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INCHBRACKEN



INCHBRACKEN

THE STORY OF A

FAMA CLAMOSA

BY

ROBERT CLELAND

NEW EDITION--ILLUSTRATED

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1887

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INCHBRACKEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PARISH OF KILRUNDLE.

The night was stormy and black as pitch. Sheets of chilling rain sped lashing across the glen, driven by the whirling tempest. The burns in the hills, swollen into torrents, came tumbling down their rocky beds all foam and uproar, diffusing through the air an undertone of continuous thunder, that could be distinctly heard in each recurring interval of the gale. Along the road which traversed the clachan of Glen Effick and then wandered up the glen and across the hills, the elements had free scope to work their evil will, and nothing with life dared venture forth to oppose them. The air was full of hissings and roarings and crackings and rumblings, as trees and roofs swayed and shivered to the blast, and the loosened stones rumbled in the beds of neighbouring torrents. The drowsy lights from the inn door and the post-office disclosed nothing but a sheet of falling rain and an overflowing gutter, and the gleams from the round boles in the cottage shutters were but shining bars across the thick darkness of the night. The two bright lamps of the stage coach from Inverlyon, descending the hill road from the east, glowed like the fierce eyes of some monster of the night, and disclosed something of the scene as they passed along, trees tossing and writhing in the wind, wayside burns broke loose from their bounds and foaming across the road, and for the rest,--slop, slush, and blackness. Within, the tumult out of doors gave edge to the glow and comfort of the snug peat fire on the hearth. The wind, rumbling in the rocking chimney, and occasional raindrops hissing on the embers, seemed but to call forth a ruddier light from that goodly pile of burning peat and peeled coppice oak. True the hearth was but clay, and of clay too was the floor of the apartment, but the flicker and play of the flames hid the one as effectually as the comfortable Brussels carpet concealed the other. The whitewashed cottage walls, as well as some outlying yards of carpet, were covered by bookcases whose tops touched the low ceiling, and big books piled and heaped one on the other as they best might be to save space.

This sombre background was somewhat relieved by the glints of the firelight on a few gilt picture frames containing portraits, and by a few steel engravings built curiously in among the books. Those dear old engravings, which forty years ago embellished every middle class home in Scotland,--John Knox preaching, Queen Mary at Leith after Sir William Allan, and Duncan's stirring memorials of Prince Charlie--they were good wholesome art for every day life, and likely to stir the children's hearts, as did the ballads sung round the hearths of an earlier generation, to an honest love of the brave and the beautiful, and a sturdy pride in their Scottish birth. We have higher art now-a-days, or we think so. We spend more money on it; and if not more discriminative, are at least greatly more critical; but is the moral influence of our walls on our households better now than it was then? The boys and girls of to-day will grow up less narrow. Will they be as loyal and true-hearted?

But to return to the study of the Reverend Roderick Brown, licentiate of the Free Church of Scotland. On the window-shelf were pots of hardy roses in luxuriant bloom, and in the distant corner stood a tall crimson cloth screen of many leaves, behind which were concealed the bed and toilette appurtenances of his reverence the licentiate. Beyond this a door communicated with an inner room; but here there are signs unmistakable of a lady's chamber, so we may not intrude.

Drawn up before the fire there stands a large writing-table, on which are books and much manuscript, and at one end sits the occupant, deep in the composition of one of the five or six discourses he will be expected to deliver in the course of the following week. A tall young man under thirty, well-proportioned and even athletic, but pale and thin, and rather worn as regards the face. The straight black hair which he has tossed back from his face in the throes of composition, displays a forehead pale, blue-veined, and high, but rather narrow, eyes dark and deep-set, beneath shaggy brows, in hollow and blue-rimmed sockets, as of one who has gone through much excitement and fatigue, but burning with a steady fire of enthusiasm, which seems as if it would never go out, so long as a drop of the oil of life remains in the lamp to supply it with fuel. The mouth is long and flexible, not without signs of firmness and vigor, but gentle and serene, a smile appearing to lurk in one of the corners, as awaiting its opportunity to break forth. The whole expression is pure and unworldly. An observer must have said, that, whether or not he might be wise and prudent, he did not look like a fool, and he was most assuredly good.

His sister Mary sits opposite him plying her needle, and crooning to herself some scraps of old world song, but softly, so as not to disturb the flow of the minister's thoughts. She is younger by some years than her brother, tall like him, and with all the grace in repose that comes of well-exercised and symmetrical limbs. The head is small, with a wealth of golden brown hair wound tightly round it, face oval and fair, with the complexion of a shell. The eyelids are very full, drooping and long-lashed, and beneath them the eyes look forth like violets from the shade. The hands are large and firm, but white, supple, and perfectly shaped, and it is a treat and a joy to watch her as she sits at work. She seems to exhale the breath of violets, suggested perhaps by the colour of her eyes, as one follows her tranquil movements, like Shelley's hyacinth bells--

'Which rang with a music so soft and intense
That it passed for an odor within the sense.'

The varying light of the fire, shining warmly upon her, touches even the folds of her black gown into a subdued repetition of the quivering glories that flicker among her hair.

Those were the *disruption times*, which all have heard of, and the middle-aged among us can recall more or less vividly. Times so different from the present! When we look back on them, knowing how much there was that was narrow, rugged, and unlovely, we must still feel a regretful admiration for an atmosphere of earnestness and more heroic warmth of feeling than is now attainable to the cold-blooded clear-sightedness and electric dispassionateness of the critical spirit now prevalent, which admits good and detects shortcoming in all varieties of faith and opinion alike, and so, leaves the seeker after the better to follow the worse in pure weariness, satisfied in the end to pursue material advantage, seeing that Truth and Goodness have become abstractions, too high to be attained, or else too widely diffused to be missed, in whatever direction the wayfarer may stray.

In those days the seeker after the goodly pearl of truth, felt constrained to forsake all and followed it; and doubtless the forsaking and the quest brought a moral benefit, though it by no means follows that the form in which they sought it, the Ultramontane fetish of ecclesiastical supremacy--exemption from State interference, combined with an unlimited right to meddle in the State--was in any sense a truth at all. An earnest following out of the supposed truth cannot but be wholesome to the seeker, and to fight for an idea of any kind, must be good in materialistic times.

One is led to use the word 'Ultramontane' in connection with the Free Church 'movement,' by the curious resemblance between the claims of these ardent Presbyterians, and those of the Ultramontane section of the Catholic Church, as well as by the very similar language in which both expressed and supported them. It would seem indeed as if since 1840 a wave of turbulence had passed over the minds of all Churchmen, beginning in this Northern Kingdom and rolling Southwards. England and Ireland have since then been disturbed by unruly priests, and the long pontificate of Pius IX. has witnessed in every country a continued effort of the Spiritual Estate to assert itself against secular authority.

That the struggle in Scotland was for no absolute truth, would appear from the change of front which the body that then arose now presents. It commenced by claiming to have inherited the rights of the historical church, confirmed by act of parliament, to guide the nation and the state in questions of faith and morals. Now it places itself with the voluntary religious associations, and clamours for depriving its own successors of the endowments which its members themselves resigned because of conditions which now do not exist. When Chalmers, ten years before the Disruption, fought the battle of Establishments against Voluntaryism, not only in Scotland, but in England also, he little thought that the Church he was to found, would, in a quarter of a century, become the hottest association of voluntaries in the country! New circumstances have begotten new 'principles,' let us say, for it would not be well to impute anything like trade jealousy to holy men.

Roderick Brown was pursuing his theological studies in Edinburgh, during the years of theological excitement which preceded the catastrophe. Youth is sympathetic, and the leaders of the movement had holy names and historic memories to conjure with. It is not wonderful, therefore, that he caught the enthusiasm of the men about him, and thirsted to bear his part in

contending for the truth. At each succeeding vacation he returned to his father's manse with a heightened ardour for ecclesiastical combat; and many and long were their discussions on the Church question and its new lights. To the young man's surprise, he found his arguments fall rather flat and pointless in presence of his father's calm and dispassionate statements of the case; but the elder found the wisdom and understanding gathered in sixty years' intercourse with the Church and the world equally powerless to cool down the heat and ardour of the enthusiastic youth. Therefore, as must ever be the case where affection and respect are combined with common sense, they finally agreed to differ, each forbearing to insist on his own preferences, and confident that the other sought only the right according to his lights.

The disappointment to Doctor Brown was not slight. He felt himself rapidly failing, and he had hoped to find in his son an assistant and successor in whose hands he might contentedly leave the care of his beloved flock, and pass on to an uninterrupted fulfilment the many good works he had commenced in his parish. Besides his parish, the future of his daughter may also have weighed much on the old man's mind. She had been born and bred in the manse, and was as well known to every one of the parishioners, as the minister himself. To the poor she had been the recognised messenger of mercy. Ever since her mother's death (when she was thirteen), had devolved on her with the assistance of the old housekeeper, the many and onerous duties that fall to the country minister's wife; and in fulfilling these she had won the love of rich and poor alike.

Roderick too had been bred in the manse, and was known to every living soul in the parish. He had fished the burns with the sons of the farmers and crofters, when a lad, and as he grew older shot on the moors with the lairds. Gentle and simple alike had only kind words to say of the minister's son, and to these was added sincere respect when he entered on his theological studies, and afforded such assistance to his father in his sacred duties as the laws of the Church permit to the unordained. There would have been but one voice in the parish from Patron, Heritors, and People, as to who should succeed Doctor Brown in his charge, and it was very bitter to the old man to find that for an enthusiastic scruple all his hopes were to be laid low.

In the year of the Disruption, Dr. Brown died, and in the same year his son Roderick was licensed to preach by the Free Church. On many therefore fell a double bereavement; his father was taken away, and forthwith it became necessary to gather up his household gods, the relics of his past, steeped in all the memories of childhood and of those who had made it glad, and to move forth into a new and an untried life.

General Drysdale, the patron and chief heritor of the parish, a staunch Conservative in Church and State, was greatly disappointed at the step taken by the son of his old friend, in quitting the church of his father. He would gladly have presented him to the living, and felt personally aggrieved that he had deliberately incapacitated himself from accepting it. The late minister had been his frequent guest at Inchbracken, and the intercourse between the families of the great house and the manse had been constant and cordial, and had formed a most useful bond of connection between the laird and his poorer tenants; but now, owing to the wrongheadedness of an inexperienced youth, all this must cease, and who could tell how the new incumbent would answer? The breeding of himself and his family might make their presence unacceptable at the castle, and in that case intercourse would necessarily cease, and the laird and his people, in consequence, would drift apart from want of the old link; or even should the new comer answer, it would be long before a stranger could establish ties between himself and the different orders of his flock, and longer still before he could become a bond between one order and another.

But even this did not make up the whole sum of Roderick's offences. His personal merits themselves added another count to the General's indictment against him. Beloved by rich and poor, his religious ministrations were greatly valued in his native parish, and many who might in other circumstances have stood staunch by the Kirk and the laird, were seduced into dissent by his insidious exhortations. Not only had he refused to accept the legitimate cure of souls, but he had raised the standard of rebellion within the bounds, thereby tending to subvert the wisely-appointed order of things, and contributing to the inletting of that free tide of revolutionary democracy which the General espied afar as doomed eventually to sweep away lairds and all other salutary potentates, and lead on to levelling ideas, the abomination of desolation, and the end of the world. Clearly, then, it was the duty of every well-regulated mind to discountenance such doings; and in the interest of public order, and for the sake of his misguided tenantry, General Drysdale's duty to refuse ground for the erection of a schismatic meetinghouse--a temple of discord, upon any portion of his and; or to rent a dwelling to the missionary of rebellion and error.

Roderick therefore being unable to find shelter for himself and his sister within five miles of the church and manse of Kilrundle, betook himself to the neighbouring hamlet of Glen Effick, which was beyond the territory of this well-meaning persecutor, but still hovered on the edge of Kilrundle Parish, over which he could raid at will, and hold meetings on the hillside for the faithful of the flock, who gathered in ever increasing crowds to hear him, emulous of the 'Hill Folk' of old, who, as they were often reminded, 'held not their lives dear, but went forth to serve the Lord in the wilderness.'

Almost all the cottars in Glen Effick would have been proud to receive the minister and his sister, but their means were less than their desires. The cottages were but small, and a few vacant rooms, scattered here and there throughout the village, were all that could be offered to shelter them and their effects. Hence in one cottage he had his books and made his study, and in

this also they both slept. In another, across the road, they took their meals, and had bestowed such of their goods as were in use for that purpose. In a third was Mary's piano and many of her belongings, and there they would probably have spent their evenings, but that an old body, with more zeal than space at her disposal, had insisted on bestowing their tea equipage in her corner cupboard, where it was visible through the glass door, and proved her a mother in Israel. Thither they felt bound to follow it occasionally, that so Luckie Howden might have the glory of making tea for the minister.

All this was very tiresome to Mary, and sometimes she thought her patience would break down entirely. During her peaceful and happy life with her father she had imbibed all his ideas. She still clung to the Established Church as her head, and disapproving of the Disruption, she had neither zeal for the cause, nor a pleasing sense of martyrdom to mitigate the worries, discomforts, and privations of her daily life. The one only solace of her lot was her great love for her brother, from whom she had resolved never to part, and with whom she was prepared to endure even greater hardships. An uncle had pressed her strongly to make her home with him, but she could not tear herself from Roderick, and so stayed on.

CHAPTER II.

A STORM.

The rumble of the stage coach past the window died away down the street, and silence fell on the room we have been considering. The scratching of Roderick's pen could be heard in the stillness, save when lost in the momentary roar of a gust descending the chimney, followed by the hiss of its watery burden on the coals, or when a bar of 'The Lass o' Gowrie' escaped for an instant from the suppression in which it was held that the sermon might not be disturbed.

At length there sounded the shuffling of feet and the opening and closing of a door. A tap, and the door of their own room opened; and entered the beadle, Joseph Smiley, a little ferrety-looking man with sharp restless eyes, that seemed as though they would squint in their alert impatience to look at everything at once. His dress was a rusty black coat, like the old one of an undertaker's man, and a soiled white wisp of neckcloth. He took off with both hands a limp and sodden hat, streaming with moisture, and deposited it under the table, with a sort of deprecatory bow to Mary, as who should say, 'It is not strong enough to be treated in the usual way, let us lay it down tenderly.' Recovering, he turned to the door, and with an encouraging 'Come in, boy,' introduced a tall over-grown lad of seventeen, dressed in a fisherman's oilskin suit, from which the rain trickled in copious streams.

'I wuss ye gude e'en, mem an' sir,' said Joseph 'Though it's faar frae what I wad ca' a gude e'en mysel', an' deed an' it's juist a most terrible nicht, though nae doubt them 'at sent it kens best.-- Ay, Sir! It was juist the powerfu' ca' o' duty 'at garred me lay by the drap parrich an' steer frae the ingle neuk this nicht. Here's a laddie come a' the gate frae Inverlyon, e'y tap o' the coach to fesh ye back wi' him to see his granny 'ats lyin' near hand her end.'

'But Inverlyon is fen miles off, and in another parish,' the minister was here able to interrupt, a matter not always to be obtained when Joseph held forth, for he loved the continuous sound of his own voice above every other noise.

'And why did they not get Mr. Watson, the minister of Inverlyon?' put in Mary; 'I am sure Mr. Watson would have gone at once, and he is so good and so kind a man.'

'Na, na, mem! Naebody 'at kens my granny wad ventur to bring Mester Watson in ower by her!' cried the fisher lad, casting aside his bashfulness, and steadying himself on the tall limbs on which he had been swaying to and fro. 'He bed in, whan a' the gude folk cam out, an' sae she'll hae nane o' him!'

'But why should you want to take Mr. Brown all that distance to-night? and a night like this? Has your grandmother some dreadful secret on her mind? And would not a writer be the best person to get?'

'Na, mem! na! There's nothing like that! My Granny's a godly auld wife, tho' maybe she's gye fraxious whiles, an' mony's the sair paipin' she's gi'en me; gin there was ocht to confess she kens the road to the Throne better nor maist. But ye see there's a maggitt gotten intil her heid, an' she says she beut to testifee afore she gangs hence.'

'Ay! weel I wat,' said Joseph, swaying his head solemnly to and fro, 'she's a holy auld wife that

same Luckie Corbet! an' I'm sure, minister, it'll be a preev'ledge to ye to resave her testimony! She's rael zealous against Erastianism an' a' the sins in high places. I'm thinkin', sir, she's gye an' like thae covenanters lang syne, 'at Mester Dowlas was tellin' 's about whan he lectur'd up by on the Hurlstane Muir, about Jenny Geddes down Edinbro' way, an' mair sic like.'

'Ay! an' I'm thinkin' it's that auld carline, Jenny Geddes, 'at's raised a' the fash! My granny gaed to hear Mester Dowlas whan he preached among the whins down by the shore, an' oh, but he was bonny! An' a graand screed o' doctrine he gae us. For twa hale hours he preached an' expundet an' never drew breath, for a the wind was skirlin', an' the renn whiles skelpin' like wild. An' I'm thinkin' my granny's gotten her death o't a'. But oh! an' he was graand on Jenny Geddes! an' hoo she was a mither in Israel, an' hoo she up wi' the creepie an' heaved it at the Erastian's heid. An' my granny was juist fairly ta'en wi't a', an' she vooed she beut to be a mither in Israel tae, an' whan she gaed hame she out wi' the auld hugger 'at she keeps the bawbees in, aneath the hearth-stane, for to buy a creepie o' her ain,--she thocht a new ane wad be best for the Lord's wark,--an' she coupet the chair whaur hung her grave claes, 'at she airs forment the fire ilka Saturday at e'en, an' out there cam a lowe, an' scorched a hole i' the windin' sheet, an' noo puir body we'll hae to hap her in her muckle tartan plaid. An' aiblins she'll be a' the warmer'e'y moulds for that. But, however, she says the sheet was weel waur'd, for the guid cause. An' syne she took til her bed, wi' a sair host, an' sma' winder, for there was a weet dub whaur she had been sittin' among the whins. An' noo the host's settled on her that sair, she whiles canna draw her breath. Sae she says she maun let the creepie birlin' slide, but she beut to testifee afore some godly minister or she gangs hence. An' I'm fear'd, sir, ye maun hurry, for she's rael far through.'

Joseph listened with a groan of solemn approval. 'Oh, minister, but it's a high preev'ledge! an' I'm no grudgin' the weet an' the gutters comin' ower to fesh ye, forby the drap parrich growin' cauld at hame!' 'Roderick! It is impossible for you to go. Ten miles! and such a night! And then, think of kind Mr. Watson; how hurt he will be!'

Joseph sighed, and muttered under his breath about sojourners in Meshech, but Mr. Brown took no notice, and replied to his sister,--

'The coach will pass going down at seven to-morrow morning.'

'I'm fear'd, sir, ye'll be ower late by than. She'll maybe no live or mornin.' An' she canna thole waitin', my granny.'

'But we have no gig, you must remember, and I know the inn gig is away, so it cannot be helped,' replied Mary.

'I'm thinkin' sir,' suggested Joseph, 'Patey Soutar wad be wullen' to gie us his pownie, seein' its you. It's a sore nicht for the puir beast, but than there's the gude cause, an' ye'll no be forgettin' the ruch wather e'y pay, sir. Patey's pownie's a canny baste, an' sure-fittet e'y dark. Mony's the time he's brocht Patey safe hame, an' him wi' a drappie in's heid 'at garred him see no' that strecht afore him.'

'Yes,' returned the minister, with a patient shrug; 'and he won't run away with me, that's certain.' It was manifest he would have to go, reason or no reason. To reduce the question to one of common sense would have raised too many questions hard or inconvenient to answer; and as to his own comfort, he had long learned to yield that. In a popular movement the people who are wont to be led will sometimes drive by the mere force already communicated to their inertia, and the minister, accustomed to lead, will sometimes find himself pushed or driven by the very impulse he has himself originated.

Mary's remonstrances were in vain. She could only do her best towards arming her brother against the storm, and seeing that his mackintosh and plaid were securely wrapped around him. Considerate, as usual, for every one but himself, the minister offered the young fisherman shelter for the night, to await the morning coach, but that was declined with a 'Na na, sir! Shanks' naig diz fine for the like o' me. An' surely gin *ye* can thole the rough nicht, I'se do weel enough.'

Up the steep hill road that runs eastward from Glen Effick and gradually gains the upland moor dividing it from the sea, the two wayfarers floundered in the darkness. The water-courses being already choked with their hurrying floods, the road became the natural vent for the superfluous deluge, and had changed into a roaring torrent, carrying down stones and gravel in its course, and rendering travel against the stream both difficult and dangerous. The pony had full opportunity to prove his character for sagacity and sure-footedness, and he vindicated it triumphantly, for he kept on his way despite of all impediments, while poor Sandie, the fisher lad, found his footing give way and himself rolled over among the rattling stones more than once, when he would pick himself up again with a 'Hech sirse! but my hirdies are sair forfuchan.'

As they won their way upwards, the darkness grew less intense, and the flooding of the road less serious; but it was not till they had reached the level of the moorland looking straight out to sea, that they were able to realize the full fury of the tempest, which threatened each moment to catch them up in its arms and dash them to the ground. The rain, however, had abated, and there was refreshment in the salt keen breath of the distant sea. An occasional rift in the clouds let through a feeble glimmer, and as they staggered along they could make out the broken horizon line of the black tumbling waters.

A flash--and the distant boom of a gun. 'I'm thinkin', sir, there's a ship out yon'er. It's a sair nicht to be on the water.'

Presently another flash--and a rocket cleft its way aloft through the darkness, while the roar of the angry ocean, as they drew near, grew louder and louder.

They now began to descend from the higher level, encountering on the downward course a repetition of the perils and difficulty which had hindered their ascent. Their attention was fully engrossed in picking their steps and left them no leisure to observe other things. At the bottom of the hill there was a considerable breadth of flooded meadow, and there a wooden bridge half submerged spanned the flooded waters of the Effick, shivering in the boiling flood, and threatening to give way beneath them as they hurried across. They now found themselves on the sea road, level and well made, and their troubles or at least the dangers of the way were at an end.

And now for the first time they could realize the horror of the raging sea, with the great billows hurling themselves against the shore, and casting their sheets of foam high in the air, and drenching the road in showers of spray. Again they see the flash of a minute gun, but its voice is drowned in the tumult of the elements. The flash now, not as before, far out at sea--the ship was coming perilously near the shore.

'I'm fear'd they'll hae sair wark to win round Inverlyon pint, noo,' said Sandie; 'they're ower far in shore!--'The Lord pity them!' he went on, as another flash showed the vessel to be still nearing the land. 'They're driftin' fair in for the Effick Mouth! The Lord hae mercy on their souls!'

'How is the tide to-night, Sandie?' the minister enquired. 'Do you think we can cross the mouth of the bay by the sands under the rocks? It will be wet, of course, with the spray from the waves, but we are too wet ourselves to mind that, and it saves full four miles of the way.'

'Na, sir! The sea's in the nicht, an' there's five feet o' water on the sands. We maun gang round.'

As they journeyed along, they twice again saw the flash of the signal guns; the second time the ship herself became visible, very near the shore, a helpless waif apparently, tossed on the summit of a mountain surge. The bulwarks, which showed as those of a large vessel, stood out black against the murky horizon for an instant, and then sank again among the tumbling waves. Two of her masts were gone, but the third entangled in the wreck of rigging, still held out. Presently there was a crash audible above the storm. Another, and they saw the ship impaled on the jagged rocks at the mouth of the bay. The furious billows rushed up after her, wave on wave, as if refusing to be balked of their prey, washed over her from end to end, broke down the remaining mast, and shook and ground her among the rocks. A few cries were carried shoreward, shrill above the tempest, and then went out in the night. Another crash--and the wreck parted asunder and fell back into the sea, and was whirled away among the furious breakers, which tore it plank from plank, and strewed the relics of that goodly ship for miles along the shore.

It was wearing towards morning, and the wind was perceptibly falling when these wayfarers reached their destination. A candle burning in the window seemed the only sign of life in the whole slumbering town; and even that guttered and flickered low in its socket, an emblem of the life slowly burning itself out on the adjoining bed. A stentorious breathing, coming at irregular and ever-lengthening intervals, told that Sandie's granny was already setting out on her long journey--that she had closed her eyes for ever on all the things of time, even the ministrations of religion; and that the mysteries to which those ministrations can, at the best, but darkly point, would shortly be uncovered to her immortal view.

The minister was dried and warmed and refreshed, but there was little call for his services. The watchers were too weary with their watching to give much heed to consolation; he did, however, what was possible and retired to rest.

CHAPTER III

THE FIND.

Long ere daylight the storm had died away. The new-risen sun shone in a sky of transparent blue, with not a cirrus rag to shew of the enswathing vapours of the night before.

The air, bracingly fresh but calm, stirred faintly among the sandhills by the shore, shaking out

the bent and grasses laid limp and tangled by their drenching overnight.

When the minister set forth on his return, the sun still hung low over the eastern sea, and reddened the waves, foam-flecked and tossing in angry recollection of the lash of last night's gale. In the ebb they had shrunk far back across the sands, but again the tide had turned and was advancing. The fisher folk were not astir. No boats could be expected home that morning. Such as were away during the gale must have put in for refuge somewhere, or been swallowed by the sea; nor would any stir outside the harbour till the sea went down. Perforce they must rest; and they rested. The cottages were still shut up, and no smoke curled from the chimneys as Roderick rode over the roughly causewayed street, past the harbour, where a lugger or two swayed up and down upon the heaving tide, and down upon the sands beyond, that he might avoid the long detour of the night before.

The Effick Water spreads itself out into a small firth or bay some three or four miles round, but the mouth of this bay is encumbered by upstanding rocks and boulders, and about these a bar or beach has gathered, standing up out of the water at all times, save the highest tides, or when the sea is driven up by an easterly gale. Through this beach the Effick cuts a channel for its own escape, and that of the water in the bay at the tide's turn, but it is fordable at any time, and at low water is but an insignificant trickling over the shingly beach. The Point of Inverlyon divides Inverlyon bay and harbour from the Bay of Effick, it runs sharply out into the sea and completely conceals the one from the other; and, in those days of scanty provision for the ship-wrecked, a vessel might be driven ashore in the latter desolate bay without the people of the village being aware, especially if the catastrophe took place after dark; and their first intimation would be when in scanning the shore after a gale they came on the wreckage.

It was an hour or two after Roderick had started before the first band of prowlers set forth to search for the rejected spoils of victorious Ocean. The shore was solitary, and he was the first to come upon the tokens of the night's disaster. On passing the point, he found the shattered relics scattered on every side--boxes, barrels, planks, wreckage of every kind. By and by he came upon a stove-in boat, and a little further along the body of a drowned sailor lay upon the sand. He was but partly dressed, and the dark yellow tinge of his skin, the straight black hair, prominent features, and set of the eyes, as well as the long, strange-looking knife, tied securely to his waist, showed him to be a Lascar. So the ship probably had been an East Indiaman, had sailed in safety round the Cape, crossed the Bay of Biscay, and escaped who can tell how many perils, and all to be cast away in the end on this solitary shore, within a few leagues or hours of her destined haven.

Roderick dismounted and examined the poor fellow, but he was manifestly dead, and there was no dwelling near to which he might carry him; so he drew the body up above high-water mark, to await the searchers who were sure to arrive shortly in search of plunder. He had visitations and a meeting to fill up his day on getting home--service due, as he told himself, to the living, and therefore more important than ceremonial cares for the dead.

Hastening forward, he crossed the shingly beach at the mouth of the Effick, and reached the sands gathered about the base of the rocks, and sloping on the one side to the sea, on the other to the inner basin or firth of the little stream,--at high water a brimming lake, but now at the ebb a slimy hollow full of pools, boulders, seaweed, and mussel beds, where gulls and crows met to quarrel over the spoils of sea and land. There he came upon a sight sadder than the last, two women thrown together upon the sand, surrounded and partly covered with wreckage, as though a specially strong eddy had set in this direction, and there unburdened itself of its prey. The first he examined was clad in thin and peculiar garments of white cotton, a life-preserver was made fast about her body, and her hands clung with the inextricable grasp of death to the clothes of her companion. Her feet were bare, so was her head, her skin was a dark olive, and her dress and appearance showed her to be an Ayah or Indian maid, in attendance doubtless on some lady returning to Europe. Her long black hair was clotted and stained with blood, and closer inspection showed terrible wounds and bruises on the head, as though the waves had dashed and pounded her against the rocks before at length relinquishing their hold. Clearly there could be no hope of resuscitation there, and Roderick passed to the other.

From under pieces of plank and broken cabin furniture he was able at last to disentangle the form of a lady. She too was encased in a life-preserver, which in her case too had failed to save her life. The cruel rocks and breakers had made sure of that. Her head and face especially showed contusions and bruises of the most dreadful description, and there was a distortion of the features, as though her last thought had been one of agony, in striking contrast to the calm which had settled on the face of her companion. The arms too were stretched out in an intensity of purpose that death had been unable to paralyze, and the fingers were clenched on a bit of a chain composed of coins connected by knotted links of gold. Could it be that the parting of this chain, and the severance from what it held, was the last agonizing idea which had passed through the poor creature's mind?

As Roderick gazed, a feeble wail hard by gave a new turn to his musings. Not many steps away, but where the sand sloped inwards to the protected waters of the bay, he descried a bundle of clothing, and while he looked it seemed to move, and again the wail was heard. Taking it up he found the bundle to be a tiny infant, warmly wrapped up in many shawls and wound in a life-preserver. The poor drowned mother had probably given her last care to make the little one as safe as she could, and by a miracle she had succeeded. The lightness and smallness of the tiny

bundle had secured its safety. While heavier bodies were being hurled and rolled among rocks and stones on the beach, this slight thing had been caught up on the crest of a surge and flung beyond the rocks and boulders margining the sea, into the protected waters of the inner bay, where it would float in comparative safety till, on the subsidence of the tide, it stranded on the shore.

Roderick took it up and undid the swathings, that it might freely use its limbs. At once the infant ceased its wailing; it stretched its little arms, and, looking into his face, it smiled. Who that is human, not to say humane, could resist the appeal?--the flattery of being approved by a pure fresh soul, all untarnished by the world's guile, and so lately come from heaven!



"The baby smiled, and twined its fingers in his whisker-ends."

Page 19

"The baby smiled, and twined its fingers in his whisker-ends." Page 19.

Roderick was enthralled at once. 'You poor wee darling,' he said, 'we cannot leave you here alone, waiting till other help finds you; you must come with me!'

The baby smiled again, and twined its fingers in his whisker ends. Roderick wrapped it again in its shawls, remounted the pony, and proceeded on his way.

He could not but look back regretfully at the poor dead mother, whom he seemed to be separating from her child; but there was nothing he could do for her without assistance, and that he must go miles to seek, and he knew it would arrive equally soon without his intervention.

He passed a good deal more wreckage as he went, but nothing that had life, nor any more bodies of the drowned. Leaving the shore, he came in time to Effick Bridge. It had withstood the spate, and though badly shaken, was still available for crossing the stream. The waters had subsided over the flooded meadows, and after crossing these he began to ascend the hill. It was a tedious task; the soil was washed away in places, and in others stones had rolled from above, among which he had to pick his way carefully, lest a jolt should disturb his fragile burden.

The morning coach for Inverlyon reached the brow of the hill, coming down, while he was still wending upwards. It stopped there, and its passengers were required to alight, and make their way downward on foot, while the driver, with all precaution, guided his team and the empty vehicle over the encumbered track. The passengers included a parishioner or two of the minister's, who by and by encountered him on their descent, and greeted him effusively. His response, however, was absent and constrained, he was wholly disinclined to stand still in the middle of the tedious ascent, or engage in the desultory gossip so dear to his rustic friends. In truth, he was worn out. His tempestuous journey over-night, the early start without breakfast, the sad spectacle of death which he had beheld, and doubts how best to do his duty to his helpless charge, had thrown him into a melancholy and preoccupied mood, and deprived him of all power to enter into indifferent chat. He made no attempt, therefore, to rein up the 'pownie,' and that canny beast went tranquilly forward, picking his steps as seemed best among the sods and heather tufts by the side of the road.

'What's come ower the minister? He wad scarce gie us the time o' day as he gaed by, an' he glowered at a body like the far awa end o' Willie Cant's fiddle. An' what brings him awa down here at this time o' day? An' ridin' on that godless chield, Patey Soutar's pownie! I'm sair misdoubtin' but he's been after nae gude!'

'Hoot, awa! Peter Malloch, ye maunna judge sae hard. I'm jalousin' he's been awa a' nicht, an' aiblins he's meditatin' on his next discoorse. Gin he'd gotten as far as the twalthly, or even the seventhly, ye see, he wadna be for brecken aff, to haver wi' a curran fules, ower a' the clashes o' the country side.'

'Speak for yersel, Tammas! An' dinna ye be for judgin' the office-bearers o' the Lord's Kirk by

yer ain silly sel'. I'm thinkin gin he'd kenned a' 'at I cud hae telt him, he'd hae frisket up his legs, an' drawn bridle fast enough. The Sustentation Fund's prosperin' bye a' expectation, an' I wad hae telled him a' about it. But noo he can juist bide till the next Deacons' Coort, whan I'll read my report. Set him up wi' his high looks! Is't no me 'ats gatherin' the siller that's to pay him wi?'

'Hoot! Peter, man, I'm thinkin' he was that carried like in's mind, he didna ken even wha it was gaed by! But I'm sayin', Peter, what was yon the minister was carryin' afore him on the saidle, 'at he took sae muckle tent on? It was sma' an' muckle happit up, an' he ne'er took his e'en aff it. Gin it hadna been him I'd hae said it was a bairn, an' he was blate ower 't.'

The subject of the discussion went on his way, unwitting of the offence he had given. 'Tammass' was scarcely wrong in surmising that he did not know who passed. Had he been questioned at the moment he would no doubt have answered correctly, but as there was no one to do so, the impression on his consciousness glanced off, causing, indeed, the mechanical salutation at the moment, but powerless to influence his thought.

Upward toils the pony, picking his steps from one soft sod to the next; the rider sunk in a brown study lets the bridle hang loosely on his neck, and the baby, rocked by the springy undulations of his gait, sleeps again, unconscious and content. The summit is gained in time, the road grows easier, and the pace mends, till a shout in front startles their drowsy senses.

'Hallo! Roddie!--halt! You're not going to pass an old friend like that!'

Roderick, wakening with a start, catches the bridle of the good-natured beast, which has already come to a stand. A middle-aged gentleman is descending a heathery knoll overhanging the road, and carries a salmon rod on his shoulder, and a boy follows with his basket, apparently well filled, and from which there peers a companionable-looking bottle neck.

'Good morning! Captain Drysdale.'

'Good morning, Roddie! Glad to see you after so long.'

'Going to try a last cast at the salmon before the fishing closes? You have every prospect of good sport. The water looked splendid at the bridge as I came over. The spate has fallen, but the water is still brown, and dotted with foam-spots. You will have a fine day's sport.'

'I hope so, lad! And I only wish you were coming with me! Od! Roddie, do you ever think of the jolly days we used to have, when young Kenneth was at home, lad! The fishing! and the days after the grouse! we expect Kenneth home to-day for three months' leave,--in fact he should have come last night. I wish you were to be with us too, old man!'

'Thanks, Captain John; but that can scarcely be. A minister should have other things to think about,--at least the Presbytery would say so, and I do not think the General would relish the crack of a dissenter's gun on any moor of his.'

'Hang the dissenters! and that weary Free Kirk that has set the people by the ears. I never could understand how they contrived to inveigle a sensible fellow like you--gentle born and bred, and your father's son, in among a crew of canting demagogues.'

'Please don't! Captain Drysdale. Nothing but a conviction that it was right could have led me to take the step, and give up so much of what I valued most. Having that conviction, I am sure even you must approve my acting up to it. My choice has cost me much, but I counted, the cost before I made it. So, as regards the church, we had better "let that flea stick to the wa'" as my beadle says. We might argue till we vexed each other, but neither would be converted to the other's views.'

'Well, Roddie! And probably your beadle says again--"They that will to Cupar, maun to Cupar;"--there's no use speaking, but it's a great pity!--And where, in the name of all that's wonderful, are you trapezing to, at this hour of the morning? And of all the steeds in the country side to carry a douse Free Kirk presbyter, if that is not Patey Soutar the drunken cadger's pony! Bonny on-goings! my lad. What would the 'Residuary' Presbytery, as you are pleased to denominate the church of your fathers say to that? Ha, ha! I doubt not the Free is both free and easy--ha! ha! And what may that be your reverence is carrying home so gingerly? My stars! I believe it is a child!'

At this point the baby disturbed first by the cessation of the pony's rocking gait, and then fairly awakened by the Captain's loud guffaw, lifted up its small voice and wept.

'Indeed, Master Roddie, yours seems to be a very free church indeed!'

'Captain Drysdale, I do think some things should not be said even in jest, which is all you mean, I know. But I do not think I have hitherto so desecrated my sacred calling as to have laid myself open to such insinuations even in jest.'

'Tush, man! Don't be so thin-skinned. One must have his joke. Besides, after all, you have no need to be much vexed, "it is such a little one," as the French girl said to her confessor.' And with a volley of 'ha, ha, ha!' Captain John bounded down the hill.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN BY THE BURNSIDE.

Mary Brown arose even earlier than her wont on the morning that succeeded the gale. The air was fresh and sweet with the scent of bog myrtle, fir, and early heather. The hillsides, new washed, were vividly green in their clothing of pasture coppice and feathery birch. The sombre moors were warming into crimson when they met the morning sun, and the shadows among the rocks and distant hilltops showed the whole gamut of blues and purple greys.

Mary perforce had to take a morning walk. Their breakfast-room was at some distance from the cottage in which she spent the night, and the sweet air tempted her to extend the stroll through the village to an old bridge that crossed the stream at its western extremity. There she sat down on the stone parapet to sun herself, and thaw out the chilliness which she had absorbed from the walls of her damp little cottage chamber.

How the poor seem to thrive and bloom and flourish into ripe and hearty old age in those houses with their turf and stone walls! vying in health and gaiety with the lusty house leek that ridges the roof thatch! Can it be that they are made of another clay from those who walk on planked floors, and shiver at every draught that sifts through an ill-adjusted casement? Mary was no hothouse plant: her health was good, and she had always spent much of her time out of doors, careless of weather; but the clammy dampness and closeness of the little cottage rooms oppressed her, and she now drank in the pure clear air of the hills with thirsty content.

The swiftly passing waters beneath the bridge, were a darker brown after the rain, and spotted with patches of white foam, and they sung with a low continuous movement as they slid over the rocks and broke on the piers of the arch. Down the stream on a grassy flat the village women were spreading out their little heaps of wet linen fresh wrung from the stream, to bleach in the sun. Farther on a few cattle had come down to drink; and beyond that, cottage roofs and palings closed in the view.

In the village street the grey shadows of the cottages alone broke the monotony of the deserted road, till as she looked a figure issued from the door of the inn, and slowly came towards her. The distance was too great to enable her to identify the person; yet some vague association, indefinite but altogether pleasant, was called up by the gait and set of the shoulders as he approached, and added a new chord of feeling which filled up the harmony of the peaceful scene. The breeze flitting through a neighbouring wood came laden with a spicier fragrance of resinous pine, and the hum of vagrant bees mixed with the melody of babbling waters, and all the music of all the sunny mornings she had ever known came back on her with a mysterious gladness as she watched the approaching stranger. He was coming nearer, however, and she turned her head till he would pass.

The gentleman came forward smoking an early cigar, and likewise enjoying the quiet beauty of the morning. The view looking up the glen was wilder than in other directions. About a mile above the village the woods ended, and the shoulders of the hills swept down into the ascending valley in breadths of green pasture and brown and purple moor, while the jagged outline of the more distant hills, bounded in the background a broad bank of grey which stood sharply out against the transparent horizon.

The steep ascent of the old-fashioned bridge, and its brown stone parapet, picked out in all the sunlit greens and yellows of moss and wall rue, made a bold foreground to the picture, and the sable-clad figure of Mary Brown on the summit, gave life and purpose to the whole.

The gentleman ascended the bridge. Mary's back seemed not unfamiliar to him, but it was only on casting a side-long glance in passing that a recognition became possible.

'Mary Brown!'

Mary started. Her thoughts had wandered away in a day-dream; she looked round, and there stood the stranger at her elbow, with both hands held out.



"He was coming nearer, . . . she turned her head till he would pass." Page 24.

"He was coming nearer, ... she turned her head till he would pass." Page 24.

'Ken--Mister--Captain Drysdale!' The light came suddenly into her eyes, and perhaps a shade of warmer color into her cheeks as she gave her hand.

'Why not Kenneth, as of old? Am I to say "Miss Brown?" I fear you have a bad memory for old friends!'

'Not that--but who would have expected to see you here?'

'And who could have thought to see you here,---sitting upon a bridge, in Glen Effick, at seven o'clock in the morning?'

'We live in this village now. But where have you fallen from? When we heard of you last you were at Gibraltar.'

'And so I was till the other day, when the doctors ordered me home on sick leave. But tell me. How come you to be staying in this poor little place? Some of your old charity doings I suppose. Will you not let me drive you over to the manse, my gig is getting ready now. As you may suppose, I was storm-staid here last night, and I am just setting out for home. Though, of course, I shall be only too glad to wait till you are ready to start.'

'Then you have not heard of my dear father's death, and that Roderick has been appointed to the Free Church congregation in the parish.'

'I knew about Doctor Brown, and felt deeply grieved. But I understood Roderick had succeeded him in the parish. The General always said he intended that he should.'

'General Drysdale meant to be very kind; but Roderick has joined the Free Church, so he could not accept, and I fear both the General and Lady Caroline are a good deal displeased. But you know he had to do what he thought right. Tell me, however, have you been very ill?'

'Oh! I have been broiling on that terrible rock all the summer, like the rest, and I had a pretty sharp attack of fever. But the week at sea, coming home, has set me up again. But about you and Roddie,--do you mean to say that for his church crotchets he has dragged you out of the old manse where you were born? And that you and he are living down here? Where do you live, by the way? Not in the village tavern, surely!--with its pipe-smoking and toddy-drinking--and yet I see no place else.'

'We live in the cottages. Several of the villagers each give us a room, so we are not so badly off for space, though the rooms are pretty far apart.'

'I would not have believed that your brother could have behaved so badly as to bring you down to that. And I did not think my mother would have allowed it. Were you not asked to stay at Inchbracken?'

'I fear she and General Drysdale are too much displeased with my brother for bringing the Free Church controversy into the parish, and with me for following him, even to waste another thought upon either of us. And perhaps, Captain Drysdale, it is wrong in me to stand here talking to you, when I know how deeply we have offended your family. Perhaps they might not like it.'

'And what then? Miss Brown. Am I still in pinafores at eight-and-twenty, that my mamma is to give consent before I may be allowed to speak to my very oldest friend? Why! Mary, girl, I have had you in my arms before you could walk, and I have fished you out of more than one burn, where you might very well have been drowned if I had not been near. And you know when you were eight years old you promised'--

'Pray stop! Captain Drysdale. Those are old stories, and neither you nor I are to be bound by the foolish speeches of our childhood. Dear old Kilrundle! I shall never forget our happy days there. But things have changed--I think this must be your gig.'

It *was* his gig, and with a very hearty shake-hands on either side, he got into it, and drove away.

'Prettier than ever,' he kept saying to himself, and the touch of the soft hands and the light in the violet eyes seemed to remain with him, and to vibrate about his heart, like the echo of a pleasant strain, till an hour later be alighted at Inchbracken.

Mary Brown strolled back to the village, her thoughts running on many things at once, the pleasant memories of the long ago and the somewhat sordid experiences of the present. Had Mrs. Sangster of Auchlippie been by, and known what was passing in her mind, she would surely have told her she was looking back to the fleshpots of Egypt, and exhorted her to take warning by the melancholy fate of Lot's wife.

Mrs. Sangster was a lady who took a particular interest in her own side of the ecclesiastical contest; and indeed it paid her to do so. She was the wife of the great man of the congregation, and seeing how mightily her consequence had prospered under the schism, she might well be zealous. From being an unpretending gentleman farmer, and the smallest heritor in the parish, her husband was now one of the few landed proprietors adhering to the Free Church, and one of those, therefore, whom she delighted to honour. Their snug home with its arable land and pastures, had now become a territorial designation attached to his name by an accented 'of,' like a German 'von,' and when he attended the General Assembly at Edinburgh he found himself sitting in committee and on platforms with the Church's solitary Marquis and the great magnates of the cause, while Madame had her seat in the Assembly among the honourable women, behind the Moderator's chair.

Fortunately for Mary, Mrs. Sangster did not appear. It was only her messenger in the person of a bare-foot herd laddie, who brought an invitation to drink tea; so Mary might let her thoughts linger in Egypt as they would. Indeed, in her case the rebuke could hardly be held to apply, seeing it was not the Free Church she had followed into the wilderness, but only the steps of her dear brother, that she might support and minister to him wherever and however he might need her help; consequently her religion manifested itself only as it had always done, in charities and good deeds, and as she had little to say on controversial subjects she was held to be 'juist a wee cauldribe'--a weakly sister after the pattern of Martha, troubled about many things and much serving, but hardly sound on the importance of the Headship, seeing she was disposed to look on all ministers as alike good, whether they had come out or stayed in.

Mary lingered long over her breakfast, but at length it was concluded, and she rose and returned to the study over the way. In the distance coming down the hill road, she now descried her brother jogging slowly down towards her.

'Eppie,' she cried, 'here comes my brother at last; will you make him some tea?'

'Hoot, mem! He's no wantin' his breakfast, I'm thinkin', or he'd be for makin' mair speed, saw ye e'er a hungry man danderin' down the road like yon? But preserve us a! What's yon he's carryin' afore him on the bit pownie? It micht e'en be a bairn by the looks o' the bun'le, an' the tent he taks on't.' 'A' weel, sir!' she shouted as he drew near, 'Ye've had a sore traivel. Hoo's a' wi' ye, sir? An' wad ye like a dish o' tea, sir! Or a drap kale? My pat's on this twa hour, an' I'm thinkin' there's a hantle mair fushion in that, nor a' yer dribblin' teapats. Tak tent, sir!' she added as he proceeded to alight before the door, 'gie us the bun'le an' ye'll licht easy. Lord sakes! sir, wha's acht the bairn? A gangin' fit's aye gettin', folk says, but wha'ar gat ye the wein?'

