'so you had as well bring up a conveyance and cart off all the scientific rubbish you care about. I want all settled up and done with within the month.'

He departed the night after the funeral, leaving the funeral expenses unpaid. He was a hasty though well-meaning young man, and no doubt he forgot. When I came up on the Monday of the week following, I discovered that the account had been paid.

***

After I had made my selection of books and instruments, besides taking all the manuscripts (watched from room to room by the Drumfern lawyer's sharp eye), I strolled out, and my steps turned involuntarily towards the little house covered with creepers where I had seen the young man Roger. I felt that death had absolved me from my promise, and with a quick resolve I turned aside.

The same woman opened the door an inch or two. I lifted my hat and asked if her son was in.

She held the door open for me without speaking a word and ushered me into the model-strewn little parlour. I cast my eyes about. On the table lay the discharged account for the funeral expenses of Dr. Ignatius Campbell!

In another moment the door opened and the young man came in, paler than before, and with the slight halt in his gait exaggerated.

'How do you do, Mr. Campbell?' I said quietly, holding out my hand.

He gave back a step, almost as if I had struck him. Then he smiled wanly. 'Ah! he told you. I expected he would; and yet you have come?' He spoke slowly, the words coming in jerks.

I held out my hand and said heartily: 'Of course I came.'

I did not think it necessary to tell him anything about my agreement with Dr. Campbell. He, on his part, had quietly possessed himself of John Ewart's bill for the funeral expenses. We had a long talk, and I stayed so late that Nance had begun to get anxious about me before I arrived home. But not one word, either in justification of himself or of accusation against his uncle, did he utter, though he must have known well enough what his uncle had said of him.

Nor was it till a couple of months afterwards that Roger Campbell adverted again to the subject. I had been to the churchyard to look at the headstone which had been erected, as I knew, at his expense. He had asked me to write the inscription for it, and I had done so.

Coming home, he had to stop several times on the hill to take breath. When we got to the door he said:

'I have but one thing to pray for now, Dr. McQuhirr, and that is that I may outlive my mother. Give me your best skill and help me to do that.'

His prayer was answered. He lived just two days after his mother. And I was with him most of the time, while Nance stayed with my people at Drumquhat. It was a beautiful Sabbath evening, and the kirk folk were just coming home. Most who suffer from his particular form of phthisis imagine themselves to be getting better to the very last, but he knew too much to have any illusions. I had put the pillows behind him, and he was sitting up making kindly comment on the people as they passed by, Bible in hand. He stopped suddenly and looked at me.

'Doctor,' he said, 'what my uncle told you about me never made any difference to you?'

'No,' I said, rather shamefacedly, 'no difference at all!'

'No,' he went on, meditatively, 'no difference. Well, I want you to burn two documents for me, lest they fall into the wrong hands — as they might before these good folk go back kirkward again.'

He directed me with his finger, at the same time handing me a key he wore upon his watchchain.

'Even my poor mother up there,' he said, pointing to the room above, 'has never set eyes on what I am going to show you. It is weak of me; I ought not to do it, doctor, but I will not deny that it is some comfort to set myself right with one human soul before I go.'

I took out of a little drawer in a bureau a miniature, a bundle of letters, and a broadly folded legal-looking document.

I offered them to Roger, but he waved them away.

'I do not want to look upon them — they are here!'

He touched his forehead. 'And one of them is here.' He laid his hand on his heart with that freedom of gesture which often comes to the dying, especially to those who have repressed themselves all their lives.

I looked down at the miniature and saw the picture of a girl, very pretty, beautiful indeed, but with that width between the eyes which, in fair women, gives a double look.

'Ailie, my brother's wife!' he said, in answer to my glance. 'These are her letters. Open them one by one and burn them.'

I did as he bade me, throwing my eyes out of focus so that I might not read a word. But out of one fluttered a pressed flower. It was fixed on a card with a little lock of yellow hair arranged about it for a frame, fresh and crisp. And as I picked it up I could not help catching the prettily printed words:

'TO DARLING ROGER, FROM HIS OWN AILIE.'

There was also a date.

'Let me look at that!' he said quickly. I gave it to him. He looked at the flower — a quick painful glance, but as he handed me back the card he laughed a little.

'It is a 'Forget-me-not,'' he said. Then in a musing tone he added: 'Well, Ailie, I never have.'

So one by one the letters were burnt up, till only a black pile of ashes remained, in ludicrous contrast to the closely packed bundle I had taken from the drawer.

'Now burn the ribbon that kept them together, and look at the other paper.'

I unfolded it. It was a will in holograph, the characters clear and strong, signed by Archibald Ruthven Campbell, of Inchtaggart, Argyleshire, devising all his estate and property to his son Roger,

with only a bequest in money to his elder son!

I was dazed as I looked through it, and my lips framed a question. The young man smiled.

'My father's last will,' he said, 'dated a month before his death. She never knew it.' (Again he indicated the upper room where his mother's body lay.) 'They never knew it.' (He looked at the girl's picture as it smiled up from the table where I had laid it.) 'My brother Archie succeeded on a will older by twenty years. But when I lost Ailie, I lost all. Why should she marry a failure? Besides, I truly believe that she loves my brother, at least as well as ever she loved me. It is her nature. That she is infinitely happier with him, I know.'

'Then you were the heir all the time and never told it — not to any one!' I cried, getting up on my feet. He motioned me towards the grate again.

'Burn it,' he said, 'I have had a moment of weakness. It is over. I ought to have been consistent and not told even you. No, let the picture lie. I think it does me good. God bless you, Alec! Now, good-night; go home to your Nance.'

***

He died the next forenoon while I was still on my rounds. And when I went in to look at him, the picture had disappeared. I questioned the old crone who had watched his last moments and afterwards prepared him for burial.

'He had something in his hand,' she answered, 'but I couldna steer it. His fingers grippit it like a smith's vice.'

I looked, and there from between the clenched fingers of the dead right hand the eyes of Ailie Campbell smiled out at me — blue and false as her

own Forget-me-not.

THE TREASURE OF THE FAAS

Up there on the moors man walks like an insect immediately under the eye of God – an Old Testament God sometimes, heralded by the thunder-clouds, heavily charioting across the landscape, and shadowing but not veiling the face. Then, say the simple folk, "God is angry." And their hearts supply each of them with causes sufficient for many angers. They know the warning is for themselves, and some better themselves, while others forget and go on. But none doubt.

When the harvest is housed, dry and wind-rustled, God is well pleased. When it rots in the November furrow, the water lapping about the roots, and the stalks snapping off close to the black ice, God's face is turned away. They see His back parts, even as did Moses, for He is angry. This is the simple faith of the hill folk.

When the snow lies up there, not in a level tablecloth, but accidented; when the bogs out of which the peats of last year have been dug show black brows; when the bare heather straggles through the white carpeting, and little pools of blackness, which have not yet been frozen, grow dangerous because ewes will persist in going down to drink there, then is the anger fiercest. And that was Longformacus Moor when old Ernie Burton set his face northward across it. Six long miles of it there was before he could reach the rich country of rolling woodland, dotted with white farms set within cry of each other, which was his promised land.

That day old Ernie was on barren ground, and

even as he looked back, he shook off the snow from his locks with a Biblical gesture, for a memorial against them.

They had turned him from their doors that December day. They gave no reason. Only, they "did not want him aboot the bit." Some stealing by vague gipsies, the rumour of "ill deeds done by gaun folk" closed the hearts of these people on the Berwickshire foot-hills against such as Ernie.

"Can ye not see the road to the poorhouse?" they asked him, and that struck him to the heart. He broke out in anger upon them, and cursed bien farmers standing on their own doorsteps - which sent them in, approving their caution in refusing shelter to blasphemers.

At last old Ernie, feeling himself suspected and hated, grew ready to do something to deserve such hatred. There was that red-faced woman with the cotton wool in her ears - she threatened him with the gaol if he set foot within her yard, and that long man with the scraggy throat — him of the poorhouse. Ernie thought of what he would like to do to them.

And his thoughts were not good to think up there alone. Then he came upon something which made him rub his eyes.

A girl sat on a knoll by the wayside, where the drove-road cut smoothly through the heather in whiplash loops of whiteness. She was eating a turnip, and she held out a piece between finger and thumb towards the old man.

"Have some!" she cried, showing her white teeth in a smile. He had come through much that day, this bent old Ernie. And it seemed now that she mocked him. Anger rose hot within him, and he

broke out against her. She sat and ate on calmly. When he had emptied himself of his spleen against the world, when he had venged himself for the slights of the comfortable, for all the bitterness of these many refusals, he stood before her weak and trembling. His wrath had passed from him in words. He was only a poor, foolish, hungry old man. He burst into feeble tears, trembling, partly with despite at his own powerlessness, partly in sorrow to think that he was still alive.

The girl hopped down and came quickly to him. She had about her shoulders a red cloak, and it made a warm patch upon the greying twilight of the moor, already overcasting under the early gloom of afternoon.

"I am Estella Lee," she said. "I am not of the farm-dwellers back yonder. I am one of your folk."

Ernie Burton looked at the mantling health, the well-shod feet, the grey gown, the neck ribbon, and the warm red of the shawl. He shook his head. He was too beaten down to resent being made a fool of. Besides his anger had sucked away like water spilt on sand.

"Come with me," said the girl, "yonder in the 'hops' where Lammermuir bends like that" (she set her palms together in the shape called in Scotland "gowpen"), "look - yonder - what do you see?"

The old man held a hand long to his brows, peering across the moor. But the snow blinded him. Also his eyes were old.

"I see nothing," he said dully.

"Then," cried the girl who had called herself Estella, "I will see for you. Yonder is a little tuft of trees. Even I can see only the feathery tops of them. But above, there is a little blue smoke, so blue and

lightsome that it never came from any farm that ever was built. Come, and I will take you there!"

"Where gat you that?" said the old man, looking at the turnip.

"In the field down yonder!"

"Your father's field?"

"God forbid!" said the girl, laughing. "I took it because I wanted it. The farmer would never miss it."

The old man was reassured and they set out.

Sometimes they went a long way without speaking. Sometimes she held out her hand to help Ernie to cross the far-stretching gash of a moss-hag, running halfway across the moor. As they went on the blue smoke rose higher into the air, still and straight, no wind troubling it. They descended little by little, but the tops of the trees remained glamorous and hazy — a thin purple network of birchen twigs crowned by the deep green umbrella of a huge pine.

Then came a little slope, the heather short upon it, matted and elastic. Estella lent Ernie a hand. He was not out of breath, but his limbs moved stiffly. Often he leaned on his staff and looked. Till at last beneath him lay a little hidden glade, brushwood of hazel and birch feathering it round, and above, the tall Scotch fir with its roots in the rock and its crown of green plumes among the winds of the open moor.

Old Ernie looked down. The smoke was rising from a gipsy fire on a black circle from which the snow had been carefully removed. Three or four caravans, red-blinded, comfortable in appearance, stood about at various angles. There was a constant stir of men and women about the fire. Black shadows blocked one or other of the open doors.

From the heather all about came a murmur of children's voices, keen and high. They were gathering heather, sticks, and brush-wood for the fire.

The girl gave the old man her hand to help him down, and he descended with short stiff steps, scarce feeling his legs beneath him. A tall man came towards them out of the gloom. The girl went rapidly up to him and spoke for a moment low in his ear. Then the man held out his hand to Ernie Burton, and said gravely, "You are welcome!"

They took him into the tent which was reared under the great fir. They laid him a couch of twigs, covered with skins. They covered him with warm stuffed coverlids smelling of birds' feathers. They brought a warm hearthstone for his feet, wrapping it about in rags. They mixed hot drinks for him, and stood around smiling while Estella, kneeling, made him drink.

Then after half-an-hour's sleep, when he was sufficiently recovered to sit up, they brought him stew of an unknown savouriness in which unexpected things swam in a kind of rich medium, half soup, half batter - game and fish and meat — but they all tasted the same to Ernie.

And after eating he blessed them, rejoicing in the good fortune.

"Thanks be!" he cried, "I owe this to my ain kin — and to no slate-roofed farmer or tarry herd!"

"You are a wanderer?" said the dark gipsy, looking keenly at the old man who stood shivering a little with the nervelessness of age.

"I am the last of the Burtons," said Ernie.

The tall dark man seemed to look him through.

"I am a Lee," he said slowly, "but my mother was

a Burton!"

"She would be my sister Esther," said Ernie. "Black Peter Lee married her out of my father's tan when she was fortune-telling at Earlstoun tryst! Ah, an old story now — an old, old story."

"Little older than I be," said the gipsy "She was a good mother to me, your sister, and for her sake you are welcome to my tent when it is set up, and to my house when we take the garrons from the shafts, and draw within four walls."

"What walls?" said the old man suspiciously, "such was not the wont of the Lees my time — nor of Esther, my sister."

"We have other winter quarters," said Gipsy Lee shortly, "to-morrow we set forward into Galloway. At the Brig-o'-Dee we have three rented houses where we weave baskets. Are you still fit for the plaiting of the willow wand?"

The old man held up two bony hands and smiled for the first time. "Once," he said "there were no better. But age and chill have stiffened the lacing twist that gives the spring. But bide ye, bide ye, Peter Lee; maybe auld Ernie will show you yet!"

And he laughed a little dry laugh, like the rattling of the wind among the frozen corn he had passed that morning before he mounted the fells.

* * * * *

The Lees never thought of the charge they had assumed. Black Peter, son of Black Peter, understood the claims of blood. Estella had found his mother's brother. Therefore he would take bite and sup with them - from now till the day of his death. There would be no grudging, no black looks

on days of hunger. They had made him one of themselves, and no one thought more about the matter. Estella had brought him. Peter had accepted him. Old Ernie Burton had become the patriarch of the Lees, and would in a little while be known by their name.

But this was not Ernie's own feeling. He had been turned from too many doorsteps, and when at last he was settled in the lower-most of the three whitewashed, thatched cottages which sheltered the clan, with the Dee flowing sullen and sombre under the winter sky at his elbow, he began to think out things in his slow old man's fashion.

For Ernie had a secret. Ernie was rich - rather he could be rich if he would, and when he would. Yet he had never desired aught for himself but the open face of the sky and shelter for the night. What else counted? Had not one of his ancestors, hanged for blasphemy at Dumfries, declared that he knew no God but salt, meal, and water. Ernie could have added, "And the open sky!"

Still it troubled Ernie now in the night to know what he would do with his treasure. Estella, who had found him, ought to have it. But he must be sure that it would not go to any farm-town dweller, who would marry her for her money and then shut her up among the barns and byres of respectability.

But the solution would not come to Ernie alone. So one day when the tribe were away on a distant expedition he found himself alone with Estella. She brought him his broth and sat by him gossiping while he ate it.

Then Ernie spoke to the gipsy girl, cunningly, with wrigglings of his old body and twitchings of his hoary eyelashes.

"If you were rich, Estella, what would you do?"

"Rich, Ernie, how could I be rich? Was ever a gipsy rich?"

"Maybe, maybe," he answered cunningly. "Would ye spend the money in foolishness, Estella? Would you marry a flat-faced farmer and rear his brood?"

But Ernie had kindled a spark. Estella was thinking.

"I would give my father new tents and caravans," she said. "I would buy these houses for the gipsy folk. They are good houses, near the moorland and the waterside."

The old man thrust his face nearer to Estella's.

"But suppose," he whispered, "after you had done that and more, that there was so much left ye could not tell the difference by a penny piece – what then – what would you do for yourself?"

"For myself — for myself," said Estella, "why, what could I do but abide with my father?"

"To marry Romney there, or Mickle George? Surely never, lassie, surely never! The rich are bound to do more than that with their riches. What for yourself, Estella? Tell Ernie, auld Ernie! And maybe - maybe – we'll see, ay, we'll see!"

He spoke with a kind of whimpering energy, as if he would drag the truth out by main force.

"I might go away to far lands," said the girl in a dreamy voice. "I might get learning - knowledge - not our learning, but that of the Gorgios. There is a country where the gipsy plays his music before kings — where there are many of us that we are a nation. So said the young lad who abode with us at the Standing Stones of Borgue. I would go there. I would learn and then — and then - "

"Then what?"

"The world should listen to the gipsy."

She sang a verse of a gipsy lament, and her voice rang out full, sweet, and caressing.

"A great lady once told me," she said, "that there were notes in my voice which the finest singers would be glad to possess!"

"Ah," said Ernie, "and would you sing before kings?"

"I do not know," said Estella, "I might. I should try."

"And learning would do that? You would be great – great – great. Yonder scum in their slated houses would be as dust under your feet. They would hear of Estella the Gipsy and eat out their hearts for envy?"

Then old Ernie rose suddenly to his feet, and, with his stiff limbs at strange angles, and snapping his fingers with uncouth gestures, he danced and laughed.

"Then you shall, hinnie, you shall! Estella shall put them under her feet. Ernie will humble them yet. He will down them the creeshy farmer carles with their sods o' ploughmen, the herd hiplocks, the thickhead toon magistrates. Ha, ha, auld Ernie Burton that they scorned will humble them a'!"

But Estella soothed him, believing in her heart that the old man had parted with his wits.

But Ernie was as far from jesting as from madness. One day he took Estella a long journey, right to the farthest end of the parish. They had one of the better beasts and the lightest cart. Estella drove over wide moors, beside rushing burns, through the white streets of villages, out again along the shores of lochs till they came to a little broken wall of garden, where once had been a cottage. The

beams had been burned for firewood. The walls had crumbled. Only a "gean" tree, and a wild matted growth of bramble marked the little washed site.

Ernie looked keenly about as if seeking something. A flat stone much covered with moss gave forth a dull sound under the iron point of Ernie's "clickie."

He laughed with a certain scorn, as he continued to tap it, scrabbling among the moss with his stick.

"They might have seen, but they saw not," he said, waving his hands about, pointing to this farm and that other. "It was on their lands – for generations and generations — the treasure of the Faas - of him that was the gaberlunzie King's comrade, our lovit John Faa, so the King called him. There's nae richt Faas now. Ernie's mother was the last and she brought with her the secret of the hearthstane by the Brig of Crae!"

"But," said the girl, laying her hand on his arm, "there is nothing there. I can see underneath — only a hole full of nettles."

"Ay, ay," cackled Ernie, "emptiness there. But Ernie has it safe — all in a bank, some here and more there — none too much anywhere. And, bairn, it is for you — all for you, to humble the house-dwellers, and to make their porridge faces green with envy, when they hear that wee Estella Lee is singing before kings."

* * * * *

And it came to pass even as he had said. Old Ernie was a cunning man, and with great caution he sought out in neighbouring towns till at Newton Stewart he found a lawyer kindly to the gipsy folk,

who for the sake of the Lees and the Burtons and the Baillies, undertook to care for the treasure of the Faas, and to make it breed other moneys surely and wisely. And Estella went away to a great city in Hungary and afterwards to Vienna and other places, getting learning, and writing letters home to an old man in the next house to the Brig of Dee — who in the intervals of chuckling cursed the farmers as they drove by to Monday market, and looked forward to the day when Estella Lee should put them under her feet.