'Well Eppie! It's a poor little shipwrecked sailor, and I believe an orphan. I picked it up among the wreck of a ship that was lost at Effick Mouth last night, and we must care for it till we find out whom it belongs to. Though I fear its parents are among those lost in the shipwreck. Poor little soul! See how it takes to you already, Eppie!'

'The bonny lamb! an' sae it diz, an' it micht tak up wi' waur folk nor Eppie Ness. I'se tent ye, my birdie! Hoot awa! Miss Mary, what ken a young thing like you about fendin' for a bairnie? Young folk hae muckle to learn, an' yer time 'ull come, hinnie, or I'm muckle mistaen. I'll seek out the bit cradle whaur my ain bonny wee lambie lay, 'at's been wi' the Lord noo gaun on twenty year, gin ye'll haud this wee birdie, Miss Mary. An' ye can be seein' til its claes, an' we'll hae to

mak meat till't.'

So the baby was carried into the house, undressed and bathed and fed, and put to sleep in Eppie's cradle. When the shawls were removed they disclosed a little girl dressed in many delicate embroideries, and around its body was entwined part of a gold chain corresponding to the links which Roderick had observed in the grasp of the drowned woman on the beach. These properties they carefully folded up and put away to assist in the future identification of the child, and Roderick wrote a letter to the *Edinburgh Witness* describing the waif he had rescued from the sea, in hopes it might meet the eye of some friend or relation.

CHAPTER V.

JULIA.

When Captain John joined the family at dinner that day, it was with feelings of more than his wonted self-content. He had returned from his fishing only the hour before, and had brought with him the two finest salmon that had been caught that season. The game-keepers and retainers had admired them as in duty bound, but theirs was the admiration that pleases only *faute de mieux*, seeing that it can be counted on, while to-day his nephew, his old rival in field sports, was present to join in the applause.

They sat down, a party of five, the three gentlemen already described, Lady Caroline, and her kinswoman Miss Finlayson. Lady Caroline was the great lady of the neighbourhood. She was tall and dignified, with a thorough appreciation of her own importance; also she was somewhat indolent, and therefore disposed to be good-natured and condescending, whenever her superiority was quietly acquiesced in. She spent a few weeks each summer in London with her husband, but these visits were yearly becoming shorter. There were so many persons of more consequence than herself, and she found herself so much in the position of one in a crowd, that she felt as if losing her sense of personal identity, became depressed, and hurried home never to return, or would have done so had it not been for Miss Finlayson, her judicious young friend, who never once presumed to advise or direct, but who yet could influence her in opposition to her own inclination, to remain in town to the end of the season, to return again the next year, and to do any thing else the said Miss Finlayson might desire.

Miss Finlayson was a young lady of five or six-and-twenty, and of slender fortune and accommodating disposition, who could converse or keep silence, read, write, play or sing, laugh or cry in sympathy with the mood of her protectress. In person as in manner she can only be described negatively. She was quite what a young lady should be at all points, or at least, when you come to particularize, nothing that she should not be. Had Madame Contour, her London dressmaker, sent home her person and demeanour, as well as her admirably fitting draperies, she would have been very much as she was. Her figure was tall and well-proportioned, waist small, bust a little flat, easily amenable to the touch of art, arms slender but well rounded and charmingly white, hands and feet adapted to the smallest and daintiest of gloves and slippers. Her complexion was pale but clear, lips thin, mouth long, nose slightly aquiline, eyes somewhat pale, forehead too high, but with the dark hair drawn well over the temples, and long ringlets descending nearly to the waist. Altogether a pale but not unpleasing vision, and what Madame Contour would have called 'very ladylike.' She had come to Inchbracken three years before, on a cousinly visit of a fortnight; but Lady Caroline had found her so delightful and invaluable a companion that she had been induced to prolong her stay from month to month, till at length, after prolonged entreaties, she had consented to sacrifice what she called her independence, and make Inchbracken her home.

Her insight into the character of those about her was unusually distinct, and the tact with which she applied the knowledge so acquired thoroughly artistic. With the General she was all grateful deference and modest trust; hanging on his lips for any occasional oracles of wisdom that chance might issue, but very careful not to bore him with her presence or conversation unsought, and ever ready with a light for his cigar when his own matchbox was mislaid, as it generally was. With Captain John she was gay, always ready with a flippant repartee whenever he attempted to gibe, but still upon her guard. There was a twinkle in the old gentleman's eye whenever they engaged in a passage of arms, which suggested that he too had some of the insight on which she depended so much in playing the game of life. With Lady Caroline, as already said, she was self-adaptive and sympathetic, and yet to all appearance spontaneously so, and without ever sinking her own individuality, or permitting herself to be taken for granted like a dependent. Besides amusing, she contrived to relieve her of many small burdens and domestic cares, and so became altogether indispensable to her indolent kinswoman. She interfered in

nothing, and yet there was no part of the household machine that did not run smoother when lubricated by her good offices. The housekeeper, the head gardener, even my lady's own woman came in time to solicit in an emergency the favourable intervention of this best natured of all young ladies, and always with the best results.

Lady Caroline found at length that she need neither think nor act, save when she felt inclined, and she declared with fervour, that Julia Finlayson was as good as a daughter of her own. That amiable person was quite content that it should be so, and indeed was most willing that Lady Caroline should have a full legal claim on her filial duty. By some deft manipulation of circumstances, the idea of her becoming a daughter-in-law had been suggested to her ladyship's mind, while the dear disinterested Julia stood immaculate from every suspicion of scheming, and, strange as it may seem, Lady Caroline was disposed to acquiesce. Her Kenneth, she said, would never make a great marriage, and if he would bring home a nobody, there was none she would more willingly take to her mother's heart than 'poor Julia.' The adjective is not exactly an enthusiastic one, but narrow circumstances had taught Miss Finlayson philosophy, and she did not look to gather grapes off thorns. If the thorns would only consent not to scratch till she had made good her hold, she knew she could pick them off at her leisure afterwards; and then for a crackling blaze under the pot! It would be 'poor thorns' then! But meanwhile, to acquire a mother-in-law, that lady's consent is by no means the essential or only step. 'First catch your hare,' or the pot will be empty, and the thorns to crackle under it will never be required. Though the damsel sit expectant and willing in her bower, what matter, if the wooer comes not? and so far Kenneth had shown no desire to approach Julia's bower in wooer's guise. Most callous of men, and most indifferent of cousins, he had passed under all the battery of charms and accomplishments, and never known. In all cousinliness he had taught her to fish, and to row on the loch. When she admitted a curiosity as to men's pursuits and a liking for tobacco smoke, he had welcomed her to the smoking-room, where she felt inclined to study *Bell's Life*, and also to the billiard room, where, in fact, he made her a very tolerable player, but that was all,—he felt to her only as if she had been a very little brother, and wondered what she meant by so many dainty affectations, and why she should bother to do so many things he shrewdly suspected she did not like. As to her clever little leadings, feints, and fencings colloquial, they were so much good brain-power thrown away, and might have been spoken in French or Sanscrit for any idea they conveyed to him. In fact she was altogether too sophisticated and utterly fine for this country-bred swain, and besides, she was always there.

If you had partridge every day for breakfast, partridge for dinner, and partridge again at supper, how long would you continue to relish that dainty food? And so probably in the case of a healthy young man with plenty of social opportunities, a permanent residence under the same roof does not afford the sportswoman the best opportunity to bag her game. So many weapons and devices become useless after a trial or two. What can be the efficacy of a parting glance, for instance, if the glancer has only gone behind the rose-bush at the other end of the garden? And how can one recall a last *tête à tête*, when the partner in it sits in an adjoining chamber, ready to resume? And how can imagination and memory ever come into play, with the fair object always in full view? Miss Finlayson was not only too sophisticated, but she was always there, and so, simple Mary Brown, though probably not so handsome according to Madam Contour's standard, and certainly less clever and accomplished, had taken possession of the young man's affections, and kept them, in spite of all the wiles of the syren.

All this, however, had come to an end two years ago when Kenneth, after long leave and quarters in the nearest garrison town, was ordered with his regiment to Gibraltar. In the meantime Mary Brown had become involved in the disgrace into which every well regulated mind in the Inchbracken circle considered that her brother had sunk. In fact she had so completely fallen out of their world that she need not be considered further, except to keep her out. Wherefore Julia made haste to welcome Kenneth's return, with all the warmth of a cousin, and to intimate as far as a well-bred damsel may, that she was capable, perhaps, of even warmer feelings.

The conversation at dinner that evening ran much on Captain John's successful angling. The appearance of his largest salmon at table gave the ladies an opportunity to join in the applause, which every male inhabitant of the house and offices had already offered.

'If you would only go out oftener, John!' said Lady Caroline. 'None of the men ever seem able to bring home anything larger than a small grilse.'

'Was it above or below the bridge you caught him? Captain Drysdale,' asked Miss Finlayson.

And so John was launched on an extended narrative of his day's spoil. Every bolt and plunge and feint and double of his fish was duly recorded, with sufficient local description to make the whole perfectly intelligible. He told his story remarkably well, and quite aroused the interest of his auditors. Too much so, perhaps, if the General's opinion had been asked; but then the General may have been hypercritical, owing to an idea he had of elevating dinner into one of the fine arts. 'You see,' he would say 'one can only dine once in twenty-four hours, that is to say if one is not to be talked about, which would be unpleasant, or to lose use of one's liver, which would be worse. And so, for myself I confess I look forward to dinner as the event of the day, and like to approach it in a proper spirit. There should be some talk of course, because we are neither beasts nor cannibals; but it should be light, gay, and cheerful, for good spirits promote digestion—yet not too engrossing—and especially—no discussion! That distracts the attention, till a man may not know

whether it is a quail or a snipe he is eating. We want a cheerful tranquility at dinner, in order to appreciate rightly the dishes submitted; and give due attention to the business before us and that, I take it, is the deglutition of food.'

On the present occasion, however, the General's views were neither asked nor propounded, and John rambled pleasantly forward through the various events of his day.

'By the way, Kenneth! I met your old crony, young Brown, this morning. Poor lad! Fanaticism has changed him sadly; long-haired, lank-jawed, and saucer-eyed, that is what he has become. He might be a Covenanter, or a member of the Barebones Parliament. He appeared to be returning home from Inverlyon, where he must have been last night, for it was about eight o'clock when I met him on the road this morning, jogging along, (how he used to gallop about the countryside of old!) and mounted, of all beasts for a douce Free Kirk priest to be astride, on that poaching rascal Patey Soutar's pony!'

'Hm!' said the General, 'I always said secession was just inserting the small end of the wedge! They quarrel with our vested right of patronage now, but that is only the beginning. By and by they will question our right to the grouse on our own hills, and want to repeal the game laws! If they had their way, I wonder would they leave us a roof over our heads, or a coat on our backs? That comes of your Reform Bills! and putting the government of the country in the hands of people who have nothing to lose! But I did not expect to see the son of my old friend array himself with such as these. It is very sad.'

'Did he seem cheerful, John?' asked Kenneth.

'He looked as I say, tired, thin, and hollow-eyed. But when I tried mildly to remonstrate, and show that he had made the change for the worse, he fired up briskly enough, and held forth quite at length. He might have been talking still, I daresay, but that just then, there came a squeal from a parcel he carried on his saddle bow. I pricked up my ears at that, and resolved to take *my* innings then. He had been discoursing on the solemnity of his avocations, which precluded shooting and fishing, so here I had a fine opening for chaff, saying that his presbytery might reasonably forbid these, seeing that it allowed other pastimes so much more engrossing, for--saving your presence, Lady Caroline--the bundle contained a baby! Poor fellow, he seemed so put-out, I really did not catch his explanation--though of course there was one, (there always is--) The confusion seemed quite out of proportion, for after all as the French girl said to her priest, "it was such a little one!" Ha, ha!!'

But no one joined in the laugh. The ladies were examining the flowers painted on their plates, and the gentlemen kept a severe silence. You surely went too far there! Captain John! Good man. He loved to make a joke, but it was not often that he achieved one. If desire had been qualification, he would certainly have been a wit; and when he thought he had achieved one, he repeated it till every one he knew had heard it. Hence the repetition of the morning's rather thread-bare jest.

Perhaps it was only to break an awkward silence that Miss Finlayson took up the word.

'Your woman Briggs tells me, Lady Caroline, that that Tirpie girl, old Tibbie's daughter, has come home again. When Briggs came over from Inverlyon last night, there was some one else in the stage-coach, all wrapped up, who sat and cried the whole way. She got out at Tibbie's cottage. This morning Briggs went over about some sewing, and there was the girl looking so thin and pale. Briggs says it was distressing to see her, she looked so weak and heart-broken. Perhaps you may remember that she was ailing and went away to some friend at a distance. Now she is home again. I fear she is not a good girl, at least not all her mother would wish her to be. But perhaps you could let her have some fine sewing, Briggs says any other kind of work would be too much for her.'

The boisterous unmannerliness of Captain John's remark had caused a sensation, but it was as nothing to the dismay which followed Miss Finlayson's perfectly quiet, evenly uttered, and perhaps charitably intended words. She seemed virtuously unconscious of all evil, but by some occult association of ideas, her statement fell into the minds of her auditors as corroborative and supplementary to what had been meant but as a little verbal horse play by the Captain.

Lady Caroline looked deeply shocked, Kenneth flushed scarlet with indignation, and as his glance met John's, the latter returned it with a twinkle of mingled amusement and admiration. He passed his napkin across his mouth to hide an uncontrollable grin, and muttered to Kenneth his neighbour--'the scandalous jade!'

William the footman appeared to quiver as if struck. His eye dilated and his jaw fell. The dish he carried would have fallen, and there would have been a catastrophe, had not the butler trodden on his toe and recalled him with a reproving glance to that sublime impassibility which alone is worthy of a footman on duty.

The General alone remained tranquil. He was eating his dinner. He heard something pass between the ladies about one of the cottagers, but his thoughts were running on other things, whether, for instance, another clove of garlic, or perhaps an olive would not give a rounder fulness to the sauce on his plate.

There was little or no conversation afterwards. Every one seemed distraught, and following out a train of new and unpleasant ideas, except Miss Finlayson, who seemed securely content, a participant with the General in his digestive tranquility. Perhaps she had fired her shot and it had sped home to its mark, or perhaps there was no mark and no intention when the winged words flew forth. We read that of old 'a certain man drew a bow at a venture.' The arrow sped, and entering the unguarded joint of a harness, it laid a warrior low. It may be that Julia's arrow was thus unwittingly shot, but Captain John did not think so.

CHAPTER VI.

SOPHIA.

Three weeks later, Mrs. Sangster entertained friends. Dinner at Auchlippie took place earlier than at Inchbracken--finished the afternoon rather than began the evening. At its conclusion the master withdrew, to make the round of his stables and cattle sheds, and see that the stock was fitly provided and bestowed for the night. His son, Mr. Peter Sangster of Manchester and his friend Mr. Wallowby, likewise of Manchester, and now in Scotland for a short vacation, also withdrew and lighting their cigars sauntered down the avenue. Only the Rev. Mr. Dowlas was left within doors in company with Mrs. Sangster and her daughter. The latter sought her embroidery frame in a distant bay window, and soon became engrossed in counting the squares of her Berlin wool work.

The elder lady was left alone to converse with her ghostly friend, and the pair selecting the two easiest and roomiest chairs they could find, drew a long breath and settled themselves for along and confidential 'crack.' There was much to tell and to hear about the fortunes of the 'cause' throughout the several parishes of their presbytery, in which Mr. Dowlas was a guiding spirit; but at length they came round to the lady's own parish of Kilrundle, which she, as ruling lady of the ruling elder and chief adherent, considered as her own in a more especial sense than did any other of the parishioners.

'And I think,' she said, 'Mr. Dowlas, that we here in Kilrundle, have fought the good fight as well as any of you. They tell me there were not two dozen residuaries in Kilrundle Church on Sunday, though the Inchbracken family are far more particular about their servants attending ordinances now than they used to be. And Lady Caroline goes twice every Sunday herself. You know there was many and many a Sabbath day in the old time, that she never darkened the kirk door at all, but now she goes to countenance that sticket dominie that fills good old Doctor Brown's pulpit. Well! poor misguided woman, let us hope she may perhaps get some small enlightenment to her darkened mind! Though, I fear, the motive which draws her to the sanctuary, being only the support of high handed error and worldliness, is one not likely to bring a blessing. It seems *doubtful* to me too if we have any right to consider the churches of the Establishment as sanctuaries at all. Just hot-beds of soul-deadening Moderatism and Erastianism, where the word of God is only permitted, in so far as it can be made to square with Lord Aberdeen's Bill.'

'Well ma'am! they *do* say that that sinful Act of Parliament is laid on the table of the residuary presbyteries side by side with the word of God! But I would fain hope that that is an exaggeration. I hear you are having very full meetings at the Muir Foot; times of refreshing, I hope, and sincere milk of the word.'

'We've much to be thankful for. On fine days when the heather's dry, far more turn out than ever I saw in Old Kilrundle Kirk in its best days; and even when it rains, you'd be surprised to see how many sit out the discourse under their plaids and umbrellas. I hope the hearts of the persecutors may be turned before long, however, and that we may get a stanse for a church, before the rough weather sets in. There's a very suitable stanse, just opposite Inchbracken Gates, and in full view of the Old Kirk. That would suit us finely and be a standing testimony against the backslidings in high places, and I want Mr. Sangster to head a deputation and wait on the General, poor thoughtless worldling, and lay our case before him, simply but faithfully; but I cannot prevail on him to undertake the duty, for I think it is a duty. He says he cannot afford to quarrel with General Drysdale, who has always been a good neighbour, though I cannot say it myself. I have found Lady Caroline always very high with me. I fear, poor woman, she wants some grievous affliction to bring her to a due sense of her unworthiness, and that she'll get it. However, widow Forester has a small free-hold down Glen Effick, and the Deacons' Court are considering about buying a corner fronting on the high road. She wants a big price for it though, and they cannot get her to move from her terms. She says the bit of land is all she has in the world, and she must do the best she can with it.'

'Ah!' sighed the minister, 'filthy lucre!' It is strange, people will set so much store by things

which perish in the using, notwithstanding the noble example of the widow in the gospel, who cast into the treasury all her living!

'Yes, it is indeed sad to see such worldly-mindedness; and you see we've a poor congregation, and whatever money is spent on the ground, there will be just so much less to lay out on the building, and we will end with having some poor draughty little place, with narrow benches and straight backs, enough to give one the fidgets in a long service, or an attack of rheumatism. We have subscribed twenty pounds ourselves to the church building fund, and it seems very hard that so much of the money should just be going into widow Forester's pocket; I cannot think that a person like that can be in a proper frame of mind. Indeed, I called on her myself, and strove to place the matter before her in all love and faithfulness. I earnestly besought her to leave all care and anxiety for her poor perishing body in higher hands,—and, what do you think? Mr. Dowlas, she had the assurance to tell me that we had better give them a site for church, manse and school, up here at Auchlippie! The impertinent beasom! I just gave her one look, and I walked out of her house—and I will never speak to that woman again!'

There came a twinkle into the minister's eye. He was by no means devoid of the sense of humour, and perhaps that trait in himself, which led the 'unregenerate' to think they detected in him a considerable vein of pawkie selfishness, led him more keenly to enjoy his friend's unconscious display of a similar propensity. He soon, however, solemnized his features and voice with the regulation ecclesiastical sigh.

'The flesh is weak! my dear friend,' he said in time, 'and we must bear with one another's infirmities! The strong especially must bear with the weak.'

'Yes,' retorted the lady, whose meekness was generally absent on the faintest hint of reproof, 'but the weak are required to look up to the strong for guidance as well as protection; for the powers that be are ordained of God. And I consider that the like of Widow Forester was very far out of her duty to speak back to *me*. The Shorter Catechism is most precise about superiors, inferiors, and equals.'

'Ah yes!' said the minister, with his twinkle of eye, and more unction of voice. He was too sensible a man to embroil himself with an angry woman and a hospitable hostess. 'It is a wonderful compendium of sound and wholesome doctrine, the Shorter Catechism. I hope our young friend Mr. Brown sees that the lambs of the flock are well grounded in its hallowed teachings.'

'Oh he does, and I am very particular myself that my young women's class have all the scripture proofs to each question at their finger ends. I would like you to examine them, Mr. Dowlas, to-morrow afternoon. You see Mr. Brown is but young yet, though he is a most excellent lad, and I feel to him almost like a mother, and try to advise him as an older head sometimes can. But he's rather fractious at times to the voice of instruction. Young folk, you see, will be young folk!'

'Yes ma'am,' said Mr. Dowlas, who, whatever his faults, was always loyal to his cloth, and would permit no one but himself to say anything against a cleric in his presence, 'I look on you people of Kilrundle as most fortunate in your minister. He is one of the excellent of the earth, and has few equals in the presbytery either for piety or learning, or I think talent. If he lives he will take a high place in the church, and then his zeal and his sacrifices for the cause are something to make many an older member blush. You see, to him Erastianism showed itself in its most enticing aspect, for his father, we must all admit, was a worthy man, though moderate.'

'Ah yes!' broke in the lady; 'there's where it is! In this life he had his good things, and was thought a worthy man; but he would not join at the Disruption. The pleasures of sin for a season were too much for him, and now he is gone to his account! It's a solemn thought, Mr. Dowlas, to think where that poor old man may be now!' Here she became ejaculatory. 'Without are dogs—and moderates.'

The minister here broke in to prevent worse, 'As the tree falleth, dear lady, so shall it lie. Old Doctor Brown led a godly life, and it is not permitted to pry into the mysteries beyond the veil. He belonged to an earlier generation, and was so bound up in the work of his parish that I do not think he gave much thought to what was transpiring in the church at large. We may judge from the training he gave his son, that his heart was in the right place, and from the course his son has taken since he was brought face to face with the questions of the day, we may guess how the father would have acted if he had been similarly placed. Just see how young Roderick, though not yet ordained, has brought out the whole of his large parish with him. It is a great achievement! When do Mr. Sangster and the Session intend to moderate the call, and get him ordained and settled among you?'

'Well! to tell you the truth, Mr. Dowlas, I have been rather delaying and keeping back Mr. Sangster (so far as a wife may) from pressing that matter forward too precipitately. It seems to me that, with the young man's talents, it is like hiding gospel light under a bushel, to keep him in this poor neighbourhood. If he had only a chance now to preach in Edinburgh or Glasgow, or even Aberdeen, who knows but he might get a call to a city church? While if he is once ordained and settled here, he may be twenty years before he gets out of it. Between ourselves—you see, there has been a very considerable intimacy between him and our Sophia, for years and years

back. I cannot say that anything has ever been said--I will not say that anything wants to be said--but a mother's heart, Mr. Dowlas, will ponder and be anxious. Before the Disruption, when there was every prospect of his becoming assistant and successor to his father, such an arrangement might have been feasible enough--not that it could be said to be much of a match for our daughter--but when there is true love and true religion, and a very good position in the county--for the Browns always visited with the best, and the money the uncle that died in India left them--. I fear I am a wee bit romantic, Mr. Dowlas, but I think if matters had arranged themselves in that way, and Sophia had wished, I could have given my consent. But the Disruption has changed all that! Still, with a city charge, and a nice congregation able to support a minister, like St. George's, Edinburgh, we will say,--perhaps we might have thought of it yet. But if he settled down here in Kilrundle, without either church or manse, it would be a clear tempting of Providence to entrust him with the happiness of our Sophia. I think of her that we have reared with such care, and given the most expensive education to!--potichomania, even, and the use of the globes!--to be living about among the cottars in Glen Effick. It would never do! The clay floors would bring on a galloping consumption in six month's time!

'Mr. Guthrie, ma'am, of Edinburgh, will remedy all that before long. Have you not heard of the wonderful success that is attending his scheme? which is, to build a manse for every minister in the Church? I hear he is carrying everything before him, and I am not surprised. Such energy and such powers of persuasion could not possibly fail.'

'I hope it may be so, for the Church's sake. But as regards Mr. Brown, he would still be in but a small way to take a wife. Not that I would have you for a moment to imagine that we are looking for a proposal from him. I have great confidence in Sophia's sound Christian principles. I do not think she would ever bring herself to do anything rashly or unadvisedly--she has great prudence and sound sense. Did you observe Mr. Wallowby at dinner, and the very marked attention he paid her? I believe he is interested in her already! and no wonder, for there are few like her, either for good looks or solid sense. Mr. Wallowby is very wealthy, and perhaps Sophia might see it her duty to accept, if he were to propose. Great wealth opens such a door for extended usefulness! That would relieve my mind greatly as to Roddie Brown, poor man, and his prospects. But as I said before, Sophia has never opened her mind to me, nor, I believe, has either admirer spoken to her. Roddie would speak fast enough, I am sure, if he either saw his way to keep a wife, or got encouragement from us; but we must see our way better before doing that. As for Mr. Wallowby, he only arrived yesterday, but I think so soon as he knows his own mind, he will let us know it too.'

'It is an anxious time for a mother, when a beloved daughter's settlement comes to be decided. But here come our young friends Mr. and Miss Brown!'

In fact the Sangster dog-cart here drove past the window, and set down the young preacher and his sister at the door. Thereupon supervened considerable noise of voices in the hall, for Peter Sangster and his friend had been smoking through the bars of the lodge gate when the dog-cart came in sight, and Mr. Wallowby had been so taken with what he was pleased to call the trim clipper-like cut of Mary Brown, that he had persuaded Peter to dismiss the groom driving, and get in themselves to accompany the new comers to the house. Peter being an old acquaintance and admirer of Mary's was not averse, and when he found her seated at his side, he wished the avenue had been of greater length.

Sophia left her embroidery frame to meet Mary as she alighted, and carry her off to her chamber, while Roderick entered the presence of the Lady of Auchlippie.

Mr. Dowlas hailed the arrival with sincere satisfaction, for his hostess' postprandial confidences had been a little irksome. She had been loquacious and exciting, when, if the unvarnished truth may be told, he would fain have been silent, still, tranquil, somnolent and perhaps even asleep; for he had dined copiously. At any time it is unpleasant to hear one's sincerely cherished sentiments caricatured, or made ridiculous by being introduced in a discordant connection, but it is aggravating when the exhibition is obtruded on a mind rendered reposeful by the sense of physical repletion. The lady's jumble of genuine selfish worldliness and artificial pietism had been very far from soothing. He could not but admit in his heart, that he had detected something like the same stirring of mixed motives in himself; but then, even to himself, they had taken a more seemly guise. Here in their grosser manifestation they shocked him greatly. It seemed like looking in a distorting mirror, when the gazer cannot withdraw his eyes from the hideous image, which he still perceives to be his own, although so different and deformed.

Mr. Dowlas rose, and said he would take a short stroll in the garden before tea. Mrs. Sangster re-seated herself with Roderick, and proceeded to make herself busy with the worldly affairs and spiritual state of many members of his flock, giving much valuable advice, as of a mother in Israel to her youngest son. Her eye, however, rested not on his comely face, but peered over his shoulder to see how it sped with Sophia and Mr. Wallowby, for she was resolved that no detrimental influence should come between that wealthy man of Manchester and her daughter's charms, if perchance she might find favour in his eyes.

Alas! the rich man's eyes were fixed on Mary Brown, whose lively talk engaged both himself and Peter, while Sophia, resplendent embodiment of repose and still life, completed the group, but contributed nothing to the conversation. Mrs. Sangster grew restless as she watched, lost the

thread of her discourse more than once, resumed in the wrong place, and wondering what her interlocutor would think, grew more and more confused. Had she looked in his face instead of past him, she would have been reassured. He had moved his chair a little so as to see, by turning his eye, in the same direction to which her looks were directed, and he sat regarding her with a smile of reposeful content. He probably knew nothing of what she was saying, and in truth he bestowed only so much attention as enabled him to smile or bow when a pause in the current of words seemed to call for a sign of assent. The young man's soul was steeped in tranquil satisfaction. He breathed the same air, he occupied the same room with Sophia,--the Sophia ever present in his thoughts by day and his dreams by night, and when he raised his eyes they rested on her form.

Sophia Sangster--the name is prosaic enough. Not Romeo himself could have taught the nightingales to warble it. But there are no nightingales in the North, and the name of the girl he loved best had never struck Roderick as wanting in melody. She was about the same age as his sister, but taller and larger in every way. Indeed, she was on as large a scale as a woman can well be, without disturbing the sense of fitness and harmony; but the proportion was so fine, that unless when some one was near with whom to compare her, she would have passed for the medium height. Perfectly modelled, and in the finest health, she lent to each movement a rhythmical repose, while rest was in her the suspended action we see in a marble statue, all free from the limp flaccidity of lolling sloth. Her abundant hair was coiled in numberless braids about her head, whose low forehead reminded one of ancient sculpture. So also did the straight nose, full lips, and chin. The rich currents of exuberant health lent brilliant carnation tints to a soft and delicate skin, and nourished the cool shining of the large brown eyes beneath the shadow of their curving lids and long dark lashes--eyes into which poor Roderick had gazed with reverent wonder since long ago.

He saw in this maiden of the admirable physique, and the transparent well-coloured eyes, all that was responsive to his enthusiastic and imaginative nature. Another Pygmalion, he had breathed into her clay a life derived from his own, and now, heathen-like, he worshipped and rejoiced in the work of his own hands, and basked in the light of perfections which existed only in his fanciful desires. With her fine person and her talent for silence and repose, she was like a handsome wall, on which the magic lantern of his thoughts could disport itself in the gayest hues of imagination, and, for the present, with far more comfort and delight than had the Sophia of his worship been a real person, liable to be found wanting, and falling short of expectation. Being an ideal creature altogether, it wanted but a little more make-believe in a new place to fit her exactly to each varying mood.

A young child finds greater and more lasting amusement in the rough, coarse cuts to be found in a backstreet picture book, than in the daintiest illustrations of Caldecott or Kate Greenaway; and the reason, no doubt is, that art having realized less, there is more scope for imagination--more field for the young idea to play in. So too in heathendom, the worship of Isis continued a living cult long after that of the Latin gods had become merely a state ceremonial. The blank impersonal carving of the Egyptian idol left unlimited possibilities to the devout imagination, which each worshipper could work out according to his own needs, while the fully realized conceptions of Grecian art showed more to the worshipper than perhaps he could take in, and the bodily perfection displayed recalled rather the victor in some circus contest than suggested the mysteries of the unseen.

But while we have been talking of her daughter, Mrs. Sangster and her guests have gone to tea. Tea was a meal forty years ago. The company sat round the table, which was set out with plates of bread and butter, various kinds of cake, and sundry varieties of preserves, the work of Sophia all, and works whose excellence warranted the pride she took in them; for before all else Sophia was a notable housekeeper.

After tea there was music, but it being Saturday night, Sophia refrained from performing her last-learned polka, seeing it was an elder's house and two ministers were present; not that she feared to seduce these grave gentlemen into the levity of a dance, but that it was not consonant with the Sabbath exercises of the coming morrow. Mary therefore was called on to sing for them 'Angels ever bright and fair,' and such other morsels of Handel as she could recall without her music. After that, Mr. Sangster called for his favourite Psalm tunes, in which he and Mr. Dowlas joined with immense relish, and no small volume of sound. Mary's voice was completely overborne in the din, and Mr. Wallowby added a new experience in sacred song to his not very complimentary catalogue of the transgressions and shortcomings of the Scotch as measured by the standard of Manchester.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSEPH.

If night follows brighter day in more sunny climes, the colder skies of Scotland enjoy at least the compensation of a lengthened gloaming. The crimson glory of sunset ebbs more slowly away, and a paler daylight lingers on and on, fading by imperceptible degrees, as the blue transparent vapours of the still and warm earth rise to meet the golden blue of heaven; it is hours before the two unite to wrap the world in the purple gloom of night.

On a slope of the upland moor which divides Glen Effick from the coast was the spot where the Free Church congregation of Kilrundle held its Sunday meetings in the open air. 'The Muir Foot' sloped evenly down into the glen, not far outside the village, and close to the high road, from which, nevertheless, it was entirely screened by a thicket of birch and hazel. On the inner edge of this was a small platform for the preacher, roofed and enclosed with canvas, and hence denominated the tent. When the services were in Gaelic and the preacher indulged in much action, the arrangement might have been suggested of Punch and Judy to a frivolous stranger, but the people were too full of solemn and earnest enthusiasm to see anything amiss. A stray colt on the hillside projected against the sky, would bring to the minds of some a vision of Claverhouse and his troopers in the olden time, for that was a theme often presented to their thoughts in tract and sermon. They had almost persuaded themselves the covenanting scenes were to be played over again in their own times, and were steadfastly resolved to 'quit themselves like men' in the day of trouble.

Before the tent there was a plat of turf, through the middle of which a burn babbled over the stones; beyond, the moor swept gently upwards, and here the worshippers were wont to sit, tier above tier, like the audience in a theatre, to listen to the preaching of the word. In that gloaming the place was not altogether deserted, the tap of a hammer driving nails reverberated through the stillness. Joseph Smiley the beadle and a joiner by trade, was at work making preparation for the services of the morrow. He had driven a few posts into the sward, and on these was nailing planks to form a rough bench or two, for the eldership and the *élite* of the congregation. There were also two or three wooden chairs, but these he hid away in the tent to keep them safe till the Sangster family should appear, and he had an opportunity to present them.

'It's nane o' yer orra bodies 'at's to hecht their tail on thae chairs, an' me feshin' them a' the gate fra' hame, I'se warrant! I'll mak an errand up til Auchlippie come Monday, an' gin I hae na twa half crowns in my pouch, or a pair o' the maister's breeks in my oxtar at the hamecomin', my name's no Joseph Smiley!' With these comfortable reflections he put on his coat, gathered up his tools, and started for home in the gathering darkness.

'Joseph Smiley!'

The words came out of the darkness under a tree, as he passed through the thicket and gained the road. Joseph recognized the voice, though he could not see the speaker.

'The deil flee awa wi' her auld banes! If that's no Tibbie Tirpie! What brings the auld witch here wi' her blathers and fleetchin'! I hae lippeden til her haudin' her tongue afore folk, but here she's grippet me my lane. But we maun speak the carlin fair'--so much under his breath, then aloud--

'Hoo's a' wi' ye, Mistress Tirpie? It's lang sin we hae forgathered the gither. But I'm aye speerin' after ye; I ken ye're weel!'

It's no my bodily health 'at's ailin', Joseph Smiley, but my heart's sair in me, an' ye ken what for.'

'I'm sure, Luckie, I kenna what ye're drivin' at; gin gude will o' mine wad gar ye thrive, ye'se thrive wi' the lave! an' as for sare heart I kenna what there can be to fash ye. But there's balm in Gilead, Mistress Tirpie, take ye yer burden there. I'm but a puir door-keeper in the house of the Lord,--tho' it's better that nor dwellin' in tents o' sin,--juist a puir silly earthen vessel, but I'se testifee sae far.

'Joseph Smiley! Ye twa-faced heepocrit. Hoo daar ye tak the word o' God atween yer leein' lips like that? Are ye no feared the grund will open an' swally ye up?'

Fient a fear! Luckie, gin the earth swallied a' body 'at spak unadveesedly wi' their lips, it wad hae a sair wamefu'! There's no mony wad be left stan'in' ower grund. An' I'm misdoubtin' but ye'd no be to the fore yersel', Tibbie. But lay by yer flitin'. Hoo's a' wi' young Tib?'

'An' it sets ye weel, Joseph Smiley, to be speerin' after my puir dautie, after a' 'at's come an' gane. An' ye hae na come naar her this three month come Saubith, for a' the wite ye hae wrocht her.'

'What's the wite, mither? Is she no weel?'

'No weel!--An' ye'll be for no letting on ye ken ocht about it!'

'What wad a ken, Mistress Tirpie? She was aye a fine bit lassie, blythe and bonny as ye'd see in a' the country side, but sin' she gaed awa, naebody kenned whaur, I hae na heard tell o' her ava.'

'Lay by! Joseph Smiley; I ken a' 'at's come an' gane atween ye; she's telled me a'.'

'The saft silly tawpie!' this aside, and under his breath.

'I ken a' about yer guilefu' tongue, an' a' yer pawkie gates. An' think ye I'll haud my whisht, an' see her bear the wite her lane? Ye ken ye swore to marry her.'

'Speak laich, mither; ye dinna ken wha's hearkenin'. They hae lang lugs 'at travel after dark.'

'Ye ken it's true! Joseph Smiley. Ye took yer Bible aith, an' ye beut to keep it. Wha's fraickin' tongue but yours has played a' the mischief? She gaed awa' at yer biddin', an' the bairn's left there, an' naebody kens wha's acht it. But the matter canna bide sae, an' ye'se beut to mak' a decent woman o' her noo. An' a gude wife she'll mak ye, an' a faithfu' whan a's done.'

'Speak laich, woman! An' bide a wee. (The deil's in the wife! the way her tongue rins). Oh Mistress Tirpie! I'm bund till own it was ill my pairt to do as I did; but the best o' us wull gang astray whiles. King Dawvit himself, tho' I wadna be sae presumptuous as even mysel' wi' the like o' him, gaed ance wrang amang the lasses, but he made it a' richt believe; an' sae aiblins wull I. But it taks time--we maun bide a wee.'

'An' what's to come o' Tibbie or than?'

'The deil may flee awa' wi' her for me! An' I wuss he wad,' muttered Joseph below his breath; but aloud his words were more prudent. 'She maun just juke an' let the jaw gae by, like the lave. An' after a', there's naethin' kenned till her discredit, we tuk braw gude care o' that; and there's a gude tent taen o' the bairn as ye cud tak' yersel', an' ye're its grannie. Bide a wee; it'll a' come richt. Ye see, Mistress Tirpie, I'm an office-bearer e'y kirk, an' there maun be nae clashes or clavers about me, or I'd lose my place. Gin thae lang-tongued gouks cud find but a haunel, it's nae Joseph Smiley was be lang the bederal o' Kilrundle, an' then whaur wad the siller come frae for me to keep a wife?'

'Hech! Joseph Smiley, but ye're a pawkie loon an' a slick-tongued! Ye'd fraik the tail aff auld Hornie himsel'. But I'm misdoubtin' ye. Ye'll be slippin' through our fingers yet, like an eel. But I'd be laith to lose ye yer place; an' gin ye'll swear again afore me an' cripple Cormack, an' own her for yer wife, I'se raise nae din. Least said suinest mendet. But Tibbie's real lonesome, an' aye at the greetin'. Ye maun come an' see her twa fore nichts ilka week, an' keep up her heart.'

'I'se tak my aith to yersel, Tibbie, wi' muckle pleasure, an' I'se some an' see Tib, but I'll say naething afore auld Cormack. I winder that a sensible woman like you wad fash wi' sic a doited auld gomeral, 'at can nae mair haud his tongue than he can flee. But I maun be steerin', or it's cauld parritch I'll sup this nicht. Sae here's wussin' ye weel, an' mind me kindly to Tibbie--bonny lass!--gude nicht.'

'Fushionless senseless gowk!' he muttered to himself as he turned homewards. 'An' she's gaun to wive her on me is she? We'll see, Luckie! Time wull tell! But it winna be by garrin' me own up afore auld Cormack!'

Tibbie likewise wended home. As she recalled her interview, she could not but admit to herself that excepting fair words she had taken little. At the same time she had broken ground, and her adversary had betrayed no small dread of a scandal. She, had, therefore she thought some slight hold on that slippery person, and took comfort in recollecting that a salmon ere now has been angled for and landed with a single horse hair. 'But we maun ca' canny,' she muttered to herself. 'He's a kittle chield to drive.' She began now to regret she had not used her little pull towards securing some present advantage. It is sweet to spoil the Egyptians. Besides, any tribute secured would be an admission of her power, and every such tribute and admission would add strength to the chain by which she hoped eventually to secure her victim. Wherefore, it was resolved and decided in Tibbie's council of one, that no time should be lost, but the very earliest opportunity taken to commence operations.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIELD PREACHING.

Sunday in summertime among the hills is not like other days of the week, and it is not like the Sundays given to less favoured scenes. It is free from the smothering sense of restraints experienced in cities, shut up as it were for the day, with their inhabitants paraded through the streets in solemn raiment returning home to depressing lunches and drowsy afternoons. It seems rather to foreshadow that bright eternal Sabbath we looked forward to in childhood, ere faith grew dim-sighted or criticism had been heard of,--that day when every act shall be spontaneously holy, and each sacred observance a delight. The glorious sunshine, the bright breezy sky streaked and dappled with shining white clouds, the crimson moors and the all-pervading scent of the heather, the hum of bees and the chirp of grasshoppers in the herbage, a silence that is musical with faint and distant sounds, burns babbling in the hollows, lambs bleating on the braes, all speak to the spirit of perfect peace and freedom and holy gladness.

The Sangster family preferred walking to church that morning. It was a long walk, but they set forth in good time and the phaeton would bring them home. It was with some misgiving lest she was yielding to the allurements of sense, that Mrs. Sangster consented to gratify this desire of the young people, but prudential considerations seemed to recommend the arrangement. Sophia could have no better opportunity for free and friendly talk with Mr. Wallowby, and Peter could walk with Mary Brown. Mary had two or three thousand pounds, and was a 'nice girl,' and should his lordship Peter, so incline, would not be an unsuitable connection. Peter's private idea was not unlike his mother's, indeed their views in secular matters were wonderfully alike, and each could count on the support of the other without the unpleasant feeling of conspiracy, which comes of putting schemes into words, when they are apt to confront one so strangely and stare one out of countenance. He was therefore the earliest in the hall and stood hatted and gloved, ready to step forward so soon as his intended companion should issue from her room.

'What brings that fool Wallowby, in such a hurry?' he thought to himself, as the latter appeared shortly after him, also equipped for the walk. But the 'fool Wallowby' had his own plans. He too was minded to cross the moorland with 'that jolly Brown girl,' as he called her to himself, rather than with the other 'stick' who had so little to say for herself.

'I think we have got ready too soon,' said Peter; 'the ladies will not come down stairs for twenty minutes at least, they take so long to dress,' and he moved as if for the door.

'One expects to have to wait,' replied Wallowby, and he stood his ground.

Presently Mary appeared, descending the stairs. Wallowby secured her book as she reached the landing, and placed himself at her side; and Peter, not to be cut out, had to make a dash for her parasol on the stand, and so constitute himself a third in the party. They set forth, and when Mrs. Sangster got down stairs she beheld to her disgust Mary Brown disappearing in the shrubbery attended by both the squires.

'Bother that lassie!' she muttered, but whether it was her own daughter or the other will never be known. At that moment Sophia, in perfect tranquility, was still giving her orders in the kitchen for the family dinner.

Mr. Sangster kept his room. He often did so of a Sunday, for the time had not yet arrived when a godly divine should stigmatize taking medicine on Sunday as a form of Sabbath breaking.

Eventually Sophia was ready to start, and at the same moment the two ministers appeared. Mrs. Sangster was of course taken possession of by the elder, and there was nothing for it but to let the ineligible escort Sophia. There was consolation then in remembering how slow and safe she was. No fear of *her* being hurried into an entangling admission during one moorland walk, but 'Oh! if Providence had only seen fit to grant her a bright lively girl like Mary Brown!'

No misgiving oppressed the soul of Roderick. The Sabbath in any case was to him a day of holy calm, whose devout associations he had cultivated by long habit into a sacred joy. To-day these were exhausted by the surroundings. The sunshine on the hills seemed to bring him into the very presence of a loving creator, and the companion by his side was one whose image in his thoughts had long stood for the embodiment of the good and beautiful. It was no vulgar love-making that he poured forth as they walked along, but the enthusiastic utterances of a devout young heart brimming over with piety and content.

And she? She looked up in his face and softly smiled. No need for words, the light in her eye spoke more eloquently than poets had ever sung. Poor youth! That light had shone as brightly and the smile had been as sweet--less vague and more intelligent--when a little while before she stood at the kitchen table and bade the cook put ten eggs instead of twelve in the custard for dinner.

Yet she really liked Roderick Brown. He was so good and so kind. She had known him all her life, and she knew that he admired her. He did not exactly say so, in fact she did not expect that, it would have been too frivolous; but his voice grew softer when he spoke to her, his eyes glowed, and his pale face would sometimes flush. She did not understand much of what he said, but she knew she was not clever, and was content it should be so. It was 'nice' to hear him talk about heaven in his earnest eloquent way; it sounded all so real, and she felt always more sure of going there when she was with him--he was so good.

Over the moor, down a brae, across a burn and up another slope. Moorland again, past a peat hag with the new cut turf drying in the sun. Straggling groups dotted the outlook, the dwellers in many a distant shieling, all converging towards the common goal--the preaching tent. Old men and women, mothers with their children, shepherds with their dogs, lads and lasses, the latter carrying their heavy shoes and stockings in their hands, till they should come to the last burn before reaching the kirk, there, after a preliminary footbath, to put them on and appear before the congregation decently clad.

Joseph Smiley, ever on the alert, produced his chairs as the Lady of Auchlippie and her suite entered the assembly and took her place in the front with a condescending smile, and Mr. Dowlas disappeared from view behind the curtains of the tent.

Roderick not being as yet an ordained minister, was not authorized to celebrate the sacraments of the church, which necessitated the occasional intervention of some one who was, as on the present occasion, when Mr. Dowlas was to perform the rite of baptism, as might be guessed from frequent thin small wails which issued intermittingly from the neighbouring covert. Immediately in front of the tent were the elders and deacons seated on the uncomfortable benches which Joseph had constructed, and near them the older and more devout of the people sat on their folded plaids, on stools or bunches of bracken. These were the more earnest church members, denominated the 'far ben christians' by their neighbours. Behind, reclining at their ease on the elastic heather, where it sloped upward from the grassy level, were the general company, who felt diffident about including themselves with the 'professors,'--men, women, children and collie dogs, basking in the sun and fanned by breezes sweet with the heather and the wild thyme.

Mr. Wallowby had all the prejudices of a middle-class Englishman. Whatever differed from the use and wont of his native county and country was wrong, and a good many things in the North had therefore met with his disapproval; but of all the matters on which sane men could differ, the most preposterous appeared to him to be church affairs, in a country where the established religion was not entitled to be called a church at all, but only, by a supercilious adoption of the native speech, a 'Kirk,' as something altogether different; though, to be sure, all bodies of Christians not affiliated to his church were in the same position, excepting the Latin and Greek communions, which being older than his, are wont to treat it with precisely the same contemptuous disrespect. The present conventicle promised at least more interest than a schismatic service in a kirk, and Mr. Wallowby had come in a mood of bland condescension to enjoy the humours of the scene, and amuse his superior mind with Sawney at his devotions. But when he seated himself in the silent assemblage, the spirit of the scene seemed to fall on him, and he found himself strongly impressed.