And one day there came a letter.

"I, Estella Lee, have sung before a great king, an emperor, a wise old man, and when I had ended, they gave me the prize, and it was a crown of common laurel. But I had to kneel down and the emperor put it upon my head with his own hands."

Then old Ernie called to the men of the Lees and of the Baillies to carry him out and set him down in front of the door. It was a Fair Monday, and hundreds passed, farmers and village-dwellers and herds from the hill. And as they passed the bridge old Ernie cried the news, mocking at them and their gigs and gentility.

"Ye are but dirt aneath Estella's feet," he cried. "She has been crowned by

An emperor! On wi' ye to the mart and sell nowt-beasts. That's your life and a' ye are good for!"

He waved the letter at them and laughed till they were afraid, and called him mad, taking care, however, to pass by on the other side. The Lees went also to the fair, for it was a great harvest day for their kind, but they left bread and ale by his side on a bench.

And when they came back they found the old

man sitting there with Estella's letter in his fingers, and the refreshment untouched.

Then they were content and said, "He has grown quieter. He will be weary with crying all the day!"

But when they looked closer, he was smiling, as it were in his sleep, and as if content. And so he might well be. For his heart's desire was attained, and in the very act of tasting the sweetness of it he was dead.

"ROSEMARY — THAT'S FOR REMEMBRANCE"

The Morris Moores had just had their first – no, not quarrel – tiff. Harry was in his study pulling down books he did not want and piling them up on his table. He selected a row of note-books bearing titles, "The Brisons and the Italian Valleys." He got out extensive white-blotched Swiss survey maps, and files of the little "Ladin" paper printed at Samaaden. He had got all this up thoroughly on his last journey, and now was the time to dip deep into the pile of printed and annotated "stuff." It would help him to forget anything so absolutely silly as a little wife upstairs in her room, the tears of temper still wet on her cheeks, and employing her small white teeth in reducing to "waste" a soaked lace pocket-handkerchief.

Henry Morris Moore felt himself very superior. He was calm, cold, judicial, and above what he called "infantile tempers." Men feel like that for at least twenty minutes after a quarrel. They approve themselves, and go over in their minds the points they scored. The logical justice and complete common-sense of their position present themselves in ever stronger lights. If this only lasted (and if the woman kept away) man would rule the world. But as it is – well, let bus see.

Upstairs Clara wept and fretted. No logic in that little white room with the brass bolt pushed as far as it will go. Clara had hurt her finger in doing it, but that was no matter – a satisfaction rather.

To think, only to think - scarcely ten months married and it had come to this! Ah, if only she had

known! Were all men so cruel, so bitter? Did nobody care for her? She would go to her mother. No (Clare's reflection came refreshingly cool like a splash of cold water) no-o-o-well, not quite that! For one thing she knew her mother, and Mrs Murray Linklater would “pack her back to her husband.” Clare heard her mother speak these very words.

But - it was over. So much was fixed. Never, never would there be “glad confident morning again.” Henry had settled that, when he spoke those words - those cruel dividing words. He had said - had said - Well, Clara could not quite remember. But at anyrate, it was over. She could never forgive him - for saying that - that about dear Aunt Lætitia - Oh yes, she remembered - that he could never get her a single night to himself without some stalking old she-patriarch with a reticule coming in to spoil everything

Clara would not have her family spoken against - not by a score of Henry Moores. She had been educated carefully in the Murray Linklater cult, and no Vere de Vere could be prouder of her name.

Clara in her bolted bedroom was getting out her blotting book and pad to write to her poor wronged aunt. She was going to ask a refuge for the few remaining days of a blasted life. Yes, that was the adjective she was using, and (strange coincidence!) the villain below stairs was also using it, though in perhaps a more colloquial sense. He had just knocked over a whole pile of the neat note-books in which he stored his literary material, and was passing off his own clumsiness in invective against inanimate things. This was *his* man's way of biting his handkerchief.

But the strong arm of coincidence reached yet

farther.

Stumbling and grumbling Harry gathered up the fruit of his experiences, and began storing them in the three-cornered shelves where he kept such things for reference. One remained in his hand - a small pocket notebook, with rounded corners which served to carry about for the shortest personal jottings. Usually it lay among his keys on the dressing-table, and when he shaved he was in the habit of putting down a word or two - oh, as brief and bald as possible.

But this particular one happened to be his diary of two years ago, and he stood there with one hand mechanically pushing the note-books into their places, while his eyes, entangled by what he read, transported him to the ragged carpet, the peremptorily furnished lodgings, the solitary walks hands deep in pockets, overcoat collar up, cap pulled low, of the days when first - But stay, what was Clara doing?

She had got out her blotting-book from under "The Songs of the North." The new maid (very hard on the temper of young wives are new maids as a class) had jammed it into the rack, bending the corners. And so, when at last Clara had released it, lo! a cascade of solidly built volumes in red basil blattered to the ground. She had just time to spring back. For the volumes had solid brass locks all opened with the same little gold key. She wore it about her neck, and no one in the world, not even Harry, had ever been allowed to peep within. Indeed, since she was married she had not often done so herself. But now - now that the happiness of her life had foundered beneath her, she would go back - it might be all the pleasure (*sob*) that was left her -

thus to live over a happy past. (*A time.*)

* * * * *

Watkins, the Moores' new maid, experienced some surprise (and not unnaturally) when, in the exercise of her vocation, she was carrying a copper jug of hot water to Mrs Moore's dressing-room before sounding the first gong, she observed her master and mistress approach each other from opposite ends of the corridor, both intently reading, he in a small black book, she in one large, fat, and red.

A still poorer opinion had Sarah Watkins of her new place, when she saw the readers look up simultaneously, suddenly and guiltily close their books, turn on their several heels, and so *exit*.

"And them *sez* as what they has only been married ten months!" she meditated. "Well - we'll see what's to come of this!"

But Sarah, a diligent student of penny fiction, knew beforehand, and was prepared to second her master or her mistress in struggle for freedom - as she said, "according."

* * * * *

The family dinner that night was distinguished by extreme correctness of demeanour and an etiquette almost Spanish in its stateliness. Neither Harry nor Clara put their elbows on the table or their chins on their palms, as was their wont when alone. There was the gloom of funeral baked meats even upon Clara's favourite apples-and-cream. Harry dined as one in the condemned cell who hears the thudding of scaffold hammers in the prison yard.

But as to politeness - they were nothing, if not polite - that is, when Watkins was in the room. But Watkins knew, and stayed a moment on the mat, listening to the silence that dropped like a pall. She entered, smiling to herself, knowing (oh, experienced Watkins!) that she would find Clara looking sideways at the pattern of the carpet as though she had never seen it before, while at his end of the table Harry was moulding bread pellets as if for a wager. These things do not vary.

But even Watkins the wise did not know everything. Penny fiction does not inform its readers what real people do. So as soon as Clara had escaped out of the dining-room, before he had time to open the door for her, Harry sulkily sat down and felt for his cigarette-case. He was sure he had left it the drawing-room. Yet he could not go for it. He could hear Clara playing a noisy jig, the wriggle and stamp of which he particularly loathed.

"The little wretch," he said, laughing in spite of himself, "she knows quite well!"

"Good-evening, Mr Moore," said his wife, and he rose and went. "Your cigarette-case in the smoking-room!"

But this time Harry had it all his own way. Six foot of blonde colossus made short work of mere pinpricks of the tongue. Clara found herself swept off the piano-stool and installed where, on the rounded arm of a big easy-chair, she had little more liberty of movement than that of swinging her feet naughtily and rebelliously, while her husband questioned her.

"What book were you reading so intently this afternoon when I came upon you in the corridor? Let me see it!"

"Sha'n't!" (*A time.*)

"Oh, you coward! Because you are strong! I shall go to . . . to – "

"Where? To whom?" said Harry easily.

"To my . . . Aunt Lætitia!"

"She wouldn't have you, child," laughed her husband, "and besides, she would charge you board – which *I* should have to pay!"

"Well, I would pay it out of my own money – there!"

"What own money?"

"My house-money!"

"You forget, Mrs Morris Moore," said her husband gravely, "if you ran away you wouldn't have any house-money!"

Then in a burst, as he shook her, "Oh, you great baby," he cried, "make up. Bring the book! It was a volume of your diary. I knew by the lock. I'll show you mine. Fair exchange! Off with you!"

"Well, come with me," said Clara, holding out her hand, "but don't you think I'm giving in. It's only yielding to brute force. My spirit is unconquered."

"Never mind your spirit," said her lord, "fetch the book!"

And in these books, the greater and the lesser, they read late into the night.

And this was the true and official Hansard of what they found.

"'Christmas Eve'" – said Clara, "begin there!"

And she paused, waiting, with her finger in its place.

"Oh." Said her husband, "I don't think there is much!"

"And you call yourself a writer."

"Well, shall *I* begin?" Clara was all on pins and

needles now. She could hardly keep still. The quarrel was forgotten. Memory's box was unlocked, and as for her Aunt Lætitia and all the shades of deceased Murray Linklaters, bewigged advocates, senators of the College of Justice, grey oblivion wrapped them round so far as Clara Moore was concerned.

"'Christmas Eve'" (she read, "'A dull day – paid calls in the Lane . . . . Went to Margaret's. Baby is adorable and Tom begins to love me and calls me "Aunty-dee-ar." Came home by Grant's and brought back fruit for dinner. There is a man coming, a friend of father's. It is a horrid nuisance,'"

Here Clara Moore broke off suddenly.

"Oh. I wrote everything fresh, you see. I wanted to remember. You've no idea how bad my memory used to be in those days. Being married helps. One has to remember one's husband's iniquities."

"'Set in a note-book, learned and conned by rote,'" murmured Harry.

His wife stopped and looked severely at him.

"Henry, don't be clever." She said sternly, "or I shut the book."

"You couldn't now," said Harry, laughing.

"How do you know?"

"By the glitter of your eye," said her husband. "Somebody is as curious as a magpie. They wouldn't give up this diary game for half Regent Street!"

Clara's lips set. She seemed about to slam the solid red basil covers of her expensive diary, but her husband's smile was contagious, and the little black note-book in his hand decisive.

She had to laugh, and in laughing, yielded.

"Well," she said, "I *did* write a lot, I know, and yours is no fair exchange. I did it partly as an

exercise too, for I was considered very good at composition at school, whatever you may think. Besides, I don't believe you have anything in that book at all."

"Oh yes – I have!" and he flourished a closely written page of memoranda before her eyes.

"Well," she said with a sigh (and her eyes were dim and distant), I will read – though I never thought to let anyone see – not even you. But since you have been so horrid to me, I will."

It seemed an odd reason, but Harry wisely nodded. Clara fluttered some leaves thoughtfully. "Where shall I go on?" she asked, knitting her brows.

"You *did* begin from the beginning," he smiled as he spoke, "why not continue?"

She glanced up with sudden shyness, almost like a surprised Eve.

"You were saying that it was a horrid nuisance, having me come to dinner," said Harry Moore, "did you change your mind?"

"Here it is," said his wife, running her eye down the columns of close writing. "'11p.m. He is gone. It was not so horrid after all. But I think he likes Edith best. He is big and badly dressed. Why can't writers and artistic people dress humanly? He had on the funniest tie I ever saw, and a beard, and he came in a big grey cloak like one of Millet's shepherds. But he talked – yes, it was worth while hearing him talk. Not much to me, though, but he looked at me a lot, and somehow seemed to be conscious of everything I was doing. Dr Stonor came in after and wanted me to look out music for him. We went into the corner together and got out the folios, and though *he* was talking to father, I knew very well he was watching

us.' That's all," Clara concluded. She had been reading very rapidly, as if anxious to get to the end. "Now for yours!"

"Mine, oh, mine's no great thing," said Harry, opening his little black pocket-book, "jottings merely."

"Go on, please," cried Clara, stamping her foot, "and mind, don't alter a word or put in more. I shall know!"

"'Christmas Eve,'" began Harry. "'Worked at *Guardian* article, took it round, saw proof of yesterday's. Chief wants me to go to Armenia about the atrocities. *Sha'n't*! To club in afternoon – Clifton, M'Cosh, Moxon, and several of the fellows there, wanted me to stop. Told them I couldn't. Had to go out to old Linklater's to dinner – girls – music, bore – but I should look in later!'"

"Oh!" interjected Clara, "a bore – was it?"

"*You* said a horrid nuisance!" remarked her husband, and continued to defend himself further.

"'I got there early, long way out of town, several false trail. At last found the place – a big house under trees. From the doorway I could see in the hall a girl standing on steps, putting up holly and green stuff. Presently old Linklater came and introduced me, "This is Clara!" I became conscious of two great dark, steady, greyish-hazel eyes. The dinner went all right after that. Pretty, well, I don't know – a fascinating and glamorous person certainly. There was also a sister,'"

"Nonsense," cried Clara, "you are making up as you go along. I know you!"

Her husband silently handed her the book. Decidedly it was so written.

Clara did not apologise for her unbelief. She only

remarked, “Oh, but – you *are* a dear.”

And rubbing her cheek against his coat sleeve, she *purred*.

“Go on!” she said.

“‘Dinner quite informal,’” Harry continued. “‘Talked too much, but got led on somehow. Everything went well. Doctor fellow there who put on a lot of friend-of-the-family side - sat in the corner and talked to the girl with the eyes.’”

“Ah, ha, you were jealous already!” cried Clara, clapping her hands joyously.

“Nonsense!” said Harry Moore. “Of little Hopgood? I think I see myself!” “Read the next day - go on - go on! No, the day you came to Elton again!”

“‘Went to make my “digestion” call. Took some flowers up to Elton and talked to the old lady. Think I made a conquest. But the lady of the eyes did not show up. Waited an hour and a half but don't think I wasted my time entirely. Dear old lady!’”

“Harry, you are a cold-blooded wretch!”

“Very much on the contrary, Mrs Moore!”

“Now shall I read?” And without giving him time to answer, Clara opened the solid basil boards and continued, “‘Dec. 28th. Went out all the afternoon with Miss Grierson. Down the lane - soup kitchen, girls’ club, and went home with her to tea. When I got home I saw mother had a secret. You can tell by the satisfied way she has of looking mysterious. She would be disappointed if you didn't ask her at once. So I teased her to tell.

“‘“Do you know whom I've been entertaining all afternoon?”’ she said, her shoulders

Shaking with suppressed laughter. I understood well enough.

“‘“Oh, the curate,”’ I said, as carelessly as I could.

"'I saw him going down the lane like a pair of compasses let loose!'"

""Do you think the curate would bring me those?'" said mother triumphantly. And she showed me a lovely bunch of roses, a waggon-load nearly, which she had set well back in the dusk of the piano, so that I should not see them before mother had her little triumph. My, they must have cost heaps of money this time of year. "They are all mine," said mother, "but if you are good you can have just one bud for yourself. You see what one gets by staying quietly at home!"

"'She was teasing me, of course, this dear, old, sweet-hearted mother.

""You see what one gets for doing works of charity and mercy!" I said. "He would have given them to me if I'd been here. I'll never do a good action again.'"

"Now turn on to 'Four Leas Cottage,' and read about that." Cried Clara. Her eyes were neither grey, no, nor yet hazel. The dark pupils had swallowed up all the rest, overflowing everything with the soft blackness of a misty night of few stars.

"Let's see – Easter – wasn't it?" said her husband. "But why skip?" Much water had flowed under bridges during these months of spring.

"Oh, I want to get to the end – the end!" Clara whispered excitedly. "Quick – quick – I can't wait."

"Well, here it is – 'April 8th. We went a walk along the beach, she and I. We talked. I told her that unless something was going to come of this I must go away.

""What," she said, "for altogether?" And I said, "Yes." Then she walked a good while silent, and when I looked, I could see – '"

"No, you didn't," said Clara. "I could never have been so silly!"

"' - tear after tear rolling slowly down her cheek,'" Harry continued imperturbably. "'I needed no more than that - who would?

"'"You don't want me to go?" I cried. She shook her head, still weeping and not now caring whether I saw or not.

"'So I stayed.'"

* * * * *

They sat long silent that night in their home, near each other, and happy. Harry's heart softened. He was in the mood for concessions.

"Dear," he said, "if you would like Aunt Lætitia to come and stay with us a month – "

"Oh, bother Aunt Lætitia!" exclaimed Mrs Henry Moore. "I only want you."

And thus did Clara Murray Linklater deny her father's house and cleave unto her husband.

THE TERROR OF ENDERBY

It was in the interval between term and term at a Scottish University — that long spell of nearly half-a-year, which enables so many to see something of life and lay by a few pounds for the coming winter — that I went to Enderby's yard at East Dene as timekeeper, having been recommended to them by a firm I had served the year before on the other side of the river.

Ridler was my mate's name, and at first thought him a sulky dog. He was kept there as a sort of chucker-out of all work. For Enderby's was a rough yard, employing only non-Union men — superior scoundrels, three week job men, and loafers, who, if they would not work, had to be run out of the yard by the aid of a toe-cap rimmed with steel.

Two of the latter belonged to Ridler, and when there was a row at the pay grating, in the office, Ridler was sent for in haste - to say nothing of the constant disputes as to the length of time a man had wrought, which it was the strict duty of the timekeeper regulate.

Being new to this sort of work, I first tried politeness. I had been used to different methods and another type of men on the other side of the river. So Enderby's came as a revelation to me. Across the Thor estuary they were polite to the timekeeper. At Enderby's they told him he was a liar. I could not believe my ears. At the time Ridler was busy at the tallies. He had a system of book-keeping which was really "board-keeping." And the board, which had once been black, was now of a grey so hoary, that Ridler made his hieroglyphics upon it in chalk or

charcoal indifferently. But I must say that his system was as correct in its results as mine, based on Colenso.

But when the man, a big, timber-sided wharf-rat, told me for the second time that I was a liar, I felt annoyed, and not being allowed to leave the little bothy (an enlarged sentry box) even for a moment, I was contenting myself with making a certain mark of discredit against his name for the benefit of the outdoor foreman, when I heard the noise of Ridler's board being overturned.

Ridler stepped to the door. He made one grab at the big slabsided man, caught him by the collar, steel-toe-capped him down the fourteen yards of pavement which led to the main gate of Enderby's, flung the man on his face in the mud, and returned, dusting his hands like a particular man who has handled a sack of lime or bone dust.

Ridler did not once look about him. He tramped back, lifted up his board again, set it on its frame, adjusted the pins, and so went on with his system of accounts. I had an idea of remonstrating with Ridler on unnecessary brutality, but on second thoughts decided not to. It seemed somehow out of place, from one who had been only a few hours in a situation, to criticise the methods of a comrade who has given satisfaction to Enderby's for twenty years — not to mention seven as a porter at the guv'nor's office, as Ridler added when asked his state of service.