The minister shortly appeared in gown and bands, and although silence overspread the crowd before, it seemed to deepen as the worshippers straightened themselves in their seats, and fixed their gaze intently on his face. Around, the swelling hills showed not a sign of life or habitation; yet in this sequestered hollow a thousand souls perhaps, were gathered together for prayer. The minister gave out a psalm, and the whole congregation presently burst forth in song. At first the voice of the precentor quavered uncertain and thin in the wide expanse of the open air, then one by one a few others tremulously joined in, till at length the ear of the people caught the familiar cadence of 'Bangor,' and the multitudinous voice rose in a mighty swell, filling up that recess in the hillside, brimming over and reverberating among the rocks around. Here and there around him he would perceive the momentary jar of a bad voice or a false ear, but these were overborne in the vast flood of sound, in which every one joined with a seeming intensity of feeling that counterbalanced mere technical imperfections, and fulfilling the purpose of all art, that of conveying emotion from soul to soul, the song of those uncultured voices impressed him as he had never been by choir and organ under the fretted roof of church or minster.

Mr. Dowlas preached from the Canticles, applying the apostrophe to the Shulamite to such as had wandered from the truth. The audience listened with silent and deep attention, but without any of the ejaculation and amens with which Mr. Wallowby's dissenting fellow-countrymen relieve and stimulate their fervour. Some aged grandmother would occasionally shake her head in concurrence with the minister's words, but that was all.

At the beginning of the sermon a slight rustling attracted Joseph Smiley's attention. He looked up and beheld Tibbie Tirpie taking her seat on the outskirts of the crowd. She was accompanied by a young woman who leant on her arm and appeared delicate and pale till she caught sight of Joseph, when her cheeks became suffused with crimson, and she bent down her head. A look of annoyance came into his sharp, squirrel-like eyes, but he passed his hand across his mouth, which appeared to act like the wet sponge over a much be-written slate, and left it blank and sober as before.

There were four babies to be baptized at the conclusion of the sermon, and during the singing of a hymn, Joseph, as master of the ceremonies, proceeded to the clump of hazel bushes and thence ushered three well pleased mothers, each with her latest born held proudly in her arms. As struts the brood hen before her chattering train, calling the universe to witness the last new life added to the mighty sum by her praiseworthy exertions, so sailed these worthy women behind the beadle, and took their places with rustle and importance in front of the congregation. The husband of each came diffidently behind, and stood in front of his proprietress, tall, awkward, and a little shame-faced before all the people, the length of leg and arm appearing sadly in its

owner's way, and the hands especially difficult to dispose of. Behind the matrons came Mary Brown, carrying the little waif rescued by her brother from the sea, Roderick himself bringing up the rear. Their appearance created a sensation, and a hum of enquiry ran through the congregation, for many were as yet ignorant of the addition to the minister's family. Mary gave her own name to the little one, and Roderick presented it for baptism as the several sires presented theirs, vowing to bring it up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Mr. Dowlas concluded the service, and while the younger and the English-speaking part of the congregation rose to depart, the older members drew more closely together before the tent, and Roderick at once commenced the afternoon service in Gaelic for their behoof. Many of them having come long distances, it was best that the two services should follow each other without interval, that they might start the earlier on their return home. In reverent haste the retiring worshippers withdrew from the ground, that they might not disturb the Gaelic congregation, and in ten minutes every one of them was out of sight. Joseph's duties were now over till the breaking up of the meeting, and as he did not understand Gaelic he withdrew to a mossy bank hard by, where birch trees warded off the afternoon sun, and stretched himself at length to enjoy a little repose. He had drawn from the crown of his tall black hat a bannock and a hunch of skim-milk cheese wrapped in a turkey red cotton handkerchief which he spread out on his knees, and proceeded to refresh himself. While he was still so engaged there approached him from the thicket in his rear Tibbie Tirpie.

'I wuss ye gude day! Joseph Smiley.'

Joseph snorted with impatience, and the squirrel-like gleam came into his eyes, but he merely answered--

'Gude day to ye! Tibbie,' sweeping together the scattered fragments of his repast, and causing them all to disappear in one comprehensive gulp. Then he wiped his mouth with the red cloth, replaced it in the hat, and resumed his wonted look of solemn composure.

'A weel, Tibbie! an' it's a graund discourse we hae heard this day; an' I houp it'll do ye gude. He's a godly man, Mester Dowlas, an' he's gaen hame wi' Mistress Sangster til a verra gude denner I mak nae doubt. But you an' me has haen a feast of fat things o' his providence. Marrow an' fatness truly, tho' it's juist a when bannocks we may hae to stay the flesh withal an' aiblins just a drappie o' something to wash a' down. Will ye taste, hinnie?' Thereupon he arose and retreated some steps to where the tree stems would conceal him from any wandering eye among the congregation, and drew forth from his bosom a flat bottle, which he applied to his lips, throwing back his head the while. After a prolonged gulp he paused for breath, and passed the bottle to his friend with one hand, while with the back of the other he wiped his lips.

'Pruive all things! Eppie. Try the speerits, an' I'm thinkin' ye'll find them not that bad.'

Eppie tasted and sipped, and tasted again, very well pleased, nodded, and returned the bottle, which was forthwith emptied where the bulk of its contents had already been poured.

'Hech! but my eyes are enlighthened like Jonathan's, an' noo let's crack about the preachin'.'

'Joseph! I hae bed a wee, as ye said. What is't a' comin' til?'

'Bed sin yest're'en! No muckle bidin' there I ween! But let's lay worldly business by, this holy Sawbith day, an' think o' wir sauls!--our puir perishin' sauls!' `An' what'll come o' your saul? Joseph Smiley, an' you sinnin' wi' the high haund an' wrangin' my puir lass Tibbie. Saw na ye hoo she was e'en ower blate to forgather wi' the neighbours, an' gaed creepin' hame afore the kirk wad skell?'

'The mair fule she! There's naething kenned again her. What maks her blate?'

'It's no for you to speer! Them 'at pet the cat e'y kirn, can best fesh't out. Ye ken what's wrang, an' ye beut to mak it richt!'

'Hech! Tibbie, ye're troubled an' carefu' about mony things. But *wan* thing is needfu', as the Scriptur says, an' this is the Sawbith day, an' I'se speak o' naething else but that same. Think o' yer saul! Tibbie, yer sinfu' saul!'

'Speak o' yer ain sins, ye rascal! an' let mine be. Yer saul's black wi' them, an' it's time ye was mendin'.'

'Na, na, Tibbie! that wad be *works!* an' they're filthy rags. I'm a' for grace!'

'For grace? ye villain! Grace Grimmond belike, gin' a' folk says be true. An' what's to come o' Tibbie? But ye'se never wad wi' Grace onybody, sae lang as Tibbie's to the fore! Tak my word for't.'

'Ye tak me up wrang, neighbour, it's the kingdom o' heaven I'm after, whaur they neither marry nor are given in marriage. An' I houp ye'll win there yet! It's no o' women, puir silly earthen vessels I'm speakin' or wull speak this holy day.'

'But ye'll hae to speak o' them! Ay, an' speak plenn--or I'se doon t'ey minister an' hae ye up afore the Kirk-Session the maament the kirk skells. I'm for nae mair o' yer parryin' I'se tell ye-ye thocht ye had puir Tibbie a' by her lane, yon fore nicht, doon i' the loanin', whan ye ca'd God to witness ye took her for yer lawfu' wife, an' juist wanted it keepit quiet till the bawbees was gathered for the plennissin'. But ye didna keek ahint the dike, an' ye kenna wha was hearkenin'!

Joseph's countenance fell, his eyes opened wider, and strove to read in the other's face whether the witness suggested was a reality or a mere *ruse* to overawe him. He took the red handkerchief from his hat, and mopped his brow as a partial screen for his features, and finding evasion no longer possible, concluded to mitigate his opponent's excitement, and manœuvre for time.

'Ye needna thrape that gate, Mistress Tirpie, gin Tibbie wad hae me; I kenna the lass in a' Glen Effick I'd sooner wad wi', but what ye said ey noo about the bawbees an' the plennissin' hauds true yet. I canna tak the lassie hame an' no a bed for her to lie down on, an' what for wad ye be raisin' a din an' a clash? It's a filthy fowl 'at files its ain nest. An' it's yer ain dochter the folk wad lichtly, gin ye didna haud yer tongue.

'But ye can bide wi' me, Joseph, till yer gear's gathered; I'se be blythe to hae ye.'

Na, na, Luckie! Ilka pat till its ain cleek! we maun hae our ain fire-side.'

'An' it's little fireside me an' Tibbie's like tae hae gin ye haud back muckle langer! I hae nae claes enough to keep her warm, an' she hasna strength to tak' wark, an' hoo can she get her strength on sowans an' kirn-milk? An' that's a' I hae to gie her. Ye maun keep yer wife, Joseph, e'en gin ye dinna bide wi' her.'

'An' hoo's a man to gather the bawbees, gin he's payin' them awa faster nor they come?'

'*Ye* ken that, Joseph; an' I'm thinkin' it's a denty pose ye hae hidden awa in some auld hugger, an' hae na the heart to spend. We a' ken ye for a hard thrifty body 'at winna spend yer ain, gin ye can finger ither folk's.'

Ye're hard on me, Luckie, but I'se do what I can. I hae nae siller in my pouch the day but a bawbee for the plate, seein' it's Sawbith, but I'll tell ye what I wull do, speak to the minister. An' he's the gude man wi' the free haund and the soft heid. Gin ye getna a' ye need out o' *him*, yer tongue winna wag sae souple, as I hae fand it can this hour back.'

And here, to avoid rejoinder he ran down the slope and took his place demurely on a stool by the tent to await the conclusion of the exercises.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BABY.

The moorland overhanging the scene of the 'exercises' was always dotted over at their conclusion, with straggling companies of the worshippers returning home. At each branching of paths they would separate and change again to break up and separate further at fresh junctions, till at length the whole assemblage had dissipated itself over the extensive tract and disappeared.

The air freshened by a breeze was so warm and bright that it tempted to linger in friendly gossip, especially those whose week spent in some remote nook among the hills brought never a stranger to their door or a scrap of news. Some of the villagers, too, chose the moor as a roundabout way home, where they would meet more acquaintances than on the hot and dusty road, and while obtaining the air and exercise, avoid the sinfulness or disrepute of taking a walk upon the Sabbath day. Those from a distance had brought refreshments, and were now seated in the neighbourhood of some clear spring discussing their simple meal of scones and cheese and hard boiled eggs.

Seated in such a group were old Angus Kilgour, crofter, and Stephen Boague, shepherd, with their respective wives and families. Boague's offspring were three tow headed children who played noisily with a couple of dogs till their father interfered and bade them 'mind it was the Sabbath-day,' and called the dogs away. The young Kilgours were older, a big lad who carried a basket for his mother, a couple of girls competing, it seemed, for the favourable notice of a youth between them, a not unwilling captive to their charms, but still uncertain to which he should surrender, and another daughter whose tardy arrival was delaying the family repast.

'What hae ye in yon creel? Mistress,' cried Kilgour to his wife. 'We can bide nae langer for Meizie, she'll be danderin' alang wi' some laad nae doubt and niver thinkin' o' hiz. Here wi' yer creel, Johnnie! an' gie's a bannack a' round. I'm rael hungry. An' syne we'll hae a pipe, Stephen Boague, you an' me, an' here comes Peter Malloch, he's a graund chield for a crack. Hech! Peter Malloch, sit down, ye'll eat a bit, an' hae ye settled yet about pettin' up the new kirk?'

'A weel I'm thinkin' we'll hae't settled braw an' sure noo. We'se get a piece off Widdie Forester's kale-yard be like, gin we can raise the siller. We'll hae to mak an effort to do that, as Mester Dowlas says, an' it'll be a kittle job, but pet a stiff shouther till a stey brae, as the folk says. We maun ca' a meetin' I'm thinkin', an' hae him to speak, he's a graund man to crack the bawbees out o' folk's pouches.'

'Ou ay!' ejaculated Stephen, 'He's a gude man, but unco worldly! He's aye cryin' about the pennies an' the sustentation fund. Nae fear o' *him* gaun a warfare at his ain charges!'

'An' belike ye'd cry about the pennies yersel', Stephen Boague, gin ye'd naething else to lippin til.'

'Weel, that was aye what I liket best about the auld Kirk! A' thing was proveedet, "without money an' without price," an' that's Scriptor. Juist the sincere milk of the word an' naething to pay for't!'

'I'd think shame o' mysel', Stephen Boague,' broke in his wife, 'to speak like that! An' ca' ye yon the word at's preached up by at Kilrundle? A curran Erastian havers! Settin' up the law o' the land ower the word o' God, an' the will o' the Coort o' Session abune the General Assembly o' the Kirk! My certie! I'se no ca' yon the milk o' the word. It's grown sooter wi' ill keepin'! A wersh savourless gospel, for puir starved sauls, hungerin' for the truth an' gettin' naething but a clash o' cauld parritch!'

A weel! gude wife, *ye* maun hae yer say, but gin ye had to fin' the pennies ye'd maybe no be sae glib! an' but twa e'y pouch to buy the sneeshin'.'

'Haud yer tongue, Stephen! an' fill yer pipe,' said the hospitable Angus, 'It's no expecket that the puir man's to pay the same as the weel-aff folk, out o' their abundance.'

'An' wha's the man to say that Stephen Boague did na pay his way the best? I'd like to ken. Na, na! It's juist anither patch on the auld breeks, an' weel the gude wife kens whaur to clap it on! an' the siller's saved. But a man beut to hae his grum'le.'

'An' wasna yon a fine preachin' the day?' asked Peter Malloch, who being a deacon, felt bound to lead the conversation into an improving groove, especially for the good of the young, and Meizie had now joined the circle followed by William the footman at Inchbracken, absent on leave to visit his sick mother.

'A grand sermon!' said Mr. Kilgour, 'an' was na he bonny about the Shulamite? Tho' I'm free, to say I kenna verra weel wha she was. But I'm misdoubtin' but she was some thochtless young hempie 'at kenned na' weel what she was after--An' hoo' he cried til her to return!'

'That was the wanderin' sauls o' sinfu' folk,' said Peter clearing his voice for an extended exposition, but he got no farther, for William here brought the pious abstract down to the concrete and personal by breaking in.

'An' saw na ye hoo young Tibbie Tirpie, sittin' awa back wi' the hindmost took to the greetin', an' down wi' her head, an' up wi' her neepkin, like's a' the minister was sayin' was for her.'

'Hech laddie!' said Mrs. Kilgour, 'an' what for no? we hae a' wandered frae the truth. The word was powerfu', an' wha kens but it may hae reached her heart. An' micht it no hae reached yer ain as weel, William?'

'An' that's true! Mistress Kilgour, an' nae doubt but it wull belive whan the Lord sees fit. But it was yersel' was speakin' about the Shulamite an' winderin' gin she micht na hae been some thochtless hempie, juist mentioned ye ken for our edification--an' it kind o' looket like's she had taen 't a' to heart. Wha kens?'

'Whish man! Think shame! Ye maunna be lichtlyin' a lass's repute for naething. Naething but greetin' e'y kirk. An' that diz her credit. It wad be weel, lad, gin yer ain flinty heart wad melt as easy.'

'Belike it wad, Mistress Boague, but I'm jalousin'!--'

Here Meizie interposed to save her young man from the threatening onslaught of the matrons by a change of subject. 'Yon's a braw muckle bairn o' Jean Cameron's, an' was na Sandie the proud man whan he held it up to the minister?'

'A fine bairn! an' sae war the ither twa. An' didna the minister lay the vows tichtly on the fathers. Gin they stick til a' they hae promised this day, the weins will get a godly upbringin'. An' didna our ain minister look solemn whan he held up yon bonny wee thing, to be baptised. An' it

neither grat nor skirled whan the water fall on its bit face, 'ats no the size o' a saxpence.'

'I'm wae it didna skirl,' said Mrs. Kilgour. It's aye a gude sign. My gude-mither wad aye be sayin' it was a sign the Deil was losin' its hauld o' the bairn.'

'Ye've no warrant in Scriptur for that, Mistress,' said Peter. 'It's a superstitious notion, an' I'm misdoubtin' but it's a rag o' the whoor o' Babylon.'

'A weel! I kenna mysel, but mine skirled weel. I had to rin out wi' Meisie there, or she'd hae deaved the hale kirk wi' her screighin'. An' see til her noo! for a braw sonsey lass. The pruif o' the puddin's the preein' o' 't. Babylon or no!'

'An' wha's the Minister's wein ca'd after?'

'On Miss Mary be sure! She carried her in.'

'An' wha's acht it? That's what I want to ken, an' that's what the minister disna ken himsel', said Mrs. Boague. 'I had a' about it frae Luckie Howden, an' she's nane sae weel pleased that Eppie Ness has gotten the tent o' 't, by her. An' her keppin' the minister's teapat in her corner cupboard. They nicht hae leuten her turn a penny on the bairn. But ye see they're sleepin' down by at Eppie's, an' sae she's gotten Miss Mary's lug, an' says what she likes intil't. But its juist the way o' the warld. The puir maun aye to the wa'. But as I was sayin' the minister gaed ower til Mary yon ae dark nicht, an' the mornin' after he brocht hame this bit bairnie in his arms. An' he thinks the Lord gied it til him. He fand it lyin' on the sands at Effick Mouth, a' happit up in the finest o' claes, an' he thinks it maun be a leddy's bairn washed ashore by the sea, when some big ship an' a' body intil't was lost in the storm. It's a queer tale, an' it's rael gude o' thae twa young folk to tak up wi' the puir wee stray, an' be at a' chairges.'

'It's a verra queer tale,' said Peter Malloch.

'A verra queer tale, nae doubt,' repeated William. 'The gentles was crackin' ower't ae fore nicht, ower their denner up by at Inchbracken, an' a curious story they made out o't, but ye hae na juist the hing o't as *they* had it, Mistress Boague. Odd sak! my heart fairly lap i' my mouth to hear them, an' I a' but cowpet the dish wi' the wine sass on my Leddy's saitin gown. Gin it hadna been for the look Mester Smith the butler gied me, I'd hae let it fa', that's sure, an' syne I nicht hae hanged mysel', for it's ne'er inside the dinin'-room door I'd hae been leuten again. The General wad hae ordered me out himsel'. He'll stand nae flousterin' frae the attendance I'se tell ye.'

'But ye hae na telled us what the gentles said yet, William. Belike ye war that frichtet ye hae forgotten't a'.'

'I'se no forget it in a hurry. But I canna sae weel rehearse't, atween what they said, an' what they garred a body think, tho' aiblins they mayna hae puiten their tongue til't. For it's no a thing a body daur say afore her leddyship. But Mistress Briggs, my leddy's woman kens a' about it, an' it was her telled Miss Finlayson. She kens what's been ado wi' Tibbie Tirpie this lang while back. An' she was comin' ower frae Inverlyon e'y mail coach that dark nicht the minister gaed for the bairn, an' wha suld the driver put in aside her but Tibbie Tirpie? He said it was a sair nicht for a lassie to travel her lane across the muir, sae he juist in wi' her an' stieked the door. An' deil a word she spak to Mistress Briggs the hale road, juist pu'd the plaid ower her face an' grat an' sabbet a' the time. Mistress Briggs, ye see, is verra genteel an' parteeklar, an' was for complainin', about folk bein' puiten in aside her, an' sae she telled Miss Finlayson whan she cam hame, an' the day, ye see, it cam a' back on me, when I seen Tibbie greetin' an' carryin' on e'y kirk. An' whan she gaed slinkin' hame afore the weins were brocht into baptise, thinks I to mysel', aiblins Miss Finlayson's no that far wrang!'

'I see na muckle in yer story, William,' said Angus, 'but I think the gentles nicht hae better to do, nor prankin' wi' the gude name o' a puir lass 'at ne'er wranged them. An' ye're ill-aff for a job yersel' to be carryin' their clashes about the country side.'

'But ye hae na heard me out yet. It was that same dark nicht the minister gaed ower til Inverlyon. An' next mornin' he brings hame the bairn. An' wha suld he meet on the brae-head, think ye, but Captain Drysdale, (the auld captain). An' the captain speers "wha's acht the bairn," an' the minister he durstna tell, an' he looket terrible blate. An' the captain he leugh, an' the minister he grew mad, an' the captain he says--says he, "keep up yer heart," or, "dinna be ower down-cast, it's nae great matter, gin it be a bairn--it's a verra sma' ane"--an' that's the captain's ain words.'

'Preserve us a!'' ejaculated Mrs. Boague, 'Diz the sin grow heavier wi' the wecht o' the bairn? Fau'se doctrine I'se wager! But that comes o' sittin' under a moderate minister! There's saul's bluid lyin' at the door o' that prophet o' Baaul, up by at Kilrundle.'

'But wha wad hae thocht the like o' Roderick Brown?' said Angus, 'an' I maun hae pruif or I can tak it in. I hae kenned him man an' laddie sin afore he kenned himsel', an' I kenned auld Doctor Brown weel,--an' a gude man he was--an' I canna thole to think he cud gang sae far astray.'

'It hings thegither tho',' said Peter Malloch, 'an' I'm sair misdoubtin' but things are na a thegither as they suld be. An' that minds me, as I was gaun til Inverlyon no lang syne, we lichted frae the coach gaun doon the brae, an' wha suld be comin' up but Mester Brown. It maun hae been that verra day, for he had a bundle in's arms, an' says my neighbour to me, laughin'-like, it might be a bairn, that i' the minister's arms. An' as for him he wadna forgather, like he may hae been blate, but juist gaed by wi' hardly the time o' day to throw til a dug. An' me the Convener o' the Deacons' Coort! I ance thocht him a gude young man, but he's verra pridefu'. An' he winna be guidet by them 'ats aulder an' mair experienced nor himsel'. An' pride ye ken comes afore destruction, an' a haughty speerit afore a fa'. So says scripiter. Pride's deadly sin, ye ken, an' wan sin brings on anither. I'm sair misdoubtin' but there may be some fundation. But it's terrible to think on. A minister o' the Free Protestin' Kirk o' Scotland, and *our* minister--hiz 'at's corned out o' Egyp', leavin' kirk and steeple an' a' ahint us, intil the leeteral wilderness, wi' naething but a bit umbrelly belike to keep aff the ren an' the snaw. Hiz wha's praise is in all the churches, as Mester Dowlas tells us, for our persecutions--to think *our* minister suld gae wrang! My certie, we's cast out the unclean thing frae amang us, to perish like anither Aachan without the camp!'

'An' him sae young! an' sae gude to the puir folk!' said Mrs. Kilgour. 'I'se no believe the like o' him or ony ither minister, till it's pruived on him.'

'Ministers are but men, woman,' sighed Mrs. Boague, 'an' the flesh is weak. I'm misdoubtin' but it's an ower true tale.'

The subject of this discussion concluded his Gaelic sermon in due course, all unconscious of the havoc that was being made of his reputation. Ere he left the tent he was addressed by the assiduous Joseph, who described to him the case of Widow Tirpie, reduced to sad straits and threatened with destitution as the consequence of the long and severe illness of her daughter. Like others whose charity takes the form of urging their neighbours to give, Joseph used his very best skill to rouse his master's sympathy, and grew both picturesque and pathetic in describing these paragons of honest independence and virtuous poverty;--the empty meal girdle, the daughter weakened by sickness, perhaps sinking into a decline and unable to work, and the mother depriving herself of such necessary food as still remained to nourish her child, and stave off a little longer the inevitable day when they must come on the parish. The eloquence was so far useless, in that Roderick would in any case have done what he could for any one in want, but he was surprised as well as rejoiced to have discerned at last so fervid a charity in one he had hitherto regarded as cold and worldly. He made no doubt that Joseph's deeds had been guided by the same warm sympathy as his words, and while promising to see the widow that evening or the next day, he made him a present to reimburse him for any imprudent outlay into which his feelings might have led him. Joseph accepted it, and when, later in the evening he added it to the 'pose' which awaited his next journey to Inverlyon and the Savings Bank, he chuckled over the good young man's simplicity and his own shrewdness.

When Roderick arrived at home he found Mary at liberty at last. Peter Sangster and Mr. Wallowby had both accompanied her from church with Eppie Ness and the baby, and had even lingered on for some time, despite the manifest displeasure of Mrs. Sangster, as she drove away with Sophia and Mr. Dowlas; but the young men had set themselves to watch each other, and see each that the other made no advance in Mary's favour to his own detriment. Neither would withdraw and leave the other in possession of the field--rivalry having made both fancy themselves more interested than either would have been but for the competition.

Peter believed he had a prior claim owing to his previous acquaintance, which he had meant to strengthen during his present visit to the North, though perhaps on a more condescending footing than he saw he need now attempt. He had thought to maintain an intimacy without committing himself, and eventually, in the uncertain future, if it suited, to come forward with his proposal, and be accepted of course. Like a timid bather standing breast-high in the water, he found himself pushed from his shelf of standing ground into deep water, where he must strike out at once or go under. He was aggrieved that his guest should so deliberately and immediately set himself to cut him out, and he thought, too, that his sister was being slighted most ungraciously.

As for Mr. Wallowby, he thought nothing about it. He was rich and good-looking, or at least his whiskers were cut according to the most approved pattern of the time, and he was accustomed to have ladies make themselves agreeable to him. He speedily decided that Sophia was rather heavy, and he imagined from the first moment he saw her, that Mary would be more amusing, and therefore strove to improve the acquaintance. It is probable that would have been all but for Peter's airs of proprietorship in the girl and his too obvious endeavours to make him (Wallowby) interest himself in the young lady of the house as her due. This was more than man or lady-killer could stand, and the result was keen rivalry and strained diplomatic relations, which did not promise increased cordiality for the morrow, when they were to shoot in each other's company.

As for Mary, being indifferent to both, she probably preferred taking them together. Each kept the other on his mettle, which prevented dulness, and she could not but be amused with the cross looks she detected now and then passing between them. Still one may have too much of anything, and she was not sorry when a clatter of plates and dishes in Eppie's part of the house was accepted by the visitors as a warning to depart.

Roderick came in very shortly after. Mary met him with slippers and dressing-gown, and drew forward his father's old leather chair from its corner, to receive his weary frame, and recruit his

strength for the Bible-class and other activities still to be gone through. She then brought the baby, and seated herself with it in a low chair near him.

'Did you ever see such lovely eyes, Roderick?'

Of course Roderick never had.

'Or such a dainty little mouth?'

Again such a mouth was never seen before, nor such intelligence, nor such a dear divine little image ever before. It was the first revelation of babyhood that had appeared in their lives, and they worshipped and wondered and reverently served, as every good soul must, before the mystery of a dawning spirit.

'It is strange,' said Roderick, after a while, 'that no enquiry should have come from any one about this little Mary of ours. I shall certainly not be sorry if no one comes to claim her. She is more than welcome to all that I can give her; but those she belongs to can have no idea what a precious little darling she is, or they would have reclaimed her ere now. My letter was printed conspicuously enough in the *Witness*, but it has led to nothing, not one enquiry. You will have noticed in the paper that Lord Briarhill and Mrs. Steele went to Inverlyon and identified a daughter-in-law, the wife of their son, Major Steele in India, in one of the bodies washed ashore from the wreck of the 'Maid of Cashmere,' which must be the ship I saw perish that fearful night. To tell you the truth I have been expecting a letter from his Lordship ever since, claiming the baby; for the drowned lady I saw, and who I make no doubt was baby's mother, was just what one might suppose Major Steele's wife to be like. When you write to our uncle you might mention the circumstance, and also ask him if there is any other step I should take to find relations for the little one. I am sure I had better not write him myself, till he cools down upon the church question, and that will take years, I fear. So pray write, dear, during the week.'

News was not diffused so freely five and thirty years ago as it is now. The mails, excepting between Edinburgh and Glasgow, were still carried by mail coaches, but people having never known anything better, were quite satisfied, nay proud of the free intercommunication between different parts of the kingdom, and newspapers were issued only once or twice a week. Further, Roderick's newspaper was one addressed to an ecclesiastical rather than a commercial or seafaring public, and therefore his communication about the child was less likely to be noticed than it would have been in some other journal. However, in this instance a different mode of advertising would have mattered little. Lord Briarhill was not aware that a child accompanied his daughter-in-law, and it was not till many weeks later, that he learned from a letter received by a mail long overdue that a baby had been born a fortnight before she sailed, and had been carried with her. By that time the circumstance of a child having been picked up alive, had quite escaped his lordship's memory, if indeed he had ever been informed of it. Mrs. Major Steele, too, belonged to a family in the Indian Civil Service, she had been born in India herself, and there her father and near relatives resided, so that, excepting the old judge, there was no one in Scotland interested in the matter.

Mary's letter was not written, owing to an invitation from Mrs. Sangster to spend the week at Auchlippie, and help to entertain the visitors. The conversation was forgotten by brother and sister alike, and affairs drifted on in their own way.

CHAPTER X.

TIBBIE.

On rainy evenings Roderick had to accommodate his Bible-class in his study. The books and pamphlets piled on the floor were removed, and stools and chairs brought in from all the neighbouring cottages. The attendance was large, the room but small, and the window could not be opened without admitting the rain. The sole ventilation therefore was by the chimney, for Roderick's chest was delicate and could not endure open doors or draughts. The breaths of the people and the steam from their plaids and umbrellas made an atmosphere almost too dense to breathe, but no one stayed away on account of that. Discomfort in fact was the chosen salt and relish of popular piety in those days. The old stories of the covenant and the persecutions had been brought out afresh after lying hid for a century under the dust of time and 'moderatism,' so called, which perhaps means only the new ideas begotten of newer circumstances in advancing civilization. These tales told in modern language and addressed to the people from hundreds of pulpits and platforms, and scattered by the thousand in illustrated tracts and broad sheets over the country, roused the best instincts of the people into a sort of fanaticism; common sense

appeared sinful latitudinarianism, and there seemed a very hunger for austerity and persecution in a small way, which raised an uncomfortable church-going into a meritorious claim on divine favour. Like other artificial revivals of obsolete feeling with their inevitable unreality and exaggeration--for the one begets the other, seeing that each individual, knowing his own earnestness to be below the standard, compensates by intensity of expression for what is lacking in depth--all that has now passed away. No better cushioned pews now-a-days invite to repose in the green pastures of the word, than those which the Free Church supplies, and the erewhile battle cry of 'Christ's Crown and Covenant' has moderated down into a demand for Disestablishment.

These cottage services were far more exhausting to their conductor than the regular preaching, and after struggling through them under the oppression of heat and bad air, he found when his apartment was left to him, that it had become uninhabitable for the rest of the evening. Whenever, therefore, the weather at all permitted, he conducted his Bible-class in the open air.

Down by the Effick side was a meadow where the villagers washed and dried their clothes, and their cattle browsed. The grass was short and thick, and the stream slid by with a low soft lapping among the stones. An aged beech tree formed a landmark, and there on summer evenings the minister was wont to assemble his class. The faint evening breezes nestled drowsily among the leaves overhead, and the glassy surface of the stream shone in the yellow radiance of the evening light. No scene could be more peaceful and still, or lent itself better to the earnest exhortations of the teacher, and the unflagging attention of his auditors, who had grown to comprise the whole inhabitants of the village, old people and children as well as the youths and maidens for whom the meeting was designed. 'Free Church Principles,' or the superiority of the church to the interference of civil authority, were the stated subjects of consideration, but this pious and indefatigable teacher would not let slip the opportunity of pressing all other branches of religious truth, as occasion offered, in a way more familiar and impressive, as his people thought, than even the regular services of the church.

It was dark ere all was over, and after singing a hymn the meeting dispersed. Then Roderick remembered the errand of mercy with which he had proposed to himself to conclude his day, and set out at once for Widow Tirpie's cottage, which was about a mile from the village. Reaching it, he found the daughter on the threshold, gazing motionless towards the western sky, where the last faint gleams of evening still struggled with the coming night. A girl of about twenty, but looking older, worn with care or illness, but with a face superior to her station, she sat like an image of regret, pale-cheeked and thin, with her great dark eyes looking out into the ebbing twilight. She rose on Roderick's approach and followed him inside.

There knelt the mother crouching on the hearth, where with distended cheeks she was endeavouring to blow two peats into a blaze, that she might boil her pot and prepare their evening meal.

Tibbie's husband had been a gamekeeper on the Inchbracken property, her daughter had been employed there as seamstress, and she herself was in some sort a client of the great house. Therefore it was a point of loyalty or policy with her to keep aloof from the Free Church, and occasionally to attend at Kilrundle, but that was not very often, the church being three miles off, and she herself, as she admitted, 'no kirk greedy.' Roderick had not therefore considered her a member of his flock, and knew little of herself or her daughter or their circumstances. She was poor, but not more so than her neighbours, or much more so now than she had always been, and she had no claim to be described as she had been by Joseph Smiley either in the matter of her poverty or her high principle. She had expected a visit from the minister, and although she had no intention of devolving on him the burden of her support, which she destined for his beadle's shoulders, still she was not averse to profiting by his bounty, and had indeed arranged her little scene so as to justify any touching appeal Joseph might have made on her behalf. She had watched Joseph from the thicket after they parted, and observed his closeting with the minister at the close of the service, and knowing Roderick's eager charity, she had thought it not improbable he might visit her that very evening, and accordingly had arranged the tableau of a scanty supper as more effective than anything she could say; besides that, being honest after her fashion and shrewd, she was unwilling to lie unnecessarily.

Tibbie had risen and followed the minister into the house, looking deprecatingly at her mother over his shoulder. She revolted at the idea of charity-getting, and dreaded the references to her own affairs, which her mother might be led into.

'Here Tibbie!' said the elder woman, 'tak' the stoup an' fesh some water frae the spring on the muir, the minister micht be for a drink; ye hae nae sic water down by in the Glen, sir, sae cauld an' sae caller!'

Tibbie took the stoup, well pleased to get away from whatever conversation might follow.

'I hear you are not very well off, Mrs. Tirpie,' said Roderick, 'and I have come to see if I can give you any help.'

'A' weel, sir! It's thankin' ye kindly a' the same, but I winna complain. Ye can see for yersel!--Some folk can mak oot to live whaur ithers wad starve. But I'm no beggin'.'

'I never heard that you had got relief from the parish, and I know that you have got nothing from us. You know we have a fund, though not a large one, for our poor brethren, and I think it is often quite as usefully employed when we look about for those who are bearing their lot in silence, as when we give to those who claim our help.'

'I dinna belang to yer kirk, sir, an' I hae nae claim on ye ava'; tho' I canna but say it's whiles gye an' hard for a puir body to gar the twa ends meet. What wi' sickness, an' a' things sae dear, it's a sair fecht for puir folk, whiles, to keep saul an' body thegither. But we maun thole. Them 'at sends a' things kens what's for our gude.' And so on. A spirit of fine sturdy independence, uncomplaining poverty, and patient trust in Providence, moderately expressed, furnished out a harangue which refreshed the soul of the worthy preacher. If tares must inevitably be found among the standing corn, it is all the more refreshing to the disappointed husbandman to see the good seed springing up outside his enclosure, and Tibbie Tirpie bore the reputation of being a cold and worldly person with the fervid professors among whom he laboured. He felt himself privileged in being allowed to minister assistance to so much modest worth, and returned home refreshed in spirit.

When he left the cottage the night had closed in, with only the glimmering stars to light him on his way. He walked slowly homewards, musing as he went on the trials and hardships of the poor, and the pious fortitude and noble courage with which they so often bear them. He fell into a reverie, and did not perceive that two men coming down behind him had overtaken and passed him. It was quite otherwise with them. Like the owls and other creatures which fly by night, their faculties were all awake.

'Preserve us a! Saw ye e'er the like? Slinkin' hame e'y dark, wi' his head atween 's feet, like a dug scaddet wi' puddin' brue. He ne'er turned round e'en whan we gaed by, like's he thocht shame to meet the glint o' honest folk's e'en.'

'What mean ye? Peter Malloch. Yon's the minister! or I'm sair mistaen, stappin' cannily hame. He's been readin', belike, an' prayin wi' some auld puir body 'at's ower frail to gang t'ey kirk. My certie! but he's the faithfu' servant, 'at sees the folk hae their meat i' due season. I wuss there were mair like him. It gars a body think shame o' their ain puir fushionless godliness, to see the gude he's aye after. Ne'er sparin' himsel', but juist spendin,' an' spent for the gude o' ither folk. He'll hae his reward!'

'Man, Tummas, ye're a rael Nathanael! It diz a body gude to hear til ye whiles. Ye hae the charity 'at thinketh no evil, an' mony's the time I'm juist winderin' hoo ye can carry on wi't. Ye do weel to think nae ill, but hoo ye can look about ye, an' stick til't, passes me. I dinna see either 'at we're ca'd on to let folk mak a fuil o's wi' their sough o' godliness an them nae better than oorsels, but rather waur, seein' what they set up for. I'm thinkin' they're juist maist like whitet sepulchers ower the dead men's banes; an' naebody's ca'd on to think weel o' sic like, ye ken.'

'I see na what ye're drivin' at. But I'se lippen 'til our young minister afore ony man I hae e'er clappit my eyen on!'

'Trust not in princes nor men's sons,' as the Psalm says, 'an' the ministers are kittle cattle to tackle wi'. Saw na ye whause house yon was he cam out o', richt afore yer eyen?'

'I ken Tibbie Tirpie brawly, an' it's her bides up yonder.'

'An' what kind tak ye Tibbie to be? She's no a kirk member ava, I'm thinkin'; a bonny ane for a minister to be sitten' aside a' Sabbath forenicht!'

'I ken naething against her; but gin she be worldly or waur, she has mair need o' the minister's advice.'

'An' there's that hizzie, her dochter! Ye'll be for makin' out the minister was adveesin *her* belike?'

'An' what for no? Gin she be young an' fu' o' daffin' she'll a' the mair need to be adveesed.'

'Young an' fu' o' daffin'! Ye're for letting her down easy. There's mair wrang nor that, I'm feared. Some folk say she's nae better nor she suld be. But there's nae gude threapin' wi' you. Ye'se think nae harm--ye'se tell me he was sympatheezin wi' her in her misfortun.'

'Whisht man! Let the lassie's gude name be gin ye hae nae proof.'

'But there maun be pruif some gate seein' it's true. The gentles hae heard tell o't. An' what's mair, it's them 'at's sayin' up by at Inchbracken 'at Mister Brown's at the foundation o' the hale mischief. Sae noo ye ken a' about it, an ye'll own yersel it's gye an' like it, to see him slinkin' up here after dark. An' ye'll mind hoo you an' me saw him bringin' hame the bairn yon mornin' early, whan the roads war that bad there wasna like to be ony body about, to see what he was after. We a' ken hoo he gaed awa for the bairn the verra nicht 'at Tibbie cam hame. Think o't! Tummas. Pet that an' that thegither, an' syne ye'll may be hae mair charity, an' no be accuisin' me o' evil speakin'. Charity thinketh no evil, sae what for suld ye be thinkin' I wad tak awa a decent lass's gude name? But gin she be na decent, an' hae nae richt til the gude name, I see nae wrang to say sae. Let the skelpet wein skirl! What says Scripture? Is na the maugistrate for the terror o' evil

doers an' the praise o' them 'at do weel? An' be na I wan in authority? The Convener o' the Deacons' Court? Tak tent, Tummas, and dinna be impuitin' yer ain sinfu' thochts til ither folk, an' them folk setten ower ye in the Lord! Speak not evil of dignities! It's against a' Scriptor--an' I may sae as weel, in a' luve and faithfulness, seein I hae a kin' o' charge o' ye, an' may hae to gie account, ye're juist a wee pridefu' whiles, an' ower set in yer ain notions, for a humble private member o' the kirk. Think o't, Tummas, an' lay't to heart!

Tummas was silenced, fairly overthrown and carried away by the torrent of words, and every meek stirring of self-assertion completely devoured out. He had meant to defend his pastor from what he thought were improbable and poorly supported suspicions; but he was meek and diffident, and accustomed to be over-borne by his arrogant companion, so he held his peace, content to cherish unuttered the assurance that there was some mistake, and to leave time to disabuse others of their misconceptions.

CHAPTER XI.

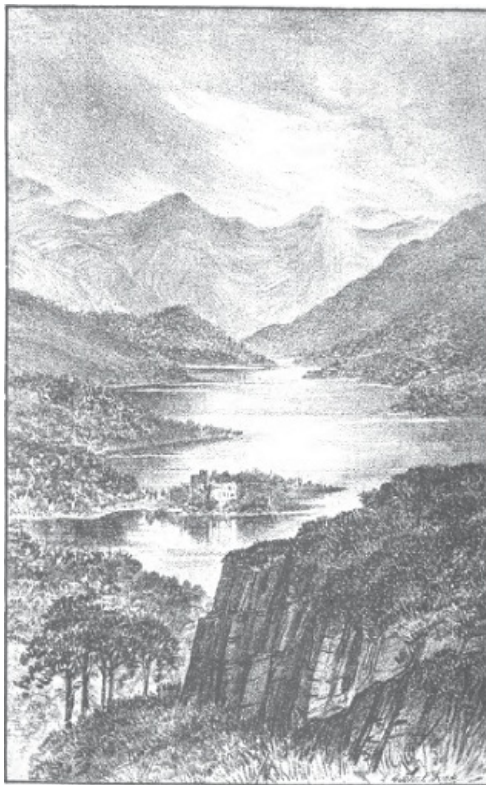
AN EXCURSION.

Mrs. Sangster decided that Mr. Wallowby ought to see something of the country during his stay. An excursion was planned, and to introduce some appearance of novelty into the party, the Rev. Roderick was summoned to join the expedition.

It was an early September morning when they started from Auchlippie. Peter drove the phaeton, and his friend sat beside him on the box. Inside were the ladies and the minister, in his quality of priest, or one of the third sex, which, as though not either male or female, possesses all the claims to deference of both, and owes the duties of neither. Roderick sat in the back seat beside his hostess, while the two young ladies faced him. The two gentlemen on the box looked back from time to time with some remark which was gaily responded to by the ladies, and Roderick occasionally joined in with a quiet jest. The presence of Sophia filled his mind with happiness too deep for merriment, and there she sat before him in full view.

Sophia being a placid person abounding in the beauty of repose, had worked her spell upon him more by looks, which he had interpreted into sympathy, and what he chose to imagine the beauty of her virgin soul, than by anything she had ever said. Looking in her eyes he had dreamt of all that was loveliest and then fancied he saw it there. Another Narcissus, he had gazed in their crystal depths, and, mistaking his own reflection for the spirit of the flood, had fallen in love with it.

It made little matter to him that they were in the midst of a merry company, he could sun himself in the presence that was so much of his own creating all the same, and save that he was more silent than at other times, no one could have observed any departure from his usual bearing. Sophia was aware of his mute observance, and thought it 'very nice,' she was used to it, and it required from her no irksome effort in response, which, as her thinking part was neither imaginative nor emotional, and somewhat sluggish besides, was comfortable. The contrast between Roderick's quiet and the lively loquacity of Mr. Wallowby, told all in favour of the former; for although Mary and her mother with their greater readiness relieved her from the necessity of reply, it was mortifying thus to realize her own slowness, and she found the constant smiling and laughter over jests whose point she had missed, fatiguing to her facial muscles, and at last she took refuge in a private chat with Roderick as to whether he thought the day would keep fine and such like weighty matters.



Loch Gorton and Inchbracken.

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Loch Gorton and Inchbracken. Page 79.

They drove across the upland moors and the ridge dividing Glen Effick from the neighbouring valley of the Gorton, and down Gorton side to where it spreads into the lake of the same name. At that point it is crossed by a bridge, the road passing an old posting inn which looks down the loch, and is backed by Craig Findochart, the highest mountain of the district, and the goal of the day's expedition.

Loch Gorton is a basin among the hills, deep and narrow at its upper end, but broadening and shallowing towards its base. It fills the mouth of a valley whose precipitous slopes crowd down upon the water at its head, but draw back in lessening and ever-widening undulations from the lower end. Near the outlet is the broad low island of Inchbracken, connected with the mainland by a narrow neck of land. Here in the old time stood the castle of the Drysdales, commanding the isthmus, which they cut across and commanded by a drawbridge. The moat is filled up now, and the square old keep, ivy-grown and ruinous, has sunk into a mere picturesque feature in the shrubbery of the modern mansion.

Leaving their phaeton at the Bridge of Gorton Inn, the party secured a guide, and proceeded to ascend the hill. A steep footpath led across several enclosed fields, and brought them through a stretch of oak copsewood to a track of open pasture, whence they could look down on the lake spread out at their feet, while the great purple mountain reared its steep shoulders above them, swelling in broad sweeps of heath backward and upward to the beetling crags far up, thrusting their jagged outlines into the sky, and shutting out the climber from the distant summit.

The belt of pasture past, climbing began in earnest. The shaggy heather was knee deep in many places, and every here and there the rocky knuckles of the mountain projected through the peaty soil.

The party began to straggle. Mary, sound of wind and limb, light-footed and active, was in front with the guide. Peter and Wallowby toiled closely behind, the latter showing the first signs of distress in shortening breath, and handkerchief applied occasionally to his brow. Mrs. Sangster followed in steady mechanical fashion. Her fifty odd summers had no doubt impaired the elasticity of her frame, but had left behind a fund of tough endurance and sturdy will, which did very well in its stead. Sophia and Roderick brought up the rear, the coolest and calmest of the party. Her fine physique made the exertion both light and pleasant, and her tranquil soul supplied a wellspring of inward coolness, which even hill-climbing was unable to overheat, while Roderick by her side among the sunshine and the ever-widening view, walked on air, held forth at will, and dreamed aloud in words overflowing; while his placid companion smiled and looked at him out of her beautiful eyes, listening, and sometimes understanding what he said. The path became steeper after a while, and Mrs. Sangster stopped to take breath, looking around the while for the others.

Mary and the young men were perched upon a rock high over her head, and when she looked down Roderick and Sophia came calmly following her. It seemed too much that Mary should monopolize not only Peter (though that was well enough), but also the wealthy party from Manchester, who had been sent by Providence, as she still thought, to open a larger sphere of usefulness to her daughter; meaning really, if self-delusion would ever let us speak plainly to

ourselves, a carriage and pair and a handsome establishment. The ice between the two had been hard to break, what better way could there be to thaw it, than the small difficulties and adventures of a mountain ramble? And here the stupid girl was letting her opportunity escape, and trifling it away with a young man whom she could beckon to her side any day, and could always fall back upon if more ambitious aims did not succeed. A more worldly or a more single-minded mamma would no doubt have spoken plainly to her daughter, and so might have influenced that not very perspicuous person more effectually, but Mrs. Sangster had the misfortune to be looking two ways at once, or like the boatman in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, she looked one way while she pulled the other. She loved and appreciated the good things of the world, as thoroughly as any one, but at the same time she was wont to say, and to really think that she thought they were a snare, or dross, in comparison with higher interests. She could not bring her tongue to frame such advice to her daughter as would in any way derogate from true religion, or the old-fashioned 'true, true love,' she had thought and sang of in her own youth. She could only suggest and influence in a half-ashamed sort of way. But she was disappointed and mortified that a daughter of hers should be so wanting in common sense. After all the advantages of her upbringing, how came it that she should fail of that well-regulated mind, which, seeing both sides of a question, can both say what is 'nice' in regard to the higher, and at the same time follow the more profitable. The thing requires a little casuistry, but it must be of the unspoken kind. It cannot be decently uttered, so each must work it out alone in those secret chambers of the brain, where not the prying eye of conscience even may intrude. Any one would feel annoyed at a carefully and expensively-educated daughter throwing herself away, and all the proud hopes that have been formed for her, on a poor match; yet openly to preach the mercenary would be infamy. So felt Mrs. Sangster, and she was greatly disturbed; for hers was virtue of the uncomfortable, rather than of the heroic kind,—it could not make her choose the better way, but it would reproach her if she followed the worse. As for Sophia, her mother wronged her if she suspected her of unwisely preferring the good to the profitable. She was only dull. Money and all it could buy would, she felt, be delightful to have, but she did not feel equal to winning it. Roderick had looked and succumbed to her beauty, and it would be very pleasant if Mr. Wallowby would do likewise; it would be grand,—and no personal preference should prevent her making her fortune; but if Mr. Wallowby was only to be captured by something she was to do, she resigned the idea at once; she felt she could do nothing, and the very idea of doing anything to win his regard made her ashamed, which was what might have been expected. If people will bring up their girls to be high-minded and good, they have no right to expect scheming and meanness from them after they are grown.

'Oh, Mr. Roderick,' said Mrs. Sangster, 'I fear I must ask you to take pity on an old woman. This climbing is hot work, with the sun beating down so on my old back. I can bear the weight of my shawl no longer. If there was only a breeze! But the air seems stagnant, and my old limbs are not what they once were.'

'We have only to get a very little higher now to have wind enough,' said Roderick, doubling the shawl on his arm. 'See Mr. Wallowby's handkerchief up there how it blows about. If you will accept a little assistance over this steep place, you will soon reach the cooler level.'

'Sophia!' continued the mother, 'I believe that guide will break a bottle, or something, the way he swings the basket about. Pray bid him take care or we shall have a dry luncheon to eat when we get to the top of the hill,—there will be no water up there. It makes me quite nervous to look at him.'

So Sophia was despatched in advance while the older lady made a leisurely survey of the prospect at her feet.

'A beautiful place Inchbracken, with its woods spreading out beyond the island and rolling away into the distance, and the steeple of Kilrundle church rising from among them. Dives with his good things, and Lazarus with his evil things! You must feel thankful to have chosen the better part, Mr. Roderick.'

'I feel no misgiving about my choice whatever, but I hope there is no reason to look on General Drysdale as another Dives. Difference in people's circumstances, shows things in so different a light.'

'Ah! my young friend, charity is good, but it must be according to knowledge.'

'But, Mrs. Sangster, the General is a most worthy man, a kind master and a good landlord, and an honourable gentleman.'

'I will not say, Mr. Roderick, that his hands are red with the blood of the saints, because it has not been left in his power to take the lives of the Lord's people; but he has been very bitter against the Free Church. We may fairly include him among the persecutors, driving us forth to worship God according to our conscience, on the bare hill-side, and refusing us a stance to build our church on any part of his property. Now, I have always said, that that open place facing Inchbracken gate is where our new church should stand. There it could testify before the very walls of the Erastian temple, instead of being huddled away in the corner of widow Forester's kale-yard.'

'But how would you like a Roman Catholic or even an Episcopal Chapel set down opposite your

own gate at Auchlippie?'

'Mr. Roderick! Popery and Prelacy! To hear you evening our true scriptural protesting Free Church to the Babylonish apostacy, with their white gowns, and their organs, and their traditions of men! I fear there's a leaven of latitudinarianism among you younger men. You should follow the staunch old lights like Mr. Dowlas, to steady your principles. How you can recall the doings of Archbishop Sharp, and speak lightly of Episcopacy, is what I can't comprehend!'

They had now reached the last steep ascent which ended on the summit. This left the old lady no spare breath to hold forth, and she was glad to catch hold of Roderick's arm to assist in pulling herself up the nearly vertical slope. The wind-swept cairn at the top was at length reached, and, notwithstanding her late complaints, Mrs. Sangster was forced to shelter herself from the keen breeze, under its lee, and to resume the shawl she had discarded.

Craig Findochart rises high over the surrounding hills especially towards the east. On that side they gradually diminish and die away in the belt of cultivation that borders the sea. To the north is a narrow glen running down into a fertile strath well-wooded and watered by a river of some size; beyond, the lofty Highland mountains toss their battered summits in the air, a very sea of emulously-surging peaks. Westward it is mountainous again but more various. The eye travels far up more than one winding strath, while glancing lakes shine out every here and there among the greys and purples of mountain and moor. Southward the view is narrower and loses itself in haze, a greyness which rises indistinctly from the distant country, but when once fairly launched in heaven, swells and curls and rears itself into vast white battlements of cloud, and drifts before the wind shining and luminous, like some great iceberg in a transparent sea.

Having surveyed the view, the party sought such shelter from the chilling breeze as was attainable, on the leeward slope, and proceeded to rest and refresh themselves, after their fatigues; the old lady, with some elation at having climbed the hill as cleverly as the youngest, doing the honours of her provision basket with garrulous hospitality, while the others reclined on the scanty herbage with infinite zeal. The warmth gained by exercise withstood the sharp upper air, whose biting keenness felt only bracing and exhilarating to those toilers upward from the airless heat below; but after half an hour they had parted with the surplus heat gained by exertion, and began to feel distinctly cold. There seemed a failing too in the brightness of the light, except over the distant sea, which still glittered crisp and bright in unclouded sunshine. A wan greyness seemed to be stealing over the landscape, not as when passing clouds dapple the view with well defined blocks of shadow, but rather a diffused withdrawal of warmth and light all undefined and vague, but ever deepening like the stealthy advances of sickness or death upon a living thing. Looking upwards they now for the first time observe great vaporous arms and wreaths extending over their heads and stretching out towards the still bright heavens in the north-east. Turning round they find the outlook completely obliterated. The shining cloud-masses of an hour before in the south-west have drifted down upon them, and are now nothing but curling wreaths of cold damp mist, seething and twisting, but ever downward and onward. They seem scarcely to have descried overhead its first advancing arms ere it has descended on them and lapped them from the world in cold damp greyness, above, below, and all around them. From far down the hill ascends the report of a gun, and by and by another, telling them that others besides themselves are on the mountain, and that they are still upon firm ground; but for that they might be anywhere or nowhere, the mist hems them in utterly, the very ground they stand on becomes indistinct, and they stretch their arms to touch each other and make sure they are not each alone. They gather close together standing perfectly still, a step in any direction may precipitate them they know not whither, and the damp clammy vapour creeps close about them soaking hair and clothing, and chilling them to the bone.

'It is only a cloud and will soon pass,' some one says; so they agree it will be safer to wait than to attempt a descent not knowing where their next step may carry them. They huddle closely together and watch and shiver; at one moment it seems growing lighter overhead, and glimmerings of the bright sky shine through, but anon a surging wreath drifts up, and the promising rift closes in again denser than before.

For more than an hour they stood thus afraid to move, stiffening and shivering in the cold. The day was passing, but the mist showed no sign of rising; on the contrary it grew thicker and more wetting, and the idea of spending the night where they were, began to present itself as a possibility unless they made a bold venture to move. To die of cold where they were, appeared a certainty if they remained, while there was at least a hope of escape, in tempting the uncertain dangers of the descent.

Wallowby being a stranger was told to keep hold of the guide, and Sophia was entrusted to their joint care. Mary and Peter having both some knowledge of the hills and the country followed next, while Roderick who had often shot over the ground, undertook to pilot the old lady. The three groups were to keep together as well as they could, and by constant shouting they hoped to keep within each other's ken.

With infinite care, groping and feeling around at every step, they commenced to descend, the grey obscurity swallowing them up, and concealing each group from the others. The voices seemed muffled by the fog, but they enabled them still to hold together.

Down they went, stumbling over loose stones, clambering down rocks and slipping among the

heather now dripping with moisture, Mrs. Sangster vowing it should be her last expedition of the kind, if ever she got safe to 'bigget land' again.

'Hold more to the left!' shouted the guide, an injunction which Mrs. Sangster hastened to obey, though still very far from the point it was meant to apply to and thereby found herself on a steep rock face, where she was compelled to turn round, and grasping the heather bushes above, to step gingerly backwards, down into the unknown.

'Oh! Mr. Roderick, this is awful!'

'Another step and you will come to level foothold again.'

'Oh! but I can't; I am caught in something. There it goes--and now I have lost my gold spy-glass, something has caught the chain and broken it. Oh, Mr. Roderick! will you help me to find it! I shall never be able to read my psalm-book on Sunday, if I lose it. Oh dear! oh dear! what an old fool I have been. Skemmeling over Findochart like a nine-year old!'

Roderick shouted to the others to wait, but the cry lost itself in the mist, or was misunderstood. The voices from below came up fainter and fainter, and finally they were heard no more.

The search for the 'spy-glass' occupied some time, and all their attention, but eventually it was found within a foot or two of where they stood, and it was not till then that they discovered they were alone on the hillside. Roderick shouted till he was hoarse, but there came no response, and it became evident they must shift for themselves.

'Most disgraceful conduct! such heartlessness! To think that Peter Sangster, my own son, whom I have sat up with, and nursed through measles and whooping-cough, till my back was like to break, should drag his old mother up here among the clouds, and then desert her!' and here the old lady began to whimper, but took care to make the 'spy-glass' secure in some inner receptacle of her dress.

Roderick suggested that it was getting late, and that by making haste they might yet overtake the runaways.

'I hope we may. But who knows? They may have fallen over a precipice, and be lying maimed and mangled at the bottom. Oh dear! it may be days before they are found. My poor Sophia! that would have looked so well riding about Manchester in her own carriage! She may have broken her neck, or disfigured herself for life! lying bruised and bleeding on a heap of stones. And the crows come and pick at people, they tell me, when they are too much hurt to drive them away. Oh dear, oh dear!

Her active mind conjured up every imaginable horror, till, distracted by the pictures of her own invention, she lifted up her voice and wept sore.

Roderick stood by powerless, and eventually silent. Each word of consolation served but to start her imagination on a new track of suggestions more frightful than the last, so he held his peace and waited. Tears brought relief in time, and now fear for herself took the place of more fanciful terrors.

'Oh, come away, Roderick!' she cried, 'what are you standing there for?--glowering at nothing! Come away!'

The descent proceeded. And now they were on an extended flat, undulating in all directions, and lying between the steep ascent to the summit and the declivity which sloped to the next level below. Without the guidance afforded by continuous descent, they found very soon that they had completely lost their way, and could form no idea of what direction they were moving in.

'I thought you had often shot over this hill, and knew it well, Roderick Brown, or I would never have trusted myself in your hands; but it seems to me you know nothing about it. I'm thinkin' we may wander about here all night, for anything *you* can do to bring us home. So I am just going to sit down till the Lord sends us help! Home! I'll never see home again; and a sorrowful woman I am, that I ever set out on this fool's errand!'

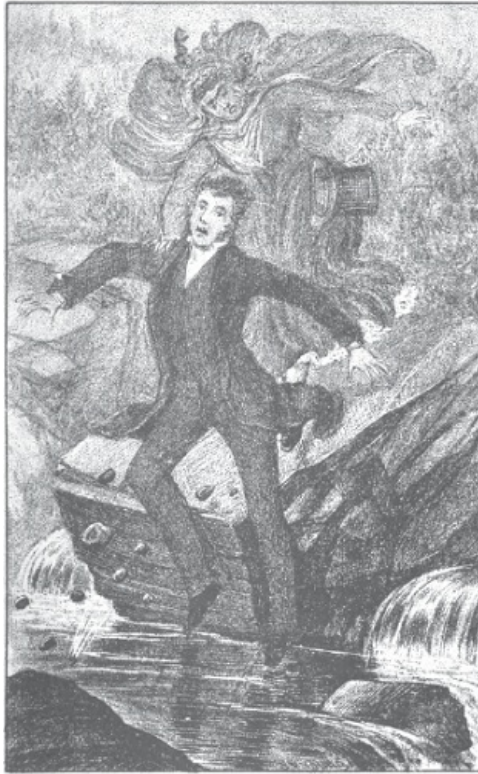
'We must do as I have had to do more than once before, Mrs. Sangster, when I got befogged in the hills, follow a stream of running water--the first we can find. The water will find its way down somewhere, and will bring us to a house eventually, though it may take us through some difficult places.'

A burn was by-and-by found, and they set themselves to follow its course wherever that might lead, like the clue by which some devious labyrinth is disentangled. It led through swampy places sometimes, and sometimes tumbled downward among rocks and under high banks, but they were already so wet that walking in its bed where the sides were too craggy and difficult made small difference, and after clambering downwards for more than an hour, they were rejoiced by the barking of a dog some distance below them.

'Do you hear that? Mrs. Sangster; I think we are nearing a habitation at last!'

Mrs. Sangster drew a long breath, and stood upright to listen; letting go her hold of the bushes by whose help she was scrambling down in the bed of the burn. The rock she stood on was slippery. On changing her poise her feet slid from under her, and with a scream, and a clattering of stones, she shot forward and downward upon her companion, landing them both in a pool of water.

'Oh, Roderick Brown! You'll be the death of me! How dare you try your cantrips on a woman old enough to be your mother? Dragging me through bogs and down precipices, and ducking me in burns till I haven't a dry stitch on my back, or an easy bone in my body! I'll have ye up before the presbytery for a graceless loon! Oh, laddie! never mind what I say. My head's just going round and round, I think I'm demented! Lay me on the bank to drip--and let me die in peace! I can go no further.'



"She shot forward and downward upon her companion, landing them both in a pool of water." Page 88.

"She shot forward and downward upon her companion, landing them both in a pool of water." Page 88.

'Nonsense, Mrs. Sangster. Just a few steps more! We must be very close to some shieling now. I declare I can smell the peat reek in the air! Here is a footpath going down the hill--come! let us follow it.'

'Give me your hand, then, for I do not think I have courage left to stand alone, far less walk. Oh! What an experience!'

They reached a shepherd's cottage in a few minutes more, where the wife of Stephen Boague, surrounded by dogs and children, came out to receive them. Roderick was not sorry to hand over his charge to the good woman's care, but he would not linger himself, he must hasten to the inn, though that was three miles off, to learn if the others had not arrived there, and if not to send searchers up the mountain after them. The mist had changed into a drizzling rain, but he was already too wet to feel it, and too anxious for the others to have any thought for himself.

CHAPTER XII.

INCHBRACKEN.

The rest of the party stumbled and groped their way slowly down the hill, Peter and Mary

endeavouring to follow the voices of those in front, and shouting to them from time to time.

By and by, when they came to more level ground, another shout reached them through the gloom.

'Ah! there is your mother!' said Mary, and shouted her loudest. 'But we cannot go to them, or we will miss the guide.'

The sound of hoofs was now heard, and the crack of a gun fired as a signal, and presently a mounted figure loomed up in the mist.

'Captain Drysdale!' said Peter.

'Mr. Sangster! and a lady! Miss Brown, you had better get on my pony. He will save you a good many stumbles.' So saying, he dismounted and lifted her on the saddle.

When people meet in the mist, and are hastening after an invisible guide, there is no time for ceremonious speeches. Mary was mounted and Kenneth leading the pony, before she had made up her mind whether she should accept his proffer or not.

'You may trust Dandy, Miss Mary; he never stumbles, and he will overtake the rest of your party sooner than you could.' But here their path ended in rock and precipice.

'We are at the bottom, climb straight down,' came up out of the abyss. 'It is not difficult, and we will wait for you.'

Peter began to descend.

'I know where we are,' said Captain Drysdale. 'If Miss Brown will trust herself to my guidance, I will bring her round these cliffs without her needing to dismount, and we, with the pony's help, will reach the inn before you, so do not be uneasy, Mr. Sangster;' and before Mary or Peter could express an opinion, the pony had turned, and they were swallowed up in the mist.

The pony broke into a jog trot, and Kenneth ran by his side. Shortly they came upon a path which zigzagged easily down hill, but tended more and more to the left. Kenneth fired again, and shortly an answering report came up from the depths below. The pony mended his pace at the answering signal, and it was not very long before they came on General Drysdale with a gillie or two and a couple of ponies. It was the spot where he had agreed with his friends to meet for luncheon, if the mist had not put an end to their sport.

'So, Kenneth, you have found the people you heard shouting. What! a lady, and alone?' The old gentleman advanced to welcome the new arrival.

'Miss Mary Brown! To meet you here!'

'She has been to the top of the hill with Mr. Sangster, and got caught in the mist. I came on them just as they were on the point of scrambling down a precipice, and I have promised to take her round by the road to rejoin them at the inn.'

'You must be drenched by this drizzling mist, Miss Brown, and it will take you more than an hour to reach the inn by the road. You had much better accompany us to Inchbracken, where Lady Caroline will be charmed to see you made comfortable, and we will drive you home tomorrow morning. Here, Duncan! you will find a short cut over the hill. Find Mrs. Sangster at the inn, and tell her, with my compliments, I have insisted on Miss Brown's remaining at Inchbracken for the night. She is too much fatigued and wetted to make it safe for her to go farther to-night.'

Mary demurred and resisted as well as she could, but the old gentleman was somewhat autocratic, and not used to being gainsaid on his own land. Her remonstrances were over-ruled or disregarded, and she had to submit, with no great reluctance after all, for she was chilled miserably, and thoroughly wet, and the prospect of an hour's ride ending in the make-shift drying to be obtained at a wayside inn was not very alluring. Having exchanged her wet shawl for a dry plaid and a mackintosh, she found herself riding along the hill track at a brisk pace, the General on one side and Kenneth on the other, the men having orders to remain and fire their guns occasionally till Captain John and his friends should reach the rendezvous.

It was later that afternoon when Miss Julia Finlayson entered the housekeeper's room at Inchbracken. In her character of young lady, if not daughter of the house, she had taken on herself the care of its floral decoration, a matter less generally thought of thirty years ago than now, and therefore even less to be entrusted to the servants. She had made the round of the conservatories, and carried on her arm a large basket of flowers to be arranged in vases which William the footman was then bringing in. There she found the lady's maid preparing tea to carry up-stairs.

'Has Lady Caroline a headache, Mrs. Briggs? I do wish she would vary the dissipation a little. Tea before getting up!--more tea at breakfast!--tea before dressing for dinner, and tea after dinner again! Why will Dr. Pilcox not intervene, and save her poor nerves? But nobody ever does venture to advise rich people till it is too late. But tea after luncheon as well! I almost think I

must take upon me to suggest a little Madeira, unless the headache is very severe.

'La! Miss Finlayson! The tea is for a young lady just arrived. Did you not know? She have rid up with General Drysdale and the Capting all in a titty tit. And my lady, far from being poorly, is quite set up and lively about having a stranger to entertain this drizzly afternoon, and indeed, Miss, she have made us all pooty lively upstairs with so many orders. Rooms to prepare--a hot bath--tea--and all the young lady's things to be dried. For indeed she had not a dry stitch to sit down in. And oh! such tears and tatters along of her having been climbing hills and precipices in the mist, and the Capting bringing her home safe and sound--for my lady says it is most remarkable. But how she is agoing to go down to dinner in that black stuff dress I confess I do not understand. Seeing as how she appears a sweet young lady indeed, and it would be a pity if she were not properly dressed, and she an old friend of the family, as I could see by my lady. Though she has not been here before in my time. But here comes Mrs. Kipper herself; no doubt she knows the young lady--'

'Hoot!' responded the housekeeper, 'it's juist auld Doctor Brown's daughter. I've kenned the lassie sin' she could rin. My lady would often have her mother up from the manse, and she would be sent down here to me, and the young laird with her, to keep them out of mischief, and two bonnie bairns they were, and unco couthie; and thinks I to mysel', I'm wonderin' will my leddy ever rue the way the castle and the manse have forgathered. And I wad no say but the Captain may have a kindness for Miss Mary yet. I thought her brother, with his Free Kirk havers and his goin' clean against the master's wishes, would have peuten sic notions out of his head. But there's no tellin'. They're dour chields the Drysdales, that kenna how to let go; and if our young Captain has wance ta'en the notion, they may save their breath to cool their parritch, that would gainsay him. He'll gang his ain gate.'

Julia heard it all, while with her scissors she snipped the ends of her flower stalks, and arranged her nosegays. In her rôle of affability and general good nature with the household, her presence imposed no restraint on those confidential servants; in fact, it rather stimulated them to talk, and show how much at heart they had the interests of the family, and how well they understood whatever was going on. It suited her to know whatever was to be thus picked up, so long as it could be done without betraying unseemly curiosity, and she was much too wise to compromise herself by putting questions to a domestic; but this intelligence was far from welcome to her, and what was worse, Mrs. Kipper's speculations were but confirmation of her own fears.

A gentlewoman of slender means, and with no near relations, she had to make her own way in the world and effect a lodgment in it somewhere by the aid of such wits as relenting nature had bestowed, when she withheld the brute strength that is given to vulgar humanity. In fact, my poor Julia was, I fear, something of a schemer. Is it not shocking?

And yet, dear lady, if I may ask--how long would that charming candour and transparency of soul, not to speak of the high-spirited independence of character, which so delight your friends, survive, if you had to depend on the hospitality of some one, whom no social law ordained to offer it? We must all eat three times a day if possible, and those who have no money themselves must arrange that some one else who has, shall pay for the dinner, or worse will come of it. Inchbracken had been the oyster offered by fortune to Julia, and very well she had acquitted herself in the task of opening it. Friends and every comfort she had been able to achieve thereby, with every prospect of their continuance so long as her kinswoman should survive. But then good things of life are not enough, so soon at least as they are once secured. Man is not an oyster, whatever his remote ancestors may have been, nor woman either; and as regards ancestors, without impugning the oyster's claim, if we are to infer anything from a never-failing hereditary trait, a place should be found somewhere in the pedigree for the horseleech; all human desire, aim, aspiration, may be expressed by the one simple formula--'a little more.' With that ahead and within view, how contentedly we can struggle along, and with how little! Progress is what we need to make us happy. Julia was becoming less young each day, and she was still unwed. No suitor had appeared, but while her kinsman remained single she had still looked forward with some confidence in her own skill and good fortune. That good fortune had sent Kenneth abroad when Mary Brown appeared to be getting dangerous, and had given herself the opportunity to slide into intimate correspondence with him as a substitute for his indolent mother. Again kind fortune had intervened in removing the Browns from the scene before Kenneth's return, and in involving them in such disfavour as to remove all danger of their being invited to the house. Then, too, she had aimed her own little shaft to aggravate the alienation by clouding his fair fame with insinuations of a disreputable scandal.

If she could but have left her ears in the housekeeper's room when she went up stairs she would have learned how successful had been her little device to make people entangle their ideas, by accepting juxtaposition for connection, and thereby mistaking, like their hostess, the *post hoc* for the *propter hoc*. William coming for the dinner bouquets while the confidential talk was in progress, was able to contribute his quota to it by repeating the appalling facts and surmises which his friends on the moor had discussed the previous Sunday, and which, in fact, had been started by himself, though his memory had failed to record that circumstance. The lady's maid raised her eyes to the ceiling, and declared that 'she never----,' while the housekeeper was 'thankful Roderick's godly father was safe in heaven, or it would have killed him outright.' In due time all this would filter upwards to Lady Caroline's ears, and yet what would it avail to Julia? Here was Mary already in the house. A fog on the hill had been able to undo all that Fortune and

herself had been able to effect in two years time, as the blundering broom of a housemaid will carry away at one sweep the cobwebs that have been weeks in spinning. Mary Brown in the house, and Kenneth at her side for a whole evening--but at least she would be true to herself, and not yield till she was defeated. Mary would be at a disadvantage in more respects than one, certainly as regards dress, and also in accomplishments and knowledge of the world. Mary on the other hand had youth, but then, as Julia told herself, youth means rawness, and 'I won't give in yet!' she added, 'I must go to her now to reconnoitre, and behave my very prettiest, and that will at least keep her upstairs till the dressing bell rings.'

So thinking, she entered Lady Caroline's sitting-room with her flowers.

'Oh, Julia! such pretty flowers! What should I do without your kind clever fingers to brighten my room for me? Have you seen the visitor my General has brought me? But of course not. She is bathing and dressing, and what not. The poor child seemed actually dripping when General Drysdale brought her in;--found her in the mist! Away up on Craig Findochart. I have handed her over to Briggs, and by and by I hope she will be able to see us. So nice to have somebody arrive this dismal afternoon. I really felt too dawning even to open the new book box from London, and as for my knitting, the stitches wouldn't count somehow, and that fool Briggs went and dropped some of them in trying to put it right, and altogether the appearance of a new face has made a most pleasing variety. You remember Mary Brown, of course,--a nice little girl, and very like her poor mother. A great friend of mine her mother was--a most dear woman. I believe I miss her sadly still, sometimes. In fact, I always do miss the Browns when I see the new people that have come to the manse,--not, my dear, that I would have you imagine I could undervalue any clergyman of our national church. Indeed, I consider it an honour to be able to contribute to its well-being in these levelling times, when if we who have a stake in the country do not support the Church, we shall have the State too tumbling in about our ears. Those dreadful levellers seem to reverence nothing, wanting to repeal the Corn Laws, and to call their dissenting meeting-places churches! and putting steeples on them, and actually ringing bells. What is to become of the British constitution if every dissenting chapel is to have a steeple and call itself a church, and ring a bell? As my dear General says sometimes, I think the flood gates must be opening. If it was only the English chapels, it would be of less consequence. You know my brother Pithevvis is an Episcopalian, and I belonged to that Church till my marriage (the Drysdales have always held to the Establishment and the Revolution Settlement), not to mention that it is the Established form across the Border; but that every little gathering of impudent seceder bodies is to hang up its kettle and deave the whole parish, whenever it wishes to say its prayers, I consider it most improper, and neither to the glory of God or man. And therefore, my dear, I would be most scrupulous in paying the clergy every attention. Still, when I asked Mrs. Snodgrass and her children to come up and eat strawberries one summer's day, you may remember it, I could not but think of poor dear Mrs. Brown, and miss her sadly. I think in future I shall *send* my strawberries to Mrs. Snodgrass. I believe she would rather eat them at home, and I know *I* shall prefer it. Then it was so convenient in Dr. Brown's time, whenever a gentleman was required to make up the number at dinner, he would come so obligingly on the shortest notice, and be so useful in the conversation;--a most accomplished man, my dear. But this Mr. Snodgrass is different, dining out does not appear to be his forte; though he is a most excellent man, and I am sure we ought to appreciate him highly. But, as I was saying, this little Mary Brown was always a favourite of mine--a nice, quiet, soft little thing, and so bright and pretty, just like one of your charming posies there, and quite a relief on a grey colourless afternoon like this. But here is Briggs to say Miss Brown is ready to receive us. Come.'

They passed into an adjoining apartment, where, seated in an elbow chair by the fire, was Mary. She was wrapped in a large white peignoir, and her hair, gathered in a knot behind, had partly escaped from the comb, and fell in a stream of sunny brown across her shoulders.

'Mary, my dear, keep your seat, and try to get rested,' said Lady Caroline. 'Why, child, how like your mother you grow! and so pretty! I was so fond of your mother, my dear, and you remind me of her. I hope they have attended to you, and brought you whatever you want. Be sure and ask Briggs for anything that has been forgotten.'

And so she went on in a continuous monody, while the younger women listened; for, when Lady Caroline felt disposed to talk, she gave little heed to what was said by any one else, but followed the tangled thread of her own ideas, never doubting but they must be as interesting to persons of lower degree, as she found them herself. An Earl's daughter, and of a historical house, she deemed nothing so reverent as its traditional glories, and insisted with gracious pertinacity on the full measure of deference according thereto; and there is little doubt that when in after years she was duly gathered to her noble fathers, it would not have been the 'Law and the Testimony,' but the tables of precedence that would have been found graven on her heart. In one house at the other end of the county she had been led out to dinner behind the daughter of a more recent creation, but she had never crossed that threshold since, nor were the offenders ever again permitted to share in the festivities of Inchbracken.

'Well, girls, here comes Briggs with my tea, so I shall leave you to your own chit-chat; it will be half-an-hour yet before the dressing-bell rings.'

Julia drew her seat nearer to the fire, and spread her hands to the cheerful blaze: like the cats, she loved warmth.

'It seems long since we have met, Miss Brown. One never sees you in this neighbourhood now, though you are still so near. Pray, how do you like your new way of life? I heard a gentleman say, not long ago, that as it was on spiritual grounds you left Kilrundle, you would no doubt feel you were advancing, and becoming more like the spirits, in so far at least as being able to live in several houses at once goes. From what we hear, you live all over the village at Glen Effick,--a sort of ubiquity, in short. But perhaps 'living' is too gross a name for that sort of thing; 'pervade' has a more spiritual sound, only it does not suggest much in the way either of bed or dinner. Do you like it?'

Mary raised her eyes enquiringly to the other's face. Did she mean to be impertinent? And why?

'A woman lives with her natural protector, Miss Finlayson. Wherever my brother fixes his home, if he chooses to share it with me, of course I shall like it.'

Julia's eyelids winced. She had a rheumatic old aunt who lived in a sea-side village all the winter with a solitary maid, and who was wont to disappear in spring, when some family from an inland town would rent her cottage for the summer. With this ancient relative, Julia had been thankful to take up her abode when the demise of her parents left her homeless, and her own small income, added to that of the old lady, had made a better provision for both. Circumstances had changed since then. When Lady Caroline found she wanted a companion, Julia recognised the greater congeniality of a wealthy household. The old aunt might talk of ingratitude, but she was quietly dropped, and Lady Caroline enthroned in her 'heart' as nearest of kin. Julia's conscience, however, was not a troublesome organ, and Mary could have meant no retaliating shot, since she had never heard of the aunt; so she continued as though Mary had not spoken.

'And now you have extended your pervading presence to Craig Findochart! What a strange choice! You do not expect to do good to souls up there, do you?'

'Oh, Miss Finlayson, pray don't! I never was clever at understanding drolleries, and it pains me to hear sacred things lightly mentioned. But if you want to know how I came there, it is simple enough. Mr. Sangster has her son and another gentleman on a visit, and I have been staying there for a few days. We made a party to Findochart to show the stranger the view, the mist came down when we were on the top of the hill, we lost our way and were all scattered, General Drysdale found me and kindly insisted on bringing me here. It seems all natural enough when you come to know it, does it not?'

'Quite natural, dear, and very nice. Pray, forgive my poor, poor little joke. You remember my foolish fondness for being lively, or trying, at least; for it is not easily done in the lonely country life we lead here. Oh, why will Lady Caroline not improve her health by an autumn at Baden Baden? Pray now, tell me the news, since you are staying at a house full of visitors. Young Sangster is home, is he? Home for the holidays, one might say, for he is duller than many a schoolboy. But his friend. Tell me about *him*--what is he like! Rich, I suppose, or mamma would not endanger Miss Sophia's peace of mind by his presence. He will be eligible from an Auchlippie point of view, and if that is not a very ornamental one, at least it is pretty solid. Old MacSiccar, the writer, dined with the General last week, and he spoke of old Sangster as one of the warmest men hereabouts. So, my dear, you might do worse than go in for gaukie Peter. I half meditate a descent myself, only it would be a long run over a very heavy country, as a Leicestershire friend of mine phrases it. But tell me about the friend. Is he nice? The two shot with Captain John yesterday over Whauprigg moor, and they were expected for dinner, but there was some mistake about dressing bags, so we ladies never saw them. Cousin Kenneth says they are horrid cads both, but then his regiment are a parcel of supercilious puppies, so we need not mind that. What is the friend's name?'

'Wallowby.'

'Don't like the sound of it. Is he moderately nice? and is he rich?'

'They say he is very rich indeed, and has more in expectation from a bachelor uncle--a mill owner.'

'Ah! Those mill owners are tremendous people. And is he nice?'

'Really I don't know--That is a matter of taste.'

'Well, does he please your taste, Miss Precision?'

'I find him very polite and attentive, more so indeed than I care for. I think fussy people are apt to put me out, and it seems difficult to converse with him. I suppose my being Scotch prevents my knowing the things he talks best about.'

'And has Miss Sophia made an impression, do you think? Or is she impressed herself?'

'Indeed I don't know.'

'Ah! forgive me. I am so forgetful, but you know I mean no harm. I remember now, there is some *tendresse* between your brother and her. She certainly is handsome, and I hope he will get

her if he wishes it, though, *entre nous*, she always struck me as a dull girl. Like a wedding cake, only good to look at.'

Here Briggs knocked and entered, with a bundle of white roses, each flushing into pinkish creaminess at the heart.

'With Captain Drysdale's compliments for Miss Brown.'

'Poor Colewort!' cried Julia, with just a thrill of viciousness in her voice, 'there go his hopes of a prize at the flower show next week! I know he has been nursing that rose for weeks past. For all that, Miss Brown, they will go nicely with your black gown, so I shall leave you now to embellish yourself with the poor man's broken hopes--Pathetic sentiment that? Ha! ha!'

CHAPTER XIII.

A HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

Roderick having bestowed his companion safely in the shieling of Stephen Boague, did not linger. He started at once down the glen by the path beaten by the shepherd and his family. Down a glen, over a mountain shoulder, across rolling upland, zig-zagging between marsh and peat bog, at length coming out on the road, and in course of time gaining the inn from which they had started in the forenoon. There was no lifting or clearing away of the mist, it had thickened rather, and filled the air with a diffused drizzling spray, which settled drenchingly on every thing, trickling down rock and herbage, soaking into clothing and ground, till like sponge, they were distended with moisture.

He was wet already, as well as more or less bruised, battered, and foot-sore from his late experience, therefore the drizzle did not add materially to his discomfort, besides, the ferment in his mind made him insensible to bodily pains. He had heard from Mrs. Sangster's own lips when apparent danger had momentarily removed the restraints of civilized life, and her native egotistic worldliness and greed for once spoke out for themselves, that she was contemplating a match between Sophia and Wallowby. His Sophia, for whom like another Jacob earning his Rachel, he had laboured and borne so long. He had not gone out each morning for fourteen years, it is true, driving the cattle before him on the pastures of Auchlippie; but these are not the days in which human life is measured by centuries. Out of what the insurance companies would call his presumption of life, he had bestowed a far larger percentage on Sophia, than were the fourteen years devoted by the patriarch to winning his bride, not to mention difference in intensity. Notwithstanding the beauty of the sacred episode, one cannot but suspect some coolness, along with the much patience required to watch the beloved object drifting from the bright bloom of girlhood into the sun-burnt maturity of thirty summers, and still keep waiting to work out the bargain. Roderick had been working out his bridal on the other line, not ministering to the greed of a grasping father-in-law, but submitting to whims, exactions, and pretensions innumerable from the coarse-fibred mother of his charmer. How she had taken upon her to regulate his orthodoxy!--had sat in judgment on all that he did! reprov'd and exhorted him! and how he had borne it all, and attributed it to ignorant good intentions, for the love of Sophia! Sophia, whom he had picked blaeberrys for in childhood, and worshipped openly ever since.

And had he not been given fair encouragement too? When he returned from Edinburgh for his college vacations, had he not always met a special welcome there, and received invitations to come and stay as frequently as even he could desire? And since then, had he not become in every respect what this most fickle of mothers the most approved? Had he not cast aside the offer of a good manse and stipend, and come forth with the faithful to suffer tribulation for righteousness' sake? Had he not been zealous, and showed his desire to spend and be spent in the cause of truth? True, he had obeyed the command of conscience, and not of Mrs. Sangster in all this; but his line of conduct had been the one she belauded as most noble and holy, and she had already, in the earlier time, let him clearly see that personally she approved him, and had given him every facility for becoming intimate with her girl. And now without the pretence of falling out or complaint against him, she was deliberately contemplating to marry her to another man. Was ever such treachery, fickleness, worldly-mindedness, and all that is worst?

Poor young man! It *was* bad treatment looked at from *his* point of view.--it was black, and deserving of all the hard names he applied to it; but then there are more points of view than one, and who shall decide which is to prevail over the others? His was the suitor's point of view, but there is also that of the sought, and likewise that of her family. A family can wed its flower and pride but once, and it is neither unnatural nor improper that it should try to do its best, which, speaking in the general, means to secure a rich husband for the girl. The most mercenary will admit that riches do not necessarily bring happiness, but the moral point is whether happiness is

possible without them. Many have doubted whether happiness is compatible with poverty, but no one has ventured to assert that the poverty is an element in the happiness.

Therefore, friend Roderick, there is something to be said on the side of the old woman. It is not to *your* interests she can be held bound, further than the truth and justice due to all our fellow creatures require, but to her daughter's. As to how the case may appear from the daughter's point of view, you have no right to say, or even to think, as you have never put it in her power to tell you, and a maiden may not divulge the secret of her preferences unasked. She has encouraged you, you say? But how? Answered you civilly when you spoke to her? Could a lady do less? Has not been averse to your company? Why should she be? Could she civilly have shown a distaste for it? And supposing she felt no distaste, but rather liked it? Must a woman be prepared to marry any man whose company she finds pleasurable, or less irksome than solitude? You never spoke the word, my friend, that would have called her to speak for herself, and therefore you have no right to complain; though I grant that Mrs. Sangster may have been inconsiderate and fickle, and may be mercenary. Still, if when she extended her encouragement, you did not tender your proposal, and thereby nail her, she must be allowed to change her mind if she desires. As to Sophia herself, the probability is, that her affections are, and will remain, in an amorphous form, or let us say in solution, until such time as her relatives provide her with a husband round whom they may properly crystallize, as they no doubt will, and she will prove a pattern wife and mother. I fear, however, that as regards the nucleus round which her affections are to gather, as in the case of sugar (another sweet substance), any stick will answer quite well.

Love is blind, and young love headstrong, therefore it is little wonder if these cold-blooded reflections did not occur to Roderick. He fretted and fumed as he walked along, and was thoroughly miserable, while the moisture dripped steadily from his hat brim, and meandered in little brooks down his neck.

Eventually he reached the inn, and bade the landlord send out a gig or tax-cart at once, to bring in Mrs. Sangster. The landlady came forward, officious to welcome a guest, and eager to show hospitality to her minister.

'Wae's me, sir, but ye *are* drouket! Past a' kennin', ye nicht hae been soomin' e'y loch, forby climbin' the craig. Stap in by, aside the twa gentlemen, an' warm yersel'. An' I'se bring ye a drap toddy to het yer insides, an' syne ye'll gang to yer bed, an' I'se toast yer breeks afore the kitchen fire. Lord pity me! the man's as blae as a corp about the gills--clean fushionless an' forfuchan wi' cauld an' weet! Gude grant he bena taeh doon wi' a fivver o' tap o't. Ye'll be for yer denner, sir, whan Mrs. Sangster comes in? But that winna be for twa hours yet; sae gang tae yer bed, sir, ey now, an' I'se see to dryin' yer claes.'

Roderick entered the room where sat Peter Sangster and his friend. A roaring fire of wood billets and peat blazed on the hearth, each had a smoking tumbler at his elbow, and soothed himself with a pipe. There was a steaminess and a flavour of broadcloth and shoe leather diffused about the apartment, but it was evident the gentlemen themselves were nearly dried, and subsiding into a sort of drowsy comfort under the united influence of warmth, toddy, and tobacco.

'Ahoy! Sir preacher! Turned up at last? and what have you done with my mother?'

'She is safe in a shieling up one of the cross glens, and I have already ordered a gig to be sent for her. You may expect her in little more than an hour. We very nearly got lost on the hill in consequence of waiting to look for an eye-glass she had dropped. When that was found, you had gone out of hearing, and we found ourselves alone. Eventually we had recourse to the old device of following running water, and a pretty course it led us, over slippery rock faces, and into pools of ice-cold water. Your mother thought she was drowned more than once, and at last gave up all hope of getting home alive, and but that she could hear the barking of dogs and the cries of children a little way below, she would have collapsed altogether.'

'Hm,' said Peter, 'I can imagine--I am glad it was you and not me! The old lady is apt to cut up rough under difficulty. However I had my own troubles. See my coat! Split right up the middle and only held together by the collar and the two pins which Mrs. Tuppy here has tagged it together with. I have to sit bolt upright, or they run into me like skewers whenever I lean back. Perhaps they are skewers.'

'Ha!' broke in Wallowby, 'we heard a screech overhead, and when I looked up, there were a pair of boot heels within a foot of my eye, the legs belonging to them were only dimly visible, and whatever was above that was out of sight in the mist. The guide got hold of one, I took the other, while Miss Sophia stood well to the one side. Then we said one, two, three, and gave a pull together. There was a crack of rending broad-cloth and oh! such an unearthly howl. He must have fancied he was being dragged down into the pit of darkness. Eh, Peter? and there stood my gentleman clutching his fingers into the cravats of his two preservers and panting like a steamboat!--Pretty exhibition of nerves, my fine fellow!--What will they say at the club when they hear of it?'

'You shut up! for a clumsy blunderbuss! You nearly dislocated my hip joint with your idiotic wrenching, and then wonder that I cried out!'

'What has become of Miss Sophia?' asked Roderick.

'Tea and bed upstairs,' replied Wallowby with a guffaw; 'the landlady marched her up stairs to bed first thing, like a naughty child who had wet her frock, and I heard her say, she would dry her coats for her. What are coats by the way? Scotticé for garters? I know what breeks are.'

'Here's a lad speerin' for Mistress Sangster, gentlemen,' said Mrs. Tuppy opening the door and pushing in a damp and touselled-looking youth, who grasped his dripping 'Tam o' Shanter' tightly in both hands.

'I was to speer for Mistress Sangster hersel.'

'She has not come in yet, but I am her son.'

'An' there's Master Brown, the young leddy's brither,' added Mrs. Tuppy, 'I'm thinkin' it'll be a' richt.'

'A weel, sir, General Drysdale sends his compliments to Mistress Sangster--- He sends his compliments' (and he looked into the crown of his hat as though he expected to find them there) 'an' he's taen the leeberty o' bringin' Miss Brown hame wi' him til Inchbracken, to dry hersel', an' he'll tak her hame the morn. He fand her e'y glen, down by fornent the Herder's Scaur, a' weel an' droukit like, an' for fear she suld tak the cauld, he juist on wi' her til a pownie, an' they're gane skelpin' hame til Inchbracken.'

'Very kind of General Drysdale,' said Roderick, giving the messenger a shilling. 'Here! Mrs. Tuppy, give him a jorum of your toddy! He looks as wet as any of us.'

'An it's yer pleasure, sir, I'se gie him a gude drink o' yill--- Cock the like o' *him* wi' the best Glenlivet! An' I'm no for giein' toddy to thae hafflin callants, no ways; they dinna need it, an' it's an ill trick to learn them. The weet's nae harm tae cottar folks' bairns, they're aye plouterin' e'y burns, an' it juist keeps them caller. But say the word, sir, an' he's hae the yill!' and so saying she pulled the messenger out before her and closed the door.

'I can't say much for your sister's politeness, Brown,' said Peter. 'When a lady accepts a man's escort, she is bound to stick to it, I should say, and not go off with the first stranger who rides up in the mist, without even a word of apology or farewell. I don't see why she could not have stuck by me.'

'And broken her neck down that precipice where you so nearly stuck fast yourself?' said Roderick. 'Your hands seem to have been full enough taking care of yourself. I think one may without presumption or profanity regard General Drysdale's opportune appearance as providential.'

'But it wasn't General Drysdale's opportune appearance! It was that stuck-up puppy his son.'

'And a far more ominous appearance for your peace, too, my boy,' said Wallowby with a chuckle. 'But grin and bear it, old man. You will only be laughed at if you get mad.'

Mrs. Tuppy looked in again.

'Mister Brown! yer room's ready up the stair. Come awa, sir, an' tak aff yer claes, an' I'se dry them for ye. Ye'll get yer death, sir, an' ye bena quick! Juist see til the dub ye're stan'in' in! A' dreepit frae yersel! An' the reek frae yer fore pairts as ye staund fornent the lowe--ne'er mind the drap toddy-come awa! I'se brew ye a soup better an' stronger than ye're in ower among the blankets.'

So Roderick, half pushed and half exhorted, found himself forthwith upstairs and in bed, while Mrs. Tuppy stood beside him with a noggin of her hottest and strongest toddy.

'Drink it down, sir! It wadna harm a sookin' bairn. An' ye're needn't. Noo see gin ye canna sleep a wee. It wad do ye gude. Gin ye dinna tak tent, ye'se no wag yer pow in a poopit this mony a day.'

CHAPTER XIV.

SCANDAL.

When Mrs. Sangster found herself safe in a human habitation, she relaxed the tense control in which she had held her faculties, and let nature have its way.

She sank into a chair beside the fire, and trembled and shivered and wept profusely for some time. Mrs. Boague heaped fuel on the fire, removed her shoes, chafed her feet, disencumbered her by degrees of her outer and wetter garments, which she hung up to dry, and wrapped her in warm plaids and blankets. The warm cup of tea which she then offered was fortified with a dash from her husband's private bottle, very privately added and not mentioned. It acted like a charm in restoring vigour and composure to the way-worn lady.

'Your tea is most refreshing, Mrs. Boague. I feel greatly better, and very thankful to you for your kind attention.'