Once or twice I had difficulties myself, and as I rather prided myself on my fists I asked nothing better than to settle these difficult out of court, as it were. But of this Ridler would have nothing.

"You ain't fit for the like o' them," he said, "they

are the Lower Cotton Street Gang, I tell you, and their business is to make a set at every new man that comes into the timekeeper's box. Lord, you're nowt but a spindling lad of a clerk — what do you know about fighting Enderby's men?"

Now I thought that I knew a good deal. But there was that in Ridler's face which told me that the fights I had seen at school and college were well enough for boys, but that here I had better keep out of mischief, as Ridler himself suggested.

"Coming my way?" he remarked that night in a shamefaced, casual sort of way. "That fellow, Bob Hicks, and his mates know better than to tackle me, but 'tis more than likely that they might be waiting round the corner for you."

"I'm not afraid!" I said boldly.

"Then the more fool you," he burst out. "I should be in your place shivering feared — and I'm the heavy-weight champion for the Northern Counties. Eh, lad, but tha ha'e mickle to learn for aw thy book knowledge!"

"Why, what could happen to me?" I asked. "I've had a hiding before, I suppose! I can take my gruel with the next man!"

Ridler came over, and with his shoulders all humped together as if he were cold he glowered down at me.

"Holy truth," he said slowly, "but you are a fool. I suppose it's being at college that does it. Why, man, you don't know what a 'doing up' means?"

"It's a licking," I said, a good deal nettled, "and I tell you, Ridler, I've had more than one!"

Ridler grunted and humped one shoulder nearly to his ear.

"What would you say to three months in an

hospital, and not yourself when they let you out — no, nor never would be. That's what thon chaps round the corner by Buckley's pub would call a 'doing'! You don't want any. No, figures and book-learnin', and a smile like as if somebody had presented you with two pound of Cambridge sausages you wasn't expectin'. That's your best chance. And leave the rest to Ridler! I give you the straight tip. But don't get it in your head that fightin' will do you a bit of good!"

By this time we were out on the road - Dene Wester main road, along which the cottages were scattered with a liberal but careless hand. They were all Enderby's property, and the firm kept a nucleus of steady men about them by means of allowing the rent to run on a bit — that is, with men tiny were sure of.

I let Ridler do as he pleased and said no word. And that was quite as well, for Ridler would have done as he pleased in any case. All at once Ridler left me. I never dreamed that the quiet hulking man could move so quickly. It was more like a tiger's bounding rush than anything quite human. I had a glimpse, vivid but momentary, of a darkling little group, tensely posted for attack, their heads a little tucked in and all looking one way - in fact they were "thon chaps round Buckley's Corner." They had been waiting for me, and if I had gone my way, trusting in my own strength, conceited with the conceit of eighteen, I should have been knocked down, knuckledusted, trampled out of human shape, all because the Lower Cotton Street Gang cherished the hope that some Enderby's would have a timekeeper who would "stand in" and mark as good cash-value time hours that had been spent at

Buckley's and elsewhere.

Of the vanity of this hope, nothing would convince them! No amount of discouragement, months in prison, the appointment of new timekeepers, each more instructed and better warned than the old, the partial breaking up of the Gang by dismissal, and the officiousness of the police — nothing could kill the idea that, by some interference of their own, they might be able to eat and especially drink without working — the latter at present a disagreeable necessity, but a necessity.

It was difficult for me to follow Ridler's movements as he rushed upon that compact little throng of slouched caps and battered bowlers. It seemed to me something of the nature of a railway accident. The unpreparedness of the enemy. The swift, clumsy, yet inevitable rush of Ridler, like a runaway engine coming swaying out of a tunnel. I saw no striking, still less anything of the nature of regular fighting.

I made out Ridler, the most active thing, apparently, in the universe. But even he did not appear to be engaged in deadly combat. He was kicking, certainly, even violently. But mostly he seemed to be tearing the clothes of a number of people into shreds. Several strewed the ground, but not as if hurt — rather as though they felt it was unsafe to get up. Then quite suddenly the field cleared, and I had a full view of Ridler. He stood massively, his shoulders more hunched than ever, and, for a space of time which must have seemed an eternity to the person concerned, he held an immense iron-shod boot over the face of a prostrate man. I never saw in all my life the picture of a more complete brute.

And, in fact, it was not for quite a while that I could bring myself to remember that in all probability Ridler the Brute had saved my life. And I really don't believe that I thanked him for it at all. Not that Ridler expected thanks. On the contrary, he came back growling discontentedly, like a dog who has had his half-gnawed bone taken from him. He paid not the least attention to me. He did not even let his eyes rest on the scene of his prowess, from which the halt, the maimed, and the half-naked were crawling painstakingly away.

"Come on, young 'un," he growled, "I think them that wants their faces kep' on the front side o' their heads will gi'e you and me the go-by for some time to come!"

Then according to programme we went to Ridler's house. It was not the sort of place you would have expected Ridler's to be – being outwardly clean, tidy, and whitewashed in more coats than Ridler had torn from the backs of the Cotton Street Gang.

As he got nearer the house a change came over Ridler, he coughed several times behind his hand, and out of a deep side pocket he pulled a red bandanna handkerchief. With this he mopped his brow repeatedly, though he was far from being warm. As a matter of fact he wanted to say something to me and felt nervous, which was far from being a habit with Ridler.

At last he got it out.

"Would you mind wiping your feet well on the mat?" said the conqueror of Gangs. And I am sure that he blushed as he said it, though I was far too much of Ridler's faction even to glance up at him.

I said certainly I would. I would be pleased indeed.

"Jess is that particular!" he explained, still keeping his face averted. Ridler opened the door, and he and I entered, my feet having been carefully wiped. I even did it twice, for I saw Ridler's glance turn my way, and that not mildly but like a searchlight.

"She's that partic'lar — ye would never guess to see me in the ofiss!"

A feeble voice arrived from somewhere unseen — upstairs it was — I could make so much out in the dusk of the lobby.

"What are you standing and holding the outer door open for? Can you not come in and be done with it, Ridler?"

The voice was weak, but dominating and yet somehow soft in tone - surprisingly so in fact for the helpmeet of the terror of Enderby's, the Chucker Out of Chuckers Out. Ridler coughed again nervously.

"I have a friend with me — the new time-keeper," he apologised as it seemed, timidly,

"Oh, Ridler, and you promised to be, home early. I have been waiting such a while. If you only thought how lonesome it is with one's eye on the clock and nothing for company but a rat gnawing in the wainscot! Oh, Charles!"

And at a sound like a sob I heard Ridler suddenly make a husky, gaspy noise in throat, as if he had swallowed something the wrong way — something considerable too. He started up the stairs at a run. For me I wondered that so big a man, with iron-bound boots with inch-and-half soles could move indoors so quietly. But it was very soon evident that this was by no means the opinion of the lady upstairs.

"Oh, Charles!" the voice was raised is entreaty,

stopping him in full career, "how often must I tell you to sit down on the bottom step and take off your boots? But will you ever remember? No, not you — it shows how much you care!"

"Don't say that, Jess," spluttered Ridler over his shoulder. He had obediently seated himself on the bottom step and was in the act of talking off his boots, making at the same time the most appalling grimaces, so large that they let me into the secrets of Ridler's dental deficiencies, by making a gap in his face exactly as if somebody had cut a couple of generous slices out of a short and stubbly melon.

The voice went on, feeble and remonstrant - querulous, yet with something attractive about it too.

"Charles, are you never going to come up to see me? I suppose I may stop here all my days — without your caring a button, so long as you have a friend! You bring home your friends — your boon companions! It's all you care about"

I began to feel in the way, and would have made my escape but for the motions and signals of Ridler, who was shaking his head so violently that the neck of a less well-built man might have been in danger.

Evidently he did not want me to go, and when I persisted, he sent up distress signals like a ship on the rocks.

"Is your friend respectable — is he sober?"

Again the voice descended the stairs, and as if moved by the sound Ridler stole up on his stocking-soles. A faint complaining murmur ensued, something like a drowsy child being petted over again to sleep. Presently the voices came stronger till I could hear, if not every word, at least a good deal that concerned myself. Contrary to the proverb as to

the hearing of listeners, it was all to the good. Ridler was singing my praises.

Never had there been so good a time-keeper known at Enderby's. Never one "so much of a gentleman." Then followed a sketch of my double ancestry — my linguistic attainments, even my personal attractions, which would have brought the blush of modesty to the cheek of a professional beauty of thirty years' standing.

But Ridler had an inventive mind, and never even paused for a word.

Finally I heard the quavering, sympathy voice again.

"Bring him up, Charles! How like you! He will be starving down there in those dismal rooms. Have you no sense at all, Ridler? Thoughtless — bring him up at once — or no, wait. That comb? And - "

The voice ceased, but I heard Ridler moving hastily in response to a demand for the Shetland shawl which he would find (so the voice affirmed) in the third drawer from the top under some silk paper. Then I gained the further information that Ridler was the stupidest man at finding anything whom the world contained for quite a number of centuries. The voice had plainly said the third drawer from the top, and there was he on his great coal-dusty knees making a regular puddle of the fourth! Had the voice said fourth? Of a surety, no. It was the second, no, she meant the third, as he might have known if he had cared the least bit!

But of course he did not. Men never did. They were made like that — and why did he not call his friend up? Did he not see that she had been ready for at least five minutes?

So I was called up, and naturally went as quietly

and as quickly as my feet could carry me. Ridler was on the landing making frantic signs of such vehemence and pregnancy that I could make neither head not tail of his meaning.

But I went in, and there, upon a camp bed under the snowiest of quilts, and wrapped in the fleeciest of Shetland shawls, lay the daintiest of little ladies, in size no bigger than a child of ten, but with the features of a fairy and eyes that fairly danced with intelligence.

"My daughter, Jess - " began Ridler, and then stopped confusedly, as if caught in a fault.

"Jessica!" corrected the young lady sharply. Then turning to me she added with a sigh, "He always will forget. He isn't used to company! Ask the gentleman to excuse you, Charles Ridler!"

I was quite willing to do without Ridler's apologies, thinking on the fate of the Lower Cotton Street Gang, but a glance from the imploring Ridler warned me not to mix myself with what I did not understand. So I frankly forgave Ridler and told him so. Miss Jessica was pleased, and showed it by bidding her father carry her right over to the opposite side of the room near the window.

And to mind what he was doing when he set her down.

Ridler accomplished the feat by lifting bed and all, and setting them down with Miss Jessica in her place with something of the air with which one sets down an over-full tea-cup without spilling.

"Ha, there — that time!" he said triumphantly, stepping back with a smirk of pride to survey his work. But he had reckoned without his taskmistress.

"Not so bad as usual!" she said, "and now get to

the washing. Mrs Purdie has set out all the things for you, and mind be gentle with the dollying. If a single thing is spoiled! Well, you know what will happen. No supper for you this night, and Mrs Purdie is going to have the pie in sharp on the back eight!"

Ridler made no objections to the programme, and only moved downstairs with a grateful look at me. I was about to follow, but the voice pointed out that she had not been removed to the window to watch stray cats, but to talk to me. Ridler could go on with his work, and leave the door open so that she could hear him if he stopped, or thumped the things too hard.

"And don't pretend you don't hear me when I speak," she said as a parting shot.

"I have to do it," she explained, after having listened to the emptying hiss of the hot water into the tub. "He would take advantage. He is so cunning. I suppose it is with people getting the better of him at the yard!"

I thought of the Cotton Street Gang, and listened marvelling to the champion fighter, whose rush was like a tiger, moving meekly about among the pots and pans of his domestic servitude. Presently a moist reek came up, then the sounds of vigorous slapping and scouring.

Miss Jessica listened critically, and at last, satisfied with the goodwill of her parent, turned to me and with much directness of inquiry caused me to give an account of myself,

She took it in silence, never taking her sharp bird-like eyes off me, and when I had finished she held out her hand, small, slim and graceful as herself.

"Father has not been telling so many lies as usual," she said, smiling. "When he brings anybody I never believe him till I know! You can come and see me as often as you like. Yes, I like books and penny bunches of violets."

When I knew from the astonished Ridler that I was the first to whom that invitation had ever been extended, I was the more grateful. Next week the doctor, finding me there, was pleased and went away smiling. For he had come in unexpectedly, and found us reading poetry together on the sofa.

And now Ridler does not do the washing, though he still keeps all the Gangs in order. For when he wants to see his daughter, he has to come across the river to Thorsby, where Jessica, cured by the oldest of all medical treatments, keeps my house in order with breezy firmness, having, however, abdicated the more severe of her functions in favour of the small tyrant in the nursery, Master Charles Ridler, junior.

My own name and Jessica's don't matter a bit.

THE DIARY OF MR WILLIAM HEWER

My name is William Hewer, and I am clerk to Mr Samuel Pepys of the Navy Office, whom all the world knows. We go much about together, he and I, and since he writes all down in his cypher books, I also have made it my business to read and learn.

Therefore I have a book of mine own and do write in it, only in another cypher which my good master hath not time to understand, being too busy with his music and fal-lalling after womenfolk. For me, I see no good in such-like. They eat a man's substance. Only I am heart-sorry for my dear mistress — that is my master's wife, whom her husband calls "poor wretch," but I (at her request), "sweet cozin." Though indeed I am no kin of the flesh to Mistress Pepys — only he whom she calls her bachelor. She doth choose the ribbands for my knee-breeches of the right blue, which she will have dark on account of my eyes being of that hue.

Ah, a sweet young lady, and much to be pitied, is my mistress - as on my soul I do pity her. For though I help my master faithfully in all that concerns his business, at home and in the house I am lieged to my mistress — ay, and think it no shame. For a poor young woman must needs have someone to stand for her. And so she shall so long as my name is Hewer, though I do repeat I do serve my master faithfully also — yes, and shall.

Yet, I own, I can never understand her exceeding jealousy of him. Our Master Samuel is well and well enough, but there be others with as tight a leg, as straight a back, and - but there! Wherefore should one search for the reasons of women. She loveth him

not greatly — no, not to the rubbing of one copper against another, save, that is, when she is jealous of him. Then her tongue goes like a mill-hopper, and her words fall wide and foolishly, till I am ashamed of the maids' hearing as they do, from garret to cellar.

Which is all very strange. For she hath often told me of her griefs, and how that she has found out better things than to fix her to upon such a man, who will follow the flutter a serving-maid's kirtle across half London! Now, for me, I had liefer bide at home with toes to the fire and watch my dear mistress at her French broidery, or, which is yet pleasanter, hear her read *The Maid's Tragedy*, or that French play in which she tripped up Mr John Dryden himself, finding his last at the King's House to be copied from it almost by line.

Now am I resolved to keep a secret diary also, which, in the evenings, when I stay at home with headache, I may read to my lady and (when it cannot be otherwise) to her chambermaids also — at least, the plainer of them, for the prettier are not to be trusted, being apt to be of my master's faction.

This I do because I hold it a pity that a poor woman should hear nothing exact of what goes forward about the Court and in the town — only chatter of mantua-makers and the singing women whom Master Pepys brings about the house. This solitude will I strive to make easier for her. Yet must I be careful of my intelligences to my mistress. For oftentimes she will fall into wild talk, and more than once, accusing of her husband, she came nigh to letting the cat out of the bag — that it was I who had spied him out in coaches and slinking about alehouses up this blind alley and down that.

Yet I count it no wrong faithfully to serve a man, and also as faithfully his wife. Even a "poor wretch" must have some comfort, and if she have it at home and in one to whom she can speak freely, how much better than gadding abroad, so as to become like many others, the talk of the town.

Besides, 'tis in all innocency, and I hold it fitting that a woman, young and mighty pretty, shall have at least the comfort of being able to speak her mind to a kindly listener. Hence she speaks to me, and I tell her all that has happened — also much that I have only heard. Only the business of the Office and of my master I do not speak. For I would be a faithful friend to both — a thing which I count difficult, but not impossible.

So, then, this being the third day of June and Mr Samuel Pepys gone to Deptford upon his affairs, I lay a page between the folios of the Book of Requests, and begin:

June 3rd. — This morning the King walked in the Privy Garden with the Duke, and there was very merry, declaring that his brother's confessors did nominate his lady-loves to him for a penance, they being so plain of their features — also old. At this the Duke took offence, and, turning on his heel, was gone in a huff to the Navy Office, into which he enters like a whirlwind, while his brother stood still, leaning on his cane and laughing. Then the King betook himself to Mistress Frances Stewart with design to pay court to her. But she would do nothing but pull cherries from the trees of the Royal Garden and eat them, letting one hang from between her lips by the stalk and calling upon his Majesty to declare if he did not think it desirable. Then did she climb a cherry-tree with the King's help, and, being

freakish, would have him follow to a seat beside her among the branches. But this his Majesty refused, though smilingly, and as one who, had it not been for the courtiers, would gladly have yielded.

Then came the Queen out, and so there was an end of the frolic. For though her Majesty hath need of patience, and practises it, yet in Portugal, her country, is no jesting with such things. Yet because the Queen also is fond of Mistress Stewart, and cherishes her for her beauty and simplicity (though not boldly witty like our Nelly of the King's House), there was no anger. Only the Queen did shake her finger at the King, and bade him think of his latter end rather than to go climbing trees after scapegrace maids. To which the King replied, "Lord, madam, that was the very thing I was thinking of." Which all took very well and held to be of a mighty pretty wit.

It was indeed rare sport to see how little Stewart could flout the King and yet keep him more on the edge of himself than Castlemaine, Davis, Gwyn, or all the drove of them — withal giving him no satisfaction but only saucy answers. And all with such a mockery of civility that perforce the King laughed himself - yet, methought, with a wryish face. But afterwards my Lord of Richmond and the Chancellor smiled at her and she at them, so that it was easy to be seen how the three were of a very good intelligence. But the King guessed nothing of it, only continued to make eyes at pretty Frances till they fairly bulged out of his sallow face — as saith the proverb, like the blobs on a gooseberry fool.

This Mistress Frances is used to behave like a child, knowing that when she smiles none can find it in their hearts to scold — her face being the most perfect that ever was seen. So much so that the King

hath caused his maker of medals, John Roettiers, to take a medal punching of it in the profile. But it is her childishness which wins upon you. For it is impossible to be angry with her. She moves quickly like a bird, nervous and light, as if ready to dart off in any direction at any moment.

Though she wears short gowns, and those of grey, there is always a look about her as of a tropic bird with glossy plumage, which one's hand desires to caress. But on a sudden, lo! she escapes from under, and is at the end of the corridor, laughing and twittering and looking back like a thing that always perched up twigs. So, at least, says the Duke, and believe him. And so much for Mistress Frances.

This day we saw not much of his Grace, for instead of abiding in the Navy Office he merely walked a little to and fro, stamping his foot, and so returned back as he came. For this all in the garden were heartily sorry, for it only made little Stewart the more mirthful, so that she kneeled and demanded of the Duke of York his fatherly blessing, meaning thereby that the story which the Lord Brunker had told was true — namely, that he was a Jesuit.

Still, it is a pity to see great men so used public, and the King himself looking on and laughing. This doth not make the country respected, but the contrary. For all the while the French Ambassador was writing in his tablets, and I doubt not all goes to Lewis as fast as spur and sail can drive it.

But after all was done, and the King and Duke retired once more, Mistress Frances laid aside her spritely manners to talk with the Chancellor and my Lord Richmond very gravely. There was none to overlook, and Mistress Stewart did give a hand to

each as though making some promise. And even the stiff old Chancellor set his lips to that which he held; while as for my Lord Richmond, he kissed his, finger by finger, like an holy relic.

It was by virtue of her maid, who is of the country of Wales (having come hither with Miss Price), that we get us news of the Court at first hand. Of course, being my Lord Duke's servant, we hear much of which we do not speak. But what little Ann Hughes doth prate, I think it no shame to tell. For if I do not, my master will, and it is a pleasure to forestall him. Besides Hughes, being of the Welsh folk, doth most merrily invent. There is no fear in her, being Miss Frances Stewart's favourite woman. Yet do I believe that for honesty there is none in the Court like Mistress Stewart, except only Miss Jennings, who is so for interest, and Miss Hobart, by nature and inclination. The Queen is also well advised of this, and 'tis said little Frances doth carry all her sweet-hearting letters to her Majesty to laugh over — which, for a child such as she appears to be, is very well thought on.

June 4th. — To-day came the Welsh girl, Ann Hughes, to our house, and my dear mistress made her welcome to such supper as there chanced to be in the house. The three of us were scarcely seated before that she clapped her hands and began to entertain us with the very latest news of the Court — the hearing of which gave us much joy.

"There have been mighty fine doings," she said, "all because of the Fair at Southwark, on the common betwixt the Abbey and Margaret's Hill. For nothing would set my lady yestreen but that she must go thither with Mistress Wells, the new-comer among the maids, both of them in the garb of saucy

pages. These they caused us to borrow — that is, Betty, who waits upon Miss Wells and knows all the idle page-knaves in St James, found no difficulty.

"But as for me I risked my service and refused to go, because of my modesty — and having one knee in and the other out, owing to a fall out of my mother's arms, long ago in my country. But knowing the dangers of the town better than my ladies, I did covenant with one Rowland Glyn, a Pembroke man, and one that is to be trusted, to follow them with a wise lad or two of my people. And, as things turned out, it was just as well. For my madcaps, being let out on the causeway, could at the first do nothing but laugh, so that their cloaks well-nigh fell off. It was only the clearer dusk of even, and no time for such pranks, when the theatres are letting so many rambling gallants abroad and the very pavements are far from secure — save, that is, in the puritanic city.

"Even so, there was a great to-do. The rude street lads, cryers of pamphlets, horse-holders, link-boys, and the like made mock. One there was who blasphemed the name of the Lord if ever he had seen a sight like that. Nay, he did pretend to faint, being a shy knave, and summoned his comrades to hold him up, sinking into their arms as one overcome by vast terror and amazement.

“But Rowland Glyn and his mate called "Prentices.' And the lads of the apron swarmed out of the booths, so that my ladies were briefly rid of these rascals. And after this they walked quite close behind Mistresses Stewart and Wells, behaving like serving-men, but still holding their cudgels ready, so that few dared meddle with them, understanding well that it would be at their peril.

"But when they arrived at the fair there were so many booths to examine, and so many fine gentlemen elbowing hither and thither, that Rowland could by no means keep so close. So it chanced that some of these jostling the ladies, without intent, as I believe, Miss Wells pulled out her little rapier that was no more than a toy. And at the sight of the naked steel Mistress Stewart began to weep. So there was a great trooping to the spot, and, as ill-luck would have it, my Lord of Rochester, who is always to be found where mischief is, would have them both into his carriage. But by great good fortune Rowland perceived the Duke of Richmond, who is greatly in love with Mistress Frances (only hides it for fear of the King's anger). And he bade him come quickly for that there was a young brother of Mistress Stewart's just arrived from Scotland and in sore need of assistance. So Richmond, with George Hamilton and the Frenchman Gramunt, called the Chevalier, did set Rochester at defiance, and carried Wells and Stewart to their coaches, and so back to Whitehall without any scandal, save that which Rochester made with his tongue. But my Lord of Buckingham, being willing to stand well with the Queen's ladies, did take Rochester aside in the Park and say to him that if he did not hold his tongue he would kill him as he had Shrewsbury.

"'And pray which of the two ladies would hold your Grace's horse this time?' said Rochester — meaning that my Lady Shrewsbury had done the like while Buckingham was killing her husband.

"'No matter which,' said Buckingham, 'so be *you* are dead!'

"And whether Rochester was afraid, or whether (as some said) he owed his Grace money which he

could not pay, I know not. At all events, Rochester hath been very civil to the ladies, my mistress and Miss Wells — the which was very far indeed from his habit. However, either because of his fear of the King or of Buckingham, he had naught to say."

This was Ann Hughes' tale, and my dear mistress was much troubled at the doings of those in high places. So after the Welshwoman was gone and I returned from the convoy, she did question me tightly of all those whom I knew, and as to my master's conduct. Concerning which I made the best answers I could, assuring her (what is quite true) that there is none at Court to compare to her for beauty that ever I have seen, and that Mr Pepys do always so uphold it. And she was much comforted — that is, at first. And I did sit and keep her company almost till her husband did return, as he said, from working late at Deptford. And but for its ending this had been a good day and memorable to me, in that my dear lady showed me much kindness, far above her wont. Yet can I not cure her of the fits of fury she hath about her husband if he be half-an-hour late in returning. Even if the poor man is but at his bookseller's, she will not believe, but vents her displeasure at large, which is but little profit, and makes for the unhappiness of the house. As, for example, this very night it happened to myself. For Mistress Pepys was very severe with me because that I went as far as Whitehall with the Welsh girl, Ann Hughes. She was sitting crying when I came back, and at first would not speak to me, saying that nobody loved her or cared whether she were dead or alive — that it was "like master, like man." For the one courted the mistresses and the other the maids, and as for her that she would go to a nunnery to end

her days.

Nor would she listen to a word when I told her how that Ann Hughes was bespoken to the aforesaid Rowland, who was indeed her bachelor and kinsman. She stood before me like a pretty fury, stamping her foot and swearing she had done wrong ever to take notice of a clown fit only for the society of waiting-maids, She bade me go find Doll in the kitchen, and in a storm of anger entering her chamber, she shut and bolted the door.

'Tis eleven of the clock, and my master is just come home, perturbed enough when I told him what had befallen, but presently up he goes to make his excuses as best he may, Yet do I thank the stars which had made me this night but plain William Hewer, a bachelor clerk, and not Mr Samuel Pepys of the Navy Office.

* * * * *

After a long interval I take my pen to write in my book (which is lean by comparison with the stout quartos Mr Saml. Pepys leaves at the Office, but yet contains much matter of which Mr Pepys is unaware). Now my dear mistress hath been grievously upset these last days, because of Deb Willet, concerning whom she need not have troubled herself, dear soul. For Deb cares no more for my master than she doth for the King, though indeed she suffers him about her, as (and the more is the pity) all maids must who enter into condition in the house of a man like my master.

But Deb is a right good maid, as I do know, come of respectable folk (and with an aunt who comes here to take her news and lace neck-trappings every

Monday). Yes, I own it — she and I are very friendly when we meet on the steps near Paul's Churchyard (by the bench under the yew-tree), where she do tell me her troubles and of our master's everlasting running after her — which is a shame in the house, he having so many out of doors.

But 'tis little I can do for Deb Willet, my duty lying to my mistress, who, as is her nature, cannot abide her. For indeed they are much too alike to agree. Of two pretty women in a house, one must have the mastery. And it is my Lady Mistress who will not bear with Deb. The maid is, I think, well enough content to have a lad of her own age about the house, and doth confide much in me — yea, kissing me very kindly, from the very first day as she had opportunity (or I could make one). But suchlike favours not being as yet so scarce with me, I do not set them all down in short-hand lest I should never come by another, as my master doth, thinking (poor fool!) that nobody is the wiser.

For if my mistress be jealous of Master Samuel, and leads him an evil life by night, in the daytime she is more than ever upon poor Deb's top-knot on my account. Not that she hath any reason, or even excuse — Deb and I understanding each other as well as ever did maid and clerk constantly in and out of one master's house.

Yet must poor Deb go. And, I wot, as much upon my account as on that of Master Samuel, who doth think himself the sole cause, and lest my mistress trample over him.

But this is no way with such a woman as my mistress — perhaps not with any woman. For me I go immediately to the attick and begin to pack my chest to leave the house. Then in ten minutes at the

most, up comes my mistress to my chamber-door, crying and begging me to abide (for my kind master's sake) — which I always do. Ah, little he guesses what he owes me in the way of peaceful homecomings and cheerful readings of "Nepotisme" (which puts him and us all to sleep). But there is no right gratitude in man, Mr Pepys cherishes me chiefly because in summations are correct, and that I do set his Tangier accounts in proper order for binding. Yet he owes me much more than that, and most likely will never know it. Yet I care not. Let others be mercenary an they will. *I* labour for the virtue which is its own reward.

For last Lord's Day I did hear Mr Gifford's sermon on the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, which made me think mighty well of myself, especially since Mr Pepys cast it up to me (seeing me with Willet) that I did cower like a thief and wear my cloak like a ruffian escape his observation. Yet will he come, at my mistress's request, to my lodging, and there eat a custard with Deb Willet to his heart's content, looking from one woman to the other like a Pasha. Which makes me laugh within me — yea, and outwardly too (Heaven forgive me!), when I did catch Deb's eye, or my lady's!

For our Samuel is ever jealous of the wrong fly in his apothecary's ointment — as formerly of posturing Jack Pembleton, the dancing master. And lately my mistress and I have sent a piping bombastical fellow named Sheres across his bows, as they say in the Office, to draw his fire. He is so everlastingly dawdling after his Knepps and worse, that if any trim lad talks five minutes with my mistress or Deb, he will sulk for days. For, as the saying is, "As you do yourself, so you dread your

neighbour!" But since I ceased to go to her father's in Longacre with my mistress, Mr Pepys pays no heed to my comings and goings, especially since I have entered upon the well-furnished lodgings of mine own, which we all find to be mighty convenient, times and seasons being observed.

So little doth Samuel know of the ways of women that he did actually send me with a letter, which he had written to Deb Willet after she was gone, calling her evil names (at his wife's desire and to satisfy her). So I did show the letter first to Deb to break her of any folly that might be in her mind about a man who would not stand to his deeds, but let the brunt fall on a girl. Then, having served, I brought the original back to Samuel for his comfort. Only, first swearing my mistress to secrecy and the bridling of her tongue, I let her know what Mr Pepys had sent me to do with the letter! So, though he hath great honour at the Navy Office and is the great man with my Lord Duke, Master Samuel is under sad eclipse where most he desires to shine — that is, with his womenfolk — the reason being that he is over subtle. While a plain man, though a clerk, can take the wall off him by mere simplicity of dealing.

It gives my mistress, who hath a pretty teasing wit and is ever ready for revenge, mighty pleasure to say to her husband when he comes home, "Mr Pepys, what a wonderful thing is providence! To-day while out in the coach, who should get in beside me (you know how light of foot these travelled men are) but Master Sheres!" Or perhaps if it hath rained, "To-day, being in the Row buying green watered moire, who should I light upon but Mr Sheres, who most kindly walked home with me!"

All which is only a little "tat" for Samuel's "tit,"

and pleases my mistress mightily.

Yet all this trouble I take, for no advantage to myself, but only that I may be a good chief clerk to my master and eke my mistress's most faithful bachelor. Because I do desire that my master reform his ways and cease to dance. Doll Tearsheet corantos athwart London, which indeed is most unseemly for the Secretary of his Majesty's Navy. Surely the warning of my mistress is not to be set down against me as though I were a common informer. As for our sins, my master is old enough to know better and I young enough to repent (when my time comes) — though even now I wear my fool's cap with a difference.

As to my dear mistress, there is none like her. For beauty she is worth all Whitehall. For wit, the city cannot show her like. Had *I* such a wife, wild horses would not draw me from home of nights. But there — Samuel's gravel-stones will not kill him much this side of a hundred, and my dear lady's repute is as dear to me as my own credit for an honest man. So I will abide by her. Yes, for her sake, and for a little of his own (being as he is a foolish, lovable man) I will abide by Samuel.

For my dear mistress is hot of soul, full of fine quick angers, as often causeless as not, and I love her for them, as one may a child. Petulant and fresh-lipped, if any try to hold her, as like as not she will peck and bite like a wild bird caught in the hands. None knows her so well as I, being long of the house and, as it were, of her faction. Often have I desired to write fully of her thoughts and sufferings — ay, and may do so some day. Because she had the daintiness of an English rose with the lightness and sparkle of her French Epernay wine — at once

light, heady, and headstrong. But it may be that between her husband and I we will keep her memory green. For (truth it is, and I own it) Samuel also doth love her well. Perhaps, in spite of his corantos, better than any. This credit I do him, and with the more grace that I know well it is to me and not to him that she owes her chosen happiness. For she calls me her sparrow-hawk, and when she beats up into an anger I fly into one ten times as fierce and sudden. When she vapours I over-vapour her till she weeps. When she scolds, I storm. When she is petulant, I grow violent. Thus she loves me, as, save for her continued jealousies, she doth never Samuel.

Yet, for all that, I cannot break her of these tempers. It is "Pierce" this and "Knepp" that if he comes in a quarter of an hour late — women that are not worth the filip of her own rosy forefinger. And indeed the poor man hath not the spirit to bid her go hang, and mind her own business — as I should (and do), who am not her husband, when she vexes me about Deb Willet. But Samuel sits like a calf behind a dripping hedge that waits for the storm to blow over. Poor man, I have it in my heart to be sorry for him at times. So simple he is, and thinks himself so clever, yet suffers my lady to ride rough-shod over him. Which, however, is useful to me, as pointing the difference between us, making her prefer him who says, "Go and be hanged!" and so slams the door — to snail-backed Samuel, who crawls at her feet, weeping, as often she hath caught him at his tricks.

So it was in this business of her tirewoman and companion Deb. It has been a grievous discomfortable time, and the house barely fit to eat meat in. For what with crying of rack and ruin,

treachery and vengeance from Mistress Elizabeth Pepys, and Samuel on the crawl among the table-legs beseeching his wife to tread upon him — bah! it makes me sick to my soul. And I do pet and comfort Deb every day, and have found her a good convenient lodging, and by-and-by she shall have a

better place. I took her box on my shoulder before the very face of my mistress, who dared not vent her fury on both Samuel and me at once. But I do fear she banks it up all the more fiercely against poor Deb — to whom, however, henceforward it will matter but little.

At saying of the final good-bye I did even take Deb's hand and set my lips to it. This I did with intent, because my lady looks best in a pretty French fury, all white, with scarlet spot on each cheek-bone, and her eyes sparking like Mr Hobbes' lightning machine. Ah, it was a rare sight, indeed, and, for a man that could stand up to it, something to be lived for.

But Samuel, who grovelled, knew nothing about such pleasures. How, indeed, should he, for ever knight-erranting hither and thither like a roaming Grimalkin?

Alas, that I should write such words about my dear master! Nor would I, save in my secret Notanda, and to be upsides with him who doubtless doth grievously comb my hair in his many quartos. But with Deb round the corner, and my mistress on tiptoe, uncertain whether to embrace or poignard me, surely I can afford to be generous. Yes, a good fellow, is Sam of the Navy Office! But in the matter of women he loveth not wisely but too many. So is rightly beloved of none, not knowing the art. Concerning which I, William Hewer, his clerk, could

draw him certain sealed orders, which (poor wretch!) he would not have the sense to act upon. For true it is that once a gadabout, always a gadabout! And Samuel follows one woman only until another crosses the trail. Love with our Samuel is no more and no less than a children's game of cross-tag, led through London streets by players who have never seen each other before.

Yet doth he serve his friends well — that is, so long as they be men. And for the others, I would rather not be a woman friend Samuel's, because of the reasons foreanent stated.

June 4th, 1703. - I have just returned to my house in Clapham from the vault near the Communion Table in the Church of the Crutched Friars, in which place I did make my eternal farewells to my oldest friend Mr Samuel Pepys, once my dear master, the husband of my yet dearer mistress, and of late my comrade and partner — as he was good enough to style himself — for long dwelling under my roof and so deigning to accept the kindly gratitude of his ancient pupil and chief clerk.

When I glance at the leaves I wrote four-and-thirty years ago I declare I do not know myself for the same man. Then I was an ill-conditioned, self-conceited coxcomb — worthy neither of the consolations of my dear mistress nor the lighter favours of Mistress Willet (who in due time married her cousin Archibald and died respected by all, the landlady of the Jolly Postboy Inn on the Bristol road).

Strange it is to think that Deb kept her light head and easy ways so long above the daisies, when within a year of my writing down all these fancies, Elizabeth Pepys, the like of whom the sun hath

never since shone on, was carried out to St Olave's Church, in our parish of the Crutched Friars,

Ay, a broken man was her husband, my master! And as for me, who was but her servant, I never rightly cared to look on woman since. And even unto this last year of grace, two old men were used to steal, in the grey light of the tenth of a London November, to St Olave's Church, and stand there a long while bareheaded, he at the head and I at the feet.

Now they two lie together, wife and husband, mayhap more contentedly than they ever did in their hot youth, and I, being left alone, will go my pilgrimage from Clapham, twice a year instead of once, on the day of his death and on hers.

Yet do I think my master ever kept a little sting of jealousy against his servant, perhaps as suspecting me of having revealed his doublings about Deb and others — perhaps on account of my dear mistress herself. I know not. For in his will he left me naught but fifty pounds and a mourning ring, as he did to the very servants of my house!

But the truth is, a man will forgive differences — concerning God, man, fortune, doctrine, angers politic and slights personal - save only the offence that cometh, like that first one of Eden, by a woman. Betwixt man and man this is the sin unpardonable.

Yet, God knows, it is with the kindest thoughts in my heart that I turn my mourning ring upon my finger and set me, as an ancient, faithful clerk, to carry out my master's wishes.

For in all save the Eden apple, the discord which came by a woman, he loved me. None better.

HOW I ELOPED WITH MY LADY BISHOP

"The misfortunes of the Philistines work for the good of Israel," said My Lord Bishop, sententiously. "The Puritans of the city have the Plague, whence it happens that we who have the cure of the souls of such as are of gentle opinions are at leisure to observe the marvels of Nature!"