'An' kindly welcome ye are, mem, an' mair I wad like to do gin I juist kened what ye wad like. It's no often a kened face, or ony face ava for that matter, comes by here-awa, forbye a wheen gillies, raxin' their breekless shanks along the braes ahint the gentles. I'm a laich country woman mysel', an' I hae sma' brew o' the hieland folk, wi' their kilts an' their pipes, the daft antics. An' forbye that, we're no e'y Hielands here! Ye'll gang twenty mile afore ye'll come on the Gaelic. It's juist a maggit the General's gotten intil's heid, to pet his folk in kilts like a curran playactors, an' please my leddy wha cam frae the North. An' are ye comin' round, mem? Ye were sair forfuchan whan ye gat down first.'

'Greatly better, thank you; I think I could take another cup of your tea, it seems quite to invigorate me. The rich cream, I suppose, and the fine mountain air. You have many mercies, Mrs. Boague, many mercies, and I hope you are duly thankful.'

'Ou ay, mem. Rael thankfu'; but I'm thinkin' it's what cam frae Stephen's crame pat 'at maks the tea sae nappy. It's Luckie Tuppeny's gill stoup gae that crame, an' no the kye here-awa I'm thinkin'. An' as for thankfu'ness for our mercies, we beut a' to hae that, as the minister says. It's o' the Lord's mercies we're no consumed, gentle and simple thegither; we're a' John Tamson's bairns sae far as that gangs, or aiblins Auld Nick's, wha kens? gin we dinna repent.'

'Ah! very true, and a solemn thought,' said Mrs. Sangster. She was accustomed to do the Scripture quoting and solemn warnings herself, when she visited her poorer neighbours, sandwiching her dole-bread with rich and succulent slices of good advice; but here for once the tables were turned. It was Mrs. Boague this time, who was performing the act of mercy, and she realized the privileges of her position. While proud and pleased to show hospitality to Mrs. Sangster, she was not going to submit to exhortation such as flesh and blood can only tolerate in view of an eleemosynary accompaniment. Mrs. Boague saw in Mrs. Sangster a fellow-member of the Free Church, a Christian sister, and was disposed to be very sisterly indeed. Mrs. Sangster liked Christian sisterhood too, but it was sisterhood with Lady Grizel Pitlochrie, and other Free Churchwomen of noble birth. We all like to look upwards, even in bestowing our best and purest affections, and feel it easier to realize the brotherhood of man in connection with Lord Dives in his coach, than with poor Lazarus who sweeps the crossing, and gets the mud spatters from his Lordship's wheels.

Mrs. Sangster held the old-fashioned notion, that God, having made her a lady, meant her to rule, instruct, rebuke and direct the lower classes in the paths of holiness; but, alas! the Free Church movement, which gave this idea increased occupation, was sapping the foundations on which it rested. A secession from, and a protest against authority in Church and State, it asked the rich to induce and influence the poor, while itself courted them by dwelling strongly on their equal standing in the Church. It has certainly led to a more democratic state of feeling in the country, and this may or may not be a good thing, according as the democracy is wise or the reverse. Meanwhile, it has loosened old ties of interdependence, and helped to widen the gulf between the classes; but then all advancement has to be paid for--Adam and Eve got their eyes opened, but, to compensate, they were turned out of the garden. The question in either case is, is the gain worth the price paid for it?

The price Mrs. Sangster had to pay for her entertainment, and she was quick enough to see it at once and to submit, was familiarity: so she repeated, 'Very true, indeed, Mrs. Boague, and really Stephen's cream-pot brings out the flavour of the tea. It's a grand idea, I must give Mr. Sangster some the next time he is kept late at a meeting of the Presbytery or the Kirk-session. He comes home so tired sometimes. These are searching times, Mrs. Boague, we have all need to keep our loins girded and our lamps burning. But you know that yourself, Mrs. Boague. And a sweet quiet home you have here, and such fine healthy children. It must be sweet to live here in the great solitude of nature, and most imposing. Away from the temptations of the world, you must have much time for meditation and the perusal of the Word.'

'I'm no sae sure o' that, mem. Gin ye had sax bairns to tent an' skelp an' do for, ye'd find yer haunds braw an' fu', no to mention the ither clout that's aye wantin' on yer gudeman's breeks. It's sma' time I hae for Bible readin' 'at canna get a steek peuten in my ain claes whiles. Whaur wad I be gin I gaed mediatin', an' a' thae bairns wi' naething i' their wee wames, skirlin' for a piece, round a teum aumbry? Na, na, mem! The better pairt's no for puir folk! gin that means glowerin' at print. It maun be for you gentles, 'at gars ither folk do yer wark, an' sits a' day forment the fire toastin' yer hirdies.'

'Ah, Mrs. Boague! wealth and station bring great anxieties, duties, and temptations. The rich are not to be envied.'

'Belike no, mem; but I ne'er saw the ane wad gie up the siller sae lang as they cud hing on til't. An' as for the solitude o' natur, what thocht ye o't yersel', whan ye cam spielin' doun the braeside an hour syne?'

'Ah! Indeed, Mrs. Boague, that was a painful experience, and very thankful I am to be in bigget land again. Indeed, I almost gave up hope of ever coming down alive, and if it had not been for Roderick Brown, that good young man, I believe I would have stuck fast. It was a fearsome road. We came through burns and down crags, but he has brought me safe down, like the good pastor he is, guiding the trembling steps of a lamb of his flock.'

'Ou ay, mem; mony's the time my gudeman Stephen diz the same, whan he finds some teough auld yow stucken faur up amang the scaurs. He juist pu's her doon by the lug an' the horn, an' she'll come hirplin' hame ahint him, juist sic like as it micht be yersel'.'

'Ah yes! a shepherd's work. It seems an appropriate thing to have been done by my pastor. Reminds one of many beautiful passages, and brings them home with a force which I feel most improving. I shall certainly mention it to the next minister I meet. Poor Roderick. He's young yet, and I could hardly expect him to guide me, that might be his mother, through the rough places of dark and difficult doctrines; but he has done his part in the physical difficulty, and no doubt in future years he may have a like privilege in spiritual things. Oh yes, a good young man, and a faithful shepherd!'

'Wha kens? Gin a' the folk says be true, he's liker the wolf in sheep's clothin' 'at's mentioned in Scriptor, than a faithfu' shepherd. Gin I had a dochter come to the age o' speerin' for, its no him suld come keekin' round my toun wi' his souple tongue an' his holy sough, I'se warrant. But ye ken yer ain business, mistress, an', ony gate, ye were wise to keep him in yer ain hands, an' no hae him danderin' round wi' the lassie.'

'What do ye mean, woman? I have known Roderick Brown since he was born, and there never was a better, steadier, or more pious young man in the parish. Man or boy, you will hardly find his like between here and Edinburgh.'

'Belike mem!--belike--Folk's a' gude till they're fand out. Wha kens whaur ony o' us wad stand, gin a' was kenned? But ye see mem, it's like a' to be fand out concernin' his misdoin's, an' it's but a cracket pig, or a broken cistern his reputation's like to pruve whan a's kenned.'

'Woman!--What do ye mean?'

'Wummin yersel' mem! I ken I'm a wummin, an' sae are ye! But I'm a decent man's wife, an' his name's Stephen Boague. Sae dinna misca' me. I'm no beggin'.'

'But what can you mean? No calumny surely could touch the character of Mr. Brown!'

'I ken naething o' calumny, an' I never lee. But gin ye like to hear as was telled to me ye're walcome. Ye'll ken auld Tibbie Tirpie 'at bides down by Glen Effick, an' belike ye'll mind her lassie; young Tib, folk ca's her, a pridefu' scart 'at shoos whiles at the castle, an' cocks her neb ower ither folic, wi' her veil an' her parrysol an' the gumflowers in her mutch, like's decent folk was na gude enough for her! Aweel mem, an' wae I am to say the like o' ony puir lass, but she's gane wrang, an' wha but the minister to blame for't.'

'Nonsense! Mrs. Boague, I don't believe a word of it!'

'Juist what I said mysel', mem. But bide a wee, till ye hear the pruiifs. Ye see, mem, the lass gaed awa, naebody kenned whaur, an' fient a word spak her mither about it. An' lang she stayed, till ae dark nicht, yon terrible nicht, ye'll mind it? Hame she comes e'y coach, a' happit up, an' hidin' like, an' greetin' sair, an' out she slinks at her mither's door, an' nane wad hae kenned ocht about it but for Mistress Briggs my leddy's woman, down by. An' that same nicht, aff gaes the minister, in a' yon wind an' ren. It was lang after decent folk was in their beds, an' naebody was steerin' to see him gang. An' next day he brings hame a bairn, an' gies't til his sister to tak tent on--the puir young leddy! To mak a fule o' her that gate, wi' a merry-begotten wein! That caps a', says I, whan I heard it. An' syne naething maun do but baptis't, an' mak a fule o' the Kirk's solemn ordinance. An' there was Tib, I saw her wi' my ain e'en, keekin ower the folk's heads, like's she thocht shame to be at the preachin' ava, an sae weel she micht. An whan it cam to bringin' out the bairns, awa she slinks hame, wi the niepkin stappit in her mouth to keep in the greet. I saw't a' mysel', mem, an what mair pruif wad a body hae? Folk dinna do their deeds o' darkness in day licht an' a' body lookin' on, sae it's juist by pettin' that an' that thegither, ye can houp to find them out. But there's mair yet. O' Sawbith nicht whan a' was dark, wha suld be seen comin' out o' Tibbie s door but the minister? An' wha gangs down to Peter Malloch's shop o' Monday mornin' but Tibbie? an' she had siller wi'her, a pund note an' nae less. A note o' the Bank o' Peterhead, 'at naebody round here ever has but Mester Brown, an' his siller a' comes frae there. Noo, what say ye til a' that? Mistress Sangster. The wicked man diz his deeds e'y dark but the Lord will bring them t'ey licht, that's what I say, an it's scriptur, or gye an like it. Belike it was a minister I heard preachin't--But is't no terrible?'

'I am confounded, Mrs. Boague! Who ever could have supposed it? But the evidence is so circumstantial, it is impossible to doubt. It seems providential that I should have come here to learn all this. And that he should have presumed to come to Auchlippie, philandering after Sophia! Would nothing less than *my* daughter do for him? The reprobate! But oh! He shall smart for it!'

'Ca' canny! mem. Has the young leddy a kindness for him, think ye? It's sair wark to bawk young luv. He's a likely chield eneugh, an' micht mak no sae ill a gudeman, noo the daffin's by. It's no aye the warst o' the men gangs wrang about the lasses. As for that limmer, Tib Tirpie, I'd bring her to shame. The cuttie stule's a' she's gude for, wi' her gumflowers an' her veils, cockin' her neb at decent folk, an' scancin' at my tuscan bonnet, that was gien me by my ain gudeman, the year he married me. But, as I was sayin', gin the young leddy had a rael kindness for him, ye're no bund to ken a' 'at gaed afore; and let byganes be byganes. It'll a' blow ower.'

'But there's nothing. He no doubt has paid my daughter some attention, or at least has come a great deal to the house; but she is far too well-principled a young woman, to have any liking for a man who has not proposed and been accepted by her parents. In our rank of life, Mrs. Boague, things are not done exactly as they are in yours.'

'Aiblins no, mem. Ye think ower muckle o' the gear for that!' said the other, the radical once more rising within her, and the colour coming to her face. But the rattle of wheels without and a knock at the door changed the current of their thoughts, before the two had time to join in wordy battle, in which, perhaps, victory might not have chosen the gentlewoman's side.

Mrs. Sangster, with profuse thanks and salutations, climbed into the tax-cart, while the anxious mother busied herself in pulling her numerous brood from among the horse's feet. The vehicle at length was safely started on its return down the glen, without damage done to any of the children. Mrs. Boague returned indoors, bearing the most refractory of her offspring in her arms, and the last that was heard of her was the sound of maternal discipline and the wails of the culprit, echoing down the glen till it was smothered in the mist.

Arrived at the inn, Mrs. Sangster found the gentlemen ready for dinner. She grumbled at the delay, but submitted; she would, however, on no account allow the minister's repose to be disturbed, and assured Mrs. Tuppy that with his delicate constitution, it might be as much as his life was worth, to let him get up again that afternoon.

Having dined, the party made haste to be gone, under pressure of the old lady's impatience; for of all the anxieties of that anxious day the most harassing to her now was that Roderick would come down and join them on the home-going. That would be dreadful, yet how was she to forbid him? He had come as her guest, and he had, in all probability, saved her life a few hours since on the hill. It needed advice and consideration to decide what she should do or say at their next meeting, in view of the dreadful revelations of his depravity which had been made to her.

She wanted to sleep over it, and felt, to use her own pietistic phrase, deeply thankful, when at last the inn was safely vanishing in the distance, without her having met him.

Had she but known she might have spared her fears. Roderick was really ill; too ill to observe that she neither came nor sent to enquire for him. He tossed about on the bed where he had lain down some hours before, hardly asleep and not quite awake. The heat of a fire and a feather bed, too many blankets, and Mrs. Tuppy's toddy, had thrown him into something like a fever, yet fatigue and general oppression had stupified him past seeking relief. When the stupor lessened, a dull hot aching was in every joint, and he moved restlessly on the bed. Then the heavy eyes would close again in a kind of slumber, but the restless thoughts refused to go to sleep. An inarticulate anxiety clung to him, and he climbed up endless precipices in his dreams. Up and up he would drag himself, and anon Sophia would appear higher up still on a peak above him, and he would climb and climb to reach her. As he approached, her features would change, and, slowly taking the likeness of her mother, she would spurn him, and then with a cry he would lose his hold, and begin to fall down and down through endless depths of nothing, till at last in utter panic his limbs would move, and the spell of the nightmare broken, he would awake.

Thus between waking and sleeping, the afternoon and the weary long night wore away. The sun was shining at last upon another day, and though manifestly ill, he was able to get into a gig and be driven home to Glen Effick.

CHAPTER XV.

MARY.

It was a revival of the dear dead past to Mary Brown, to find herself again at Inchbracken. General Drysdale took her in to dinner, and, perhaps because he would not touch upon the present, leading, as it must, to her brother's defection from the national Church, nor, in fact, on that young man in any way or respect whatever, he talked to her about her father and mother.

She found it very grateful to listen to their praises; and something like a tear glistened in her eye while she looked in the old gentleman's face, and the faint colour of her cheek deepened into a warmer pink.

We value our powers to interest others most when we feel them leaving us, and it is not often that an old man's conversation can bring a flush or a tear to the cheek of youth and beauty. General Drysdale felt pleased as he marked the effect of his words. It recalled, who can say what associations with the time when he was a young man, and an object of more interest to the fair, and he became more and more warmed himself, out of sympathy, as he dwelt on the charities and the worth of Mary's parents.

Julia, from her place across the table, remarked with surprise the General's unusual animation and loquacity, and his unwonted inattention to the high duty of the hour--dining. Mary's eyes were shining, and in her plain black dress with the roses, she bloomed a brighter flower than they, radiant in pure content. So, at least, it was evident that Kenneth thought. He sat at some distance from her, and had even to lean forward somewhat to see, but his eyes were ever travelling in that direction, and he appeared to answer the gentlemen on either side of him in so distraught and unsatisfactory a manner, that they soon ceased to disturb his musings by further talk.

Julia had arrayed herself for conquest. She always dressed well and carefully, but on the present occasion her effort had risen into the region of art. Arrayed in some combination of white and green, which cured any tendency to yellowness in her complexion (and her shoulders at times were a trifle too suggestive of old waxwork), her pale eyes twinkled with quite an unwonted lustre, and there was positively a bloom on her cheeks and lips, while the falling ringlets were longer and more poetic than ever. When Briggs went into her room during the dressing hour, she had surprised her in the act of locking something very like a paint-box into her desk, and she had made a pretty sharp survey while she added the few pins that were all the office required of her; but, as she remarked subsequently, 'I could not take my oath of it, Mrs. Kipper; if she do, she manages uncommon clever.' Painting is a fine art, and Julia had studied it as well as all the others, and would have thought it but a paltry achievement to deceive the stupid eyes of poor Briggs.

There were several strange gentlemen at table, and Julia was on her mettle. The two who sat next her found her most agreeable, but sparkle her best, she failed to catch one glance of appreciation from Kenneth's eyes. At the end of the table she saw Mary, and the General still smiling and engrossed in their talk, and confessed to herself that she had undervalued the strength of the enemy. To think that that slip of a girl, brought up in a country manse, should manage so splendidly, and contrive to win the old gentleman to her side as well as the young one! How was it done? Through all the years she had dined at his table, she had never been able to extract more conversation from him than a casual remark between the courses, and latterly she had ceased even to expect that.

Matters did not progress much more satisfactorily in the drawing-room. Julia had sat down to the piano, and played her best, which is saying a great deal, for she was a brilliant performer. She also sang, and although her voice was thin, it had had the best training, and she could warble through the most intricate compositions with consummate taste and execution. She soon had all the gentlemen gathered around her in silent admiration, all, that is to say, except the General, who was in his usual corner, by his own lamp, his eye-glass on his nose and a blue book in his lap. As one of the legislators of this great nation, he felt it incumbent to fall asleep--to fall asleep over its affairs every evening; it reminded him of the House in fact, where he had had many a good nap in his day. However, as he never spoke, and always voted straight with his party, that made no difference. Kenneth too was wanting. Mary Brown sat on a low stool beside Lady Caroline's arm-chair, who,--the lady that is, not the chair--was chatting drowsily to her, while she swayed her great fan to and fro, and Kenneth, with his elbow on the chimney-piece, hung over both. Julia was by no means insensible to the admiration of the strangers,--at another time it would have given her great satisfaction; but just at present, the defection of Kenneth and his father out-weighed it all.

There is now but one chance to outshine her rival--to get her to the piano and try how her poor little efforts will sound after her own finished performance. After one more song, therefore, which she took care should be the *chef d'œuvre*, she declared she could sing no more, but suggested that some one should ask Miss Brown. Miss Brown was asked, and would fain have declined, but Lady Caroline recollected how sweetly her mother used to sing old Scotch ballads, and enquired if she had not taught them to Mary. Mary had to admit so much, and thereupon was led to the piano, while Julia seated herself in full view to enjoy a triumph.

It is no doubt perfectly true that Scotch music is by no means the highest development of that delightful art. It is but the outcome of natural feeling in a simple age and among an

unsophisticated people; yet it does not by any means afford a good or safe medium for the beginner or the bungler to display to advantage his slender skill, while proficients in operatic music will find little opportunity to display their vocal feats, and it is quite probable that they may not be able to render it at all. It has an accent of its own which is not expressed in the musical notation, and is beyond the reach of any but a native, and attained but by few of them. Mary Brown's musical opportunities had not been great, but she had a full pure voice, always in perfect tune, and she had been accustomed to hear and to sing Scotch ballads all her life, and she entered into their spirit. Before she had sung two verses, the General's drooping head had steadied itself, he had risen to his feet, joined the group by the piano, and was beating time with his eye-glass to the quaint old measure. Lady Caroline too had risen, a most unusual exertion for her to make after dinner, and was standing with the rest.

In this highly cultured age, we are all most learnedly musical. Beethoven, Bach, Spohr, we pay guineas to hear their works rendered, and are immensely pleased of course; though perhaps there are more of us than the one of whom it is recorded, who could very well mistake the tuning of the fiddles for the choicest morceau of the evening, and who certainly prefer the grand finale to all the rest. But the effect of a well-sung Scotch song on a roomful of Scotch people is something markedly different from the conventional and sometimes fictitious enjoyment of high music. Like the spiders which issued from the crannies of his cell when the Bastile prisoner touched his lute, so the inherent nature of the Scot will out and show itself at the sound of the national music, the dullest eye brightens and the heaviest foot would join the strathspey. It is in the blood. The artificial and conventional culture is scarce fifty years old, while the individual and peculiar nationality, of which our music is the voice, has come down in the blood through twenty generations, from before Bannockburn and the wars of independence, and is still present behind the whitewash of cosmopolitan pretence.

Lady Caroline wiped her eyes under the rendering of Bessie Bell and Mary Gray's sad fate, and declared it reminded her of the old nursery at Pitthevliis, when she was a child. The General (who would have thought it?) was most interested by the woes of true love; and the 'Mill dams of Binnorie' and 'Barbara Allan' made him tug his moustache very hard. The strangers each had his special favourite, and Mary knew them all; then at length she was permitted to rise from the piano, and she did so amid an ovation of thanks. Julia's plan to belittle her had not succeeded.

The following forenoon Kenneth drove her over to Glen Effick. They stopped at the inn by Gortonside, where they were told of Roderick's illness, and how he had started for home only an hour before. That was the single bitter drop in Mary's cup. She had spent a delightful day at Inchbracken, and now, undreamed of joy, Kenneth was driving her home himself. He was, oh! 'so nice,' and was saying----. No matter what he said, but it seemed the sweetest song she had ever listened to.

Lady Caroline and Julia had stood together at the window, and watched the pair drive away.

'It is not often Kenneth is so attentive to any one,' she observed to Julia. 'The two appear to have settled themselves for a most comfortable chat. And really she is a nice girl, and so pretty. I am not surprised at Kenneth's fancy, and if anything comes of it I shall make no objection. I once tried to bring on an attachment between him and one of the Pitthevliis girls, quite as much for Pitthevliis' sake and the girl's as for Kenneth's, for I know she won't have sixpence; but she thought she could secure a title then, and was disposed to reserve us for a consolation stake, if the other venture miscarried. That was more than I could brook, as you may suppose, considering it was they were to be the gainers, and not I, so Edith has never been asked to Inchbracken again, nor will be, till either she or Kenneth is married. Not that it matters, very likely, for of course the plan was only between Pitthevliis and myself. With his long family and the mess he has made of his affairs, it was the only way I could think of to help him, and he appreciated it, but the girl and her mother were both fools. However, it is doubtful if Kenneth would have fancied her in any case, he is so whimsical and critical. I have had half-a-dozen good fortunes staying with me at different times,--and a shocking ordeal it is, my dear, to undergo, I can tell you; the monkeys seem so thoroughly to understand why they are there, and presume so abominably upon it. But the very fact of my having brought them, seemed to set him against them. He is so wilful and headstrong. I remember, when he was a baby, the trouble we had with him,--insisting on feeding himself long before he could hold the spoon. I suppose it is the same temper that will not allow his old mother to help him in finding a wife. I have quite made up my mind to acquiesce in his choice, whatever it may be, for it will do no good to remonstrate; and if this is the girl he has set his fancy on, I confess I think he might go farther and fare worse.

Julia listened. Lady Caroline's discourse generally poured itself forth, irrespective of an interlocutor. She simply thought aloud to an auditor, who, of course, in the nature of things, must lend an attentive and sympathising ear to whatever a daughter of Pitthevliis might choose to say. Considering what had been her own views, it was hardly an agreeable subject of conversation, but the pain was not very great. There was nothing emotional, neither jealousy nor wounded love, in the matter. Next to a cool head a cold heart is perhaps the best outfit for one who has to get on in the world by the exercise of his own wits. Julia was a good deal like a spider, thinking that when one web has been swept, no time should be lost in beginning to weave another. Hate, spite, jealousy, are all unremunerative; worse, they are waste of force. Yield to the inevitable, and try a new scheme when the old miscarries. Julia had to be settled in life, and so soon as the one desirable party became manifestly unattainable, it was time to cast about for another.

From Mary Brown she led the conversation back to the circumstance which had brought her to Inchbracken, and that naturally led back to the companions who had shared with her the dangers of the mist.

'Would it not be proper, Lady Caroline,' she said, 'since Craig Findochart is on the Inchbracken property, and a serious accident might so easily have occurred, to enquire for the people and how they got home? If you think well, I could drive over and leave your card.'

'I see no objection, my dear, if you want the drive; but she is so pushing, she will be returning the visit forthwith, and I dread that. She stifles me. Her very deference is aggravating.'

'I think I should like the drive, dear Lady Caroline, and you shall have all the news I can pick up on my return.'

CHAPTER XVI.

MAN AND WIFE.

It was dark before the wanderers alighted at Auchlippie. Mr. Sangster had already retired. He was always up in time to superintend the feeding of his stock and to see his men begin work punctually at six o'clock, and he generally became drowsy early in the evening.

Every one was cold, weary, and perhaps a trifle cross. Supper was a necessary, but it proved by no means a cheerful meal, and each one sought his candlestick as soon as possible. Mrs. Sangster followed.

All through the afternoon she had been in a state of suppressed excitement, she found it hard to refrain from saying what was uppermost in her thoughts, yet, what she would have said, she felt she could not say before her daughter, nor even her son and his friend. She had been restless and irritable all the way home, breaking in upon and interrupting the rather listless chat of the others, yet unable to furnish talk herself. Arrived at home, and unable to get speech of her spouse, she had fallen foul of the supper arrangements, and rated the parlour-maid soundly, till that injured damsel withdrew in tears, and informed the denizens of the kitchen that 'something had come ower the mistress, for she was carrying on ben the house, like a hen on a het girdle.'

Having seen all safe for the night, she sought her chamber. There she seated herself on the chair by the bed-head of her slumbering lord, and laying her hand on his shoulder, she imperiously whispered, 'James.'

James opened his eyes. 'Is that you, Kirsty? Put out your candle and come to bed.'

'But I couldn't sleep a wink, James, till I have talked it all over with you. So waken up!'

'I'm sleeping already, and I won't be disturbed. If you wanted to talk over things, you should have come home sooner. Come to bed!'

'I cannot lay down my head to-night, or sleep one wink till I have talked it all over.'

'Then, sit up, by all means, if it pleases you; but put out the candle and hold your tongue. I've got to be up early in the morning, and I want to sleep,' and thereupon he turned round on the other side.

'James Sangster! Wake up at once! and listen to me! I'm the mother of your children, and the wife of your bosom! Saint Peter says you are to give honour to your wife as the weaker vessel, and I insist on your attending to what I have to say!'

'Saint Peter wasn't married to a Scotch woman, or he'd have known better. Small weakness I see in any of you!'

'Mister Sangster! I will not allow the Scriptures to be spoken of in that irreverent manner. And you an elder of the Fre Church! For shame!'

'The Scriptures command wives to obey their husbands, and I tell you to put out your candle, and hold your tongue!'

'I won't have Scripture bandied in his irreverent way! Pray who are you? to take its sacred precepts in your lips, you worldly-minded man. But it's none of your fleeting temporal concerns

I'm thinking about! It's the Church itself.'

'Well, my dear, it can keep till morning; it can't take fire to-night. That's one advantage of it's not being built yet! And you've deaved me often enough before about Widow Forester's kale-yard and all the rest of it--Get to bed!'

'It's not the church stance I'm thinking about. It's our souls! I'm afraid, nay I know we have been placing our immortal interests in the hands of a man of Belial!'

'What are you havoring about, now, gude-wife?--man of Belial?--speak plain English or honest Scotch!'

'It's true! James Sangster, Roderick Brown is a man of sin!'

'We're all sinners, my dear. If you'd only mind that always, and that it includes yourself, you'd speak more charitably of your neighbours. I wish I was as sure of myself, or you either, as I am of young Brown. He's a true christian--the very salt of the earth!'

'The salt has lost its savour, then, for he's a bad man!'

'Oh fie, Mrs. Sangster! And it's not a month yet since you were talking of marrying him to our Sophia! and I really felt like agreeing with you for once. He'd make a better man for her than that whiskered gomeral down stairs--for all his siller. I'm thinking its the Englishman's bawbees, mistress, have changed your tune.'

'I am *not* mercenary!' retorted Mrs. Sangster, stiffening herself in her dignity and her best English; 'and you well know it! Though but for my christian prudence, your standing in the world, and your balance at the bank, which is more within your narrow comprehension, would not be what they are!'

'Hoity toity, woman! no offence! Well! you've woke me up, at any rate now, (the pertinacity of these weaker vessels!) so say your say and have done!' and thereupon he sat up in bed, adjusting the white nightcap with its tufted summit over his red sun-burnt face. The clouds of sleep had entirely dispersed themselves, and with them every shadow of ill-humour; but there was a twinkle at the corner of his eye at the absurdity of his wife's vehemence, which she found harder to bear up against. 'Tell away, my dear, I'm listening.'

His wife cleared her voice and opened her lips, but nothing came.

'A mountain in labour and out comes a mouse! "*ridiculus mus*" we used to say at the Grammar School of Forfar.'

'There's nothing ridiculous about it!' retorted the lady, snatching at an excuse to become indignant again, and so bear up under the tranquil cynicism in her husband's face. 'But you men are always for casting ridicule on serious things. You think it shows your superiority, I suppose.'

'Never mind, my dear, go on with your story.'

'Well, as I said already, he's a bad man. He has brought the innocent confiding daughter of that poor lone, widow Tirpie to harm, and now he is not only concealing his sin, but, as one may say, glorying in it, and trading on it to get a reputation for beneficence before the whole parish. He brings it home as a poor foundling rescued from the sea, persuades his sister to adopt it, and actually has the effrontery and the profanity to hold it up for baptism, and take on himself the vows before the whole congregation.'

'Did old Tibbie Tirpie tell you all that? Is she publishing the disgrace of her own child?'

'It wasn't she who told me, but I have no doubt when you call her and the girl up before you in the Kirk Session, they will confess the whole.'

'And if Tibbie is not your informant, pray is it the daughter? And what corroborating evidence can she show? I wonder you would lend so ready an ear to the assertions of a designing quean, whose conduct, by her own confession, has shaken her claim to credit.'

'Oh you men! you are all hard alike, and scornful, when a weak woman is the sufferer--is that your manliness? But it was not the girl who confessed to me. I venture to think that not the most impudent would come to *me* with such a tale. I trust my character as a virtuous matron stands high enough to save me from contamination such as that.'

'No doubt, my dear--I should not like to be in her shoes, at any rate, if she did venture so far--your virtue would be too much for her--and would not spare her.'

'I hope not, Mr. Sangster! Though you say it as though it were a disparagement. The evidence is all circumstantial, as it must necessarily be, in a case of secret sin and hypocrisy; but it fits so well together, and is so conclusive, I have no doubt whatever in the matter. Less has hung a man before now; but then that was in cases of sheep stealing--a very different affair. Sheep are property, and you men are keen enough where that is concerned. This is a case of souls, and till women and ministers get a voice in your law-making, there's little justice to be looked for.'

'The Lord grant I may be removed before that day arrives. The women and the ministers ride us roughly enough at home, but when it comes to making our laws, and governing us publicly I hope I shall be away--But, to return to our mutton--not the sheep-stealing, but the matter in hand--what is your circumstantial evidence? And where did you hear it?'

'The most startling circumstances, as far as I can recollect them at present, are, that it was on that dark night of the storm, that the girl returned home after a long and unexplained absence. That same night, as I am informed, in the dark and storm, when nobody could see him, he stole away, and the next morning brought in the child. Observe the coincidence. Then there was the conduct of the girl at the child's baptism. It was quite startling as described to me. So like the workings of an awakened conscience! And the unwillingness she showed to look at the destroyer of her peace. She actually rose and left the meeting before he stood up to offer the child for baptism. As I was not an eye-witness of that, however, I cannot express it so strongly to you as it was impressed on me. Then he has been seen coming out of the Tirpie cottage, after dark. Oh! repeatedly! And he has been giving them large sums of money. The old woman has carried pounds of it into the village, and it is known that no people about here pass notes of the Peterhead bank except the Browns. Now! what do you say to all that, James Sangster?'

'Nothing, my dear, at present. Who told you it all?'

'It came to me in quite a providential way, seeing that I felt rather under an obligation to Roderick Brown just then, and therefore softened to him in the matter of his courtship to our Sophia. We got lost in the mist this forenoon on Craig Findochart, and we all got scattered. If it had not been for Roderick Brown, I believe I might have been there yet. But we got down at last, and came right upon a shepherd's shieling, where I waited and got dried, till a vehicle could be sent for me from the inn. The shepherd's wife,--Boague is her name, and I owe her some flannel for her hospitality,--seems a very worthy woman, and an earnest adherent of the church, and it was she told me it all. Told it in a very proper spirit. I believe she is a worthy woman, and seemed to deplore most properly the sad falling away of one of our office-bearers. But do you not agree with me, such a man should be made an example of?'

'Made an example of? Whom would I make an example of? I would make an example of the idle tattling woman who makes free with the names and reputations of her betters! If I lived in the good old times when my father was Provost of Forfar, and if I filled his shoes, I would have her tawed through the town at the cart's tail, and so teach her to weigh her words. And as for you, Kirsty! I am surprised that a good woman should lend so ready an ear to foolish slander, without a shred of proof to support it. You have known the Browns all their lives, and yet you will let the idle blathers of an ignorant cottar wife set you against them! I thought you had set your mind on getting the girl for Peter. How will circulating slanders against the brother help you there?'

'The girl, Mr. Sangster, has other views, it would appear. She left Peter in the mist and rode away with Captain Drysdale to Inchbracken. Brother and sister seem both tarred with the same stick. But she shall never have it to say that she jilted my Peter! When her brother is disgraced that 'will be reason enough why Peter should not press his suit with the young lady.'

'Don't let your tongue run away with you, my dear. I see no prospect, and I hope there *is* none, of your ever disgracing Roderick Brown, and I warn you never to repeat to any one the trumpery story you have woke me up to listen to; your husband will have heavy damages to pay, if you so far forget yourself.'

'But it is a spiritual matter, and will go before the Church Courts.'

'Even if it did, my dear, a civil action would lie, so you had better take care. The damages would be perhaps a thousand pounds, besides expenses.'

'But what did we leave the Establishment for, if we are still to be answerable to the Court of Session.'

'If we left it for that purpose, my dear, it was a false move, for we are still the Queen's subjects, and liable to be sued in all her courts. If you circulate a slander to a man's civil injury, you must pay for it, and your circulating it through the Courts of the Free Church will not save you from the consequences, and very properly, too! So take my advice for once, and say no more about it. Now, get to bed.'

Mrs. Sangster had much too high an opinion of her own perspicacity to be moved an inch from her belief in the minister's wrong-doing, by anything her spouse could say; in fact, as a superior woman, she felt bound to believe it all the more on that account. At the same time his plain common sense impressed her uncomfortably, and though she would have scouted to own its influence, she yet had no wish to meet it in collision. She therefore forbore to say anything on the subject next day, though it was much in her thoughts; just as the owner of some delicate fancy article will be careful how he brings it within the brutal swing of a sledge hammer, though he does not therefore part with his property.

Sophia had a bad cold, and Peter was laid up with toothache, swelled face, rheumatism, and most of the other aches and pains possible to frail humanity after being drenched to the skin. Mr.

Sangster had gone off to attend a fair, and only the hostess was left to amuse the guest. Mr. Wallowby had sauntered round the garden, the stable, and the cattlepens, consuming much tobacco as he went, and now he was returned indoors. Mrs. Sangster had provided him with newspapers, magazines and such light reading as she could lay her hands on; he had looked at them and laid them down; and now the two were confronting each other in the drawing-room making themselves miserable in abortive conversation. Neither was more stupid or worse informed than people in general; on the contrary, both were sharp enough; but by no device could they contrive to make their ideas run in parallel trains. Whatever was said by the one was answered by the other at cross purposes, till both felt themselves sinking into helpless fatuity. Wallowby held up his book that he might yawn behind it, the lady went to the window, that she might take the same relaxation undisturbed.

The sight of a carriage approaching was a welcome apparition, mingled too with a little surprise as she descried the Inchbracken liveries, and bethought her that there was no election in prospect; for it was seldom, save for reasons of state and the good of the nation, that Lady Caroline vouchsafed the light of her countenance on the dwellers at Auchlippie.

Mrs. Sangster was immensely gratified by the kind interest in her welfare which had prompted Miss Finlayson's visit, and was pathetic in her regrets for the severe headache which had deprived her of the sight of her ladyship in person that forenoon.

Miss Finlayson then turned to Mr. Wallowby, enquired the length of his stay in the neighbourhood, and expressed Lady Caroline's regret that she had not seen him at dinner the day he shot with Captain John, and mentioned the many interesting things they had been disappointed of showing him.

Mr. Wallowby was a radical, and therefore enjoyed the idea of having excited interest in a titled lady--all democrats like distinguished company. The American variety live, when possible, exclusively among Colonels and Judges; but in England where these are few, a lord or a lady is a being whom it is happiness to have spoken to. He expressed his wish to call before leaving the neighbourhood, and she, by enumerating the real or imaginary engagements of her ladyship for all the days but one, secured that if the visit were made it should be on a day when the gentlemen would be absent. She dared not inflict a distasteful guest upon them, but she knew she could coax Lady Caroline into complaisance for one afternoon. She also produced a few of her best smiles and pretty speeches, and offered them tentatively to the gentleman, who rose to them freely; and, to change the metaphor, was indeed in very high feather.

When the visit came to an end, he manifested considerably more *empressement* in seeing the lady to her carriage than Mrs. Sangster thought was at all called for, and she went up stairs at once to her daughter's room to see if she could not be brought down, and make a little way with him in his present lively mood, or show at least how much handsomer she was than the agreeable young person who had just driven away. Alas! poor Sophia's cold in the head was too severe, her face was swollen and flushed, her eyes were watery, and several letters of the alphabet were beyond her power of speech. The mother sighed, but had the wisdom to admit she was best in her own room.

Wallowby went up to see Peter, who was trying to deaden his pains with tobacco, to tell what a remarkably fine girl had just left the house. Peter would not admit the fineness, but he mentioned what told more strongly in her favour--her relationship to the noble family of Pitthevlis.

'Really aristocratic!' said Wallowby. 'I knew it, the moment I saw her. A most elegant person, and she seems to know a well-looking Englishman when she sees one. Most remarkable, Peter, how well we got on together!--seemed to understand each other from the very first. You know I am rather a stiff and reserved fellow in general, with perhaps just a shade of hauteur. But somehow, we just dropped into each other's way at once. Most remarkable!' Somehow he forgot to say anything about the intended visit to Inchbracken. In fact he meant to make that alone, and he trusted to Peter's rheumatism lasting long enough to prevent his wishing to accompany him.

CHAPTER XVII.

RODERICK.

When Mary reached home she found her brother already in bed, where he lay tossing uneasily in search of the rest and slumber which he could not attain.

His cheeks were flushed with incipient fever, and the tangled hair hung about his face in

matted locks. His eyes were closed, and his lips moved in inaudible mutterings, as he turned restlessly from one side to the other. He complained of an acute pain in his side which caught his breath, and a dull aching that smouldered like fire in his bones and joints, which he fancied he could count by their separate twingings.

The sight of his sister seemed to do him good, and when he felt the coolness of her hand on his brow, he closed his eyes and fell into a kind of slumber; but the sleep was not of very long duration, and it was restless and disturbed. The nightmares of the night before fell on him again; groaning and muttering he tossed to and fro, and presently awoke.

The surgeon arrived in due course, and shook his head gravely, while he enjoined the greatest care, as pleurisy or rheumatic fever, or both, appeared to be impending. Roderick lay and muttered, righting with the dismal visions that floated like mists about his brain, and struggling to keep hold of the reality.

In that, however, he found little solace, it seemed more dismal than aught a fevered fancy could conjure up to distress him. Visions of Cain driven forth from home and kindred, to wander over the face of the earth an outcast and a stranger; Abram sent forth to find him a new home in a strange and unknown country, turning his back on all that he had ever known or loved; Job with his children all slain in a single hour; those who had cast away a right hand or plucked out a right eye for the sake of the kingdom of righteousness; all the forlorn and desolate and bereaved he had ever heard or dreamed of, passed in melancholy procession before him, and hailed him as their fellow. He looked upon the stricken train, and questioning each as to the nature of his sorrow; it seemed to him that in their misery, they all had justice or hope or consolation. But his? It stood alone among them all, unmerited, unreasonable, without purpose and without pity. There was nothing he had held too dear to part with, nothing he had kept back, when he laid down all to follow his Church into the wilderness. Then why had this new grief come upon him? and what good end was to be served by enacting anew in his case the parable of the prophet Nathan, and robbing him of the one ewe lamb he cherished in his bosom? Since his boyhood, the whole pure love of his heart had been given to Sophia. Her image had filled a shrine in his inmost thoughts, and he had clothed it in all he knew of pure and holy, and held it for a symbol of unseen good. He had waited till in all reasonableness and truth he could win her for his wife, and she and her parents, in some unspoken measure at least, had consented to his resolve.

Now, all of a sudden he hears from the lips of her own mother, wrung from them, as it were unawares, under the dread pre-occupation of impending danger, that another man's suit is entertained or courted, and so utterly trivial are any pretensions of his held to be, that their very existence is overlooked, and himself made the confidant of the mother's views. Oh, how can he resign himself? How pluck away the image around which all his hopes and dreams, the very roots and tendrils of his being have entwined themselves for so many years? Pluck out an eye? It were to pluck out his very heart, and cast it from him--to cease to think--to cease to live. Yet if she were to become another man's wife he would have to do it. He groaned. The universe seemed falling in on him, his head swam, and he fell into a dose.

When he next awoke the emotional strain was somewhat relaxed. His thoughts would run in no other channel, but he began now to muse, and plan, and question. Was it indeed decided? Or was it as yet but a plan of the mother? Had Sophia consented? And even if she had, was it of her own free will, and with the concurrence of her affections? Or was it a mere compliance with the wishes of her parents, while she had no sufficient reason to admit a preference elsewhere? For the unmaidenliness, as he would have called it, of loving unsought, was not to be dreamed of in the case of Sophia.

'Ah!' he cried aloud, 'Who knows? I have never spoken, or----' the rest would not frame itself in words, but a vision arose before his mind's eye, or rather many visions, remembrances of all the sweetest and most endearing looks, or what he regarded as such, that she had ever given him; and as he thought, his poor chilled soul grew warmer and more at ease, and the throbbing in his head grew easier.

'The venture is worth making,' he said presently. And thereupon he rose from bed and sat down before his desk, which, as already mentioned, was in another part of the same room.

Mary was not present at the moment, so there was no one to offer opposition. He drew to him some paper and prepared to write. His mind had been seething with emotion, but as he took the pen in his hand, the thoughts grew hazy, and refused to shape themselves in words,--they refused to be written down. Fluttering and whirling before him like the disordered gleams in a moving prism, they would not be caught, and yet kept tantalizing him by settling upon his pen, till he tried to write them, when they would dissipate again in a new and perturbed whirl of tempestuous feeling. He clasped his hands upon his aching brow, but it ached worse than ever, and he sat stupified in blank despair.

Words came after a while, and by and by he began to write, but the writing when it was done had to be torn up, and the work begun again anew. Sheet after sheet was written and destroyed, and the scattered flakes gathered like snowdrifts about his chair. He wearied himself in abortive efforts, but at least he deadened the acuteness of his misery. The fantastic pains and throes of composition were an anodyne to the more real agonies of his mind. By dividing its action in the endeavour to express its workings, he reduced their intensity. As he grew weary, therefore, he

began to grow calmer, and was able with some sort of coherence to say the thing he meant. It was no great achievement in the way of a love-letter, but under the circumstances a great achievement was impossible. He was too much under the direct influence of his emotion,-- whatever of mental force he had was expended in the suffering, the jealousy, the hopelessness and the longing, and but a fraction could be abstracted to express his meaning.

An emotion when it can be expressed is in a manner relegated from the present to the past,-- from experience to memory; and we may be sure that the poets were pretty well cured of their woes, before they made the world resound with their harrowing despairs and their plaintive wailings. Goethe tells us he got quit of much perilous stuff in writing Werther, but one can scarcely doubt that he was convalescent before he undertook the task. Art is always fiction, though fiction is so seldom art, and its nearest approach to actual veracity is when the artist brings forth the ashes of bygone emotion from the sepulchre of memory, and galvanizes them into a second life before his attentive world.

Such utterance as Roderick had been able to achieve had done him good. The beads of moisture stood on his brow, as he folded and addressed his letter; he directed that it should be given into Sophia's own hands, and then returning to his bed, he closed his eyes with a long sigh of relief, and fell into a peaceful sleep.

The letter was as follows:--

'My dear Sophia,

'For this once I must so address you, even if it be permitted me to do so never again. I am sick in bed, in consequence of yesterday's misadventure, so unable to come to you myself and speak, and it has come to my knowledge that an offer of marriage is already, or will shortly be made to you, therefore I write.

'I owe it to myself, that you should know before you have given an answer, that I too desire you to look on me as your suitor.

'I had meant to wait till after my ordination, but I cannot run the risk of letting another man speak while I remain silent.

'Oh, Sophia, I seem to have loved you ever since I saw you first--as far back as I can recollect--since we were both children; and the love has grown with the years till I believe I could not live if I saw you married to another. That other may be rich, while I am not; but think, Sophia,--he never saw you till the other day--and what can his love be to mine, that has been growing and deepening through so many years?

'Think of it, dearest. Have we not played together as children? sung together as boy and girl? Have we not taken sweet counsel together as christian man and woman? and shall we not walk through life as wife and husband?

'Think of it all, Sophia, and choose with the best wisdom you can command.

'My life will be a lonely journey, if it is not to be shared by you, for you have been to me the symbol of all that is good and holy; but if you find it is not I who can make you happy, at least my prayer shall ever be for a blessing on whatever choice you make.

'Yours utterly,'

'(Signed) RODERICK BROWN.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DELIVERY OF A LETTER.

It was the next day that Joseph Smiley set out to deliver the minister's letter. His instructions were to give it into the hands of Miss Sangster herself, if possible, or at least to make sure that it went direct to her, and to ask if there was any answer. This was a mission very much to Joseph's taste. Being a man of diplomatic genius, he loved to attain his purposes by a circuitous path, and to go round a corner rather than walk straight up to his object.

There was once a minister of the Free Church, of whom a brother divine declared in the bitterness of his soul,—for he had just been circumvented in a cherished scheme,—that he never tied his shoe without having some ulterior motive. If beadles may, without irreverence, be compared with ministers—the very small with the extremely great—Joseph's idiosyncrasy was of a like kind. It was well known that Mrs. Sangster's was an all-pervading presence at Auchlippie; the very cat must drink her milk in the appointed time and place, or the mistress would know why; and all comers and goers and their business were bound to come within her ken. The house, the dairy, the poultry-yard, these were her domain, but fortunately they were also its limit. Queen irresponsible in these, her writ would not run in the adjoining stable and farm-yard. The master had settled that long ago. Good-natured and submissive in the house, he tolerated no petticoat influence beyond its limits; and the mistress, after one or two defeats in the attempt to extend her sway, had yielded long ago to the insuperable, and dwelt at peace in her own kingdom.

As Joseph neared Auchlippie, therefore, he crossed a field or two and made a circuit, so as to approach it from the rear, with the farm-yard to shelter him while he reconnoitred, and to retreat into in case he was seen. He likewise carried under his arm his bag of tools, so that if, later, the lady should come upon him, his errand might appear manifest enough. There was always shelving to be put up or taken down, doors that would not close, locks that would not open, and Joseph was the man to see to it all. The work was well enough, indeed Joseph preferred 'orra jobs,' as he called them, to steady work. The variety amused him, and the sight of new faces, besides gossip, drams, and sometimes a share of the kitchen dinner were among the recommendations; but the pay at Auchlippie was not altogether satisfactory. Mrs. Sangster preferred paying in kind to disbursing her silver. Joseph would return home at night with an armful of old clothes, serviceable enough, perhaps, but with the drawback attending them, that he could never tell when his accounts were to be considered square. The next time he did an 'orra job' at Auchlippie, he would be reminded of the load of things he had carried away last time, and given to understand that the present 'job' was to be looked upon as in part working out the previous haul.

For these reasons Joseph was not disposed to obtrude his services. He now went quietly into the stable yard, and fell into chat with the lad who was rubbing up the gig in which his master would shortly start for a neighbouring market. He kept his eyes well open, and it was not long before he descried a petticoat in the distance. It was certainly not Sophia. A second look showed it to be Jean Macaulay, the kitchen-maid, returning from the garden with a basketful of green stuff, and Jean, he bethought him, was a very particular friend of his own, and he might do a trifle of business for himself as well as fulfil his commission.

He vaulted lightly over a gate, and with three or four skips intercepted Jean, just where the blind wall of the dairy intercepted all view from the house.

Here with his gayest smile he caught with both his hands—-not Jeanie, it was only her disengaged hand held out at arm's length; for she had seen him in time, and laughed merrily in his face, while she held her own well beyond his reach.

Joseph had missed his chance of a salute, and had to content himself with a salutation.

'Haud awa! ye caperin' antic!' she cried, 'an' behave yersel' afore folk. Yonder's Jock Spiers e'y yaird! Lay, by! An' what brings *you* about the town at this time o' day, my mannie?'

'What wad it be, Jean, but yer ain sonsie face? I'm aye thinkin' o' ye, whan I canna see ye! I canna lie quiet i' my lane bed, lassie, for the thocht o' ye! Sae here I am.'

'Awa, ye leein' haveril! Do you tak me for a fule, to think ye're to blaw the stour i' my e'en that gate? Lay by, now! (Joseph had become demonstrative again), or I'll gie ye a gouff i' the lug'll gar't stound the next half-hour! An' I canna be claverin' here a' day. Awa wi' ye!' and she caught up her basket.

'What ails ye, lass? Winna ye bide a wee? It's no often a body gets ye yer lane for a crack. Bide a wee!'

'I canna bide, man, ey noo! Gin the mistress comes ben an' dizna find the pat on the fire; I'se get my kale through the reek, I'se warrant ye!'

'Here, than, Jean! Here's a letter frae the minister to Miss Sophia. An' ye maun gie't to naebody but her ain-sel'. I'se be hingin' round here-awa, an' ye maun fesh back the answer belive. Winna ye, noo, lass?'

'We'll see,' said Jean moving off; 'she was bakin' pies whan I gaed out, gin she hae na gaen butt the house, I'se gie her't. Ye'll be here whan I come out? For I'll no can bide lang.' And folding the letter in her apron she hastened into the house.

Sophia was still in the kitchen, giving the last ornamental touches to her pies, when the letter was brought her.

'From Glen Effick, eh? A note from Mary Brown I suppose. And an answer is wanted? very well.' She slipped it into her pocket, and retired to her room to read it at her leisure.

No one could have been more surprised than was Sophia at the contents of that letter, and the

earnestness and solemnity with which they were expressed. She had never received a love-letter in her life, and had some indistinct idea from what her mother had occasionally said, that the subject was scarcely a proper one in real life. It was something that was to be read about in books, especially in poetry books and tales, but of these she had not read many. Her mother considered them relaxing to the mind, except when they were of a theological cast, and refrained from such frivolities as love scenes; the biographies of serious people, in fact, had been the staple of her reading.

She had been accustomed to look forward to a time when she would be married, but the aspect in which the change of state had chiefly presented itself to her mind had been the being mistress of a house of her own. From the time Mr. Wallowby had been expected to visit them, her mother had spoken to her of the possibility of his wishing to marry her, and of the wealthy and distinguished position she would in that case be called on to fill. She had thought of it as something that would be very nice if it took place, though also rather formidable, and wondered if it would feel very strange and uncomfortable at first; but it had never presented itself to her as a thing which she was to make any effort to gain, or that it was a matter in regard to which she would be called on to exercise any independent choice. Her parents had arranged everything for her hitherto, and knew what was best and most proper. They had sent her to school, and decided what she was to study there, and she had studied it accordingly. In the proper time they would arrange for her being married, and it would be for her to fill as she best could the position they might decide on as best for her.

And yet Sophia was not a person without character or full average intelligence, as no doubt some day would be made manifest enough, when at length her individuality should waken up and assert itself. It was only that she had lived in retirement, and been 'very carefully brought up,' that is to say, in an especially narrow and artificial groove, that she was slow and quiescent herself, and had an unusually energetic and masterful mother.

As regarded Roderick, she liked him very much for a friend, better than her own brother Peter, because he was kinder and more attentive to her, and better than his sister Mary, the only other person she had known equally long, because she was 'only a girl;' but that Roderick should feel for her anything so different from this tepid friendship, was something beyond her comprehension. She read the letter again, a third time, and even a fourth, utterly bewildered by its earnestness, and finally unable to make anything of it all, she carried it to her mother.

Mrs. Sangster opened her eyes in surprise. Had a letter reached an inmate of her castle without her knowledge? Had her daughter received one without its passing under her censorship? What were things coming to? She took the letter and put on her glasses.

'From? Roderick Brown! as I'm a christian woman! And what? I do declare--a love-letter! Oh----!!' Many indignant thoughts swept wildly through her soul, many words hurried to her lips. 'The serpent!' But at the sound of her own voice, she paused. Her daughter knew nothing, no one had ever dared to sully her pure ear with such a tale; and should her mother's be the hand to rend the veil of innocence, and let in the sad knowledge that there is evil in the world? She could not. And yet she must say something, if only to cover her discomposure.

'And has it come to this, that a daughter of mine has actually received a love-letter! You! Sophia Sangster! what kind of conduct do you practise, that a libert---- a---young man feels encouraged to write you a love letter, and make you a proposal? Where has been your maidenliness? Your common sense of propriety? When I was a young woman, no man breathing would have presumed to write about love to me!'

'Mamma! I have done nothing. The letter is as great a surprise to me as it can be to you!'

'But you *ought* to have done something. If you had behaved with becoming propriety and decorum, he never would have had the courage to write. But you never had proper spirit! Go to your room, Miss!'

Sophia withdrew in open-eyed amazement. She was not prone to tears, and under long habitude had become somewhat callous to strong language. Her mother's ebullition merely added an accession to the bewilderment Roderick's letter was already occasioning her. Other girls in the parish had been married, and it seemed to her, that, somehow, their bridegrooms must have spoken or written to express their wishes, else how came they to be known? and none of these had been more frequent visitors at the homes of their future brides, than had Roderick been at her father's. The imputation of unmaidenliness, then, had been only one of her mother's tantrums, things she had been used to all her life, and knew to contain more noise than mischief. She must not return an answer to the letter--that seemed all the outburst meant, and it was rather a relief to her to think so, for, to tell the truth, she would not have known what to say. Roderick's grave and sacramental way of putting the matter, seemed to make any light and ordinary answer akin to blasphemy, and how otherwise was one to answer, where feelings were barely up to the level of commonplace? So she sat herself down with her hands in her lap, and thought afresh over her remarkable letter.

Mrs. Sangster walked up and down her room, 'frying,' as her cook would have said, with indignation, at this abandoned young man, who, steeped in iniquity, had yet dared to raise his eyes to her dovecot. She would have liked to hound him through every court of the Church, and

to let loose every cur in the parish at his heels; but after what Mr. Sangster had said about actions for libels, and the Court of Session, there was no use thinking of that. She stamped her foot in her impatience, and anon wiped her eyes, as she thought of the pathetic helplessness of her gentle and interesting sex. No notice should be taken of the letter; that was as much as she could venture on. But how had it come? That was worth knowing.

Repairing to the kitchen, she learned that the minister's man who brought it was still hanging about the premises. Then thinking to pump him more conveniently, she bethought her of a new shelf for the store-room, and sent for Joseph to give him the order. He appeared, but with no great show of alacrity, and it was not till he had heard orders given for his subsequent refreshment, and had actually fingered the lady's coin, that he began to show something like interest.

'And what's the news in Glen Effick, Joseph?'

'No muckle, mem. Tarn Jamieson's coo's gotten a cauf. I'm thinkin' that's about a.'

'And your master the minister? No news about him?'

'Weel mem, he's lyin' sin' yester mornin', whan he cam hame frae Gortonside. But I'm thinkin' ye ken better about that nor me. Folk says ye an' him got a terrible dookin' e'y burn, up by on Findochart. An' gin it hadna been for him ye'd ne'er hae gotten out ava, mem. An' noo it's a' ower, the folk says he's like to dee o't.'

'Indeed, we had a most trying time, Joseph, and have much cause for thankfulness, in having escaped as we did, and I hope Mr. Brown's illness will not prove serious. But, tell me, are there no reports or rumours about him circulating in the village?'

'I kenna what ye're drivin' at, mem, I'm sure.'

'There is, then, nothing stirring down the Glen at all?'

'I ken o' naething, mem.'

'Widow Tirpie's girl has come home again I hear, and looks poorly.' Joseph started slightly, and glanced suspiciously under his eyelids, but he answered impassively enough.

'I heard sae, mem, but I haena seen her mysel.'

'And is nobody's name associated in the village with that?' Joseph, in his discomposure, missed his hammer stroke, and gave himself a severe rap on the thumb, which with a gulp he transferred to his mouth.

'I'm no sure 'at I guess what ye're drivin' at, mem.'

'And about her child?' continued Mrs. Sangster, still intent on learning something.

'I ne'er heard tell that she had ane,' said Joseph, waxing more and more uneasy.

'Do the people ever remark a likeness between her and the baby Miss Brown has adopted, for instance?'

Joseph turned round and looked Mrs. Sangster in the face; he felt relieved he was safe, but he was also astonished.

'I hae na heard ony body speakin' that gate; an' gin I micht mak sae free, mem, do you see ony yersel?'

'You are a canny man, Joseph, but I think the more of you for it. It would not do for you to be disclosing your master's secrets, but you must remember you are the servant of the church as well, and that she has the highest claim on your fidelity, and I don't mind saying to you that I see a very remarkable resemblance, notwithstanding that the eyes are of a different colour, and the hair fair instead of dark. That's what makes it so remarkable! The features are all different, there is nothing that can be set aside as a mere accidental coincidence, and yet the likeness is so manifest to me! Do you really mean that nobody in the village has noticed it?'

'Deed, mem, an' I hae na juist heard quite sae muckle as that. But ye see we're plenn folk down by, an' maun look til our betters for guidance, whiles?'

'Very true. But what are they saying about it all?'

'I hae telled ye a' I ken, mem, an' that's naething.'

'And what do you think yourself, then, of all these rumours and suspicions that are flying about? Can it really be possible that Mr. Brown is the father of that infant, do you think?'

'God forbid, mem, that our young minister suld hae sae far fa'en frae grace! I wad houp for the best! But it's an auld an' true sayin', that there's aye water whaur the stirk's drooned, an we ken

oursels there's nae reek but whaur there's burnin'.'

But come now, Joseph, is not Mr. Brown constantly going to see those women after dark? And does he not give them a great deal of money?'

'He's been there, mem, I ken, but he gangs to a' body; it's his wark. An' he's gien them siller, but he's aye doin' that as weel, whan he thinks folk want it. I see na weel 'at that need tell against him. Hooever, as ye say yersel', the suspecion wad na licht, athout some grund. It's a bad job.'

CHAPTER XIX.

SUBORNATION OF PERJURY.

It was late in the afternoon when Joseph started homewards. He had spent a cheerful day, and was in the best of spirits. The servants at Auchlippie had been most hospitable, and his friend Jean assiduous in replenishing his cog from the kitchen beer-barrel; she had been gay and saucy in the extreme, and her dexterity with tongue and fist, whenever he went beyond the permitted limit, had excited his sincere respect and admiration.

'A clever cummer 'at can haud her ain wi' the next ane! An' hech, but she's gleg!' was Joseph's admiring soliloquy, as he tramped down the road.

'She's gotten a pose e'y bank, an' her granny's a bien auld body, wi' naebody else to leave her gear til,' he continued, 'wha kens?' but here the soliloquy died into deeper reflection, and he tramped along in meditative silence. How comfortable and respected he might be, established in the granny's croft, as master, with Jean to minister to him and keep things brisk, with an occasional passage of wordy warfare. But the shadow of Tibbie rose in his mind and blocked the path. She would forbid the banns and involve his schemes in utter confusion, unless she could be quieted.

He thought over his conversation with Mrs. Sangster. Oh! If Tibbie had only been there to hear it too! Some idea might have struck her, that would have induced her to loosen her hold on him, and try for higher game. We can but judge others by ourselves, and he knew that with himself an arithmetical consideration was the weightiest that could be presented, and that a pretext by which pounds might be extorted unjustly, would seem more attractive than an honest claim which could only be realized in shillings and pence. If she would only slacken her hold on him for a very little while, he thought he could manage that she should never renew it again.

So reflecting, he reached home. It was Saturday evening, and there were the usual preparations to make on the braeside for the services of the morrow, and thither he now repaired.

The evening's shadows were gathering round the tent, and creeping up the brae--sad and transparent like ghosts of the good resolutions begotten there last Sunday, and since then smothered and trampled to death in the hurry and busy turmoil of the world's life; or so they might have appeared had any pious and pensive soul been there to witness them, but there were none such. Only Tibbie Tirpie rose from the tent or pulpit steps, to confront Joseph as he approached key in hand.

'Tibbie? Hoo's a' wi' ye, woman? A sicht o' ye's gude for sair e'eri.' It's lang sin' we hae forgathered.'

'Juist sin' last Sawbith! An' ye hae na dune as ye said ye wad, yet--sae the langer time the mair shame to ye.'

'Ye canna weel say that noo, Tibbie! come! I said I wad speak t'ey minister for ye, an' there's naebody e'y clachan but kens he gied ye siller. Was na that keepin' tryst?'

'What kind o' a gowk do ye tak me for, Joseph Smiley? Think ye ye'r to slip through my fingers that gate? Ye ken brawly it's no the minister's siller I'm seekin', it's yours, an yersel' along wi't. An' that I'se hae, an gin ye winna richt my lassie by fair means, I'se gang to Mester Sangster an' the minister an' shame ye, an that'll be the last o' yer bederalship, an' the end o' ye a' thegither round Glen Effick. Think ye I'll let ye aff o' the scathe, when my puir Tib has to thole the scorn?'

'Whisht woman! yer tongue's rinnin' awa wi' ye. Gin yell juist ca' canny, an' do biddin', ye'se do far mair for Tibbie nor I cud. Ye see, Luckie, I'm juist as ane nicht say, naething but a puir

earthen vessel, no gude for muckle, wi' nae gear, an' sma' wut to gather't wi'. What wad ye say noo til a gentleman for Tib? It's what the lassie ocht to hae gotten wi' her bonnie face, an' gin what a' the folk says was true, belike she'd get ane.'

'I kenna what ye're drivin' at, my man, but gin ye're gaun to send me on a fule's errand, an' sae gar me let ye aff, ye're sair mistaen; an' gin ye come na in whiles as ye gang by an' gie the lass her dues o' coortin', fair out afore folk, I'se gang down til auld MacSiccar, an' he'll hae ye up afore the Shirra, or I'm mistaen, an' syne yell ken whether a law plea or a waddin' taks maist siller, an' aiblins ye'll hae to wive wi' her a' the same.'

'But hoo wid ye like the minister e'y stead o' the bederal? wadna that be something worth while? The folk thinks that's the richts o't a' e'y noo. An' gin ye'll juist haud them on their ain gate, an' keep yer ain jaws steekit--wha kens? A minister wad wed wi' the Deil's ain--dochter afore he'd hae himsel' or the Kirk misca'd. The folk says yon's Tibbie's bairn he taks tent on, doon by, an' what for need ye fash to deny't? gin the wein cam out o' the sea he'll can bring nae pruif, an' the folk hae taen't i' their heids to think the ither thing, sae gin ye wad juist threip the same gate aiblins ye'd get yer way o't.'

'The Lord forgie ye, Joseph Smiley, for a blackhearted, twa-faced vagabond! Ye ken weel what a gude maister the minister's been to you, an' ye wad turn round an' gar me lee awa his gude name! But tak ye tent! There was ance anither, gaed to betray a gude master, for the sake o' what he'd mak out o't, an' he gaed an' hanged himsel' afore a' was done--Wha kens? The hemp may be baith sawn an' pued 'at's to mak yer ain grawvit! An' noo I gie ye fair warnin', gin ye come-na by afore Wednesday, I'se gang til auld MacSiccar; sae nae mair o' yer parryin'.' And with a portentous shake of the head she departed.

Joseph was little discomposed; he could hardly expect so startling a proposal to be received otherwise than with indignation, and yet, as by an off chance, it might bear fruit after all. The evil seed just scattered wanted time to germinate, some corner of her mind might yet prove to be a congenial soil, and it might spring up yet in a crop of lies to serve his turn.

Returning home he came upon Ebenezer Prittie, merchant and postmaster, and one of the elders of the church. Ebenezer was a quiet plain man and zealous,--all his life he had heard of the Covenanters, their heroism and their sufferings, and had been taught to think of them as the summit and flower of his country's glory. He felt it to be a privilege to be admitted to their sacred brotherhood, through being a member and office-bearer of the Free Church, and his only misgiving was on account of the exceeding ease of the process, and its cheapness--an entering as it were on the privileges attached to the martyr's crown, at half price. Fighting wild beasts at Ephesus, wielding the sword of the Lord and of Gideon at Drumclog, escaping through the hill mists of the morning from the pursuing troopers of Claverhouse,--to be made heir to, and sharer in, all those deeds of heroism by paying the modern equivalent of so much self-sacrifice, contributing a penny a week to the Sustentation Fund, and sundry moderate payments to the schemes of the church, was cheap indeed. The ministers said so, of course they knew, and why was he to object because the burden was light? He could but support his church all the more warmly if its yoke was easy, and he would do his very best for its advancement.

Rumours about strange conduct on the part of the minister had begun to sift and whisper through the village. With whom they had originated no one could say; known circumstances were appealed to in corroboration, and every one shook his head; but there was no one who stood forward as accuser, and each seemed afraid of the sound of his own voice, in uttering the first word against their hitherto blameless pastor.

Ebenezer having shut up the Post Office had walked along the road to breathe the evening air before retiring for the night. He mused over the rumour as he went, and when Joseph, returning from the 'tent' appeared before him, it was but natural that the subject in his thoughts should come first to his lips.

'What's a' this clashin' about? Joseph Smiley. Ye beut to ken.'

'What clashes, Mester Prittie? Folk wull be aye claverin' ye ken. An' them 'at kens least has aye maist to say about it. For mysel' it taks a' my sma' wuts to mind my ain business.'

'Nae doubt, Joseph, we a' ken ye for a dacent man, an' a quiet; but a body canna keep a calm sough a' thegither in sic like on-gaein's as we're hearing tell o' noo. An' a body has aye their lugs, whether or no.'

'I hae heard tell o' naething, Mester Prittie; but than, ye see, I'm but an orra body rinnin' efter my ain bit trokes, a' round the countryside; an' ye're sittin' yonder e'y middle o' a' thing--the Queen's mails brocht in twice ilka day, an' a' body 'at's onybody rinnin' to ye for their letters. Ye're sure to ken a thing 'at gangs on.'

We a' ken ye for a dacent, carefu' spoken chield, weel eneugh, Joseph, sae ye needna be aye mindin' folk o't. An' losh! What gars ye be sae terrible mim? There's a time to keep yer jaws steekit, we a' ken that, but there's a time to let on as weel! Sae out wi't a' man!'

'Ye maun out wi't yersel, Mester Prittie! For De'il tak me, (but the Lord forgie me for swearin'! tho' efter a' it's but the De'il's name I'm makin' a bauchil o'), gin I ken what ye're efter, wi' yer

winkin's an' yer hirselin's o' the shouter. Juist say what's yer wull, Mester Prittie, an' gin a puir chield can pleasure ye I'se do't. Aye premeesin' ye ken, 'at it's the thing a gude christian an' an honest man may lawfully perform.'

'Ou ay! A' lawfu' eneugh, Joseph! What tak ye me for, laddie? gin the Queen can lippen to me about her mails, it's surely a' safe for Joseph Smiley wi' his bits o' trokes and clashes. But come in by!' Ebenezer had turned round on accosting Joseph, and had been retracing his steps ever since. They were now in front of the Post Office, and Ebenezer unlocking the door invited Joseph to enter, that they might finish their conversation without fear of interruption.'

'An' noo, Joseph, what's a' about the minister? an' what hae ye to say ower't?'

'What about the minister?--forby 'at he has the cauld? Mistress Sangster fell in a burn, an' he beut to pu' her out; an' she bein' a muckle denty wife, an' rael hefty, he coupet in himsel an' got sair droukit, an' noo he's lyin' wi' the cauld. I see sma' grundlfor clashes there.'

Hoot! ye're no sae simple as ye wad let on! An' it diz na look weel o' ye, Joseph, bein' sae terrible keen to gar folk think ye ken naething. Ye'll hae them jalousin' ye had a finger intil't yersel, my man. Wha's acht yon bairn o' the minister's?'

'I ken naething mair about it nor ither folk! Ye ken as weel as me what he said about it himsel'.'

'An' do ye ken 'at folk says it's Tibbie Tirpie's bairn, an' that he's its faither?'

I hae heard tell 'at folk was sayin' that; but we a' ken there's folk e'y warld wad say onything, an' the dafter it was, the mair they'd haud til't. Do ye believe it yersel', Mester Prittie?'

Weel! that's juist what I dinna ken! Whiles, whan I think o' a' the minister has dune an' come through, I canna believe it ava'; but than, what a' body says maun hae something intil 't, an' they hae sae mony sma' things to lay thegither, a body canna weel help misdoubtin' but there may be something intil 't. An' ye ken, efter a', the flesh is but wake!'

'Hech sirse, ay! rael wake,' sighed Joseph, with a most melancholy swing of the head. 'Rael wake! we hae Scriptur for that. The apostle himsel fand the evil praisent with him, whan he maist wanted to do gude, an' *he* was gude by ordnar. It's little winder gin the lave gangs wrang whiles. It's juist a dispensation, as ane nicht say, or a kind o' warnin' to folk no to be ower sure an' sotten up i' their ain gudeness. Weel I wat we're wake craiters!'

'But what think ye o't, Joseph? Ye're a man o' sense, an' I'd like til hear yer opeenion.'

'A weel, Mr. Prittie, I'm juist like yersel', I dinna weel ken what to think. I've fand him a gude maister, an' he's a fine preacher, an' a' the Hieland folk says he has the Gaelic juist grund, an' he's rael gude to a' body 'at's needin'; but as ye say yersel', the flesh is wake.'

'An' ye see,' said Ebenezer, 'it's sing'lar whan ye pet that an' that thegither, the way it a' fits in. Peter Malloch telled me 'at auld Tibbie Tirpie brocht in a pound note o' the Peterhead Bank the verra day efter he seed the minister slinkin' oot o' her door efter dark, an' we a' ken naebody passes thae notes here ava, but him. I'm fear'd, Joseph, there's something intil 't. An' hoo cud it come intil a' body's head at ae time, gin there wasna some foundation?'

'Lordsake, ay, Mester Prittie! There's aye water whaur the stirk's drooned, we a' ken that, an' there's nae reek athout burnin'. But is na't a' terrible? Sic a fine young minister! an' sic doon-come t'ey Kirk! Ickeybod! Ickeybod! wae's me!'

'Na, na. There maun be nae Ickeybod! An' nae wite te'y Kirk. Ilka sinner maun bear his ain laid, an' Auchan maun be peuten furth frae the congregation o' the Lord. We maun hae't a' up afore the session! an' Joseph, ye'll hae til appear, an' testifee til a' ye ken. We beut to hae this Babylonish gaarment cousten out e'y camp!'

'Preserve us a'! Mester Prittie, it's you 'at beut to testifee; ye ken a' about it, I ken naething.'

'Wha said Ickeybod ey noo? Was that me? An' what meant ye by't, gin ye winna staund to yer word?'

'An' wad ye hae me say Ickeybod to the Kirk Session? An' what wad I say syne? I cud say what ye telled me, Mester Prittie, 'at ye thocht the lassie Tirpie was the mither o' the minister's bairn, but I ken naething mysel'.'

'An' what for wad ye pu' me intil't a'?'

'It was ye telled me, Mester Prittie; noo wha telled you?'

'Faigs an' that's mair nor I ken mysel'. We maun hae a quiet meetin' o' the session, an' gang ower't a' first, an' aiblins we'll ken what to do syne; for there's nae man of Belil sall sit e'y tabernacle gin I can pu' him doon.'

'An ye, hae raison, Mester Prittie! Pu' doon their high places, an' burn their groves wi' fire. It's

a' Scriptur an' sound doctrine. But I'm sayin', sir, hae ye been round to speer for the minister the day? An' hoo are ye gaun to manage for the morn's Kirk?'

'Weel I wat, an' ye hae me there, Joseph. Ye see I juist cudna bring mysel' to gang an' be speerin' for a man whan the folk says he's livin' in open sin. There's nae tellin' what micht come til the skirts o' my ain garment! as ye were sayin' e'y noo, the folk's that set on their reports an' their rumours, there's nae kennin' whaur the next flee may licht; an'--Lord! they micht hae a body's sel' kirned up wi't a'! An' then! think o' me to be taen by the folk for an ill liver. Spoken o' for keepin' company wi' the evil men an' seducers 'at wax worse an' worse, as the word says. An' gin I gaed hame syne, the wife wad be for pu'in the wig aff my cantle, an' layin' the spurtle about my bare lugs; for she's no for prarkin' wi' that gate, *my* mistress! A gude wummin I'll allow, a' the same, but juist terrible on a' ill doin, an' licht on-gaein's. But we maun hae a thocht to the services o' the Sanctuary the morn, an' no hae the folk comin' to the ministry o' the word, an' nae banquet ready for their hungry sauls. We'd hae them stravaigin' the braesides the lieve lang Sawbith day, like puir menseless sheep that hae na gotten a shepherd. Sae, gin ye'll come wi' me, for fear o' pryin eyen, we'se gang round an' see hoo we'll arrange.'

'As they sallied forth they encountered Peter Malloch taking his evening stroll. For once Ebenezer was well pleased at the meeting, and resolved that Peter too should accompany them, and be another witness to the conservation undefiled of his skirts--a purely poetical figure by the way, for he wore a sort of jacket, his wife and tailoress being economical of cloth. The article of dress was, in fact, that which his betters of an earlier generation were wont to denominate a spencer.

It required no pressing to secure Peter's company. He scented promotion in being thus associated with one of the eldership, in church business, and it seemed a first step upwards from the Deacons' Court to the sacred college of the Kirk-session. Under other circumstances this honour would have been carefully withheld, for Peter's popularity among the church officers was not great. To use Ebenezer's own words on another occasion, 'He's a gude man, an' a leeberal, but oh! he's a meddlin' body.' Ebenezer's skirts, however, were uppermost in his thoughts then, and their invisible folds sufficed to cover many an objection from his view.

Reaching the minister's door, they found Miss Brown in the act of dismissing the surgeon. Her brother had at last fallen asleep with the assistance of an opiate, and he was not on any pretext whatever, so said the Doctor, to be disturbed. Miss Brown led them into Eppie Ness's apartment, where that good soul was sitting with the baby in her arms.

Ebenezer regarded the poor child fixedly, and gasped in his indignation. How could he think, or arrange for the ministrations of the sanctuary in the very presence of that child of confusion? His brow darkened, and no one can guess what eloquent utterance he might not have given forth, if Mary Brown with her pleasant smile, had not pointed to a chair for him to sit down, and asked what arrangements he proposed to make for the church supply on the morrow.

As when, on the aching head of a fevered invalid buzzing with a thousand delirious fancies, a cool soft hand is laid, banishing uneasy nightmares, and bringing back the patient to waking common sense, even so the innocent friendliness of Mary's glance dissipated the whole swarm of crazy suspicions for the moment, and brought Ebenezer's thoughts back to their wonted wholesome tenor; and though the little thing crowed in its nurse's arms more than once, he forgot about its being perhaps an imp, or at any rate something unholy, and would even have admitted in words that it was a 'bonny bairn,' but that Peter Malloch sat at his elbow.

The minister had been looking to see some of his elders all the afternoon, and in the end had jotted down on paper his desire that Mr. Sangster, Mr. Prittie, and another of the elders should each give a prayer, and that Ebenezer should read to the people a chapter of the Saints' Rest, as a substitute for the usual sermon, and call a meeting of the Session and Deacons' Court for Monday evening. There was no business therefore to transact, Joseph was despatched to Auchlippie with the message for Mr. Sangster, and the others withdrew.

Ebenezer felt relieved when he was once more in the open air and there was no further possibility of an interview with the minister, for he had thought it would be but right, and accordingly had screwed up his courage to say a word in season if the opportunity should occur. At the same time he was full of dread as to how it would be taken; indeed he could conceive of no possible way in which it could be taken that would not be unpleasant, and therefore he felt positively rejoiced when the danger was past. Nothing disagreeable had happened, and yet he could stand up boldly before his conscience, as one who had not shirked a duty however painful; and when, in the privacy of his home, he went over the events of the day, he was indeed a proud man under the praises which that incarnate conscience, the wife of his bosom, bestowed upon her steadfast and faithful Ebenezer.

CHAPTER XX.

IN A SICK ROOM.

When Roderick had written his letter he fell into a long and deep sleep, and it was daylight before he awoke. He was calmer in mind than he had been since he was taken ill, but it was the stillness of exhaustion. His fevered thoughts had been labouring up and down a never-ending gamut of feeling, like a prisoner tramping hopelessly up a revolving wheel, ever the same mountain of misery and despair rising before him, toil to surmount it as he might. He had climbed and climbed unceasingly--purposeless and hopeless, unable to stop, till at length, worn out, he had, as it were, fallen back in complete prostration. His waking was like that of one who has fallen from a height--stunned, the returning of far-ebbed consciousness was slow, and he would, if he could, have pushed it back again, and returned to oblivion.

He closed his eyes and turned from the light, courting the retreating footsteps of beneficent sleep, but that gentle healer refused to be detained, and he was awake. By-and-by he saw his letter carried away to its address, and he set himself to wait patiently for the return of his messenger, some time in the afternoon.

The rheumatic symptoms which had added greatly to his unrest, the day before, were abated, and his medical adviser expressed strong hope of being able to remove them altogether; but the distress in his chest had increased, his breathing was laboured and painful, threatening to develop into a serious attack.

The surgeon looked round the room, it was not a promising sick-room for an affection of the lungs. The walls, where they could be seen behind the book shelves, were stained with moisture; there was the cold earthen floor beneath the carpet, and a pervading flavour of mouldy dampness through the room, which seemed to grow only more perceptible when more fuel was piled on the hearth. When the weather was dry the windows could be opened, and with the help of a bright fire, a moderately sweet atmosphere could be obtained after a time; but whenever rain without necessitated the closing of the windows, the stuffy savour of mouldiness again took possession of the place.

Roderick lay and waited. He tried to read, but his eyes soon grew weary, and his thoughts would not fix themselves on the page, though he tried one book after another. It pained his chest to converse, and he could only possess his soul in patience, and wait Joseph's return.

But Joseph came not. Noon passed, the shadows crept round and lengthened, but still no sign. It might be that Sophia required time to consider his letter. In that there was at least this much of hope, that if she had become engaged to the Englishman there would have been no occasion for her to delay in saying so. He grew restless as the afternoon advanced, and by evening was so flushed and increasingly feverish that they gave him a composing draught, and so got him to sleep.

In the morning he was dull and stupid for some hours, but gradually the fumes of the night's potion dissipated. His first enquiry was what letters or messages had come. There had been none. It seemed strange that no member or office-bearer of his hitherto attached flock should have come near him. Some of the more remote and scattered would not know, but it was strange the villagers should hold aloof. Could they have imagined that his illness might be infectious? and yet they were not wont thus to avoid contagion. The very elders, part of whose duty it was to visit the sick, had kept away; and although they might have been expected to take some interest in seeing the pulpit filled, they yet had allowed Saturday to pass without coming near him. Even Mr. Sangster, the presiding elder had not come, although the illness had been brought on in attending upon his wife, and he must have known all about it. He would know also of the letter to Sophia. Could it be on account of that that he did not come? Yet why? If he had other views for the settlement of his daughter, why did he not say so? The silence was getting unbearable.

Sunday proved to be rainy, greatly to Mrs. Sangster's relief. She availed herself of the excuse to remain at home, her son and daughter were both laid up with severe colds, and Mr. Wallowby was not inclined to get himself wet. Mr. Sangster was therefore the sole occupant of the phaeton, and he did not reach the village till the church hour had arrived, and he had to hasten straight to the tent. There, with the associates Roderick had named, he did his best to extemporize some resemblance to a church service to the few shepherds (proof to rain and tempest) and old women crouching under umbrellas, who alone, defying the elements, had assembled as usual for their weekly meal of doctrine.

The diet of public worship was got over as speedily as possible, and at the conclusion a few parishioners knocked in passing to enquire after the minister's health. They were so few, however, as to excite the surprise of Mary, as well as her brother, and there had been no elder or deacon among them.

In the end Mr. Sangster did appear, he was admitted to the sick-room, and manifested the most cordial sympathy in Roderick's illness. He explained that the previous day being a market in

a neighbouring town, he had gone thither, and had only got home a few minutes before Roderick's message, requesting him to assist at public worship, had been delivered.

He returned the heartiest thanks for Roderick's care of his wife, and was in every way as friendly as possible, but he made no allusion to the letter to Sophia or to the proposal which it contained, which is not remarkable seeing he had not heard of it.

Roderick lay and listened. The free and friendly tone did not look as if his suit had been received unfavourably, and yet it was alluded to in no way whatever. He gathered courage at last to enquire for Sophia, and was answered that she was laid up with a severe cold, but the manner of the reply was the most simple and ordinary, and showed no sign of an idea that more could be meant by the enquirer than met the ear.

Roderick inferred that the old man was favourable to his suit, and that the young lady was taking time to make up her mind. For the moment, therefore, his hopes rose, his mind grew easier, his body more at rest, and he spent a calmer evening and night than the preceding.

On Monday morning he was very hopeful. She had had a long Sunday undisturbed by the possibility of doing anything else, for it had rained steadily, to reflect on his petition, and she must surely return him an answer to-day.

Neither message, letter, or visitor appeared, however. 'Ah well,' he concluded at last, 'her father will no doubt bring it with him in the evening, when he comes to be present at the meeting of Session.'

The evening came. Roderick's study had been transferred as far as possible into a fitting meeting-place. The screen which closed off his sleeping corner from the room was removed, the writing table and books moved aside as well as might be, and a dozen chairs or more arranged in front of his bed.

The clock over the fireplace marked the quarter to seven, but no one came. It seemed strange that all that day no one should have come to see him. He had lived in the completest harmony with his people, and when in health had had some one always dropping in for a 'crack,' so that it had often been difficult for him to secure the privacy necessary to prepare his sermons. The sudden change was altogether inexplicable to him. Every one seemed to stand aloof, and he seemed to be put under a taboo by the entire population of the glen.

Mary went to the window. No one appeared to be coming, she then went to the door, but the village street was deserted save by a few grimy children tumbling in the gutter. Looking across the road, however, where a lane ran down to the waterside, she descried one or two figures standing. They stood well up to the wall of a house and were nearly hidden from where she stood. Indeed she would have supposed they were actually hiding themselves there and watching, but that she could imagine no possible reason for such a proceeding.

While she stood looking, Peter Malloch came out of his door and walked towards her. Here at any rate was one man coming to the meeting. It was getting late, but then the village time would get astray sometimes. It depended on the watch of the stage coach guard, a not very accurate timekeeper, as its hands would sometimes be moved twenty minutes forward or half an hour back that the coach might arrive at its different stages in time, whereby its internal economy would become deranged, and it would be sent for a fortnight to recruit at the watchmaker's.

Farther down the street she now descried Ebenezer Prittie. No doubt it was the clocks which were to blame. But no! When Peter Malloch reached the corner of the lane, he stopped short for an instant, and then hastily turned down it and disappeared. Ebenezer marched steadily along till he came to the same point, but then he also stopped and straightway vanished, like the other. What could it mean? Roderick was restless and very ill. It would require all his strength to get through the proceedings in the quietest way possible, and she could not think of fretting him, neither could she say anything to Eppie now.

That good soul had been rather tiresome as it was, for the past few days. She was always kind and attentive, though a trifle more motherly than Mary considered the circumstances to warrant, for she objected to the old woman's view of her as a helpless young thing who needed to be clucked over, and protected with beak and feather, like some unfledged nurseling of the poultry yard. Of late Eppie's commiserating sympathy and sad devotion had become nearly overpowering, as Mary could divine no possible ground for anything so pathetic; things had appeared to be going much as usual, the only unwonted circumstance having been her own return home a day or two before in the Inchbracken dog-cart, driven by Kenneth. Eppie must have got it into her head that she was falling under the influence of those black persecutors, the Drysdals, and that her soul was in danger; and that was too provokingly absurd altogether and not to be tolerated.

Mary flushed slightly to think of it, though there came also a light into her eye, as though in some aspects the idea was not so grievous after all. But it must be put down, whether or no, and she had been endeavouring to assume a deportment of severe and dignified distance, which would put the old body back in her proper place. Poor child! Her attempts at offended reserve were like the snaps of a toothless puppy, they had small resemblance to biting, and were far

more likely to tickle the offending hand than to hurt it.

The next person to appear along the village street was Mr. Sangster. He appeared to think he was late, and strode quickly along. He reached the end of the lane. Would *he* also turn down? No; Mary saw him wave his hand in salutation, which showed that the others were still concealed there, but he stepped briskly across, and, with a cordial greeting to herself in passing, entered her brother's room.

He had scarcely done so, when, round the corner of the lane, there came the whole Kirk-Session and Deacons' Court,--some ten or a dozen persons in all,--like a crowd of urchins late for school. They hurried forward in a sort of knot, each unwilling to go first, as though there were an irate pedagogue to confront, yet no one wished to be last, as if he expected the dominie's cane to descend on his shoulders. They were all oppressed by the dreadful rumours in circulation, as to the minister's iniquity, and all wished to wreak vengeance on the defiler of their church. But how to set about it? Something vigorous and memorable must be done; but what was it to be?

A posse of the lieges called out to assist in capturing some notorious offender, half-a-dozen dogs holding a wild cat at bay--their fingers tingle to collar, their fangs glance fiercely ready to throttle; they stand all eager, all fierce, all cruel,--but who shall be the first to lay hold? and what may not befall that impetuous individual? Knocking down, braining, scratching of eyes out; even in the case of these zealous Free-churchmen, flooring in some metaphorical but very actual though imagined sense. No man was prepared to tackle the offender, yet all were so sure of his wrong-doing, that each felt as if he were bound to do it, if he should encounter him alone or first. But now Auchlippie had gone in, he, the ruling elder, their official head, was the proper person to do the undevised deed, or, if he did not, to bear the 'wite' of leaving it undone.

Roderick brightened up on the entrance of Mr. Sangster, and looked enquiringly in his face, but he did not venture to ask the question that was so near his lips. Mr. Sangster was cordial even beyond his wont, and answered his enquiries about the different members of his family at full length; but he did not say what Roderick was so impatient to hear; he could not, for his wife had told him nothing about it.

The entrance of the elders and deacons made further personal converse impossible. They walked up to the bed, took the sick man's hand one after another, but could scarcely command their lips to frame the ordinary inquiries after his health. Singularly to them, the minister received them with perfect composure, and all his wonted friendliness, while their eyes fell and wandered while the words died away upon their lips. 'Who was the sinner?' Ebenezer Prittie very nearly inquired aloud. Here were they, twelve just men and righteous, endowed in their own sight and that of their neighbours with all the virtues and christian graces in plenteous abundance, and yet this one impenitent sinner, laid out before them, snared in the full bloom and luxuriance of his iniquity, was able to outface them all, while they, his judges and accusers could scarce look him straight in the face, and had not a word to say.

The proceedings began in the usual manner. Roderick however, found he could scarce even whisper the opening prayer, and he therefore requested Mr. Sangster to act in his stead. They had been called together to make the concluding arrangements as to their new church. Widow Forester had come to terms about the ground, and they were therefore to set to work with all the expedition in their power, to raise the walls and secure a roof to shelter them, before the arrival of the winter storms. The day before had given them warning if that were needed, that the fine summer weather was drawing to a close, and that in a very few weeks the season of cold and storm would be upon them.

It was decided to commence work without any delay whatever, and that on the Thursday they should hold a religious service to inaugurate the work. Roderick had already bespoken the assistance of Mr. Dowlas, who had agreed to come over from his own parish whatever day he might be summoned. All therefore that had to be done was to notify him that Thursday was to be the day, and that owing to Roderick's illness he would have to assume the whole duty himself, instead of merely taking part, unless on so short notice he could induce his neighbour Mr. Geddie to accompany him.

No one present seemed disposed to speak unnecessarily, a somewhat unusual circumstance, for the deacons especially, being new to office, were prone to eloquence on ordinary occasions. Roderick accepted this taciturnity as a mark of consideration for his weakness and felt grateful. Indeed no more judicious mode of showing consideration could have been devised, for he felt himself getting worse under the stir and excitement very quickly. The meeting broke up as speedily as possible, and he was left alone, for Mr. Sangster had been carried away by the rest. He had been counting on another talk with him and perhaps of yet hearing from him the thing he most desired, but his own voice had entirely gone, so it was but natural his friend should not think of remaining with him when he could not speak.

He lay back on his pillow and solaced himself by thinking all manner of good of the men who had just left. The poor, the lower classes, who are thought so gross and rude in their perceptions! What people could have shown a more delicate intuition of what would be grateful to him in his weakness, than those rough-spoken, hard-handed men? He had been vexing himself with thoughts of their indifference and neglect, during his illness, but see how considerate and forbearing they had been this evening, notwithstanding the well known crotchets of this one and

that, which would certainly have been brought out on any other occasion.

It was a beautiful thought, though not, in the circumstances a very accurate one, and helped him much in dropping peacefully to sleep not long after.

CHAPTER XXI.

CIRCE.

On Monday morning Mr. Wallowby was the first to appear in the breakfast-room,—an unusual circumstance. There was meditation in the noiseless tread of his slippered feet, and he rubbed his hands thoughtfully, one over the other. So, a reflective cat will softly move her paws and undulate her tail, while she is planning her next raid on a neighbouring mouse hole. His enquiries after Peter's health were solicitous and tender, and the regret and disappointment at his being still confined to his room, perhaps excessive, considering his strong recommendations over-night, that the patient should keep his bed altogether next day, and, by making a regular lay up of it, get well the sooner. He asked Mr. Sangster to lend him a horse and trap to drive over to Inchbracken, still lamenting Peter's indisposition and deploring the necessity of having to go alone, but persistently deaf to the suggestion that he should wait a day or two till Peter got better.

The trap was ordered round as desired, the old gentleman being thankful that in default of Peter's help the guest should take his amusement into his own hands, and not fall back on him, James Sangster, who had been resignedly counting on a day of self-sacrifice and boredom in the young man's company. He would have yielded the day freely enough, and submitted to the boredom with a fair grace, but he feared the young man would be as much bored as himself; and that, somehow, he did not relish. We are all of us so accustomed to being bored by our fellows, that none but the very young think of complaining, but that our fellows might be bored with us, is a suggestion our self-love would rather not entertain. Mrs. Sangster did not approve the idea; she would have had Peter go to consolidate his intimacy with the county magnates, and what could it possibly matter to Wallowby? she thought. She proposed a postponement, but Wallowby was already deep in a discussion of the relative merits of Hungarian rye-grass and timothy with her spouse, and so continued not to hear.

The hour arrived, so likewise did the trap, and Mr. Wallowby issued from his chamber glorious as a sunbeam. He had dressed himself with the greatest care, and he really looked very well, if only he could have run against somebody or something, so as to derange the get-up in some slight degree, and make the whole more human. He was of sufficient stature, and his face was well enough, if a trifle vacant; so that in this faultless array, without crease or plait or pucker, he resembled one of the figures in a tailor's fashion plate considerably more than a gentleman of the period. Mrs. Sangster met him on the stairs and was vastly impressed. She would have liked Sophia to see him; but, alas! that could be managed only by peeping from behind a blind, for Sophia herself was still the victim of catarrh, and forced to remain invisible.

Reaching Inchbracken, Mr. Wallowby was received by Julia. Lady Caroline had not yet left her room, but sent word that she hoped to see him at luncheon, and the gentlemen were from home. It was Julia's acquaintance, however, which he had already made; and as the other lady was to appear later, he resigned himself with perfect satisfaction to be entertained by that agreeable person. They walked about the grounds admiring the broad sweep of the lake, which, lapping round Inchbracken on three sides, swept far away into the shadow of the overhanging hills. Mr. Wallowby was charmed to discover in himself a remarkably just appreciation of scenery, which he had never before been conscious of possessing; but then he was not sure that it had ever before fallen to his lot to have it so well called forth, or to have met so appreciative a companion. It was quite remarkable and very pleasant to find on how many subjects their opinion exactly agreed, not on scenery only, for that was not a theme to last long, but in general views of life and society, even politics and religion, though these, as heavy matters, were only glanced at in passing; 'but it is so pleasant to meet with a woman capable of understanding one on such higher and more masculine subjects,' at least so thought Mr. Wallowby.