"Tush, my dear!" said his wife, "think you, Providence hath gone to so great an expense in order that you may see the trout jump and the bracken flourish? It were more to the purpose if God had ordained that we could walk in the Mall and watch the changing of the guard."

The Bishop of Alchester and his wife were seated quite like ordinary people at the corner of a common near their country house. The Plague had driven the Bishop to his diocese, where he had not been seen since the year of grace 1661, his attendance upon the King being of course accepted in heaven as excuse for a consistent neglect of his pastoral duties.

Now Alchester was an exceedingly pleasant place. Ringed in by miles of common, now in June yellow with gorse and whin, sweetly turbulent with the song of birds, and overarched by the deep blue sky of south-eastern England, the cathedral city drowsed above its water meadows and shut off the Plague by such a system of espionage and quarantine as commended itself to the fears of the authorities, lay and ecclesiastical. But it was mainly dull in Alchester. No one could deny that.

My Lady Bishop herself is the authority for this. I myself did not find it so. But then I am but a

country booby, alert in the matter of partridge and moorfowl, but careless how the fashion goes so that my fishponds are fruitful and the pigeons come home betimes my dovecotes.

But for all that, I do not deny that I sought the company of My Lady Bishop. How she came to marry Anthony Lowther, late singing canon of his Majesty's Chapel Royal, the devil and his angels may know. For I and the rest of us are still in the dark as to the matter. She had been Peg Brunker, a niece of My Lord of that name and counted a great catch. Gay she was, too, and merry of tongue, also quick of wit and not disinclined for the gamesomest sport that might be going. It was thought that she had been wrought upon the churchman's key, which silly women think can open and shut heaven and hell. Or mayhap it was that Peg Brunker, though a wit and a beauty, had never been allowed to go to Court. For My Lord, though a follower himself, would not give his womenfolk so much as an ellisand of liberty — that is, if he could help it.

However this may be, it presently became obvious to all that pretty Mistress Peg was no whit more religious as My Lady Bishop of Alchester than she had been as the niece of the wittiest and — save one — the worst of all the courtiers of King Charles.

So, jocosely enough, the Bishop and his wife sat at the Ashdown cross-roads, where the way to Yenthem crosses the pretty woodland bridle-path which dips into the willow copses and then winds up the hill again toward Chilton. A pretty place is Ashdown and full of woodland quiet and the sough of leaves blown out edgeways to the wind.

But before I go further I had better tell my name. I am Richard Piggott of Larimore, a man who has ever

kept to his own acres, though in times of trouble I have suffered for my opinions and, during the oppression, paid clearly for fealty to prince and Church. So you will know that I am not a man to cry down the ordained clergy, and least of all my neighbour and that right reverend father in God, the Bishop of Alchester.

It was the hour of the evening walk, when one listens to the reed birds down by the marshes at Great Widgery, or the chats in the yellow broom, and finds it mightily Pleasant to be alive.

I came to where the Bishop and his wife were sitting, cosily as if they loved one another. I saw them talking low and looking at the ground as I came up, so I knew that they were speaking of me.

I saw the Bishop look at his wife with beseeching expression as one that would counsel a silence he had not the means of enforcing.

"A very good even to you, My Lord," I said, bowing my best, "and to you, most dear lady!" said I.

"Ah, squire of Larimore, this is good seeing," cried My Lady Bishop, as she rose to put her hand in mine. And her face had upon it a smile of welcome which I could not think to be assumed.

For she was both young and fair, and it behoves not such to be wedded to a sullen self-seeking carle like My Lord Bishop. At least so thought I then. And with fuller knowledge even so think I still.

We were even thus placed, the Bishop and his wife sitting side by side, I in front of them. The Bishop looked over the heath and his wife smiled at me. It was a thing I had often noticed: My Lady smiled only when the cold eyes of her husband were elsewhere

A winsome, frank, lovable smile it was and, I own,

abode with me after she had done smiling.

Presently our eyes converged on a spot at which the Bishop had been gazing for several minutes.

Over the heath which stretched away to the north-east a horseman was riding — or at least so it seemed to us. But presently, the direction of their journey changing, the one became two, and they grew up into plain sight before our eyes.

"What cavaliers spur so fast and ride so late?" said My Lord Bishop with a trifle of anxiety. And not for the first time I saw the placid professional smoothness of his brow marred by an unmistakable frown.

"From London surely!" said I, their horses are very weary, though they are spurring with intent to reach the end of their journeys."

My Lady Bishop had a different light in her soft hazel eyes. I saw hope of a new experience shining there, but innocently and sweetly as a child that looks upon a gaud fresh from the booth at Bartholemew's, or out of a merchant's mulepack.

The cavaliers rode up. We kept our places as they swerved at sight of us. One was a handsome man of middle age with dark ringlets and the stillest, weariest eyes that ever I saw. Yet I could see, too, that he was good-humoured and easily amused. I was not afraid of him. But with the other it was different.

For such a scornful and mirthful devil beaconed and signalled in his glance — such a festive and capricious imp of mischief glanced in pouting of his lip and forthwith ducked under only to reappear astride on the curl of his nostril, that I was chilled to my bone's very marrow. And I was glad that I was not a woman to have that man for a lover. But all

the same my hand itched to buffet his face so that he might be my foe and have him at the sword's point — oh, not long, for the space of a quarter of an hour.

The Bishop rose and swept his hat from his head with the large gesture only learned at Court, which we bumpkins of the country never achieve. But we hate and despise those who, like the Bishop, have it naturally.

At the sight of the prelate, both of the riders leaped from their horses and he of the impish eye bent and kissed the ring on the white episcopal hand. But the man with the brown ringlets stood erect, smiling subtly and humourously behind his long-lashed eyes.

The Bishop was about to speak, but the darker man of the two was before him.

"My Lord of Alchester," he said, with the, softest and most plausible accent, "you wilt mayhap receive two gentlemen of the Court, travelling on important business as far as Colchester."

"Ay, that will I and willingly," the Bishop made answer with a courteous inclination of his head, "the gentlemen of the Court of so great a king are ever welcome at the house of one who owes all to the undeserved favour of his Majesty."

I saw the imp for a single moment look out of the eye of the younger man. But the smiling patience of the other was unruffled. He only bowed slightly at the prelate's declaration.

Then presently the spokesman of the two travellers informed us that his companion was one Sir Charles Darnley, Baronet, and that he was plain Robert Wilkes of Coombes Manor in the County of Kent. At which I was very glad and thankful, for I

had thought them of far greater quality, and so the more difficult to speak with for a man of books and green fields. The Bishop, however, only bowed again with a subtle look on his grey heavily joweled face.

It was on the tip of my tongue to bid them all farewell and peremptorily return to Larimore. But My Lady Bishop, with a curious look of appeal, turned abruptly to me as if to escape from the glances of the gentleman with the imp in his eye. She even laid her hand on my arm, begging me to go to Bishopsthorpe and help her to entertain her so little expected visitors.

Now when My Lady Bishop asketh a favour with her eyes on the ground during the asking, and then all suddenly flashes them up at you while you were preparing to answer, the result doth not make for the freedom of your own will. So have I found and so it was on this occasion. I would sooner have given up any field in Larimore (except the Home Park) than gone to the palace with two such cavaliers. Yet when My Lady looked at me with that sweep of the eyelash, which is like the day breaking quickly, my will within me became as water, and I never so much as thought of refusing.

Her husband went on before, a cavalier on either side of him. Each of the two was leading his horse and they all talked quietly and confidentially like men who know each other well. And I wondered to see our cold and remote prelate so swiftly unbend.

But on the other hand, I never saw My Lady so suddenly reticent and frigid. Each time that either of the two strangers looked her way or dropped a pace behind on the narrow woodland path, I saw her instinctively slacken her pace and draw nearer to me. And this, as I have remarked, was very far from

being the use and wont of Mistress Peg Brunker, either before or after she married My Lord of Alchester.

The Bishop's palace at Alchester was no more a palace than your house or mine. You will remember that, being in Noll's own district, it had been plundered and burnt by the country people after the news of Marston Moor. Before that they had been feared of Rupert the Prince, because he had a house near by. But when the news came that Cromwell had killed him and ridden about all day with his head hanging, like Absalom's, to the pommel of his saddle, no one thought it in the least unlikely. So they went and plundered Bishopstowe.

So in the meanwhile, and till money came again into the country, the Bishops of Alchester lodged at an old manor-house called Garden Wycke, close down by the sea, where the Lords of Assize were wont to bide so as to be out of the narrow lanes and uncouth smells of Alchester.

To Garden Wycke then we went. I loved the place greatly – particularly since My Lord had returned there from the Court – the wilding garden, overrun with little yellow China roses, scenting like love-locks, the great elms standing all about, arches everywhere, and hidden leafy ways, many yew hedges, clipped and curious, and an open space in the midst of the maze, where one might sit and consider the sundial and the hastening life of man. There was, I grant you, less of melancholy in the sight when My Lady sat by me, throwing bread to the carps in the Stowe, than when, at other times, I walked over from Larimore, leaped the locked gate and so made my way through the dreary, dripping laurels to the pond by the sundial. All the same, I

made pilgrimage regularly, for these three purposes – *imprimis* to consider the vanity of things, to feed the carp (the goldfish I had given shelter at Larimore), and to recall the manner Peg Brunker had of shaking out her skirts when she rose off the marble garden seat.

But though I dined but seldom with Mistress Peg and her husband, I often looked in of an evening. For, said she, I was so gay that dull care had no chance with me, but forthwith flew out of the window! Yet I minded not her irony, being grateful only for the privilege of playing *ombre* and *espada* with Bishop Anthony Lowther — which, as time went on, I grew to consider a wonderful distraction, so that I added to my prayers (which I said in great secrecy, being of the King's party) a thanksgiving that God had made me a landholder near to an episcopal city. My only drawback was Anthony Lowther himself. I could not bring myself to do more than barely support his presence, and indeed I looked at him as seldom as possible, though I had heard that he was thought much of at Court, and could cross wits with the King himself and not (they said) get the worst of it.

We went, therefore, to Garden Wycke, and ever as we approached nearer My Lady Bishop waxed ever the kinder and leaned the more heavily on my arm. This I thought most friendly of her, and when the cavalier with the elfish eye came back and walked a while by us, she addressed never a word to him, but drew yet closer to me, and gripped me hard, almost to hurt. All of which I endured with an extreme fortitude and wondrous patience.

When he of Kent had betaken himself back again to the tall dark-haired man (Sir Charles Darnley to

his name) I heard them laughing low each to the other, and Sir Charles looked back over his shoulder at My Lady walking by my side. I felt that it would come to blows sooner or later, and I thanked God and Major Theophilus Desbro, who had taught me swordplay, so that I had the use of sabre and small-sword better than any man in the county. As for these prick-me-dainties of Whitehall, I made nothing of them.

But when we came to the long grotto, all of leaves, by which one can make the way shorter to the house by going through the orchard, Peg burst out into such tears as I have never seen any woman shed — not even my dear mother when she heard of my father's death after Worcester day. And when I asked what was the matter, she only sobbed the more and shook her head, being in such a taking that it was impossible for her to speak.

Nevertheless she laid her head on my shoulder, and since she knew not what she was saying, to soothe her I promised to take her away out of her misery that very night at eight of the clock. I convened to meet her at the orchard gate, armed with sword and pistol. At another time I should have had much to say, but then (so strange it is!) I did not even think of saying "No." I only wanted Peg to stop crying. And oh! how I hated her husband, his courtly ways, and his walking with his hat in his hand, making gestures with it as he walked. Faugh — I was doing what was wrong, doubtless — but such a man! — such a man. Besides which, you who condemn me have not had Peg Brunker cry on your shoulder and all down your lace ruffles.

At Garden Wycke I stayed till after dinner, and then I went, my soul boiling within me. For the tall

black man with one lid hanging lower than the other made undisguised love to my dear lady, while the other, who had his eyes everywhere, took off the attention of My Lord Bishop — which, as it seemed, was easy to be retained. As for me, I sat grilling, my thoughts running on blood and wounds, and, save for My Lady's gracious eyes bidding me keep the peace for her sake, I think I had slain them there and then — how many I do not know, but My Lord Bishop at any rate

At last I took my leave and hid me in my trysting-place by the end of the little store house where the winter apples lie ripening. I had a long time to wait, but I was heartened by what I saw on the roadway. For there was a coach and four, and the coachman whose head I saw was no other than John Hodman, the Bishop's own man himself, so that if I were doing wrong in running away with My Lady I was doing it, as it were, with all the honours of war. I counted the money in my pockets, and found that I had fifty-three guineas and a crown piece. For by great good luck, only the day before I had received the uplifting of my Wellwood properties, a circumstance which I thought little enough of at the time, but now became suddenly important.

After I had waxed very weary and stiff to my limbs, there came my dear lady, a cloak cast about her shoulders, close hooded, and her pretty slippers showing their red Cordovan tips. Ah me, if only all had been well, and the folk had been throwing such tokens after us as we mounted into the wedding coach. Even as it was — well, there is no need to talk about that. It was all strange enough. A bishop's wife is not run away with every day by a simple country squire, who has never so much as

been to town.

I was so taken up thinking about everything that I never heard what directions My Lady gave to old John, My Lord's coachman. That John was in the secret was clear. For when we were in the coach together Peg took no further heed as to where we were going, but began to talk to me very fast. Her eyes were all a-flame, her cheeks glowing. She held both my hands, and whenever I would have turned away from her she jerked me sharply back, so that I had perforce to listen to her. I declare she babbled like a child in a fever — without sequence or purport. But I loved her the more for being so keen to keep my attention fixed upon herself.

Yet when, my conscience getting the better of me, I asked Peg if it was not very wicked of us thus to run away together (and then begged pardon for my country qualms), she but laughed at me and said, "Oh, not so very wicked after all!"

And then, all at once, I heard a familiar crunching of gravel, and when I looked up, lo! there we were at Larimore front door. Peg had sprung out and was running up the steps to throw herself upon my dear old mother, who stood smiling and weeping at once within the porch that the ivy trails over till it is almost hidden.

And that was a douche of cold water to me, who had been thinking such great things of my gallantry. But really, in my heart, I was very glad. For I know not if I would have loved Peg quite the same. She had written to my mother and sent a messenger in private as soon as we got to Garden Wycke.

And my mother would not even let me bide in the house — mine own herited house — but sent me off with guns to the men-servants' quarters at the

entrance of the fortified quadrangle of Larimore. I was to arm the gate-porter and our two stout deer-watchers. We were to be ready, and if any came insolently we were to resist — but only when my mother gave us the word.

Then we all sat down and waited — Peg and my mother being in the house of Larimore, all alone with the maids, and us three young men with our muskets loaded on either side of the gate. For the porter did not count, being of my father's time, old and fat.

My mother's last orders were that on no account were we to pull trigger on the certain slim black man — the one I had heard called Darnley. But as for the Kentishman with the eyes of an elf, the three of us might do with him as we chose.

We had no very long time to wait, there in the lodge gate of Garden Wycke. First we saw two cavaliers come riding, and with them the Bishop also, rather behind, but doing none so poorly on a carriage horse.

Then, when they had come to the gate, we challenged them, desiring to know what they wanted.

My Lord of Alchester called out that their business was with the lady of the house and did not concern us, and the Kentishman, waxing angry, demanded to be let pass in the King's name. It was a high word for such an occasion, so I asked to see their warrant. To this they demurred. And it was my mother, appearing on the height of the staircase landing without, who bade me let them pass.

So they rode within the courtyard of Larimore and quite near to where my mother stood. I could not hear what was said at first, for I had to close the

gate and stand on my guard beside it, with Ridley and Vardon, our serving-men — so that in no case could they seize or do harm to My Lady without trying conclusions with us.

But the first words I heard my dear mother say struck me shaking — dumb and afraid.

"Anthony Lowther," she said, "I have long known you, and you will never be archbishop, for I, Dame Anne Piggott of Larimore, have taken your wife into sanctuary. With me she shall bide, since you, My Lord, would make her honour a thing of truck and barter. *I* know why you chose Peg Drunker, My Lord. A bird out of such a nest seemed a ready-made decoy! No, go your ways, My Lord! Your wife abides with me, and while she does so, my son Richard shall keep the gate."

"And what do you make of me?" cried the Kentishman, suddenly roused to fury. "Are there no laws in the land to render to a man his own wife when she elopes?"

"Not the wife of a bishop, sir," quoth my mother, "not while Dame Anne Piggott lives to tell why! Neither for you, My Lord of Rochester, nor for your master shall she be given up. I will be to her as a mother – "

"Faith of me," said the dark man with the plume low over his face, "but this is a most valiant lady. Her fashions may be those of the precisians, but I am told that her people made some stand for the good cause!"

He was not speaking directly to my mother, but in a moment she had turned upon him and swept a deep Court reverence.

"Sire," she said, "my husband saw worthier work than this by your side betwixt Whiteladies and

Worcester field. He lies buried in the common ditch outside St Martin's Gate and with him five and twenty of the forty good Alcastrian lads who followed him. Prince you were then, King you are now. But permit it to the freedom of an old woman's tongue to tell you, Sire, that, by comparison, this is poor work for the son of St Charles!"

"After Worcester," said the dark man cheerfully, "they called me 'that rogue, Charles Stuart.' I fear they were in the right of it — so long that is, as I keep company with such rascals as this Kentish lord."

"God send your Majesty better counsellors and a wiser choice in companions," said my mother.

"And send my subjects the wit to know that kings are of the same mould as other men," retorted the King, "and must have the same time to make themselves perfect!"

Then he turned to ride away, but finding the gates still shut, and Ridley and Vardon armed, he pretended to fall into a confusion, crying, "What, another plot! And in the house of my friends! wouldst thou be my executioner?" he demanded of me. "If so, I am provided already with a Juxon, but I fear I am in a poorer case to die than was my blessed father, not having had the advantage of living like him. Nevertheless kneel, Master Richard, and do penance for the rascal trick of constraining the person of a King."

"Your Majesty," said I, "I knew not that it was the King, but had I known, and my mother had bidden me, I would have done the same twenty times over."

At which they laughed (except Anthony Lowther) but to this day I know not why.

However, I kneeled as I was bidden, knowing that

he would not dare to do me an injury, with Ridley and Vardon, both stout fellows and good shots, standing within ten paces of him. And with that he tapped me on the shoulder with his fine French sword, and bade me rise, calling me by the name of Sir Richard Piggott of Larimore.

Then I knew not whether to thank him and kiss his hand, or bid Ridley and Vardon fall on. For it seemed so strange a thing that I believed he was mocking of me. But at the word of my mother, I let them pass, saluting the King with my hat below my knee. Then they rode off, the two cavaliers jesting and merry, but My Lord Bishop following heavily behind with his head down.