Julia was a wily sportswoman. She had often heard Captain John describe the method of tickling a trout, and here was a gudgeon whom she was minded to try her hand on, and capture, if possible, by that delicate process. Wallowby opened out and spread himself in the bland warmth of her approving smiles, like a very sunflower. He had truly never before realised what a remarkably fine fellow he was, and the revelation was delightful; and so, too, in consequence, was the fair prophetess who had disclosed it. Loch Gorton was fine, no doubt, and so too were the

purple shadows slumbering among the hills beyond; but what were these in comparison to the heights and depths, long concealed under mists of modest diffidence, in the wondrous soul of Augustus Wallowby? The man fairly shimmered like a moonlit fountain, with coruscations of self-surprising wit and gratified vanity, while Circe cooed genially in response, still leading him onward into deeper quagmires of idiocy. Through gardens and shrubberies she led the way, and he followed closely behind, with ears laid luxuriatingly back; as the donkey whose poll has been deftly scratched will rub himself up against his new found friend, and court a continuance of the titillating process. Julia was actually discomposed by the rapidity of her success. Had she been in fun it would have been amusing, but she was a practical woman who meant business and a settlement for herself, so she feared to proceed too fast. Too speedy an inflation applied to so little solid substance might burst it, like a glass blower's freak, in a shower of spangles, to the mere idle glorification of the man himself; whereas if there was to be glass blowing, it was a useful goblet for *her* that was wanted. To change the tune, therefore, she now led the way to the old square tower overtopping the shrubbery, which was all that remained of the ancient family residence. Here a larger share of the conversation devolved on herself, Scotch antiquities and history being altogether unfamiliar to her Southern friend. He listened, however, with respectful interest to her account of the early Drysdales. When a man is uncertain who may have been his own grandfather, or whether such a person ever existed, there is something impressive in the long line of progenitors claimed by other people, and their certainty as to the possession. Here among the crumbling walls they once inhabited, it was impossible to doubt about them,--a very legion of haughty shadows who had once ruled the surrounding country,--or not to feel a positive reverence for their surviving representative. This train of thought naturally led to Lady Caroline, and as Julia phrased it, 'my Cousin, Lord Pitthevlis.' In the presence of that noble house the pretensions of the Drysdales dwindled considerably,--came down almost within reach, as it were, of Mr. Wallowby's unhistoric self; and yet this magnificent family were cousins of the engaging maiden who stood before him and discoursed so graciously of their grandeur. It was a delightful idea to realize, and he endeavoured to bring it well within his grasp, by desiring to know the precise degree of cousinship. She replied that the relationship was through George, the thirteenth Earl. It appeared to be difficult to particularize very exactly. An honourable Cornelius somebody, and a Lady Mary somebody else, besides other important people, had all been implicated some generations back in Miss Finlayson's introduction on this sublunary scene; 'but Lord Pitthevlis always calls me cousin, and so do the rest of the family, so of course it is so,' she concluded, and Wallowby was satisfied. There was apparently no prospect of her ever being a countess in her own right, but she was evidently very highly connected, so that when she died, her husband would be able to put up a hatchment with eight quarterings in front of his house; and Mr. Wallowby actually called up in his mind's eye a momentary vision of his own residence in the outskirts of Manchester so adorned, just to see how it would look. Poor man! I fear he was far gone.



"Through gardens and shrubberies she led the way." Page 162.

"Through gardens and shrubberies she led the way." Page 162.

During those few minutes when the lady left him in the morning room, while she went to remove her bonnet before luncheon, he drew a long breath and asked himself, 'could it be that at last he really was in love?' A long train of captives passed through his memory, the supposed

victims of his fascinations--or his fortune, was it? But what were any of them to this incomparable person? So elegant, so accomplished, and so appreciative! It seemed very sudden; but then, was not love at first sight the truest, the best, the highest form of that delightful emotion? And was not the attraction mutual? With his long and intimate knowledge of the sex, *he* knew all the signs. He was sure of that, and could not be mistaken in this case. He was indeed a sad rogue, so he told himself. He could not help that, but he felt for the poor girl in a serene and benevolent sort of way, and resolved that she should not sigh in vain. Yet he must be circumspect and do nothing precipitate! Although he was to return to England in three days' time, and could not without making explanations to an inquisitive world come again to see her; that was a matter he must break to her gently, and he would ask leave to correspond with her. Meanwhile he must practise reserve--veil his radiance somewhat, lest the poor child should be reduced to a heap of ashes--another Semele--before the fitting time for a proposal had arrived. So far his reflections had got, as he stood looking from the windows, and pulling out the corners of his whiskers to their extremest length, when he was interrupted by a summons to luncheon.

In the dining-room the ladies were already seated, one being Lady Caroline whom he had not yet seen; and whether it was merely the presence of a third person, or the silent claim of superiority on the part of that lady, the atmosphere appeared to have undergone a change. Life was no longer a river at high tide rolling to a triumphal march from 'the Caliph of Bagdad,' but a very ordinary stream indeed, oozing along between monotonous banks, over a flat and muddy bottom. Instead of a prized and congenial friend, he was now reduced to the part of stranger, and rather an unknown stranger too. Lady Caroline led the conversation as was her wont, but more interrogatively, and less as an exclusive monologue than when addressing persons with whom she was better acquainted. Having been called on to express his admiration for Scotland and the Scotch, on this his first visit to the country, he was next asked if he had been induced to attend any of the open-air conventicles which his friends so much affected, and how he liked them. He said he had been at one, and that it was a picturesque gathering in a stagy sort of way, and something very different from anything he had ever seen before.

'I should think so,' said Lady Caroline; 'it seems to me a species of madness which has fallen upon the people. I wonder the authorities do not put it down, for it is utterly subversive of order, and all good government. I feel quite ashamed whenever I hear of it coming under the notice of people from another country. They must form so strange an opinion of us. If you spend another Sunday in the neighbourhood you must persuade your friends to send you over to the parish church. It is not far from here.'

Mr. Wallowby replied that he would be returning to England before another Sunday came round. 'But I was not aware,' he added, 'that there were any but Presbyterian chapels for many miles round here. I felt compunction about attending the ministrations of an unordained person, it seemed to me so much a burlesque on the offices of religion, but I was told that except in towns and a very few country places far north, there are no clergymen in Scotland at all. And yet the Scotch claim to be very religious. I did not know before that people could be religious without church or parson, and now I have seen it I do not like it.'

'Yes! English people are all alike! They insist upon choosing for themselves, and having done so, they would impose their choice upon everybody else. That is not so bad perhaps when they stick to the old-fashioned ways--in my young days we all got on most comfortably together; but now when they have adopted so many new notions, apostolical succession for instance, which we never used to hear of, it seems a trifle unreasonable that people who have so much difficulty in knowing their own views should expect others to accept them too. For myself, I find the Act of Parliament and the law of the land the best religious director, and wherever I live I mean to conform to the Established Church of the country--always excepting France, and I never will live there. I have not forgot yet how we used to be threatened with Popery and wooden shoes if ever the French should land upon our shores. Now, the English Church people are dissenters in Scotland, just as Presbyterians are in England. But I hate the very name of dissenter, as of all disloyalty, and therefore I attend the English Church when in England, just as I do the Scotch in Scotland.'

'But if the ministers of the Scotch form of worship are not priests, how can they constitute a Church? That is my difficulty.'

'The Act of Settlement says that they do, and there is no going behind the law of the land. The Archbishop of Paris probably does not consider the Archbishop of Canterbury a priest, or able to constitute a Church; but no Englishman would be worth his salt who cared for what a Frenchman said. As for the clergy in different countries, they are all most excellent people, but they require a Queen Elizabeth or some such person to keep them in their own place. They are all, priests and presbyters alike, inclined to be meddling and tyrannical; and if we would only let them, they would rule us with a rod of iron. I am quite familiar with your prejudices, and even respect them, so far; my brother Pitthevlis is a Scotch Episcopalian, and I was so brought up myself, but I fear I must say they are a little narrow, and too like your own new disturbers (Puseyites, you call them, I think), ever to be possible as a national Church.'

Mr. Wallowby bridled slightly. He thought he was a Puseyite himself, and had great scorn for the Low Church party; but in those pre-ritualistic days his High Churchism was, like most other laymen's, little more than a taste for illuminated windows, surpliced choirs, intoned prayers, and a musical service; and that rather on account of its 'swellness,' than as a means of edification;

and he would have been as prompt as any Low Churchman to cry out 'Popery' against the modern developments. Thirty years have passed since then, and many things have changed. Mr. Wallowby had raised his head to do battle for his faith, but meanwhile Lady Caroline had meandered on to other themes, so what he might have said can never be known.

The chicken, the salad, and the toast were at length consumed. All rose from table, and Augustus felt that it was time for him to withdraw. Julia accompanied him to the door, there was some low-toned conversation, and he was gone.

'Well! my dear Julia,' said Lady Caroline, 'I do not know what I should do without your kind good-nature, to take the bores off my hands. It must be between three and four hours since that misguided man arrived, and you have been with him all the time! Does your head ache?'

'Oh no, dear Lady Caroline, I have got through the visit very pleasantly. He does not talk so much as to weary one, and yet he has plenty to say.'

'Ah? Then I may save my condolences. So much the better! He strikes me as being almost good-looking, if he were only a gentleman, and not quite so tightly buttoned into his clothes. Men laugh at women's tightlacing, but how they endure all these wisps of muslin round their throats I cannot think. And I am sure they are quite as ridiculous.'

'I thought Mr. Wallowby dressed rather nicely; and as to his manners--of course he has never gone into society, and he is not the least like a guardsman; but then he has never had the chance to see one. And, who knows? he may have a son in the army at least, perhaps even a field-marshal, or a Lord-Chancellor, for I hear he is very rich, and even the greatest families must have a first man, or perhaps, as you would say, the man before that.'

'Julia, my dear, you are a philosopher! The gentleman must have merit, or he would not have won over my critical young cousin so soon. He is rich you say?'

'Yes, Lady Caroline. Miss Brown, who was living with the Sangsters says he is very rich; and it would be too absurd in a penniless girl like me to be critical and fastidious in judging a man of his substantial fortune.'

'Fastidious! my dear? Then there is a chance of his being submitted to your approval?'

Julia coloured. 'Indeed Lady Caroline, it is so hard for a girl to say. But if you will not think me absurd, I almost fancy there might perhaps be a possibility of something like that.'

'Ah, then, my dear, that alters the question altogether. I have no daughter of my own, and there is no one whose settlement in life I have more nearly at heart than yours. Confide in me, child! I have every wish to be a mother to you.'

Julia kissed her hand very sweetly. 'I shall find out all about him,' continued the old lady, through old MacSiccar, and you may trust me not to compromise you in any way. If his circumstances are satisfactory, it might probably be a very judicious step on your part; One cannot have everything you know; but enough to live upon is a thing it is impossible to do without. And as to the rest, under your guidance, I see no reason why he should not make a perfectly presentable figure in society. I am sure you will make an admirable and attached wife, whoever you marry; but marrying for love, instead of with it, as every good girl of course will, often turns out to be a mistake. You know, my dear, I was not very young myself when I married, and a few years earlier I was very nearly doing something foolish of that kind. The gentleman had high rank and was really very charming; but my dear papa discovered the unsuitableness of the connection in time, and though I was really infatuated, he carried us all down to Pitthevlis, and kept us there for two years. In the meantime, what papa expected occurred, the gentleman ruined himself. His property was put under trustees, and he himself has been living at Boulogne and such places ever since, on the few hundreds a year allowed by his creditors. I shudder sometimes when I think how narrowly I escaped---. Shortly after that my dear General came forward, and I need not say how thankful I am that I was saved from my earlier folly. Rank and position are most desirable things, but a solid income is indispensable. There are so many girls now, too, and the men have grown so mercenary, that a girl without fortune or a title cannot look for more than a younger son, which is merely a sort of decent dependence on the family, and often a most painful position. So my dear,' added the old lady, who had been gradually warming under her own eloquence, 'I wish you every success, always provided the *parti* should prove worthy your acceptance,' and thereupon she rose, and bending over Julia, kissed her on the forehead, like a fairy godmother, or some other superior spirit, animated by the most beneficent intentions. She was thinking that if Kenneth should marry and settle down at Inchbracken, as his father desired, a third lady in the household would be one too many.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN SESSION.

The joint meeting of elders and deacons broke up as described, and left the minister alone. They did not separate, however, for Ebenezer Prittie stood without the cottage door, and begged them so urgently to come round to the Post Office that they consented.

The Post Office proved a meeting place still more restricted than the one they had left, but it was private. The shop having been closed, they seated themselves on the counter and sundry kegs of nails, and waited the opening of the proceedings.

Ebenezer moved that Mr. Sangster should take the chair (a tall slender-legged stool), and that the proceedings should be minuted in the Session books, as a continuance after adjournment of the meeting which had just broken up. Mr. Sangster objected to so irregular a course, and declined to mount the chair. He would be happy to hold an informal conversation with his friends there assembled, but he would take no part in a hole-and-corner meeting not duly called, and held without the knowledge of their minister, who of right should preside.

Ebenezer coughed behind his hand, cleared his voice, and stood forth. He had been planning something very energetic in the way of resolutions and minutes of Session, which by and by would be produced in the Presbytery with his name as prime mover and leader; but now he had got them together, it did not appear such plain sailing as he had anticipated, and he began to have qualms and misgivings. The position of prosecutor or accuser did not appear so desirous, now that he stood in the midst of that silent and expectant circle, as it had done when he was merely planning it. He coughed again, but the silence remained unbroken. No one else desired to speak, so he had to go on. He told them that it was unnecessary for him to name the reason for his having requested them to reassemble there, as they knew it already. Mr. Sangster interrupted, that he for one had not an idea of the object of their meeting, and was waiting to hear it. Ebenezer replied that the whole glen was ringing with reports of the evil living of the person acting as pastor over them,—that it was a crying scandal, and that the enemy would have good cause to exult over the subversion of their Zion, if they did not cast the unclean thing out from among them.'

'What do you allude to. Mr. Prittie?' asked Mr. Sangster.

'To the minister's bairn, sir!' replied Ebenezer; 'ye hardly need to speer that.'

'But Mr. Brown's adoption of a foundling infant affords no ground of censure that I can see. I confess, indeed, that I have always thought he had set us an example of Christian charity we would do well to copy.'

'Do ye mean to say, sir, ye dinna ken wha's acht that bairn?'

'I do. Whose is it?'

'His ain, of course!'

'How do you know?'

'A' body kens that by noo, 'at bides in Glen Effick.'

'I don't, for one; and I should like to know how *you* know it.'

'What a' body says maun be true! Ye'll allow *that*, Mester Sangster. An' what's mair, the mither's kenned as weel.'

'And who is the mother? Has she said so?'

'A body wadna just look for that, ye ken, sir. Folk dizna cry stinkin' fish e'y open market. An' ye wadna be lookin' to hear auld Tibbie Tirpie cryin' 'cuttie' after her ain dochter!'

'How then do you make it out? For myself, I don't believe one word of it.'

'Do ye mean to say 'at I'm leein', Mester Sangster? I'm but a puir man to you, I ken weel; an' I'm mindin' 'at ye're the Laird of Auchlippie; but I was ordeened to the eldership o' the kirk the same day ye was yoursel', an' I'm thinkin' we're baith brithers in the house o' God, whaur there's no respect of persons; an' I kenna what for ye suld think I'm leein' ony mair nor yersel!'

'Whisht, man!' remonstrated Peter Malloch. 'The Laird never thocht to misdoubt *you*. It's just a way o' speakin' folk's gotten. But I'm sayin', Mester Sangster, I cud gang a lang gate mysel' e'y pruin' o' thae suspecions. I hae seen the minister wi' my ain een, slinkin' frae the auld wife's door, lang efter dark; an' the verra next day, doon she comes to me for tea an' sneeshin' an' sic like trokes as a puir body can do wantin' weel enough, an' pays a' wi' a pund note o' the Peterhead Bank. There's nae misdoubtin' whaur that siller cam frae! An' folk dinna gie notes to

pair bodies for naething.'

'Folk differ in that as in other things, Peter,' retorted the laird with a shrug. 'Some wad gie a bodle gin they had ane, an' when they haena they gie a bawbee. An' mony's the button I hae fand in the kirk collections in my time! But I can't see that therefore we must attribute Mr. Brown's liberality to an evil motive. He preaches liberal giving, you know, and he practises what he preaches. Perhaps we might all take a lesson from him and increase our charities without going beyond our duty.'

'Hech!' sighed a voice in the corner, 'it's no the amount! It's the speerit it's dune in; an' that's a grand truth, an' a comfortin'. It was the Widdie's twa mites 'at gat a' the praise!'

'Yes!' retorted the Laird with a chuckle, 'but they were all her living! The chield that put the button in the plate gets little countenance there! But, to return to the rumours; there would have to be some more conclusive evidence before any step could be taken in the matter. As I have said before, I believe the whole thing is just idle talk, and I will be no party to insulting Mr. Brown by even bringing such an insinuation under his notice. This parish and the whole church owe him gratitude for his zealous and self-denying labours. I regard the whole tenor of his life among us as ample refutation of any unsubstantiated report that can be circulated to his disparagement; and I wonder that any office-bearer of this church, after all the intercourse we have been privileged to have with him, can think otherwise. I think it is the duty of all here present, to put down this tattling of idle tongues; and if we cannot stop, at least we should not heed them, and by-and-by they will cease to wag of themselves.'

'It's braw crackin' about tatlin' tongues,' said Peter Malloch, 'but wadna we be giein' the enemy grund to blaspheme? an' that's clean contrar' to Scriptor. A bonny tale the reseeduaries wad mak o't a', gin it cam to their lugs! They're aye sayin', as it is, 'at the unco gude (an' that means hiz) are nae better nor ither folk, but a hantle waur. An' as for Mester Brown an' his giein', there's mair ways o' doin' gude nor juist giein siller to feckless bodies 'at canna help themsels. What for canna hie gie a help to the honest hard workin' folk 'at's fechtin' their best to gar baith ends meet, an' support the lawfu' tred o' his ain glen? "Claw me an' I'se claw ye," is gude plen Scotch. Gin folk peys their pennies intil the Sustentation Fund reglar, it's gey an yerksom to see the minister's family gae by the door, an' dale wi' outsiders. It'll be a week come the morn 'at the carrier frae Inverlyon brocht them a muckle creel fu' o' groceries. What wad come to the tred o' the glen gin a' body dealt that gate?'

'Hoot, Peter,' snorted the Laird, 'the sand in yer sugar's been ower grit! I'm thinkin' I heard tell o' a sma' chuckie stane in Miss Brown's tea-cup. Folk are na juist hens, ye see, an' dinna find sic provender halesome.'

Something like a snigger followed the Laird's sally. No one else present being a 'merchant' of eatables, the joke was greatly relished. It is always pleasant to see a neighbour suffer, because it gives point and relish to one's own immunity. It is a form of childish sensuality that survives the relish for lollipops, but it is perhaps most openly indulged in during the lollipop period. Whispering and restlessness become hushed all over the school-room when a whipping is going forward. Each child settles in its seat to watch the performance, all eyes and interest; the sharper the whish of the cane and the louder the wail of the victim, the more pleasurable and keen the interest of each spectator, for the better he realizes the ease and comfort of his own little skin.

Peter flushed. The laird was a privileged man, who might take his joke as he pleased, but no prescriptive immunity sheltered the rest.

'I see naething to nicker at, Ebenezer Prittie! Gin onything fell amang my sugar I ken naething about it ava, as I'll explain to Miss Brown; but I see na hoo yer ain ellwand can be an inch shorter nor ither folks, an' ye no ken o't.'

'I daur ye to say that again, ye ill-faured leein' rascal! Gin it war na for my godly walk and conversation, as a Christian man an' an Elder, I'd lay the ellwand about yer crappet lugs!'

Here there was a general intervention between the two angry men, and the laird expressed his regret at having used any expression that could disturb the harmony of the meeting, but they knew his weakness for a joke; and as everything seemed to have been said on the subject they had met to consider, and as it was getting late, he would now wish them all good-night.

'I see na that a' has been said,' observed Ebenezer, so soon as the Laird was beyond hearing, 'or that ony thing has been said ava that's ony gude. Are we to let the hale thing drap, an' mak fules o' oursel's afore the hale glen, just to pleasure Auchlippie? I trow no!'

'An' what wad ye be for doin' then?' asked one.

'I'll tell ye what we suld do,' suggested another. 'Isna Mester Dowlas comin' to haud the meetin,' an' lay the foundation o' the new Kirk? An' what for suldna we ca' him to adveese wi' us what ocht to be dune? I'm thinkin' he's as weel able as Auchlippie to direc' folk, an' we needna be feared to anger *him*, he's no a laird.'

'Aweel!' said Ebenezer, who had now mounted on the top of the tall stool, and was benevolently regarding the meeting from his self-appointed station as chairman. 'Ye'll better juist

muive that, Andra Semple, an' as I'm e'y chair I'll put yer motion to the meetin'. An' syne *ye* can muive an adjournment, Elluck Lamont, an' we'll adjourn to Thursday afternoon, whan the kirk skulls. An' sae we'll be a' in order ('let a' thing be dune decently an' in order,' says the Apostle) till we get Mester Dowlas to set us richt.'

Thus the meeting had but small direct result. Its effect indirectly, however, was considerable. When, early that evening, the members had stolen down the lane near the minister's cottage, to intercept each other and feel circuitously towards the point of interest, each would have been ashamed, first and unsupported, to repeat aloud the rumours that had reached him. When he had heard them in the first instance, usually from his wife--it is the gentle sex usually which originates or introduces such tales, probably because it has no head to break, which is to say, that its corporal immunities in a civilized land enable it to say unpunished what would bring down on the male tattler both brawls and broken bones,--he had at first declared it was impossible, and then that it was unlikely; and even when, after dwelling on it in his mind, the love of a sensation made him half think half hope there might be something in it, he would hesitate to allude to it save by a whisper and a shake of the head, and would caution his wife not to repeat it, or let herself appear as one who was giving it currency. When, however, the matter had been talked over, audible speech exercised its usual defining and contracting influence. The mysterious and appalling, as well as the doubtful element, became vulgarised as well as realized. Without any additional evidence, yet in the company of so many others who all believed, each felt it due to his own character for clear-sightedness and high moral tone to dismiss every remnant of doubt, and to be eager for the exposure and punishment of the offender. Afterwards, in the presence of the accused himself, their certainty had begun a little to waver. The many pieties and goodnesses associated with him in their memories, were too discordant with this new and vulgar suspicion, and probably had they met him each alone, they would have dismissed the accusation from their minds; but each sat under the scrutinizing eyes of his twelve or thirteen fellows. They were the eyes into which he had looked, a little while ago, when he had made up his mind that the rumours were well founded; and as he felt their glance on him now, it was like a voice urging steadfastness and consistency with what he had been saying so shortly before. Those persons looking at him had heard him say that he believed everything; how, then, could he, while still under their eye, turn round and dismiss his suspicions without any new fact or argument to account for the change? Nevertheless, the zeal of the old Hebrew prophets, which some of them had felt stirring in their veins and urging them to lift a testimony and denounce the sinner in the midst of his ways, had cooled and oozed away as they sat round the sickbed; each looked expectantly to the others, but felt he could not undertake the work himself. It was a relief to all of them to leave the sick-room, and when they re-assembled at the Post Office, they felt more strongly built up in their suspicions than ever. If anything could have bound them more firmly to their position, it was Mr. Sangster's scant respect for the conclusion at which they had arrived. They were willing to admit his superiority both in position and education, and probably any one of them would have deferred to him if alone; but the sturdy democratic or Presbyterian element in them objected to so many yielding to the one who wore a better coat and had learned Latin; and when in the end he tried to dismiss the meeting, after pooh-poohing its object as absurd, they felt bound to assert themselves by boldly and openly taking the other course.

All reserve, therefore, was dropped. Each had all the others to bear him out in whatever he said; and that night he openly discussed the supposed facts with his wife while she prepared his supper.

The next morning the 'stoups' stood empty at the well, and heaps of wet linen lay neglected and unspread down on the 'loaning,' while their owners in garrulous knots discussed the minister's misdoings, and Peter Malloch sold more little parcels of tea and snuff than he had ever done in one day before, so many of the gudewives desired to get his version with full particulars.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

Sophia looked from behind her window-blind as Mr. Wallowby drove away to make his visit at Inchbracken.

'A fine looking man!' observed her mother, who stood behind her. 'This cold of yours is very disappointing, Sophia, confining you to your room. I was in hopes you and he would have become quite intimate by this time. He seems a very superior person, and would have been an improving companion for you. Your cold appears to be better to-day. Put on your blue silk, and let him find you in the drawing room on his return. You owe to your brother, my dear, that his friend should

find things as comfortable and pleasant here as among our neighbours.'

'Certainly, mamma, if you say so. But I don't think it will signify much to Mr. Wallowby. He does not mind me in the least, and I find it uphill work trying to make manners to him. Even Mary Brown, who has so much to say, thinks him a tiresome man.'

'She did not appear to think so when she was in his company, laughing and singing and carrying on! I was disappointed to see her father's daughter manifest so much levity of character. I fear it is a family trait.'

'Mamma!'

'Yes, Sophia! I mean what I say; young girls should be seen, but not heard. That was the rule in *my* young days. She took the whole entertainment of the stranger off your hands, as if she had been in her own house; forward, I thought her, in fact; and I don't think your brother Peter thought any the more of her for it.'

'Oh, mamma! it was Peter who made her talk! A girl must answer when she is spoken to; and she must laugh too, when people are trying to amuse her, however poor the joke may be. And it was Peter who persuaded her to sing when she would rather not. I know, for she told me so!'

'H'm! I fear she is a sly monkey that Mary Brown--for all her artless ways! I wish you had some of her worldly wisdom, added to the high principles I have been at such pains to instil into your mind. I am sure you will never be a flirt; but a young woman must be settled in life unless she is to be an old maid and a failure; and how is an eligible young man to know what treasures of good sense and right principle there may be in her, if she will not open her mouth to him, or hides away in her own room? I call it a waste of precious opportunity! Remember the fate of the man who hid his talent in a napkin, and be warned in time!'

'But, mamma, you have always told me, and I am sure it is so, that marriages are ordained by a higher power, and that the appointed man will certainly find you out, even if he has to come down the chimney to reach you.'

'Quite true, my dear, in a sense! but we don't want the sweeps at Auchlippie at this time of year. And there can be no more proper place for a gentlewoman to meet a young man than her mother's drawing-room; so put on your blue silk and bring your worsted work down stairs as soon as you are ready. I shall send Betsy to your assistance;' and, with a rather scornful shrug, the old lady left the room.

'I believe,' she muttered to herself as she descended the stairs, 'that girl's a gowk! It's the Sangster blood in her, I suppose--a dull, literal-minded lot!--soft and sober! To think that a daughter of mine should need to be spoken to, as I have just been speaking to her! We were all more gleg than that on *my* side of the house. I don't know whether to be more ashamed of being mother to sic a daw; or for the things I have been driven to say to her! They don't sound like the walk and conversation of a Christian woman! and yet the best of us are but flesh and blood. We must all eat and drink, wear clothes, live in houses, and, when we can, ride in coaches, marry and give in marriage, just like the people before the flood, though they were so bad; and we must strive our best to provide for our families unless we would deny the faith and be worse than infidels. Ah! there is Scripture for it! So glad I remembered that text! It saves one from feeling base and scheming. But one ought not to be driven to put doubtful sentiments into words. One should be helped out with them. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' That seems an apt quotation and appropriate, if it had only come into Sophia's mind! But there's no use looking for that from *her*. She's a glaikit tawpie. Ah me! the trials of a discreet and conscientious mother are not light! I hope I may have strength to bear them.' And so, with a sigh, she went about her affairs. The texts had evangelized (if not evangelized) the mercenary schemes, and she was again rehabilitated in her own eyes as a righteous person.

Sophia stood brushing out her hair and musing on her mother's precepts, as a dutiful daughter should. She had never before heard marrying discussed in this bare, hard fashion. Was she a Circassian slave at Constantinople, to be tricked out and submitted to the inspection of the rich man in this fashion? Once before, some few words had been said to her in a more guarded way, but, as she now perceived in the same spirit, when the coming of her brother and his friend had been first spoken of; but at that time they had been less heeded, or she had understood them less, and they had not then shocked her. Love and marriage were subjects which up to that time had only been mentioned in her hearing as something vague, mysterious and holy, which it did not become her to pry into. As for personal love experiences, she had none; and the subject of maidenly fancies had generally been referred to by her hard and practical mother with scorn and derision.

Roderick's letter to her had therefore fallen on her unprepared mind as a revelation. All the two previous days her thoughts had been repeating over and over his earnest words. How deeply he must have felt before he could so have expressed his anxiety! And she? What answer should she make? All the long years of their intercourse passed through her memory, and incidents disregarded at the time and forgotten, came back now to her recollection with a new meaning and a new force. Their long talks, in which he had spoken so much and she so little, began now to take a new aspect in her mind. She must have been encouraging him though she did not know it;

and what was more, if she had to enact those scenes over again, with the new enlightenment in her eyes, she felt that she would encourage him none the less, but rather the more. To have excited such emotion in one so clever and good, was an achievement of which she felt proud, in a wondering and enquiring way, for she could not imagine how she had done it; but the thought of his love for her grew more and more sweet and engrossing, and she began to suspect that down deep somewhere in her nature where she had never looked or known of before, she was fond of him in return.

And yet, she had not answered the letter. What would he think of her? Since her mother had called her unmaidenly, she had not ventured to return to the subject in case of another explosion. But now that she had in cold blood set a matrimonial scheme before her, and deliberately incited her to endeavour to win the regard of a man for whom she felt no attraction whatever, simply because he was rich, she felt strong enough to broach the question again. Whatever her mother said she would answer his letter somehow, and more than that, should her mother propose another suitor, she would have nothing to say to him till she had come to an understanding with Roderick.

Having donned the blue silk, Sophia descended to the drawing-room, work-basket in hand. The room was empty, which was disappointing, as she had strung herself up to concert pitch. She settled herself to work and waited. The monotonous motion of the needle and thread had a calming influence on her nerves; but as they grew less tense she began to feel less confidence in her own courage, and to wish her meditated conversation well over. Visitors came in, which afforded her a further respite, and in her disturbed state supplied a vent for some of her suppressed energy. She had never before, perhaps, shown so much animation and vivacity in general conversation. It surprised her mother and quite rehabilitated her in the good opinion of that careful parent, who congratulated her on having so well held her part, and hoped it was the beginning of a new chapter in her life, and that she was about to assume with due *éclat* the part of daughter in so prominent a household of the Free Church.

'It's a duty to the cause, my dear! Remember how the daughters of Israel sewed curtains of scarlet and needlework for the ark in the wilderness. By all means let us show that we are in no respect behind the heathen in the graces of life! and let us show forth the beauty of holiness among the uncircumcised residuaries!'

It was not altogether plain to Sophia how holiness arrayed in blue silk was to advance the cause, but she let it pass. Her lady mother was in tolerably good humour, and that was a point in her favour. She consulted her about the shading of a rose in the worsted work, to break the current of her thoughts, and then, like the bather about to plunge into an unkindly sea, with firm-set teeth, and fingers clenched beneath her embroidery, she made the leap. After a preliminary cough to steady the tremor in her voice--

'Have you got that letter of mine, mamma? I think I must answer it to-day.'

'What letter?' demanded the old lady with a start.

'That letter from Rod--Mr. Brown.'

'I thought we had said all that need be spoken on that subject already.'

'You said I was unmaidenly,' replied Sophia, aghast at her own temerity; but even the sheep when it is cornered will turn its horns to the collie.

'And was that not enough for any right thinking young woman?' retorted the mother, showing a pink spot on either cheek--the red lamps of danger.

'I am not thinking of myself, mamma! Mr. Brown has written me a kind and a very urgent letter, and I think I owe him an answer of some kind, when he shows so deep an interest in me. You said yourself this morning that a girl will be an old maid and a failure if she is not married. I suppose you don't want me to propose to the men myself? and if a gentleman proposes to me, surely I owe him a civil answer.'

'The lassie's in a creel!' cried Mrs. Sangster, jumping up. She had a tingling in her finger tips, which not so many months before, would have relieved itself in an assault on her daughter's ears; but the blue silk, the tall womanly figure, or an unwonted determination in the girl's face, restrained her, and she sat down again.

'I am astounded, Sophia, to hear you use such language! When I was a girl I think I would have died, before I could have brought myself to say as much. Have you been reading novels? or what has come over you?'

Sophia sat speechless, eyeing the danger signals on her mother's cheeks, with considerable alarm; but that did not appear. Well for us it often is, that the sluggish frame is a mask and veil, but slowly responding to the inner working of our minds, or the tide of battle would oftener be turned in its course. She said nothing, which was the very best reply she could have made.

'Here have we got a most desirable match in the very house with you--one only requiring the most ordinary assiduity on the part of any handsome and well brought-up young woman, to

secure the prize. Nature has done its part for you, and I, though you think so little of your mother's love, have done mine; and yet you send your thoughts wool-gathering far and wide to take up with a penniless, ill-principled, disreputable licentiate! Not even ordained! Nor ever likely to be, if a's true that's suspected. For shame, woman! An' show mair sense!

'Mamma! I am nothing to the gentleman you allude to! He would rather sit in Peter's room and smoke tobacco, than trouble with me. And I care just as little for him.'

'Ay! There it is! You're that indolent you canna be fashed to make yourself commonly agreeable to your brother's friend! Do you take yourself for another 'Leddy Jean' in the ballad, that all the lords and great men in the country are to come bowin' and fraislin' for a glint o' *your* e'e? You are vastly mistaken if you do! The young men of fortune now-a-days know their own weight too well for any such nonsense. A girl will have to make herself agreeable before she need expect attention even, not to speak of a proposal.'

'But I don't want a proposal! and I don't want *him!* Am I for sale, that I am to be trotted out and shown off to him, as Jock Speirs does with papa's colts, when the horse-couper comes round?'

'Sophia Sangster! To think I should live to see the day when my own child would taunt me with being a match-making mother! Is that the outcome of all my self-denying care and love? But you'll change your mind yet, my lady, or I'm mistaken. When your poor mother is laid in the kirk-yard, and yourself are a middle-aged spinster living in lodgings, up a stair, in some country town, spending your time cutting up flannel to make petticoats for beggar wives, and no diversion the live long week but the Dorcas meetings on Friday evenings, then you'll remember your poor mother's assiduous endeavours to settle you in life, and you'll see your headstrong folly when it's too late!'

Mrs. Sangster seldom attempted to wield the limner's art, and that was the reason why her present effort was so effective on her own sensibilities. She buried her face in her handkerchief and gulped.

'Mamma! what is the good of talking nonsense like this? There is no present fear of my being an old maid; Mr. Brown has asked me to marry him, and that is what I want to talk about,--not about suppositions that can never come to anything.'

'And what would you wish to say, then, in your great wisdom?'

'I would simply say that I am not engaged to anybody, and that I am too much startled by his letter to be able to say more; but he can speak to papa about it.'

'But I will not allow you to have any correspondence with that young man!--a bringer of open reproach upon the truth he professes! All who have dealings with him will be brought to confusion yet, I am certain! Touch not, taste not, handle not!'

'I only want to write him a letter!' responded Sophia, a little pertly; but the effort of self-restraint had lasted a good while, and she was approaching that state in which one must either laugh or cry. 'And what do you know against him?' she added.

'There are rumours in circulation,--and well founded rumours, too, I am sorry to say,--which preclude decent people from having any dealings with him whatever.'

'But what are they about? Considering the subject of his letter, I ought to know--surely!'

'I hope you will never know what they are about. They are too shocking to be spoken about altogether.'

'And do you believe them?'

'I cannot help myself! The evidence is too convincing.'

'Does papa believe them?'

'I don't know that he does--exactly--just yet. He is so prejudiced in favour of that young man. But he will be compelled to believe before long.'

'Does papa know of his letter to me?'

'How should he know? Do you think I would bring myself to speak of what I consider a gross insult to the family? But have done! Here comes Mr. Wallowby. The dinner was to be kept back on account of his absence. Go and bid them have it on the table in three quarters of an hour. But remember, Sophia, I command you in the most solemn manner not to write to that other man. And think no more of it.'

The guest's return cut short further discussion; and probably it was best so. Mrs. Sangster had had the last word, which she would have insisted on having in any case; and Sophia, if slow, was well known in the family to be obstinate--one on whose mind, if an idea could once inscribe itself, it remained for ever, written in ink indelible; and under the new awakening that was at work

within her, she was little likely to have been moved by any thing that would have been said. Her mind was made up. Roderick should certainly hear from her, on that she was resolved; but the lifelong habit of obedience in which she had been reared, prevented her direct contravention of her mother's command. She would not write a letter, but she must get at him in some other way.

She would have liked to talk it all over with her father, as being a person of incomparable wisdom, and one better inclined to Mr. Brown, as she had just gathered, than her mother; but her father if very wise, was also very far off--a Merovingian king, in affairs of the household or of his daughter, which he was content to leave under the absolute and undisputed control of his wife--the mayor of the palace. She had been used every day to see him preside at table, and read prayers morning and evening, but she had never had much personal intercourse or conversation with him; and to go to him and say that a young man had asked her to marry him, was beyond her strength. She grew pale at the bare thought of it.

The next day was taken up with other cares--a dinner party at home, and on Wednesday came leave-taking, as her brother and Mr. Wallowby were returning to the South. In the afternoon, however, stillness had fallen upon the house. Her father was away, having accompanied his guests to the county town where they were to catch the mail. All the stir and bustle of the past two weeks was over, and her mother declaring she had a headache, had retired to her room. Sophia sat down to her worsted work, and as with busy fingers she wove the many-hued threads into her web, her own thoughts seemed to disentangle themselves out of the confused wisp in which they had lain, she began to perceive what it really was that she wanted, and to make up her mind what she would do. Roderick's letter somehow kept repeating itself over and over again through her mind, but she made no attempt to stifle it, nor did she grow weary of the phrases so often rehearsed; on the contrary the colour deepened in her cheek, and a light dawned in her eye, clearer, warmer, more human, than those organs with all their gazelle-like beauty--their suggestion of the ox-eyed Heré--had ever revealed before. 'Yes! Roderick should have his answer--in part at least--for, after all she felt herself, as one of God's free creatures, entitled to exercise the resources of her hunter's skill. Before she yielded to his yoke, as Tibbie Tirpie would have said, she meant to have more courting. And Mary--she could see and speak to *her* without challenge and without reproach--*she* should be her messenger.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LUCKIE HOWDEN.

Roderick was certainly growing worse, although the rheumatic symptoms had disappeared. His voice was scarcely audible now, and he spoke with great difficulty. All through Tuesday there was a look of waiting and anxiety on his face. A step in the passage without, or a passing wheel on the road, and he would turn his eyes to the door, as though he expected some one. But no one came, wheels and footsteps alike passed on their way; and he would heave a weary sigh, turning his face to the wall. On Wednesday he was more restless, more depressed and certainly worse. He had not slept the night before, and at early daylight he had begun again to watch for coming steps, and to sigh as each passed on without turning in to him. Mary sat by him, and sat alone. Excepting the Doctor and Eppie Ness, no one came to share her watching, or to enquire how he was--their minister, for whom they had hitherto professed such regard, and to whose bounty so many were indebted for substantial pecuniary aid.

'I think it very unkind of Mrs. Sangster never to have come to ask after him,' she said, 'and it is strange as well, seeing that it was in her service he got so wet; but I am quite confounded at the neglect the rest of the parishioners are showing him.'

'Can you account for it, Eppie?'

'No, mem. Gin it bena just the way o' the world. "Them 'at gets, forgets." It's an auld sayin', and it looks as gin it was a true ane. An' they're a' that gleg, to tak up ilka daftlike clash 'at ony donnart haverel may set rinnin'. Whan a man has gaed out an' in amang them, an' gien them his strength an' his gear sae free, they micht think shame.' Here she stopped abruptly and in some confusion, as one whose tongue had outrun her discretion. She caught the look of bewildered surprise in Mary's face. 'But I'm thinkin' my ain tongue's rinnin' awa wi' me. I'm just clean angered wi' the doited gomerels.'

'I don't understand you, Eppie. There must be something going on we don't know about. What is it?'

'Hoot, mem, there's just naething awa! But I'm thinkin' ye'll better gae ben, the minister's

steerin!'

Mary returned to her brother's bedside, but he told her he had not called. She took one of his books and strove to interest him by reading aloud, while she ran over in her mind all that had occurred in the neighbourhood for weeks past, and how it could in any way bear on their relations with the people. Roderick grew drowsy in time under the monotony of her voice, and she herself would shortly have fallen asleep, when the click of the latch was heard.

Both were awake in a moment, and starting round, beheld Kenneth Drysdale standing in the doorway.

'Is any body in?' he exclaimed, as he stepped into the room with a laugh. 'I have knocked three times and got no answer. You must both have been asleep. Ah! I see. A good book! That is just like my mother's reading on a Sunday afternoon. Good books give such peace of mind and repose of conscience, that the body shares in it too. One is sure to find her extended on her sofa any time between luncheon and the dressing bell. 'Meditating with her eyes closed,' she calls it; but from the regularity of her breathing, I would venture to call it by another name. Julia, now, reads French novels, and you won't catch *her* napping. Roderick, old man! Laid up?'

Roderick took his old friend's hand in both his own. It was a great and unexpected pleasure to see him. The stand he had taken on the Church question appeared to have severed him altogether from the family at Inchbracken, and it was by no means the least of the sacrifices he had felt bound to make for the truth. He had heard of Mary's visit to Inchbracken before taking to his bed at Gortonside, but since then his own physical pains, and the misery in his mind about Sophia's being about to marry the Manchester man, had so possessed him, that he had not spoken to her on the subject. If he had, he would have been less surprised at Kenneth's appearance; that is to say, if she had or could have explained; for in converse where looks and tones of the voice go so far to modify and even replace spoken language, it may be doubted whether she would have found anything she could have reported. *She* understood, and Kenneth understood, and each knew that the other understood; and yet what was there after all to tell? Until you found it necessary to make a disclosure to your mamma, dear Madam, and the gentleman now your husband made a formal statement to your papa,--pray what could you have said in your own case? And would it not have been impossible for you to say anything at an earlier period to enlighten your elders and save them from afterwards moralizing on the remarkable secrecy and cleverness of the young people in managing their tender affairs? A good deal of the same sort of thing passed on the present occasion. Kenneth talked mostly to Roderick, and both were happy to renew the old friendship. Mary sat by perfectly content. The portion of the conversation that fell to her share was not large, but there were looks and softenings of the voice, quiet smiles and comings and goings of a flush, that supplied all she waited to hear or desired to say.

Roderick felt refreshed by the visit, and when Kenneth, promising to come again very shortly, at last withdrew, the burden of living appeared lighter to him, and he lay back armed with new fortitude to bear and wait.

Kenneth had been gone but a few minutes when Eppie Ness in her turn had a visitor--an old woman, toothless and bent, limping on a staff, and with a covered basket on her arm. A grizzled elf-lock or two had escaped from the white sowback mutch which was bound to her head by a winding of broad black ribbon, and hung down over the glittering beadlike eyes. A hook nose and projecting chin nearly met in a bird-like beak over the fallen-in mouth, whence one surviving fang protruded with a grim witch-like effect. Her dress was dark blue linsey, and over it she wore, as on all occasions of ceremony, the scarlet cloak in which she had been 'kirket' as a bride fifty years before, and had worn unfailingly ever since, summer and winter, to kirk and market. It was Luckie Howden. She pushed open the door without ceremony, and stood in the middle of the kitchen looking about her. Eppie, with the child in her lap, sat by the fire and was crooning some old song in the endeavour to make it sleep.

'Hear til her noo! wi' her daft sinfu' sangs. Wraxin' the thrapple o' her like some screighin' auld craw! "Like draws to like," folk says, an' aiblins ye're no that faur wrang, gude wife, to be skirlin' the like til a merry-begotten wee din raiser, as that wein's like to turn out. But wadna "Bangor," noo, or "Saunt Neot's," or some douce tune like that, an' belike ane o' the waesome Psaulms o' penitence be fitter baith for the puir bairn an' its ill-doin' faither?'

'Haud yer lang, ill-scraipet tongue, Luckie Howden! We a' ken what maks *ye* sae bitter on the puir bairn. Gin ye'd gotten the tentin' o' her, an' three shillin's the week forby the feedin', ye'd hae thocht nae wrang; an' ye wadna hae been sae gleg to hearken to senseless lees, 'at ony body no clean doited micht ken better nor mind.'

'Ye ill-tongued limmer! Hoo daur ye even me to the like?'

'Ou ay! Ye're rael heigh, are na ye? But ye gaed fleechin' to Miss Mary for a' that, to get the bairn awa frae me, an' ye said ye'd tent her for half-a-crown. I'm thinkin' she'd no hae fared ower weel, the bonny lamb, gin ye'd hae gotten yer way. Ye'd hae shotten't by, wi' ait meal brue, an' drank the sweet milk yersel!'

'An' gin I did speer Miss Brown for the bairn, was there ony wrang kenned anent it than? An'

what for suld I no? Wad it no hae been weel for the bairn gin I had gotten my way! I hae raised twal o' my ain, an' I'm granny to naar twa score. But you! ye ne'er had but ane, an' ye kenned na hoo to guide it--made sae puir a job o't the Lord ne'er chanced ye wi' anither.'

'The Lord forgie ye! ye ill-tongued witch,' cried Eppie, while her brimming eyes overflowed. The image of her long-lost darling rose before her in all its winsome beauty, and she gathered up the baby in her lap, more closely to her motherly breast, and pressed it fondly for the sake of the one that was gone.

'An' sae gin ye hae the merry-begotten brat, an' the siller, ye maun e'en tak the disdain as weel. I'm blythe for mysel' noo, 'at the half-crowns didna come my gate. There war nane but decent men's bairns e'er lay in thae arms.' She stretched her spider-like tentacles, while the contents of her basket gave a warning rattle, 'An' that minds me I maun do my errand wi' the young man--I winna ca' him a minister, for the gown suld be strippet frae his shouthers; an' that's what it will be afore lang.'

'My certie! An' ye'se gang nae sic gate,' cried Eppie, rising and preparing to block the way. 'The minister's lyin' sair sick, an' he maunna be fashed wi' a randie auld tinkler wife's daft blathers. Set ye down! Though I winna say ye're walcome, an' I'se fesh Miss Brown.'

Miss Brown was fetched accordingly, she had overheard high words, and entered in some surprise.

'Mrs. Howden,' she said holding out her hand, 'so you have come at last to ask for the minister. The people seem to have cast us off altogether. Since he has been sick scarcely one has come to enquire for him.'