By great favour I supped that night with my mother and Peg in the Larimorehall. My mother was sadder than I had thought to see her. For she had the old notions about kings, and could remember the ways of the first Charles Stuart. But Peg was very merry, and kept calling me Sir Richard in mockery. She had all the names of the shire-side lassies at her tongue tip, and when I refused all these, she would have me ride off to Court to seek a bride. There was, she said, one Mistress Stewart who was like to none for beauty, but thought nobody under the rank of a duke worth listening to. Still, a title was a title, and Lady Pigott of Larimore sounded fine enough to tempt any woman, let her conceit be what it would.

* * * * *

'Tis long since that night now, and we are old people, Peg and I. Anthony Lowther did not long outlive his disappointment in the matter of the

archbishopric. And so my mother told me that if I but asked Peg, she would not say me nay. Which was just as well, for I hardly think I should have thought on it myself. I would not have ventured I mean. As to thinking of Peg, I did enough of that, even when Anthony was still in the way, solid and grey as a cathedral tower.

But I have been a happy husband, and that I think makes a happy wife. For I have serve and obeyed Peg all my life, even as before that I served and obeyed my mother. I make no shame of it. It hath been my happiness. Peg's also.

She hath had her whims and tempers, of course. From such women are never free. But if a man takes no notice, but goes his way, presently they are sorry and make up.

And so it has been with Peg.

AN IDYLL OF THE SUD EXPRESS

Five o'clock on a bleak autumn morning, and my faithful Bigño had parted from me almost in tears in the draughty station of Bilbao. Sunny Spain was in tears as well as Bigño, and my heart too was heavy when I thought of London fogs and business worries, the many adventures we had had together, the strong-smelling muleteers' satchel over his back, and the caravan parted with to a merchant of rabbit-skins:—these were added tribulations too heavy almost to be borne.

Wrapped in my big Spanish cloak and huddled in a corner — surrounded with the last tokens of Bigño — the latest newspapers, after a while I took stock of my companions. We made an odd assembly for a first-class express carriage, even in Spain.

Opposite me was a sad-faced peasant woman with a sack beside her, which evidently contained her earthly belongings. I was wondering idly what she was doing there, when a voice, unmistakably English in its brightness, called my attention to the far side of the carriage.

"Now, Jack," said the speaker, "you can never again say I am a growly woolly bear that won't get up in the morning!"

"When did I ever say so, little silly?" Jack smiled down at her with undisguised adoration.

"Not so *loud*, Jack!"

"Oh, these foreign Don Inky-cloaks will never understand!" My polite fellow-countryman meant me, having heard my farewell to Bigño in Bilbao station.

"You always say I am a growly bear if I have to

wake up early — and here I am after making you a lovely cup of tea, boiling eggs, and finishing the packing, after getting off that horrid Southampton boat!"

"Yes," interposed Jack, "you know you do pack so beautifully!"

"Ungrateful brat — haven't I got the temper of an angel? Say so quickly! Out with it or I'll kiss your shoulder before these people! Then they'll be sure we are newly-marrieds!"

Jack Trenchard had an Englishman's horror of sentiment, and, moreover, not being oversure of what his mischievous little wife might do, surrendered at discretion.

"Mamie Trenchard, you little witch, I will say, think, do anything you like. I swear you are perfect — and death to the man who says you are otherwise. No — no — I mean death to any other man but me who says you are!"

This lovers' quarrel settled, the girl began to take a survey of her fellow-passengers.

"How funny," she said, laughing softly, and talking with the universal English disbelief in anyone understanding their language, "do you see that peasant woman there with the sack. How does she come first-class?" Then with a quick change of voice, "How sad she looks — I wish I could talk to her. It is so different to have you here, you dear, big, stupid Jack — tut! There, I will do it. The growly person in the corner wrapped in his cloak and 'boina' does not understand a word. Look, he is going to sleep!"

Again she referred to a very alert journeyman of letters, who had the manuscript of a volume of Spanish adventure in his kit-bag.

And so rattled on the light-hearted English wife, a dainty picture full of life, coming and going in bright swift flashes, mainly from her eyes. She was the only Englishwoman I had ever met in many years of Spanish travel. No wonder she took me for a don.

The slow Spanish train (if it did call itself an express) was passing through the beautiful Basque scenery. At times the wooded dells spoke of England. Again everything flitted past rude and wild as any Scottish glen. France, too, mingled subtly with the landscape, but there was no trace of the Spain I knew so well — tawny, bare, ravine-furrowed, yet growing dearer to the heart as the years go by — a wrinkled, ancient mother, but somehow kindly too.

From the window I presently returned to a covert survey of my compatriots. Mistress Mamie was busy preparing a dainty little meal for two — no tea or eggs this time, but sandwiches, chicken, rolls and butter, a few leaves of lettuce, olives, and a bottle of good white wine. She was evidently ignorant of the Spanish custom which makes the offer to partake the most necessary of forms when travelling.

"Jack, you lazy boy, get out the cork, and, hey, my merry men, fall to!" There is no need to report all that was said as with merry chatter the two discussed their good things.

Presently I too fished in my pocket for the more ordinary fare Bigño had provided — a roll cut in two, with slices of sausage and onion. I had a slight pang of regret that Bigño's tastes were not more refined, but I washed it down from my flask — and would gladly have shared with my neighbour opposite, but she, poor soul, was sleeping the sleep of the tired, with the signs of tears still wet on her cheeks and

her thin arm clasping her sack of belongings.

At this moment the conductor entered in the casual way a Spanish railway official has. He walks along the step outside, opens the door, shuts it behind him, and lo! with a noble sweep of his cap he demands your ticket — or your life.

Meekly I gave up mine. Trenchard the Englishman searched wildly in all his pockets, till at last they were discovered in the overcoat which his wife was using as a pillow. But a rough shake awoke the sleeping woman. For her the guard of an express mail train stood on no ceremony. With a dazed look she handed out her ticket. Alas, ignorance and sorrow had placed her in an awkward predicament. Sleep had overtaken her, and the junction where she ought to have changed was long since passed — hours ago indeed.

A desolation seized her — the fear and panic which any dealings with men in authority always causes to southern women.

"Oh, Pedro," she wailed, "why are you not here to help me? See, senor (she appealed to the guard), my husband has gone to kill the Americans, and I, well, I have nothing now — I am going home to my people."

"Enough," interrupted this polite official. "See, you must go on to Zumarraga and you must pay me the excess fare. It will take a little longer that way, but you will get home all the same."

"Sanctissima Maria, and I have not a centimo!" The woman stared round her like a trapped animal. It seemed as if she were about to make a bolt for the window.

I was about to speak when my eye caught the merry feast arrested in mid course. The girl was

staring with wondering, uncertain eyes. Her Spanish was evidently desperately limited, but, woman-like, she grasped the main situation.

"Jack, Jack," she whispered, "quick, give me the money."

Then, passing swiftly to where the woman sat bewildered, she faltered out, "No ha dinero? Quanto es? No puede haoler mucho, perro." Then her Spanish went to bits, and with Jack's fresh English gold in her hand, and with tears that mingled with those of the peasant woman, she gave it up and left us three men to settle the question. It was all very pretty to see.

I explained to the collector. Then, turning to Mr Trenchard, I confessed my co-nationality. Together we arranged the return fare — a matter of a few shillings — and then little Mrs Trenchard insisted on feeding the dazed woman, with all the gentleness and sweetness which only women can (if they will) show to a sorrowing sister. Then I too came in for a share of the lunch, and was assistant interpreter. The woman's annals were the short and simple ones of the Spanish poor.

Her Pedro had gone to the war — but he was all she had — and only that morning she had seen him off. Oh yes, she could get work at her old home — and then by-and-by, when Pedro came back -

Then all suddenly she laid her face on her new-found friend's breast and wept.

"But if he comes not back - oh, then, I must just die!"

"What does she say?"

The interrogation was addressed to me, almost fiercely. I was evidently unforgiven for pretending to be a foreigner.

"Ah, but he will." This in mixed English and Spanish. But the secret sympathy told the meaning, and somehow Pedro's wife felt comforted.

When the train stopped we had all to get out, we three to change to the line for the frontier, and Pedro's wife to wait a couple of hours till a train would convey her home.

With much emphatic Anglo-Spanish, the product of phrase-books half-forgotten, Mrs Trenchard impressed upon the guard to see that the woman was looked after. And he, succumbing to her bright beauty, her indifference to mistakes merely grammatical (and to a couple of *pesetas* I slipped him), promised to do her bidding.

It was with manifest horror that he saw at parting the peasant throw her arms about the neck of the generous young Englishwoman. But because Mamie smiled at him at the same time, taking him, as it were, into her confidence, he suffered it with a shrug of his official shoulders. All English were mad anyway.

At the French frontier we got the news that the war was over. No more troops were to be sent out. Pedro would never even have reached Corunna, his port of embarkation. So, though I was not there to see, doubtless Pedro and Pedro's wife were soon after reunited.

And, at any rate, though the story is incomplete, it pleased me more than many I have finished to my own proper liking. If more English folk were like Jack and Mamie Trenchard the name of Britain would smell sweeter abroad. To which end also some small acquaintance with tongues helps amazingly — also breaking off the habit of calling the rest of the world "foreigners."

All the same, little Mrs Trenchard never forgave me for pretending to be one. It was taking such a mean advantage. What might she not have said?

MONSIEUR LE MAIRE

Brilliant June sunshine cast ink-black shadows and made even the dull green of the olive-trees mistily bright. All was gay, smil-smiling and sparkling about the small Provençal town nestled between two hills, with the broad sweep of the Rhone rushing past it. A young man, Jean Baptiste La Farge, and his wife Gabrielle, felt what a happy place this world was. They had reasons for thinking so.

Gabrielle Briand was an orphan of such long standing that she had never been sorry for herself. She had known and loved Jean all her life. But it was a lonely time for her when he was away at Grasse doing his three years' military service, though the rare joy of seeing him come home in the glory of his picturesque uniform and jaunty blue *berri* helped to console her. And then, how wonderfully proud she was when he came back at last for good, no private any longer but a full sergeant.

After that fell out a gay and busy time. Gabrielle left her place at Madame Champion's on the Avignon road, to make Jean Baptiste's home as bright and happy as any in all Provence.

Père La Farge and his wife were very fond of Gabrielle, and the old dame's clever fingers had helped, on those long evenings when Jean was away at Grasse or clambering among the frontier Alps, to get Gabrielle's wedding frock and add to her pretty store of linen.

It was while the two women were thus employed that Jean Baptiste won his first step.

His company's officer had slipped on a dangerous ice-slope. He would certainly have lost his life but for the quick presence of mind and courage of Gabrielle's sweetheart. That was during the first year of his service, and ever since, when the list of promotions was read out, it was a rare thing if it did not contain the name of La Farge, Jean Baptiste. And even the good-for-nothings of the regiment agreed that he deserved it. For in all the Chasseurs Alpines there was no better fellow than Jean. Then he sat down and wrote to Gabrielle, telling her it was all for her sake.

But all this was over now. A year and more had passed since Gabrielle had accompanied Jean and his people, to the Maire one day and to the church another. Indeed soon a wonderful thing was to happen, so wonderful that Jean could not bring himself to believe that the like had ever happened before! But there was dread too mingled with the exultation. For his treasure, his little Gabrielle, his "ma mie," must walk through the Valley of the Shadow - and he be powerless to help her.

It was the twenty-fourth of June and he woke her with a light touch on the hair, dark against the pressed pillow. His hands held a steaming bowl of coffee, so it was not with them he had touched her.

"Here, littlest," he said, "the stove outside is lighted, and I made this to give you strength to get up. I must be off."

"Jean, Jean," said the girl, "you spoil me! But there was never a man like my man! See, Jean, listen. Look in the vase at the corner of the glass-case and there you will find some flowers. I bought them last night — to place on the old cross. It is your name day, sweetheart, but somehow I am not

strong enough to walk so far to-day. You will take them before you go to work and place them on the old cross, as I have done for my lad's sake, and for the blessing of good Saint Jean Baptiste, ever since I can remember."

The young man turned with the flowers in his hand, smiling sadly down at her.

"Poor little Gabriella!" he answered slowly; "it cannot be to-day, child. All that is over. Did you not know that the old cross is to be torn down, by the order of Monsieur Tellier the Maire — and that, dearest, is the work I have to do to-day -"

Gabriella started up, her lips whitening.

"Oh, Jean, my own Jean," she wailed, do it not, do it not! Not the old cross where I have kneeled and prayed for you. No, Jean no; it cannot be — oh, the Bon Dieu would surely punish us if you helped in anything so wicked."

The flowers dropped on the floor and jean was kneeling beside her.

"Little woman," he whispered, with his arms close about her, "what can I do? I must do as the Maire orders. Think, little one, if I refuse he may take away from us even the small wage I earn — and — and - there is the child to think on. I must do my duty, and if God be true and just He will know I am not working against Him, but for my wife — my wife and — our child!"

So in silence, but with an ache at his heart, he kissed her and went out into the clear early sunshine of midsummer, leaving her thus — because he feared to remain.

There are always grievous times in France when politics rule everything. Within a year Gabrielle had seen the convents sold up, and the good sisters

driven into exile. The fathers from the big monastery on the hill had been forced to flee, and now the reddest of Red Republicanism ruled the town and indeed the province generally. Workmen in the town not of the "party" could hardly expect to earn a living, and Jean La Farge, though no politician, had voted for the stronger party for the sake of wife and home.

Left to herself Gabrielle got ready slowly, some unknown, inevitable danger heavy upon her heart.

She gathered up the flowers and kissed them tenderly, before putting them back in the vase on the mantelpiece. Having set her house in order, and dressed in the beautiful Provençal costume with its becoming coif, she dragged herself, already weary, into the chattering throng of the market-place.

She hardly seemed to hear the greetings and gossip which sounded about her, though the much-experienced dames whispered to each other that it was high time that old Mère La Farge was taking the road to her son's house to look after his young wife.

Gabrielle turned into the quiet aisles of St Jean's, the soiled flowers still in her hand. At the feet of the statue of the patron saint she laid them, opening her troubled heart to Mother Mary and the Son who bears and hears all burdens. Specially she prayed that Jean, her lad, might be forgiven for the day's innocent sacrilege, and, then, with a pitiful little prayer for herself, she passed out again, the bustle of the market-place sounding curiously dead in her ears.

She made her little preparations. Something extra she must have as it was Jean's fête day — yes, he loved a little *ragout* of mutton, with rice and savoury onions. Yes, she would get him that, and a carrot

too, they were cheap — and What was it they were saying? Why did her head swim so — a carrot, please, Mère Pichou — and Oh, dear God, are they saying that the Cross has fallen sooner than the men expected and that it has killed? Whom? Oh, not him! Why would they not speak louder? Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean! She knew no more. A blessed unconsciousness fell upon her. Kindly hands carried her home to the neat whitewashed little room which she had so lately swept and garnished.

* * * *

"She will do now," said the doctor to old Mère La Farge, "thank God it is over – and a fine child. Jean Baptiste will have a happy home-coming. It makes an old bachelor wish he had children of his own instead of only – "

"What is it, petite? No, you must ask no questions. Keep her quiet, La Mère. Her mind is wandering."

For from the bed began a ceaseless wail which gradually took shape in words, "Ah, why would the Bon Dieu not listen when I prayed in St Jean's, quite near the altar? My Jean dead – I never to see him again! God, it is unjust, unjust. Jean was but doing his duty. There is no God or He would have listened – Jean, Jean!" And drifting back into the inarticulate moaning, she sank on the bed, while doctor and mother-in-law gazed at each other wonderingly.

"I must find that son of yours," said the doctor at last, "he is the best medicine she can have just now."

And so saying he snatched his hat and

passed out.

When Gabrielle woke again it was to a new world. For kneeling at her side was her own Jean – really her own Jean – *à elle* as she said immediately, touching him to make sure. Only his face was pale and weary with anxious watching.

"Little wife," he said, "it is I, look, dear, foolish one, do not be afraid." For he saw the remnants of the past terror in her eyes. "My wife, I am here, strong and well. God is good and just after all, and has given us back to each other."

Utterly weary with all she had been through, Gabrielle turned her face to her husband's shoulder and the healing tears dripped down her pale cheeks.

Then Mère La Farge came in with some warm soup, and with her hand clasped tightly in her husband's big brown one, she soon fell into a sweet untroubled sleep.

It was some days before she knew all that had happened that morning, and how everything came about.

Almost as soon as Jean had gone out that morning he had come upon the Maire, busy seeing his shop windows putting on their morning dress.

After a moment of hesitation, Jean begged the Maire would spare him a few words. Briefly he told his story of his wife's desolation at the thought he should break any of the Church's altars. "She is so good," he said, "and at such a time I thought Monsieur le Maire would be gracious and spare her this."

Now the Maire had a tender spot in his rough political old heart. Besides he knew Gabrielle by sight, and the young man's anxious face touched a chord of unexpected gentleness in the fighting

revolutionary.

"Hey, Jean Baptiste," he cried roughly, so as not to appear sentimental, "it is your name day, and there is no reason why you should not have a holiday? There, go back to your pretty Gabrielle and tell her old Maire Tellier is not so bad, after all, even if he is a 'Rouge' of the 'Rouges.'

"There are one hundred sous. Be off and buy her something useful for the baby when it comes. My wife will tell you what. But mark you, lad, if it turns out a boy, he must stick by the party. There, go, and — God bless you both. You will find madame in the pottage-garden — over yonder, among her salads, I'll warrant."

The morning the cross had been demolished - a man — an idle good-for-nothing, Jean Brislou, by name — standing with hands in pockets lazily watching the work of better men than himself, had been killed on the spot, by the fall of the cross at a quite unexpected moment and angle.

When Jean Baptiste the second was three weeks old, a party assembled in Gabrielle's kitchen — just the two adoring grand-parents and a few old friends, some of whom had known Jean Baptiste the First in the Chasseurs Alpines. The repast was simple, but yet simple love and gay humour made it a company fit for any but fools.

Suddenly a knock came to the door, and the rosy round face and figure of Monsieur Le Maire appeared. All at once stood on their feet. Maire Teller was warmly welcomed, and when he told Jean his errand, the young folk could hardly believe their good luck.

Jean was to be Cantonnier on one of the best bits of road in the country — with a house, a slip of

garden, and behind both a little field of olive trees! Many servants of the commune had to wait all their lives for only half as much.

Gabrielle cried and laughed both in a breath, and then, to the vast astonishment and amusement of the guests, threw her arms round the neck of the worthy Maire and kissed him on both cheeks.

There were tears in the tough old fighter's heart as he looked at the young mother.

"Little Jean," said the Maire, "you shall be my godson, and you must grow up the very reddest of Red Republicans — or else I will set your father to pulling down every cross in the countryside, no matter what your mother says!"

And with that he shook his stick at Gabrielle and went out whistling the Marseillaise, while the good action he had done warmed his heart like wine.

HOW ELSIE DANCED FOR HER LIFE

'Do you mind the wee house o' Breckonside?' It was Silver Sand who was speaking, and we were all gathered about the big, open fireplace of Isle Rathan in the frosty gloaming.

'Mind it!' cried a voice, quick and indignant as of one having authority, 'mind it! I heard the tale when I was a lassie, and I never want to hear it mair. It's eneuch to keep us a' from sleepin'! We'll hae nane o' your stories o' witches an' warlocks in my hoose, if ye please, Mr John Faa!

But at this there was, of course, great wonderment among all the younger folk. The lads gathered in closer, where they sat making baskets of plaited willow wands, while the maidens disclaimed their desire to hear any horrible tale –but nevertheless hitched in their chairs closer so that they might not lose a word. They looked over their shoulders whenever the door opened suddenly behind them, and I doubt not, felt pleasurable fears sting them momently in the marrow each time a dog barked.

'Aweel,' said Silver Sand quietly, 'since it's no your pleasure, Mistress may, we will say nothing more of the wee cot o' Breckonside, the auld miser Hobby Kinmont, and that puir young lass Elsie, wha was shut up for the space o' a simmer's nicht wi' the terrible Mounster…'

'Wait till ma mither gangs to the milk-house and then tell us,' whispered one of the bright-eyed maidens, whose work had power to move the old wanderer's heart to tell his best tales.

'Oh, deed,' laughed the mistress of Isle Rathan,

'ye can drive on wi' your tale, Silver Sand. Dinna mak' a 'mounster' o' me in my ain hoose – but gin the bairns dinna sleep this nicht after haein' your daft havers dinned in their lugs, you an' the guidman may e'en bide in the turret chamber wi' the rats or sleep in the barn gin ye like, for into my kitchen ye dinna come nor lie in bed o' mine this nicht!'

'Weel' said Silver Sand philosophically, 'I hae spent some time in waur places than either - and wi' that same guidman o' yours too, Mistress May. But wi' your permission, I will tell the tale of 'How Elsie danced for her life."

And this was Silver Sand's Story

There is no house on Breckonside now (he said), only as ye gang your ways up the brae-face, at the turn of the road where the burn runs bonny and clear down in the dell, and the heather reaches down among the green breckons that give the place its name, ye may see a kind of knowe or hillock, that is, it may be, a thocht greener than the lave. Not one stone is to be seen upon another. The kindly mould is over all. The hemlock and the bluidy fingers (foxglove) grow tall where lovers caaed their cracks by the inglenook, and of all the well-set yaird where the miser grew his lint and dibbled his potatoes, only a single lilac-bush now stands in the corner that overlooks the road.

Now at this lonely yet heartsome place dwelt for many a year auld Hobby Kinmont and his daughter Bell. She had the name of being bonny to look on in her young days, and many a lover come to see the miser's heiress that would fain have hung up his hat behind the door and taken his seat at Hobby Kinmont's table as the auld man's son-in-law.

But auld Hobby was a far seeing carle and not to be cheated by any 'flairdie' (blarney).

'When I hae a want o' ony guid-sons,' he would say, 'I'll put up a notice in the window or hae it intimated in the kirk!'

Hobby had the name of a warlock, too, and the neighbours used to wonder at the strange noises that were to be heard at mirk-midnicht about the cot of Breckonside, and the lights that gaed wandering athwart the leas. It 'werna canny' they said, nor more than decent that Hobby should always have the best lint to make his linen sheets of, the earliest potatoes by a clear fortnight, the cleanest wool whereof to weave his homespun.)For Hobby was a weaver as well as a bonnet-laird on a small scale.)

Above all Hobby had the name of siller, and nothing makes for envy like that, whether in town-street or countryside. 'Envying and grieving at the guid o' your neighbour; aye, there ye hae it bairns' (said Silver Sand, nodding warningly at us to point the moral. The love of siller is the root of all evil, and even the very name of it breeds unkindness and illwill).

But upon a day this Bell Kinmont, that had been counted the richest-tochered lass in seven parishes, settled the matter of a son-in-law for her father without consulting her father. There was a Hieland marching regiment in Dumfries, and squads of them used to tramp here and there through the countryside, airing the braw feathers in their bonnets, and drawing in the young lads to list with them by the glint of their accoutrements, or, maybe, the merry noise of the pipe and drum that went before them and set the pulses jumping.

So with a blythe young Hieland sergeant in His Majesty's 93rd regiment, MacHamish by name, Bell Kinmont took the road, and the auld men only sat the stiller at his loom and caaed away at the shuttle the harder. And if he could not manage to weave himself a new daughter, at least he worked so hard that he seldom minded the one he had lost. The name of her never more crossed his lips. And when anybody, gentle or simple, speered for Bell, he shut the door in their faces and syne went ben again to his weaving.

So a year or two slipped by, and maybe another five or six to the back of that, and still no word of Bell. When, true as I am telling ye, who but Bell brought back work of herself. Faith, and it was a strange word! I mind it clear as yesterday for it was me, Silver Sand, that am this day and old, done man, who gat the first glimpse of her.

It was a fine summer morn, early in June, and the clouds in the sky to the east were just the colour of the first briar rosebuds in the hedge by the roadside. I came up the brae whistling like a lintie and as free o' care, for my heart was light in those good days. There stood the cot of Breckonside before me, shining white in the sun. For the auld miser, though he spared most other things, never was a sparer of good whitewash. I was just beginning to listen for the *click-clack* of Hobby's shuttle, when down by the waterside methought I saw a ferlie.

Fegs, I said to myself that surely the auld times had come back again and that the wee folk were disporting themselves once more in brought daylight. For on the grass by the burn a bonny bit bairn ran hither and thither wavin' its hands and laughing to the heavens for very gladness. The night

had been calm, a 'gossamer nicht,' as we gipsy folk call it, and from hedge to hemlock and from lowly breckon to tall Queen o' the Meadow the silver threads were stretched taut like the cordage of some sea-going ship. The dew shone silver clear on ilka silken strand, and the blobs o' it were like pearls and diamonds in the burning sun.

And aye the langer I stood the wilder the bairn ran and loupit, lightfoot as a fairy herself. 'Bonny – bonny – oh, bonny!' she cried, clapping her hands and laughing, 'see mither,mither, are they not unco bonny?'

Then by the side of the beck, as if, being wearied with travel, she had set her down to take a drink of the caller burn water, I saw a woman sit. She was aneath a bush of hazel, and her head was resting tired-like on her hand. So, being back there in the shadow, I had not noticed her at first, being taken up, as was small wonder, with the sight of that bonny yellow-haired barin flightering here and there like a butterfly in the sun.

Then the wee lass saw me and ran whatever she could to me. She took my hand and syne looked up in my face as trustful-like as if she had kenned me all her days.

'Here, mannie,' she cried, 'come and wauken my minnie to me, for I canna. She winna hearken when wee Elsie speaks to her?'

Hand in hand we went up to the puir thing, and even as I gaed a great fear gripped me by the heart. For the woman sat still even when my step must have sounded in her hear. I laid my hand on her, and as I am a living man, she was clay-cauld. The bairn looked ever up into my face.

'Can you no wauken my mither either?' she said,

wistfully.

'No,' says I, 'No, my puir wee lassie!' For, truth to tell, I kenned not what to say.

'Will minnie never wauken?' she asked again, bright as a button.

'I fear not, bonnie lassie,' said I, and the tear was in my eye.

Then the elf clappit her hands and danced like a yellow butterfly over the lea.

'Then she willna greet ony mair! She willna be hungry ony mair. She will never need bit o' meat nor thread o' claes for ever mair.' She lilted the words, almost as if she had been singing a tune. 'She will be richt pleased my minnie. For oh, sir, she grat sair and often. She carried me in her airms till her ain feet were hurtit and she could gang nae farther. Late yestreen she sat doon here to wash them, and I sat took and after that she cuddled me in her airms. Mannie, are ye no richt glad for my minnie?'

I telled her that I was glad, for naught less would satisfy her, though even as I spak the words the sob rose in my throat.

And as we stood there looking at the woman, sitting with her face on her hands, what should happen but that the auld miser should come hirpling to the door, and there too, looking over his shoulder, was Daft Jeremy, that the village bairns were want to pook at and call the 'Mounster.'

'What hae ye there, gipsy Jock?' the old man cried, shaking his stick at me; 'keep awa frae my door wi' your doxies and flichterin' changeling bairns.'

But I was civil to him for his age's sake and also because of the witless man that was looking over his shoulder. For it is not good to cross such as the

Lord has smitten in their understanding, and so do my own folk never.

'It is a woman, Laird Kinmont,' quoth I, 'that hath set herself down to die by your burnside.'

'Die,' cried he with a queer scream most like a frighted hen flying down off the baulks, 'whatna word is that to speak? A woman dead by my burnside – what richt had she there! What has ta'en sic a liberty wi' Hobby Kinmont?'

'Nay, that you can come and see for yoursel" said I, a little nettled at the carle's hardness of heart. So the auld miser, bent and stiff, came hirpling barehead down the path, and behind him, looking most uncanny, danced Daft Jeremy, combing his hair with a weaver's heckle and muttering to himself. The morning sunshine fell fair on this strange couple, and when she saw him the little maid let go my hand, but he pushed her off. Wherat being nothing affronted, the witch caught at his stick and pulled it away from him before he could resist. Then she gat astride and played horses with it on the green grass of the burnside dell. It was like an incantation.

But without heeding her the old man went to the woman, and, lifting up her head, looked steadfastly in her face.

'God in his heaven be merciful,' he cried; 'it is my ain dochter Bell!'

Then the 'naiteral' laughed loud and long, and, wrapping his 'heckle' in a wisp of paper, he played a tune upon it with his mouth, dancing round and crying, 'There's her richt for ye – ye said she hadna a richt, Laird Kinmont! Ye were that hard ye wadna fie the fremit woman room to die at your dykeside. But Bell has come home to claim her ain. Coffin and

clay- coffin and clay! Sax foot o' clean kirkyard sods! Faith, I wish a' Daft Jeremy's enemies had the same, nae mair and nae less. But it's as weel as it is, Laird Kinmont – for Jeremy canna be doin' with grown women aboot the hoose o' Breckonside. And it's him that has the say noo, ye ken!'

But the old man answered nothing, good nor ill. He only stood and looked down at his daughter, muttering to himself words that sounded like 'Bell has comed hame… My bairn has comed back to me at last!'

So in time the miser buried his daughter decently, and took the little lass hame to him to bring up in the cot-house of Breckonside. But when this came to be talked of in the countryside, there was a well-to-do woman in Dumfries toon, a Mistress Comly or Comline, that was some kin to Bell Kinmont through her ain mother, and when she heard o' the puir bit bairn shut up in that lanesome house with only an auld miser and a daft man, she had heart pity on her, and as soon as she had shut her shop one Saturday afternoon, off she sets to Breckonside in a pony cart that she used to bring her goods up from the Port.

It was but a cauldrife welcome she gat at the white house of Breckonside, but sorrow a bit Margaret Comline cared for that. She tied up her sonsy beast, that was, like hersel', fat as pats of butter, to the yet-post of the old miser's garden. And syne, when he came to the door himself, she did not take a couple of minutes in telling the auld runt her business plump and plain.

'I hae comed to ask ye to pit awa' that daft man,' she said, and, 'get a decent woman for a housekeeper, Laird Kinmont.'

'Meanin' yoursel', Margar't Comline,' interrupted the miser, with a cunning smirk. He had shut the door in her face, and was conducting negotiations through a crack.

'*Me* be your housekeeper,' cried the visitor, 'me that is a rate-payer and a weel-considered indweller in the burgh o' Dumfries. Man, I wadna cross your doorstep though ye were Provost. But I hear that ye hae this bit bairn in the hoose, and a lassie-bairn too (that's full cousin's dochter to mysel'). I hae come to tell ye that it is neither Christian nor decent to bring up the wee thing but-and-ben wi' a kenned 'naiteral' like Daft Jeremy, that has twice been tried for his life for the sheddin' o bluid!'

From behind the closed inner door of the cot-house there came a high-pitched angry cry, that garred the very blood run chill as ice in Margaret Comline's veins. I mean that the thought of it did afterwards. For at the time she just looked about her to see that Donald, her pony, was not so far away, and that the road was clear to the light market cart in case that she had to make a break for it. She had eke a stieve staff in her hand, that the loons of the port kenned brawly the weight of.

It was the voice of the man wanting wint crying out to be at her that she heard.

'She has ta'en frae me my guid-name,' his words reached her though the very stone and lime of the house, 'and she wad tak' the bonny siller oot o' your black kist that you and Jeremy herd sae carefully. Gie the woman the bit lassie-bairn, Lairn Kinmont, and let her be gaun. For less winna serve her, and, forbye, a bairn is nocht but an expense and an eatin' up o' guid meat in ony man's hoose!'

And while the din was at its height in the cot,

there came a sound to Mistress Comline's ear that garred her kind heart loup within her. It was like the whimpering of a bairn that is ill-used and dares not cry out loud. And with that she forgat her fear of the strange 'naiteral,' Daft Jeremy, and with her naked hands she shook the door of the cot-house of Breckonside till the iron stinchel clattered in its ring.

The Magistrates o' Dumfries shall ken o' this or I am a day aulder!' she cried in to them. 'Gie me oot the lassie or the preventative men shall hear o' the barrels ye hae hidden in the yaird. Supervisor Imrie shall be here and search every inch high and low if ye lay as muckle as a finger on the most innocent wean!'

And even as she cried out threatenings and shook the stout oaken door so that the leaves almost fell asunder, Margaret Comline heard a noise behind her, and whipped about quickly with her heart in her mouth, for she thought it was Daft Jeremy come out to slay her.

But instead it was the wee lass herself that had escaped by a kind of miracle through the window o' the 'aumry' or pantry-closet. For Laird Kinmont had it closed with a board, grudging the expense of glass. The lass was greeting and laughing at the same time – feared to the marrow of her bits of bones, but yet crouse withal. Mistress Comline marvelled to see her.

'I hae left the stead o' my teeth in his hand, I wot!' she said as Mistress Comline helped her into the light card at the roadside.

'And see what I brocht wi me,' she added as they drove away. It was a shagreen leather pocket-book like those which well-to-do farmers carry, or rich

English drovers that come to the cattle trysts to buy for the English market. And Mistress Comline, struck with fear lest she should be deleted as a thief, would have turned back. But that at that very moment, out of the door of the cot, there burst a terrifying figure – even Daft Jeremy himself, a great flesher's knife uplifted in his hand. He was scraitching out words without meaning and looked so fleysome that the decent woman e'en slipped the shagreen purse into her reticule basket and laid whip-lash to Donald till that pampered beast must have thought that the punishment of all his sins had overtaken him at once.

The 'naiteral' pursued after them with these and such like affrighting outcries to the very entering of Dumfries town. And never had Margaret Comline, decent woman, been so glad to recognise His Majesty's authority as when she saw Supervisor Imrie with two-three o' his men come riding up from the Brig-End and out upon the green grass of the Terreggles Paes. But she said nothing, only gave them a good day in passing and bade them 'beware o' that puir 'naiteral,' Daft Jeremy, that was in one o' his fits o' anger that day.'

'Sic a craitur should be in the Towbooth. He is a danger to the lieges!' said Supervisor Imrie, adding more cautiously, 'that is, were it no that he was be a cess on the burgh and pairish!'

When Mistress Comline gat to her own door she first delivered Donald into the hands of her serving-prentic, Robin Garmorie, as stout and blythe a lad as ever walked the Plainstanes. But the wee lass she took by the hand up to her own chamber, and there she stripped her to the skin and washed her and put fine raiment on her, new from the shop – aye, and

did not rest from her labours till she had gathered every auld rag that she found on her and committed them to the flames, as if they had been art and part in the wizardry of Laird Kinmont, her grandfather, and the coming ill-repute of the white cot-house on the brae-face of Breckonside.

For at that time it was never suspected by what dread means it came to pass that auld miser Hobby had grown so passing rich, nor yet the bond that was between him and his strange house-mate and crony, Daft Jeremy. But had Mistress Comline examined what was contained in the shagreen pocket-book, she might have come nearer to the truth than an entire bench of magistrates summoned and set aside for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of them that do well.

But fearing she knew not clearly what, she sealed it up in clean white wrapper and laid it aside in her drawer, saying to herself 'If this be honestly come by, the laird is no the man to forget to ca' in for his ain.' And if no…' Here a shake of the head and a shrewd smile intimated that the contents of the pocket-book might one day be useful to its finder, little Elsie Comline, as she was now to be named.

'And wha has a better richt!' the shopkeeper would add, perhaps to salve her conscience in the matter.

But, indeed, it was but seldom, the pocket-book once safe in her drawer, that she thought about the matter at all. For Margaret Comline was a busy woman of affairs, having under her serving-lassies and prentice-loons, a shop on the ground floor of a house in the Vennel, and a well-patronised stall in the market. All day she went to and fro, busily commending her goods and reproving her

underlings with equal earnestness and point. Sunday and Saturday the wrinkle was never off her brow. Like Martha in the Scripture, she was careful and troubled about many things. She read but seldom, and when she did her memory retained not long the imprint of what she read. So that our young monkey, Elsie, being fresh from the mischief-making of the grammar school, where she was drilled with a class of boys, used to shift the marker of woven silk back ten pages or so in the godly book over which her foster mother fell asleep on Sabbath afternoons. By which means Mistress Comline was induced to peruse the same improving passage at least fifty times in the course of a year, yet without once discovering or for a moment suspecting the fact.

For all that , she saw to it that Elsie did her nightly school tasks, recommending the master to 'palmie' her well if she should ever come to school unprepared. But, being a quick and ready learner, the young lass needed the less encouragement of that kind.

As she grew older, too, Elsie would, upon occasions, serve a customer in the shop, though Margaret Comline never allowed her to stand on the street among the babble of tongues at the market stalls. In a little time she could distinguish the hanks of yarn and thread, the webs of wincey and bolts of linen as well as her mistress, and was counted a shrewd and capable hand at a bargain before she was fifteen.

All this time her grandfather, the old miser Hobby, lived on in the little white house up among the fir woods of Breckonside, growing ever harder and richer, at least according to the clashes of the country folk. By day, and sometimes far into the

night, the click of his shuttle was never silent, and being an old man it was thought a marvel how he could sit so long at his loom. And still Daft Jeremy abode with him and filled his pirns. Sometimes the 'naiteral' would sit on the dyke-top at the end of the cottage and laugh at the farmers as they rode by, crying names and unco words after them, so that many shunned to pass that way in the gloaming, for fear of the half-witted, strong creature that mopped and mowed and danced at the lonely gable-end. And they were of excellent judgment who did so.

But when Riddick of Langbarns broke his neck-bone within a mile of Laird Kinmont's loaning, and less than a month after that Lang Hutchin was fand, one snowy Sabbath morn, lying dead with never a mark on his body save that his face was twisted out of all image of mankind and his e'en terrible to see, there were those who began to whisper fearsome things about the innocent-appearing white cot at the top of the Lang Wood o' Breckonside.

Yet there were others again, and they a stout-hearted majority, who scoffed and told how Riddick had been seen in market carrying more than his load of whisky, and that as for Lang Hutchin had he not dared his Maker that day to strike him dead if he spoke not the truth – all that heard him well knowing that even as he uplifted his hand he lied in his throat!

Nor was Elsie wholly forgotten by her only near of kin. Twice or thrice a year there came from the cottage a web of fine cloth, woven as only Laird Kinmont could weave it, with the inscription written plainly thereon, 'To be sold for the benefit of the upkeep of my grand-daughter Elsie Kinmont or MacHamish,' the latter being the name of the

Highland sergeant who in past years had charmed the heart of the dead woman Bell, so that she counted it a light thing to leave her father's hearthstone to follow the tuck of drum.

Which seeing, Mistress Comline would toss her head and explode in incontinent scorn, 'MacSkirmish indeed – the deil fee awa' wi' a' the Hieland Mac Skirmishes atween Cape Wrath and the Links o' Forth. They are no worthy yae decent burgess o' Dumfries that tak's doon his shutters in the mornin' and counts up his bawbees in the even.'

So as often as Elsie offended her patroness and did the thing she ought not, it was by this name of obloquy that Mistress Comline called her.

'Here, MacSkirmish – do ye caa' theae pitaties scrapti? There is dirt eneuch on them to fyle Nith Water for a month. But what can yin expeck frae the dochter o' a wild Hieland reiver. Tak' your wabs o' claith and be travelling up the brae. Your grandfaither, the auld miser, and his familiar, the daft man, will be prood to see ye, I dare say, since this decent woman's law-abidin' hoose is no guid eneuch for MacSkirmishes and the likes o' them!'

Words such as these were mostly spoken after the wilfum maid had taken her own way and gone to visit her grandfather in the cot at the head of the Long Wood. For to do him justice the old miser was unweariedly kind to Elsie, and the maid's heart was often wae for the lonely man weaving by his lone in the half-darkness where the great beams of the loom almost blocked the light out of the narrow cottage windows.

Mostly Daft Jeremy would vanish at her approach, though sometimes he would squat on the hearth looking at her for hours together through his

dumb, sullen glooms, as if he feared that she came to carry away something that of right belonged to him. He had a flute whereon he blew strains that are not of this earth, yet which had a certain harmony and rhythm in them too, like the 'chanties' of demons that stoke the fires of hell.

These things Elsie did because (as she told herself) 'blood is thicker than water.' And also, perhaps, because Breckonside Wood is a long wood and Breckonside Brae a long brae, and there were many chances that one Will McQueen, the Provost's son, late dux of the Grammar School and Elsie's most constant admirer, would meet her under its shades, as it might be, by accident, and convoy her home again in the gloaming.

It chanced, late one Saturday afternoon, when the August fields stood almost ripe to the harvest (for it had been an early year on Nithside), that Elsie took her way slowly up the Lang Wood to see her grandfather. Daft Jeremy had brought the message in the morning, and her guardian had noted with surprise that he looked 'mair spruce than ordinar'.'

'Are ye to be marriet Jeremy?' Mistress Comline had asked over the counter. She was in good humour, having just completed a keenly contested bargain to her satisfaction.

'Aye,' cried Jeremy, executing a double shuffle on the shop floor, 'and se, Mistress, I hae bocht a bonny fiddle to dance to at the wedding!'

And sure enough, the daft creature took a fiddle and bow out of a brown paper parcel under his arm, and jigged uncouthy round to the sound of his own music till the hastily angered huxter ordered him out of the shop.

'And sure as daith,' said Mistress Comline,

retailing the matter to her own particular gossip, 'the craitu gaed doon the Vennel, bowin' on his fiddle, and lauchin' fit to raise the hair aff your crown!'

Now this good benefactress of Elsie's, though kindly of intent and of a heart that was sound as a bell, had sundry tempers of her own which were most liable to take her on Saturdays. The perversity of 'thae Dumfries bodies' who, with the whole week wherein to do business, would persist in putting off till they 'cam' the nearest to breakin' the Lord's day, just to buy a pennyworth o' preens or a double yaird o' valenceens to trim their Sunday braws,' spoiled her temper on the seventh day of the week. It is small wonder, then, that Elsie gladly snatched at the chance which fortune and Daft Jeremy offered her of escaping from the rigours of Mrs. Comline into the caller aisles of the Lang Wood, to say nothing of the chance that – well, that she might meet with company there more to a young maid's mind than caffering guidwives cheapening wincey and paduasoi.

But it so chanced that Master Will McQueen had also come across the Higher Power that afternoon, and, less fortunate than his sweetheart, was left without excuse for taking an airing in the Lang Wood. His father, either ill-satisfied with his ordinary diligence or suspecting that love-making was in the young man's mind, set him early in the day to the long labour of re-marking and checking all the goods in the shop on a brand new system of his own. Whereat Master Will chafed and fumed, bit his lip, dabbed viciously at the paper with his quill, cursing his father and the fates that bound him untimeously to his desk, when, as had been

intimated to him, a certain girlish figure would be walking slowly (and it might be expectantly) under the hazel boughs of the Lang Wood.

So it chanced that, in spite of many backward glances over her shoulder, Elsie found herself still solitary, surmounting the Green Brae, at the top of which stood the cot-house of Breckonside, with its 'pew' of blue reek going quietly up from the kitchen chimney. She walked the last step of the way quickly, for she was angered with Will. What business had he to keep her waiting on him? Not that she cared – it was not likely that she would care – no, indeed, not in the smallest degree likely.

Still, as she came a little nearer to her destination, and heard the weird wail of the witless man's fiddle within, which suddenly ceased in the middle of a bar, Elsie Kinmont owned to herself that it would have been indeed a comforting thought, if, while she was inside, she could have known that Will McQueen was biting his finger-nails with impatience behind the drystone dyke at the loaning foot.

However, it was not to be on this occasion. There was no tall form, clad in blue from top to toe, to be seen hastening up the road across which the slant evening shadows were creeping like checker-work on a plaid. So drawing a long breath, and resolving in her heart to stay as short a time as possible, Elsie set foot on the clean blue flagstone of the doorstep. Perhaps by the time she came out Master Will would be there – not that she would speak to him. She would show him that he could not behave to her after this fashion with impugnity. She did not care what excuse he might have.

Standing on the doorstep she listened. It was

strange, she thought, that she did not hear the click of her grandfather's shuttle.

She had never come that way before on any working day from dawn to dark, that she had not heard the steady wheeze of the loom and the click-clack which told that the miser was at his endless task.

But now a curiously uneasy silence brooded over the cot, and with a sudden throb of the heart, Elsie realised that she was alone, and that Will and the heartsome town were a very long way off indeed.

But she could not turn back now. She tapped every so lightly, telling herself that if it was not answered, she would turn and run straight home again. But almost ere the first faint rap had fallen on the blistered blue paint, the door opened and the face of Daft Jeremy appeared in the opening. He held his fiddle in one hand and with the other he beckoned the girl confidentially within.

Even then she would have turned and fled, but something in the 'naiteral's' eye held her, something bright and living and daunting. She stepped over the doorstep quickly and daintily, as indeed she did all things.

'Where is my grandfather?' she said.

The 'innocent' jerked his elbow in the direction of the 'ben' room, where stood the loom at which the miser had worked so many years.

'Is he at work? I do not hear him,' said Elsie, making as if she would pass. But Daft Jeremy stretched out his great hairy paw between her and the door, and a sudden spasm of anger crossed his features. The next moment it had passed, and he grinned in her face with loutish cunning.

'Wheest,' he said, holding up his finger, 'ye

maunna disturb him – he's makkin' his wull! Thoosands and thoosands of pounds – you an' me are to be his heirs. He wadna trust thae laywer bodies; na, na – they wad hae pitten it by puir Jeremy. Jeremy that made it a' for the Laird – Jeremy that watched ahint dykes or amang the trees o' the Lang Wood mony a drear winter's nicht – Jeremy that struck the stroke and howkit the hole! Wha should hae the siller – a' the bonny gowden guineas that him and me countit on this table, if it werena Jeremy? And you, my bonny young lamb, ye shall hae them too. For this is to be oor marriage nicht, yours and mine!'

With a gasp of fear Elsie rose from the seat and strove to reach the door of the inner room.

'I will go to my grandfather; I must see him,' she said, breathlessly. 'Let me pass!'

But Daft Jeremy, with the strange black glitter of madness in his eye, stood between her and the latch of the door.

Then quite suddenly Elsie lost her presence of mind.

'Grandfather! Grandfather!' she cried aloud. 'Come I want you!'

And with her little hand she pushed against the breast of the maniac. But he set her aside as one brushes a moth away, with one hand, and passing the other round her shoulders covered her mouth tightly.

'Did I no tell you to be quiet,' he hissed in her ear.' Do as I bid ye, then. The Laird is no to be disturbit at his work!'

Then the dreadful thought came to Elsie that she was trapped and at the mercy of this wild beast. But with the thought came the calmness of resolve.

There was nothing for it but to humour him till, as was likely, Will McQueen would arrive, or her benefactress send in search of her.

After watching Elsie suspiciously a while, the man-wanting wit took up his fiddle and began to play, if that could be called playing which contained scarcely a strain of mortal music. Only here and there the lit of an air emerged, or suggestions of reels and strathspeys, songs and quicksteps; but all hopeless and weariful like music played by demons in the Place of Ill to taunt the damned with the ghosts of happy memories.

And there, in the deepening gloaming, mercifully long and clear, the girl sat and nodded approval, listening for a footfall without, or a stir in the room within which her grandfather sat, if the madman spoke truth, drawing up his will.

Suddenly Daft Jeremay threw down the fiddle.

'What am I thinkin' on,' he cried, 'ye'll no had had your 'fower hours,' bonny lassie! Bide ye here till I fetch a peat of twa frae t he hoose-end.'

Hope dawned anew in Elsie's heart. She smiled brightly upon him.

'I will get down the tea-caddy,' she said, and looked along the mantelpiece for it. But again the angry, threatening look flashed across the maniacs face.

'Na, na, bide ye where ye are, lassie. In the hooose o' Breckonside guid bairs do as they are bid. What's in the tea-caddy is no yours yet. It belongs to Jeremy – and *him.*

He pointed to the shut door of the silent 'ben' room with his finger.

After standing in this attitude awhile he opened the outer door, and, going out, closed it behind him

again. Elsie heard the click of the lock. Then, without a moment's hesitation, she ran to the 'ben' room and lifted the latch. The door was fast.

'Grandfather – open – open – quick! It's me, your Elsie, you ain Elsie!'

But there was no answering movement within. No reply came from the loom, only from the gable-end she could hear the noise of peats flung rudely into a leathern 'wecht,' and the senseless crooning of Daft Jeremy as he went about his work.

However, she noticed that a ray of light streamed through a crack, and kneeling down Elsie perceived her grandfather sitting at his loom. His brow was bent forward upon the beam, and between his hunched shoulders something showed black against the red western sunset. *It seemed in shape like the haft of a knife.*

The girl kept her reason as she gazed. Perhaps the fighting stock from which, on her father's side she came, helped her in her hour of need.

She heard the murderer (as she did not doubt that he was) returning. He crooned a weariful song as he fitted the key into the lock. Then she prayed as she had never prayed before for Will to come and save her. Yet no, she thought with fear of what the madman might do to Will, falling up on him unarmed and unsuspecting. She saw no help, unless it should come directly from God.

But all the same she rose mechanically and made up the fire to boil the kettle. And as she went about the house Daft Jeremy followed her with his eyes greedily.

'After a' ye are a bonny lassie,' he said; 'you and me will do fine yet. We will be rich and ride in our carriage. Yon man doon the hoose wadna gie me the

siller that was my richt. He denied me a single pound note to buy a fiddle – me that brucht it to him purse by purse – a' except the shagreen ane that was lost.'

Then, dazed and affrighted, the girl sat shuddering while Jeremy with laughter and slapping of thigh, reeled off the terrible tale of how his master and he had made a murder trap of the Long Wood, carefully selecting their victims, marking them down beforehand, drovers from Ireland and the Shire, unknown English men riding to other distant markets. He related how Laird Kinmont had bidden him spring upon them unawares in the dark – how their strength was of no avail in his hands, and how the murderous pair had brought goods and gear home to the white cot-house on the braeface of Breckonside.

'And yet, after a' that, he refused me a pound note to buy a fiddle to play a spring on at my own weddin'!' he concluded, looking at the closed door of the weaving-room with a dark and threatening brow.

Then, as if a thought had suddenly stung him, he took from a corner cupboard a pair of pistols, primed them and laid them on the table before him. Then he nodded to Elsie.

'Dance!' he cried, with sudden vehemence,' 'dance, ye lazy hizzie. Ye shall gang the same road as your gran'daddy if ye cross Daft Jeremy. Do ye think to lichtly me that am to be your wedded husband. Dance, missie, and I will play ye the bonny music!'

And there, on the blue whinstone flags of the cottage floor, Elsie Kinmont danced for her life, hour after hour as the shadows deepened and the shaft of light ceased from the crack in the door of the 'ben'

room – the room which contained she knew not what of strange and terrible – her dead grandfather for one thing with the haft of a knife sticking in his back.

And ever as the maniac tired of one tune Elsie called for another, and danced on to the sound of the fiddle sweeping out through the wood in eerie gusts, and to the yet weirder accompaniment of the laughter of the madman.

When at last the moon rose, large and full, over the dark pines of the Lang Wood, Elsie was still dancing, pale and weary-footed, smiling with her lips but with despair in her heart. Then all at once, suddenly dropping his fiddle, the maniac cried, 'Sing! Am I to do all the work?'

And Elsie, with her eyes on the long moonlit avenue, which led through the wood up to the cot-house, lifted up her voice and sang of the sadness that dwells in Yarrow. It was the first song that came into her mind: -

Oh Willie's rare and Willie's fair,
And Willies wondrous bonny,
And Willy hecht to mairry me,
Gin ever he married ony.

She put all her fear-stricken heart into the words. They seemed to leap out on the night with a tragic appeal. And with a quick nerve-jerking hope Elsie saw a figure cross the loaning and vanish as if it ran from tree to tree. Life stirred within her when she had counted herself as good as dead, and she sang ever the louder. The mad murderer held up his hand to stop her. His quick ear, or some suspicious instinct, had caught a sound without. He drew a sheath-knife from his pocket and opened it with a snap. 'This will be quieter than a pistol,' he said.

Then going on tiptoe he slipped silently to the door. She could hear him breathing behind it. The next moment it was open and he was out. Elsie snatched the loaded pistols he had left on the table before him and pursued after. He would kill Willie – that was what was in her thought. She was sure it was he. She cried out to warn him.

About the house came the panting chase. It was indeed Willie McQueen, who ran, unarmed and helpless, scarce a dozen steps from the uplifted knife of the slayer.

'Into the house, Willie!' she cried, stepping down from the threshold to let him pass. There was no time for thought. Elsie thrust one of the pistol barrels against the pursuer's chest. Without intention she pressed the trigger, and the next moment, with a terrible scream of agony, Daft Jeremy fell forward, making a clang of steel on the whinstone of the doorstep.

Then, leaving the dead man with his forehead cold upon his weaver's beam, and the dying murderer lying where he had fallen across the threshold of the cot-house of Breckonside, the pair of young folks fled down the avenue of the wood, half crazed with the multiplied terrors of the night.

And as they ran hand in hand, Elsie said pantingly and in agony of soul,' Oh, Willie, Willie, I hae killed a man!'

Then, as they reached the lights of the Brig-End, she added, 'But God will forgive me, for I did it to save you, Willie!'

~~~

In the days which followed the cot-house of Breckonside was razed stone from stone by the infuriated people. The miser's ill-gotten hoards were
~~~

handed over to the officers of the law, and all the murderous traffic exposed by which Laird Kinmont had so long used the madman as his instrument to gather in his spoils.

The two bodies even were refused Christian burial, being thrown as they were found in a pit at the gable-end of the fatal ruins. Even the road itself was carried another way, so great was the horror folk had of passing the graves of the weaver laird and his henchman, Daft Jeremy, the murderers of Lang Wood.

As for Willie and Elsie, no long time passed before they crossed the sea together, that the disgrace of the dead might not cling to their children after them. And with them went Mistress Margaret Comline, who settled up her business in Dumfries, with the intent that (as she declared) 'she might be spared to guide the footsteps o' twa foolish young folks into the paths o' peace and pleasantness.'

But, even in a foreign land and among a fremit folk, Willie and Elsie never speak of the night when she danced for her own life, and slew a man to save her sweetheart's, under the pines of the Lang Wood of Breckonside.

And that (concluded Silver Sand), when you come to think of it, is a thing little to be wondered at.

Also available in Galloway Raiders digital format:

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING
OF THE COMPLETE CROCKETT

1893 The Stickit Minister and some common men
1894 Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills
1894 The Play Actress
1894 The Raiders
1894 The Lilac Sunbonnet
1895 Bog Myrtle and Peat
1895 A Galloway Herd
1895 Men of the Moss Hags
1896 Cleg Kelly
1896 The Grey Man
1896 Sweetheart Travellers
1897 Lads' Love
1897 Lochinvar
1897 Sir Toady Lion
1898 The Red Axe
1898 The Standard Bearer
1899 The Black Douglas
1899 Kit Kennedy
1899 Ione March
1900 Joan of the Sword Hand
1900 Stickit Minister's Wooing
1900 Little Anna Mark
1901 Cinderella
1901 The Firebrand
1901 Love Idylls
1901 The Silver Skull
1902 The Dark o' the Moon
1902 Flower o' the Corn
1903 The Adventurer in Spain
1903 The Banner of Blue

1904 Love of Miss Anne
1904 Strong Mac
1904 Raiderland
1904 Red Cap Tales
1905 Maid Margaret
1905 The Cherry Ribband
1905 Kid McGhie
1905 Sir Toady Crusoe
1906 White Plumes of Navarre
1907 Me and Myn
1907 Little Esson
1907 Vida
1908 Deep Moat Grange
1908 Princess Penniless
1908 Bloom o' the Heather
1908 Red Cap Adventures
1909 The Dew of Their Youth
1909 Men of the Mountain
1909 Seven Wise Men
1909 My Two Edinburghs
1909 Rose of the Wilderness
1910 Young Nick and Old Nick
1911 The Lady of a 100 Dresses
1911 Love in Pernicketty Town
1911 The Smugglers
1912 Anne of the Barricades
1912 Sweethearts at Home
1912 The Moss Troopers
1913 Sandy's Love
1913 A Tatter of Scarlet
1914 Silver Sand

POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
1917 The Azure Hand
1920 The White Pope
1926 Rogues' Island
2016 Peter the Renegade

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'