'Aweel, Miss Mary, an' it's no juist that has brocht me, ill doin' ye ken maun bring ill feelin'. Whan folk sees the abomination o' desolation sittin' in the holy place, as the Scripter nicht word it, an the steward o' the Kirk's mysteries gien ower to the lusts o' the flesh, the douce Christi'n folk beut to hand awa. Touch not, taste not, haunel not, ye ken what the word says. An' I hae been thinkin', seein' hoo things hae come round, ye'll be best to tak tent o' yer bits o' dishes yersel', gin Eppie there can gar it gree wi' her walk an' conversation as a Christi'n wumman to mind that ill-faured scart o' a bairn, I see na at she may na keep yer teapat as weel!' So saying she lifted the cover of her basket, and proceeded to lay out the cups and saucers on the dresser.

Mary was too much astonished to say anything. She was glad to see the ware once more brought within reach of use, seeing that hitherto it had been a mere embellishment to the glass cupboard in the corner of Luckie Howden's cabin, a testimony to her piety and helpfulness to the church; but the cause and the manner of the restitution were beyond her comprehension. She glanced at Eppie for some explanation, but Eppie sat with lips compressed in determined silence, a flame of scarlet indignation burning on either cheek.

Luckie Howden went on arranging and counting the pieces of crockery. 'Twall cups an' twall sacers, four bread plates, an' twa bowls. Ye'll find that a' richt, Miss Brown. An' here's the bits o' siller things,' producing the teapot, over which she passed her hand with a regretful stroking motion, 'It's gotten neither clure nor dint i' my haunds. A' siller say ye? An' weel I wat it's bonny. Aiblins it's no sae bricht an' glintin' as it ance was. "Yer goold an' yer siller are become dim, yer garments are moth-eaten," that's what the Prophet Ezekil said til back-slidin' Isril lang syne, an' it's true yet! Wae's me, Miss Brown! 'at the white raiment o' yer puir wanderin' brither, 'at we ance thocht sae clean an' white, suld be spotted wi' the flesh after a'! But what's been dune i' the secret chaumer sall be proclaimed on the house heads afore lang. My certie! but he's been the lad to draw iniquity wi' cart ropes! an' to sin wi' the high haund! But it's a' fand out at last, he'll be peuten til open shame, an' be nae mair a steward o' the gospel mysteries in Glen Effick!'



"Ye'll find that a' richt, Miss Brown." Page 190.

"Ye'll find that a' richt, Miss Brown."
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'I don't understand one word you say, Mrs. Howden,' cried Mary in open-eyed amazement. 'If our things are in your way you are perfectly right to bring them back, and it will not inconvenience us in the least to have them here. It was kind in you to give them house-room when we came to live in the village, and we are obliged to you for having taken such good care of them. But I don't understand what ground of offence my brother can have given you, or why you should speak of him in such extraordinary language.'

'I'm thinkin' ye'll hae to thole waur langidge nor that afore a's o'er, Miss Brown. An' aiblins ye ken mair nor ye wad like to let-on. I'm no yer judge, but we hae scripter for't, 'at refuges o' lees winna stand.'

'Think shame, woman!' cried Eppie, unable altogether to keep silence, though she still restrained herself, fearful of provoking a tempest and disturbing the sick man.

'An' what wad I think shame for? It's the ill doer 'at fears the ill word. I hae cleared my skirts this day. I shack the stour frae my very feet, an' I'm dune wi' the De'il an' a' his warks!' And shaking out the folds of her red cloak, with a stamp of either foot, she hobbled away.

'What does she mean, Eppie? And whatever it is, the rest of the people must think it too--Don't deny it, Eppie! you know all about it. I have seen so much as that in your face for several days. What is it?'

'It's naething ony sensible body wad heed. Just a when senseless havers. Ne'er fash yer thoomb, Miss Mary! It'll a' blaw ower.'

Miss Mary was resolute, however, and would be told. She sat herself down on a stool beside Eppie, and between coaxing and sheer pertinacity she at last prevailed on the old woman to speak. They sat together for some time with their heads very close, conversing in whispers.

'Oh how could any one believe so monstrous an invention?' she cried at last, her face suffused with crimson, while she kissed the sleeping baby, the innocent cause of so much confusion, and returned to her brother's room.

CHAPTER XXV.

Thursday morning was the opening of a great day in Glen Effick. The foundation stone of the new Church was to be laid, and from the most distant corners of Kilrundle parish the people came streaming in across the braes, more numerous even than for the Sunday meeting. The Session had at last come to an agreement with Widow Forester for half of her kaleyard on which to build their Church. The foundation was already dug, and every owner of a horse and cart had agreed to contribute so many days' labour towards delivering the materials on the ground. And now the work was to be inaugurated with preaching and prayer, that it might be brought to a speedy and prosperous issue. The good people having neither oil nor wine to bestow in cementing the stones, had resolved to pour forth a copious oblation of words devout and stirring, and to celebrate their triumph over Laird and Law in true democratic fashion, by a general gathering and unstinted speechification.

The hot stillness of September days had passed away, and the fresh cool brightness of October had succeeded. In low-lying hollows the first hoar-frost of the season was melting into dew before the approaching noon, and straggling flecks of cloud swam merrily overhead in the breezy sky. The crimson of the moors was withering somewhat into rusty brown, but the birch along the watercourses had ripened into sprays of gold, while the distant hills stood out against the sky in violet and blue. The trooping worshippers displayed all their Sunday bravery of apparel, but the solemnity of their Sabbath demeanour they had felt at liberty to leave behind. The children ran hither and thither shouting their loudest, while the seniors chatted cheerily as they went, carrying their dinners in heavy baskets between them, and resolved to make the most of the day's 'ploy.'

Along the village street the people trickled in a continuous stream, and by and by Ebenezer Prittie and Peter Malloch put up the shutters on their respective shops. Donald Maclachlan shut up the smithy, and Angus Eldrecht, the wheel-wright, closed his yard, and stepped off with their wives to the meeting place on the brae-side, where Mr. Dowlas and a reverend brother of the presbytery were already in the tent waiting to conduct the exercises.

Mrs. Sangster, with her daughter, was on the ground betimes, discussing with unwonted affability the terrible scandal to the elders and more prominent people near her. She occupied, of course, the beadle's special chairs, and as the time to commence the service drew near, she beckoned to her Stephen Boague and his wife, and seated them beside herself and daughter. It was a public recognition of their exemplary character she considered, which would fully reward the woman for her hospitality the day she was lost in the mist, and was quite inexpensive besides. When Mary Brown presently appeared, the good woman would fain have yielded up to her her accustomed seat under the matronly wing of the congregation's only lady; but Mrs. Sangster requested that she would not move. 'I could not countenance Mr. Brown or his family,' she said, 'under the circumstances.' So the poor woman had to remain; but she no longer felt promotion in her place of honour, and all her acquaintances looked askance, and wondered at her 'upsettin' impudence.' Mrs. Sangster was too busy with her 'spy-glass' and psalm-book to see the approach of Mary, who coloured with resentment at what, since Eppie's explanation, she now perfectly understood, and looked about for another seat. The Laird had been watching his wife's proceedings with cynical amusement, he now came forward and removed his daughter to the elder's bench, setting the chair she had been occupying beside her, and seating Mary upon it, while he took his own stand beside them.

Mrs. Sangster's spy-glass dropped upon her book; amazement and indignation paralyzed her, which was fortunate, or she might have exhibited a tantrum, even in that sacred assembly. She! that congregation's Deborah without a Barak, as a fawning preacher had once described her at family prayers, to be thus flouted before them all! And the wholesome discipline she had meant to exercise in support of the public morals to be turned round upon herself! and this, too, by her own husband! the man bound to protect, honour, and obey her! For *of course* he was bound so to do, whatever Saint Paul, or any other old bachelor who knew nothing about it, might say. Was she not the more advanced Christian? and in right of her higher standing in '*The Kingdom*' entitled to instruct, advise, and reprove those on a lower level. Oh! how should she punish him and bring him to book? There was the difficulty. Scolding would not do. She had tried that before, and it did not succeed. He was apt to laugh in her face, and sometimes even to scold back in return, in an altogether dreadful and appalling way--for an elder--if she persisted; and then nothing, not even her unfailing Christian meekness could secure her the last word, which was her due as a lady. She thought of putting him on low diet for a while.--'And it would serve that monkey Sophia right, too, for sympathising with her father. See how contentedly she cottons up to Mary Brown!' thought she. But she did not like bad dinners herself, and it would come out if she had a sweetbread quietly in her own room. Besides, she had attempted a penitential regimen of cold mutton once before, and it had not ministered to his spiritual needs; on the contrary, he had broken out in a way that was simply dreadful, and had threatened her with a housekeeper if she could not keep a better table. Her crosses were indeed many and grievous, and she might have grown weak and hysterical in reviewing them, but that other cares and anxieties demanded her present attention. Surely there was something rubbing up against her in a familiar and unbecoming way. She turned, looked, and almost leaped into Mrs. Boague's lap. Stephen's largest collie was titillating his spine by pushing it up and down against her new plum-coloured

silk gown.

'Haud steady, mem! The folk 'ull see ye, an' ye're nae licht wecht forby!' whispered Mrs. Boague. 'Ne'er mind the dugs, an' they winna fash wi' *you*. An' de'il a yelp or snap wull they gie, sae lang as ye dinna staund on their tails.'

Touseler, finding his scratching-post withdrawn, stretched himself on the ground to sleep out the sermon, and Mrs. Sangster resumed her chair. Her tranquility was of short duration. First would come a tug at her parasol, accompanied by a strangled yelp, as a puppy having swallowed the tassel would struggle to escape, like a trout on a fish-hook; and next it would be her shawl. A dirty little finger would be found tracing the flowing lines of its elegant embroidery, or the corner would be pulled down, that the critics squatting on the sward might more conveniently scrutinize the elaborate design.

When Sophia's chair was removed it had left an open spot in the crowd, to Mrs. Sangster's left, and as nature abhors a vacuum, the unplaced material of her party had flowed in to fill it. She looked down on a confused knot of dog and child life, heads and tails, legs and arms swaying and kicking to and fro in silent happiness. Had a quadruped or a biped given tongue in the 'House of God,' there would have been whipping behind the first big boulder-stone on the home-going, and they had all felt the weight of Stephen's hand at sometime, so were wary; but so long as silence was kept, and they remained beside the shepherd and his wife, they might kick, roll, and be happy as they pleased.

Poor Mrs. Sangster's attention was fully occupied in protecting her dress from the busy fingers of the little boys and girls, and in seeing that the dogs did not make a coverlet of her skirts; and she vowed never again to 'take notice' of people from the 'lower orders,' who so little appreciated the honour she did them, and made themselves so utterly abominable with their ill-reared dogs and children. She lost all the good of their sermons as she told the reverend orators that evening at supper, and was far too concerned for what might befall her own draperies, to give much heed to the Rev. Æmelius Geddie's description of the curtains of fine linen and badger skins, blue and scarlet, prepared for the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and his tender appeal to the women of Glen Effick to go and do likewise. Mr. Dowlas described the building of Solomon's Temple, its joists of cedar covered with plates of pure gold, the chapiters, the pomegranates, and the wreathen-work, the brazen pillars and the vessels of pure gold. He interspersed these with spiritual interpretations and mystical images drawn from the Prophets, till the hearers were brought under a general vague impression of splendour and solemnity, they could not have explained wherefore; but they all agreed that it was a 'graund discourse,' and 'very refreshing,' and that they had entered on a high, noble and arduous work, in proposing to build themselves a little meeting house; and that, though propriety forbade their saying so, the Divine Head of the Church was greatly beholden to them, and that they might look, as their certain due, for large amounts of blessing, spiritual and temporal, to requite their exertions in church-building, as well as that heroic penny-a-week to the Sustentation Fund.

Like other fine things, the sermon came to an end at last, and after psalms and benediction, it was announced that they would proceed in procession to the site of their future church, where reports of the different committees would be received, and addresses given, after which the foundation stone would be laid with prayer and praise.

The congregation then broke up, and in the confusion Sophia got the opportunity she had been desiring of a quiet word with Mary. Circumstances had befriended her wonderfully she thought, when her father had brought her away from her mother, and placed her beside Mary Brown. She had always been fond of Mary, but now she felt a sisterly drawing towards her which she had not known before. Mary was her junior by about a year, but was quicker and earlier to mature, and this had sometimes made Sophia feel a rawness in herself, and a general slowness and obtuseness by comparison, in a way approaching as near to jealousy as her somewhat stolid and easy-going disposition was capable of experiencing. But as Mary neither assumed nor probably was aware of any advantage, this feeling in great measure slept; and now, when Sophia's development had advanced as with a bound, under the stirrings of awakening emotion, the latent grudge was altogether overborne. She sat up very close to her and pressed her softly. Mary was surprised. Demonstration of the faintest kind was something new in Sophia, and altogether unexpected. Her heart was sore at the unkindness of the parishioners to her brother, and their haste to adopt unwarrantable and improbable suspicion against him; and that Mrs. Sangster; who had assumed to play the rôle of mother to her in her lonely position, should turn and publicly visit the imaginary misdeeds of her brother on her head, had been very grievous. She assumed that Sophia meant to signify her disbelief in the idle rumours afloat, and, accepting the proffered sympathy, she returned the friendly pressure with grateful warmth. The two read from the same bible and psalm-book, and sat so close that the Laird was able to find room on the bench beside his daughter, just as he was beginning to think a two hours' stand rather a heavy penalty for interfering with his wife's absurdity.

'Mary!' whispered Sophia, when the assemblage was breaking up, 'I want you to tell your brother that I received his letter. Whoever told him that I am engaged is altogether mistaken. Nobody ever asked me to--be engaged, and there is no one who could have any right to do so. I would have answered his letter, but mamma forbade me; she even says I must not come and see you, while some report or other, I don't know what it is, is going about. So I have been waiting for an opportunity to speak to you. Mamma says papa does not believe the report, so--' here the

words died away and the colour deepened on her cheeks--'but papa does not know of his letter to me.' Mary leant forward to bestow a kiss, but Sophia started back under a sharp prod from the parasol of her mother, who was eagerly reaching over the shoulders of the intervening crowd.

'Sophia Sangster! what are you lingering there for? Don't you see everybody is on the move? Come to your mother's side, your proper place, this moment.'

It was not a happy half-hour for Sophia that followed. The maternal plumage was sadly ruffled, and in the 'preening' that ensued to readjust the feathers mental as well as physical (for the silk gown was rumpled as much as the self-complacency was disturbed), not a few stray pecks fell to her portion. That her husband should have carried away her own girl from her side was almost intolerable; only, till she could devise a way to punish him which she had not yet discovered, she must bear that; but the girl had acquiesced without sign of reluctance or remonstrance, had consented to be separated from her own mother with perfect equanimity, and in spite of all that had passed, had seemed entirely comfortable beside Mary Brown, notwithstanding the maternal taboo. She had had little leisure for observation. Her gown, her shawl, the children, the sheep-dogs had made constant demands on her attention, and when she looked for succour to the shepherd and his wife, they were drinking in the sumptuous splendours of Solomon's temple, and had no thought for the turbulent little Bethel at their feet. Once however she had found time to glance across and was disgusted to see Sophia and Mary singing amicably from one book and evidently on the best of terms.

'You're a saft feckless tawpie, Sophia Sangster!' she enunciated with much emphasis, as she and her daughter were carried along in the stream of the procession. 'It seems to me sometimes that you have no more sense than a sookin' turkey!' Mrs. Sangster rather prided herself on her English, which she considered equal to that of any body on her side of London or Inverness. These were the two seats of perfect speech she considered; but failing them Auchlippie could hold its own against Edinburgh, St. Andrews, or anywhere else, and was decidedly a better model than her son Peter since he had adopted a Lancashire brogue. Nevertheless when she became 'excited' (*i.e.* angry), she admitted that she had to fall back on the pith and vigour of her native Doric with its unlimited capacity for picturesque vituperation.

'It's not from me you take your fushionless gates! That comes o' the donnart Sangster bluid in you, I'm thinking. But what possessed you to take up publicly like yon with Mary Brown, when you know I want you to steer clear of her just now? When the Presbytery has taken the matter up, it will be proper enough to bestow patronage and show sympathy for the poor girl; but meanwhile we have a testimony to bear, and it will not do to countenance evil doers or their families.'

'Mamma, I don't know what you are talking about.'

'Of course not. It's no subject for a young girl to know anything about; but you must not think in your ignorance to set yourself above the advice and opinion of your mother, who knows all about it.'

Sophia said no more. To speak was but to stir the fire of her mother's wrath. She held her peace, and left the flame to burn itself out, or smother in its own smoke and ashes. She simply did not attend, and when her mother, stopping for breath, turned to survey, as it were, the field of battle, or at least to view the result of her onslaught as depicted in the girl's face, she was smiling to a bare-footed urchin who trotted by her side, Stephen Boague's youngest, who had taken a fancy to the gay apparel of Mrs. Sangster, and still kept it in view.

'Let that de'il's buckie alone, Sophia Sangster, and attend to me! It has been pulling the fringes of my shawl for the past two hours, and made it smell of peat-reek and moss-water so that I shall never be able to put it on again.'

The meeting was held in the field adjoining the excavation made for the church's foundation. Mr. Sangster was in the chair and supported on either hand by a minister, and there were chairs in front for Mrs. Sangster, her daughter, and Miss Brown, to which the matron, somewhat mollified by this observance, was ushered, when she very quickly appropriated the remaining seat for her shawl, so that there might be no vacant place for any one else. She might have spared herself the trouble. Mary was not in the crowd, and if she had been, would not have desired to sit beside her.

At the close of the religious exercises, Mary had hastened home to her brother, from whom she had already been longer away than at any previous time since he was taken ill. She would not have attended the meeting at all, but for his desire that she should; and she was glad to return home at the earliest moment, for since she had learned its proneness to think evil without cause, she loathed Glen Effick utterly and all its affairs. Her brother had been drowsing, but he woke up at her entrance, and asked to hear what had been done.

'Just the usual thing. Mr. Geddes preached about the Tabernacle, and Mr. Dowlas about Solomon's Temple.'

'Ah! I can imagine it; very pretty and flowery, no doubt. But I think when so many were collected they might have had something more useful and more likely to do good to the poor

people. "A dish of metaphor," as my good father used to say, "is light feeding for hungry souls."

'They did not think so, I assure you; they seemed quite delighted; though I confess I rather wearied over the inventory of the golden vessels, and I saw Sophia Sangster yawn once at any rate.'

'Was Sophia there?'

'Oh yes. And by the way she sent a most particular message to you; or at least she seemed particularly anxious that you should receive it.'

'Ah!' said Roderick, raising himself, 'tell me quick.'

'I declare, Roddie, you look quite excited! She asked me to tell you she had received your letter--You rogue! What have you been writing to her? I remember now how restless you were one morning till you had got Joseph sent off to Auchlippie! But I, simple soul, supposed it was Session business with the Laird. To think I should be so obtuse with a little comedy going on under my very nose! But, ah me! It has been more like tragedy of late, you have been so ill, and we have both been so lonely.'

'But, to return to your comedy, or at least to Sophia, what more?'

'She said she had got your letter! Was not that enough? She did not *say* it was a sonnet to her eyebrows--but I suspect, she blushed so prettily--yet, now I think of it, it was not a sonnet you sent, for I was to tell you that she is not engaged--that there is no one who has a right to ask her to be engaged. You must have been jealous, Roddie! Who was it? And she said she would have written, but her mother forbade her.'

'Oh that tiresome Duchess! What ridiculous fancy has she got in her head now, I wonder? I feel quite ashamed when I recall the black thoughts I have been nourishing against that poor harmless cockney or whatever he is, Mr. Wallowby; all along of some absurd scheme of hers, which rushed to her lips in her agitation that day on the hill. Poor Duchess! She must have a bee in her bonnet; but she is a sad worry.'

'She is far worse than that!--hard, evil-minded, worldly.'

'Hush, Mary! "Judge not," et cetera. But proceed!'

'Sophia told me that her mother says there is some rumour afloat which must be cleared up before she can have communication with us; and, in fact, the tiresome old thing did her best, not only to cut me to-day, but to keep Soph away too; but the Laird, honest man, was too many for her.'

'You do not mean to say that that abominable Duchess was publicly rude to *you*? I could not stand that! Though she may do or say to me as she likes (and she generally does;) for I do not suppose any sensible man could seriously mind her.'

'Oh no! The Laird came to the rescue like a man and a gentleman, as he always does; and, in fact, if the Duchess had behaved herself, and Soph and I had been under her wing, I do not believe the poor oppressed child would have had courage or opportunity to send you your message, sir, so do not be harbouring bad thoughts of the poor Duchess! Ah! ah! And by the way, there is more message yet! Sophia says her father does not believe the rumours which her mother has been so ready to accept; and--but she blushed and stammered and I could not make sense of it, for you see I was not in your confidence, Mr. Prudence--but, if I were an old woman and understood about those sort of things, it sounded suspiciously like bidding you carry your tale to 'Papa!' Ha! Have I found you out, old gentleman? I suppose I may go for a governess now; I may be losing my place as house-keeper any day!' And she laughed merrily while Roderick coloured and looked confused, but intensely happy.

When the Doctor came to visit his patient that afternoon, he was astonished at the improvement in his condition, and quite confirmed in his belief as to the wisdom of his own prescriptions, and general course of treatment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAMA CLAMOSA.

The meeting was an undeniable success. The chairman called on his reverend supporters for addresses, which they made in their warmest and most florid style. They recalled the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, when each man laboured with his sword by his side, and worked, and watched, and fought by turns; till every hearer present believed that he might emulate Nehemiah and Zerubbabel by contributing to the collection, and began to finger his loose change with a view to doing it. There were stirring references, too, to John Knox, (especially to the scene at Holyrood, when he spoke back to the Queen,) to George Wishart and Andrew Rutherford, Margaret Wilson, John Brown of Priesthill, martyred by 'Clavers,' Jenny Geddes with her creepie attacking the Dean of Edinburgh, and other Scots Worthies.

Then followed reports, statements of funds and calculations of expenses from the Deacons, and finally speeches from all who chose to address the meeting. This last feature in the proceedings was especially popular. Every greybeard in the crowd was in turn urged and goaded by his admiring family and neighbours to step forward, and when, after much shame-faced trepidation, he had hummed and stuttered through a few sentences and would finally come to a dead stop and return to his friends, he had earned the self-satisfied consciousness that he was a potential orator, and that 'gin the Lord had but granted him schulin' in his youth, he might have wagged his pow in a poopit wi' the best.'

At length the hoary grandsires had all spoken, the fathers, the sons, even the 'halflin callants,' began to feel the stirrings of ambitious eloquence. Luckie Howden, too, felt movings to rehearse her testimony in favour of good morals, and Brother Dowlas saw it was time to draw the line. In a whisper he called attention to the practice of Saint Paul, who suffered not a woman to teach--a sentiment which was overheard by Mrs. Sangster, and elicited from her a look of most contemptuous wonder, but nevertheless received the adhesion of the Laird. They therefore proceeded to lay the foundation stone, with appropriate prayer and praise, and the proceedings came to an end.

At this moment, Mr. Dowlas came forward and stated in a loud voice that he had been requested to intimate 'that the Session and Deacons' Court were requested to assemble for special and important business at the Post Office, immediately after the close of the present meeting.' Mr. Sangster was taken by surprise. He asked on whose authority the intimation had been made, but the reverend announcer replied that a written notice had been placed in his hand, and that he and Mr. Geddie had been requested to be present.

The elders and deacons were already assembled when Mr. Sangster and the ministers entered the place of meeting, Joseph bringing up the rear in his most official manner, yet diffidently,--as if uncertain whether he were wanted,--but still desirous to know what was going forward, and willing to give weight to it by the presence of the beadle. He stood by the door with his hand meekly before his mouth, and surveyed the silent assemblage, whom he afterwards described to Jean Macaulay as resembling 'a curran hoolets wi' their muckle blinkin' een, lookin' terrible wise an' sayin' naething.' Perhaps it was in their silence that their wisdom lay.

Ebenezer Prittie, being host, or at least the party in occupation of the premises, rose to his feet, and after clearing his voice, proposed that the ruling elder, Mr. Sangster of Auchlippie, now take the chair, and that the clerk of session take the desk and minute the proceedings.

Mr. Sangster rose in reply, saying that before he did so, he desired to understand the nature of the meeting over which he was asked to preside, as he knew nothing about it but the intimation which had been read after the meeting just closed and while it was dispersing.

Ebenezer replied that it was the meeting adjourned from Monday, as agreed on, that they might consult with the two reverend members of Presbytery, who were now kind enough to be present.

The Laird answered that the joint meeting of Session and Deacons' Court on the Monday, had concluded its business and been adjourned *sine die* by their acting minister who presided, and that when he (the speaker) subsequently conversed on the same evening with his friends, whom he had been happy once more to meet in that place, he had dwelt strongly and without being gainsaid, on the fact that their meeting as a Church Court having been dissolved by the presiding officer, that which they were then holding was merely a friendly conversation, and without authority. And he begged to inform the person, whoever he might be, at whose instance they had now come together, that it was altogether '*ultra vires*' (his voice hung emphatically on the Latin words, and they greatly impressed his auditors) for the Session to assemble itself at the pleasure of any of its members, and to act as a court. Mr. Brown as acting minister was '*ex officio*' (more emphasis and deep impression) the proper caller and president of such courts; and failing him, it was the ruling elder on whom it devolved to summon and preside over the Court. But the minister had no knowledge of,--far less had he called or sanctioned their meeting,--and for himself he could not, as a constituted authority in the Church, be party to a proceeding so irregular and subversive of all Church government, as the course proposed.

'But Mester Sangster,' put in Ebenezer, 'ye canna but say that we met here on Monday nicht, and gin ye dinna ken that we agreed to come thegither again the day, to consult wi' the twa ministers here present, it's yer ain faut. Ye gaed awa at yer ain wull, an' naebody cud tak on him to bid ye bide.'

'Brethren,' interposed Peter Malloch, with an elated but solemn smile, 'what say ye to ca't a' a meetin' o' the Deacons' Coort? An' we could meenit it a' in our books,--I'm thinkin' that's our plan. I'm the convener, an' I hae a richt to convene my ain coort!'

'Certainly, Mr. Convener,' responded the Laird, 'you may call a Deacons' Court; but on what point is it that you want the advice of the Eldership here present? Will the treasurer's books not balance? Have some of the collectors failed to make their returns? Or what is it?'

'Hoot, Laird! ye ken just fine! The treasurer's a' richt, an' sae are the collectors. It's the minister an' his bairn we're after, as ye ken brawly.'

'I regret then, Mr. Convener, to have to remind you that your court has no jurisdiction. Faith, morals, and discipline, are the exclusive province of the Session; and I for one protest against the Deacons' Court presuming to touch such matters.'

'Presumin'! quotha!' interjected Andrew Semple. 'An' hasna ilka auld wife e'y Glen been presumin', as ye ca' 't, for twa week back an' mair?'

Here Mr. Geddie felt compelled to intervene, and pour the oil of evangelical sweetness on the troubled waters. He was to dine and spend the night along with Mr. Dowlas at Auchlippie, therefore he would fain have agreed with his host; at the same time he had no intention of being balked of a sensation, and what promised to be a most interesting hunt after recent iniquity, at the very outset.

'It appears to me, my friends,' he said in his smoothest accents, 'that the points of order raised by our excellent brother have great weight, and are taken with that clear and perspicuous wisdom which have made his opinions a tower of strength to the church in turning back the army of the aliens; and therefore while the Deacons' Court are manifestly moved by a holy zeal for righteousness, such as we might have expected at their hands, it will be best that they do not take action officially in this matter.'

'I defy them to do it!' interjected the Laird, little mollified by the unctuous adjectives.

'It is also not to be expected,' continued this reverend Achitophel, 'that our erring brother'----

'Prove the error,' muttered the Laird.

'That our brother who has wandered from the paths of holy living, but whom we all love (and brethren, I may add that he is still but young, and the flesh is weak)! It is not to be expected that he should call a Court to investigate into his own shortcomings; or that until he has been brought to see and admit the heinousness of his offences, and that they have all been found out (for that, brethren, I have always observed is a powerful lever in awakening a slumbering conscience)--It is when the poor sinner has discovered that his refuges of lies will not stand, that they are all swept away like mists before the winds of indignation, and that the clear light of truth is shining down on his nakedness, and wretchedness, and moral wounds; it is then that the poor sinner comes forth with tears in his eyes and sackcloth on his loins, and cries aloud, "I have sinned."

Here the orator stopped for breath. He was moved by his own pathetic elocution, and his picture of the returning prodigal. Also, he had got entangled among his parts of speech, and lost his way among the parentheses; and now he scarcely knew where he was, or what he had intended to say next.

'Are you not condemning a man before you have even heard the accusation brought against him?' inquired the Laird; but without gaining much attention from any one. The audience, in fact, was just then uttering a sigh of satisfaction over the moving words of the previous speaker, which were as impressive as a doleful sing-song could make them, besides being in accordance with their own opinion; and nothing is more interesting and weighty than our own sentiments uttered by another, with a fluency and copiousness which we could not have lent them. It is like looking at ourselves through a glorifying medium, contemplating our own portrait from the brush of a distinguished court painter; which, judged by the walls of Royal Academy Exhibitions, is the highest, as well as the best paid form of art. The golden bowls and pomegranates of the morning were nothing to this! it was as good as a sermon, and 'so practical,' as some one whispered. Nothing like a practical sermon! my friend; and much tilting at sin. Always premising that the sin is not yours nor mine (which would be personal and rude), it makes one feel virtuous by proxy.

Mr. Geddie looked over for a suggestion how to proceed, to brother Dowlas, who was quietly enjoying the scene. He knew what it was to be flown away with by Pegasus, and then dropped helpless in a swamp. It had happened to himself; but he was older now, and it was not disagreeable to see his young friend meet the reward of his overforwardness in this miscarriage.

Mr. Dowlas suggested that the present was properly to be considered a meeting of members and office-bearers of the congregation, to investigate certain rumours affecting the character of their acting minister, and to decide what action, either by way of petition to the Presbytery or otherwise, as might seem most expedient was to be taken thereanent.

'Ay! Thereanent, Elluck! Hear ye that?' whispered a neighbour to Alec Lamont, 'That's juist what they say e'y Presbytery. I ken, for I hae heard them mysel'! A grund head for business he's

gotten, that Mester Dowlas. We's gang the richt gate to wark noo, I'm thinkin'. An' hear till him noo, Elluck!' he continued. 'Hear til him noo!' while poor Alec was straining his ears to listen, and was only prevented by the chatter of his talkative neighbour.

Mr. Dowlas went on to propose that the postmaster, Mr. Prittie, act as secretary to the meeting, which was carried with general applause; and Ebenezer took a new quill pen from his drawer, examined the nib critically on his nail, and then placed it thoughtfully between his teeth, while he took his stand at the little shop desk. Observing the tall stool he bethought him that a chairman was wanted, and forthwith reciprocated the holy man's politeness by proposing that he take the chair. Mr. Dowlas bearing in mind his own bulk, and surveying the tall and slender legs of the stool, demurred, suggesting that the chair should be filled by one of themselves--the Laird in fact. The Laird declined with emphasis. He said that it would not be long till they would not only regret, but be heartily ashamed of what they were doing, that he would not compromise himself in their proceedings, even so far as to be present, but that he thought it well that a friend of both sides, who had not yet committed himself to a judgment without evidence, should be present, to prevent mischief as far as possible.

No one ventured to retort. The majesty of wealth and prosperity forbade that; but it may be safely said that for the moment the kindness and goodwill of a lifetime did little to mitigate the indignation begotten of that rebuke.

With some trepidation and much care, Mr. Dowlas clambered up to his lofty perch, from which he looked giddily down. He could not now *rise* to speak, and there was nothing so abstruse going forward that he need come down to the level of his hearers, wherefore he remained where he was, and like the Queen addressing her Parliament, he spoke seated.

He looked down over Ebenezer and his clean sheet of paper and directed him how he should begin the minutes of the meeting, and then informed his auditors that they might now consider the meeting as constituted, and that it would be in order for some one to bring before it a categorical statement of the business which had brought them together.

All eyes were turned on Ebenezer, but that terrible word 'categorical' had proved a stumbler to him. Looks, winks and nods were in vain, because he had resolved not to see them, and was busy remaking his pen, and flicking the point with his thumb that the hair split might come straight. Next they looked to Peter Malloch, but *he* was persistently looking to some one else, so that the electric influence, if there was any, was simply passed along further by him as a conductor, and nothing came of it.

'Is there no one,' said Mr. Dowlas at length, 'who will state the purpose of this meeting? We have nothing before us which we can consider or come to a decision upon, surely some one present could repeat the charges and statements on which Mr. Geddie and myself were induced to attend here.'

His eye had fallen on that of Andrew Semple, who was looking up and listening with all attention, and there, unwittingly fixed, it had remained, till Andrew feeling himself singled out and addressed individually, stood up as by special command, and after some introductory stammering, found voice.

'It's little I can say 'at I *ken*, Mester Dowlas, an' I see na what for ye suld look to me to mak yer statement; but seein' ye're a minister 'at kens what's richt, an' wad na be for leadin' simple folk 'at lippens to ye, intil harm, I'm no mindin' gin I say what I can. A weel, sir, ye see it was just the very day our Davie was ta'en down wi' the jandies. It may hae been on a Tuesday? Na, it was Wadnesday, I'm gye an' sure it was a Wadnesday. I had gotten thegither a score o' yows, an' I was just gaun to herd them down by til Elluc Powie's; an' the gudewife she comes to me an' she says, "Andra," says she, "I'm sair misdoubtin' but our Davie"--or na! It was "that puir bairn Davie" she ca'd him. Ay! thae was her very words, "that he's gotten the jandies, an', gin yer road's through Glen Effick, I wuss ye wad just rin in as ye gang by, an' tell my Auntie Lillie, she's just graund on the jandies." An', says I, "gudewife, I'll do yer biddin'." An' sae, me an' my yows, an' my dug Bawtie--ay it was--Bawtie, I'm thinkin'--Mustard had gotten a lang jag in's forepaw, sae he bed at hame. Aweel, as I was sayin'--'

'Hurry up! Andra,' whispered the Laird, 'or it will be supper time before you get through! I want to get home.'

'The truth's better nor rubies, Laird! speer the minister there gin it's no! I wull no lee, for a' the lairds atween here an' Fruchie! an' it's a sair job to be mindin' byganes. But, as I was sayin', minister, we was just fornent the smiddie, (me, an' the yows, ye ken, an' Bawtie) whan wha suld I see but Auntie Lillie hersel, an' says I to her, "Hoo's a' wi' ye, Auntie?" says I--Na! that's no hit. It was her 'at says to me, "Andra Semple," says she, "but the sicht o' you's gude for sair eyen," says she, an' syne she speered for the gudewife. An' I up an' telled her hoo our Davie was down wi' the jandies, an' her, she was sair afflicket to hear tell o't, for she's a rael kindly auld body. An' says she to me, "It's just trouble an' affliction a' round," says she, "I'm thinkin' it's the days of the end 'at's comin' to pass," says she. "An' there's nane to lippen til. We're just born til evil as the sparks flee up. An' there's non that doeth gude, no not wan," for she's weel grundet e'y scripter, our Auntie Lillie. "An' ye'll no hae been hearin' what's come o'er our minister," says she, "Him we a' tuk for sic a sonsie honest laad, an' a gude!--aweel gin a' the folk says," says she, "be true, he's

gaen clean wrang a' thegither." An' sae she up an' telled me a' 'at a'body kens a'ready; an' ye a' ken't, an' that's just hoo I cam to hear tell o't at the first. An' sae I hae telled ye a' I ken.'

'But you have told us nothing at all,' said the Laird, 'except that your Auntie Lillie has skill with the "Jandies," and it was not that we assembled to hear about, though it is a far more useful thing to know than the other stuff. I think we had better go home!'

'Patience! brethren,' said the chairman, 'let us cultivate a calm and judicious frame of mind. What was it, Andrew, that your aunt told you about the minister?'

'Hear-say evidence!' interjected the Laird.

'Not at all! It is not evidence in the legal sense we are after at present, simply a beginning of some kind,—an allegation, a statement to be afterwards sifted. Now, Andrew Semple, what was it your aunt told you about Mr. Brown?'

'Aweel, sir, she telled me o' the bairn 'at auld Eppie Ness was takin' tent on; an' I says, ne'er misdoubtin' wrang, ye ken, says I, "It's juist like him; it's him 'at's aye doin' gude." An' Auntie Lillie she just leugh, an' gae a kin' o' glint o' the e'e, an' syne she gae the ither nicker, an' says she, "Andra," she says, "Semple's yer name, an' simple's yer natur! It's his ain bairn, bless ye!-- the pawkie young sneckdrawer 'at we a' thocht was sae blate an' sae douce. I canna but laugh whiles, to think sic fules as he has made o' us, for a' it's sae wrang." "But it's no true," says I. "That's just the fash o't," quo' she; "it's ower true! There's no a wife e'y hale glen 'at disna ken a' about it.'"

'You affirm, then, that it is commonly reported, Andrew,' said the chairman, 'that the infant adopted by Mr. Brown is his own child? Here is an allegation which the ecclesiastical authorities cannot possibly let pass unsifted. On what authority is the assertion made?'

'Just a' body tells the same tale. An' I hae telled ye a' 'at I ken, an' that's naething!'

The ice being broken, every one was now willing to contribute a surmise or a circumstance, till in the end they had worked up the narrative to the full strength at which it was circulating out of doors.

'And now,' said the chairman, 'we have the accusation before us; and yet, strange to say, there is no accuser. We have here a public scandal, a case which would give the enemy ground to blaspheme. We must do our duty to the Church by taking steps for the removal of its withered branch. Now, who will undertake the Christian duty of libelling Mr. Brown before the Presbytery? Will the Session do it? or will the members of Session do it? It is a thing that must be done! You are all guilty of connivance, and are in fact accessories to the sin. Will the Session undertake to present the libel?'

'I won't for one,' said the Laird. 'I believe it to be all idle tattle. You have not a thread of evidence to support your libel, whatever.'

'Is there no one whom we could examine, so as to get at the facts?'

'Here's Joseph the bederal,' said Peter Malloch. 'The minister's man sees mair o' him nor ither folk!'

'I ken naething!' said Joseph, coming forward with a troubled look, 'naething ava! I'm ower weel kenned for a douce an' peacefu' Christian, for ony body to let on to me, gin their walk and conversation wasna what they suld be.'

Mr. Geddie appeared touched, and began to observe more attentively this excellent person.

'Did you see Mr. Brown bring home this infant?'

'No sir; but I saw the bairn in Miss Brown's arms, no lang after.'

'Where was the child brought from?'

'Naebody kens.'

'The child was brought from the seashore,' interposed the Laird, 'where it had been cast by the waves after a shipwreck. Mr. Brown never made any mystery about that!'

'Ah yes!' broke forth Mr. Geddie in his most dulcet cadence, 'charity never faileth! It is good for us to be here! This simple undoubting credence in our beloved and highly esteemed brother, is refreshing to the soul, as the grapes of Eshcol in a thirsty land! We know, my brethren, that we must all become as little children, trustful and believing in the gospel message. And here is one who has been nourished on the slopes of Carmel, in the footsteps of the flock, on whom the heaven has dropped her fatness, and the wisdom of the word has been his abundant nourishment. He is as a prince among us, and dwells in his own land among his flocks and herds, with none to make him afraid. Lo! my brethren, behold the simple and confiding innocency of our well-beloved brother, and his charity that never faileth, and his voice that is as the voice of a dove. But ah! my brethren, this is not the primeval Eden of our earliest progenitors! Alas! the trail of the serpent

can be traced among the flowers! Sin has entered on our goodly land, and though we should still seek to be harmless as the dove, the wisdom of the serpent is also required, and we are cautioned to arm ourselves with that wisdom, even before we show the lovely gentleness of the bird of beauty, whose wings are sprinkled with silver, and its feathers with yellow gold. It is a wicked world, my friends, and while we may well envy our brother his beautiful charity of soul, we are clearly called upon to take heed to our steps, and not to be deceived by the cunning craftiness of evil men.'

An angry flush suffused the forehead of the Laird. I sadly fear he was not the heavenly-minded person depicted by the gushing preacher. He certainly would have resented and repudiated the portrait himself, and would have liked to detect some palpable sign of ironical intent, that he might quarrel with the man on the spot. But the preacher continued to regard him with his most lambent and seraphic smile, and in perfect good faith, without the smallest tinge of mockery. The audience, too, bore the outpouring in the best possible spirit. It struck them as very pretty language, and no doubt the Laird deserved it, though that was scarcely the view of his excellences which had hitherto presented itself to their minds; however, no doubt, the minister being a learned man knew best.

Joseph was the only person present whose sense of humour was in any way disturbed. When he heard the Laird likened to a bird of beauty, his wandering eyes alighted on his honour's bald and blushing poll. He felt tempted to grin, but checked himself in time, raised his eyes to the ceiling and sighed long and softly, like one recovering breath after a protracted draught of sweetness. Mr. Dowlas bore the effusion with entire composure. Such bearing is a necessary gift in the eloquent professions. He had often had to practise it for the behoof of his fellows, and he suspected that they too had had reason to use it for his. He took up the examination.

'How was this infant brought home? he asked of Joseph.

'On Patey Soutar's pownie, sir. The minister cam hame ridin'.'

'Patey Soutar!' ejaculated Ebenezer, 'Patey Soutar the cadger? The maist ill doin' drucken vagabond e'y parish. Ye may tak yer aith the minister was after nae gude whan he gaed ridin' Patey Soutar's pownie!'

'Did you see him riding it then?' asked the Laird.

'No sir, but I heard tell o't.'

'Who told you?'

'I'm sure I canna say, sir.'

'Then we must question Soutar himself.'

'He's the warst leear e'y glen!' cried Joseph, who had no desire that it should be found out that it was himself who had procured Patey's pony for the minister. Had that come out, and the object of the minister's journey, all the suspicion and mystery would have fallen to pieces; and while he had no deliberate wish to injure the minister (whom indeed he liked as well as any one, except Joseph Smiley), yet if somebody else did it, and if Tibbie could be induced to join, why then his suit to Jean Macaulay might come to something. His attitude, therefore, may be described as 'expectant,' and his policy, to use his own words, was 'to haud a man on his ain gate.'

'And what do you think about this yourself, Joseph?' asked Mr. Geddie.

'A weel sir! I dinna weel ken just what to think; but my granny had an auld sayin' 'at there was "aye water whaur the stirk was drowned," an' I'm feared it's a true ane, for the heart of man rins on evil continual, we hae Scriptor for that, an' the flesh is waik ye ken, sir, for, after a', ministers are but men, though wi' a hantle grace they may come to great things, as in yer ain case,' said this polite Joseph.

Mr. Geddie was visibly touched,--the tribute was as unexpected as it was gratifying. 'Evidently a very superior man,' he thought, 'and one who has the root of the matter in him. He seems to know his Bible well too.'

'And now,' said Mr. Dowlas, 'what is to be the result of our deliberations? We dare not let this matter drop. Of all here present, who will sustain before the Presbytery the libel that must be drawn?'

'Who *can* sustain it?' said the Laird, 'that is what I want to know.'

'There is clearly a *fama clamosa* in this parish, against the acting minister, destroying his usefulness, and injurious to the church. If some of the office-bearers here present will frame a libel, it will be the best and most expeditious mode of proceeding; if not, Mr. Geddie and I must bring this *fama clamosa* before the Presbytery, that it may deal with it as in its wisdom may appear best, and I call on you all here present to assist us in the work! Further, it seems to me that we should appoint a committee to visit and deal with the suspected transgressors, in all faithfulness and love. Who knows but they may be brought to a due sense of their offences, and

may make confession (which would simplify proceedings)? Or at any rate such admissions as they may make, will be of assistance in framing our libel.'

'Wha's that he's gaun tae gar confess?' asked Alec Lamont. 'I ne'er heard the name afore. Phemie wha? I'm thinkin' ye hae her name wrang, minister!' he continued in a louder voice. 'Her name's no Phemie ava, it's juist Tibbie Tirpie!'

Alec was speedily reduced to silence by his neighbours, and Mr. Dowlas went on.

'I have important duties at home which will call me away to-morrow, but I propose that the committee to call on and deal with the parties under suspicion, be as follows:--To represent the Presbytery, Brother Geddie, who, I feel sure, will see it his duty to remain over, Mr. Sangster and Mr. Prittie to represent the Eldership, Mr. Peter Malloch the Deacons and congregation.'

'For myself,' said the Laird, 'I will accompany your deputation to wait on Mr. Brown, if it were only to show him that there are some who believe in him still; but as for visiting the young woman who has had the ill luck to fall under the suspicion of this meeting, I must crave to be excused. How any man can think of going on such an errand to a lonely old woman and her daughter is beyond my comprehension. For myself, I could not do it.'

'Duty, brother! duty!' cried Mr. Geddie. 'That should be the watchword of every true soldier of the cross! Likings and dislikes will go for nothing in the eyes of true wisdom when duty calls, and *her* ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace!'

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEALING WITH A SINNER IN LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS.

The next day Roderick, having slept well, was greatly refreshed, and felt strong enough to move to his easy chair by the fire. Mary had heaped up the peat and coppice oak on the hearth, and thrown open the window till the air grew sweet and wholesome, and the clammy damps of their hovel were dissipated like the nightmares that had been oppressing his brain all through the past dreary week.

'And what can the rumours be that Sophie spoke of, Mary?' he asked. 'I really am curious to know. I suspect they have influenced more people than that absurd Duchess. That would account for the way the people have stayed away from me, which has been surprising and even distressing me a good deal. However, I am getting better now; a day or two more and I shall be out among them, and I shall find it all out. But I really feel hurt by their coldness and indifference to me.'

'Nonsense, Roddie! They are a foolish and ungrateful lot; never mind them. You must follow the doctor's advice, and go south for the winter, as soon as you are able to travel. Just look at the walls! green with damp, and the moisture trickling down the plaster; and yet this is only October! What will it be in January? It is fine weather now, and we are burning as much fuel as can be done without setting the house on fire, and it takes it all to drive the horrid mouldiness even temporarily out of the air. When winter comes and the rain is incessant out of doors, except when it snows, perhaps, for a change, the window must be kept closed, and the mouldiness and the damp will turn the place into a very cave, and, as the doctor said, after this attack a very little matter will drive you into a consumption. You must not think of it--it terrifies me, and, indeed, I am afraid even for myself. As for the people--I think they will very likely think better of you after we are gone. When your charities among them are suspended, very likely they may think more of you and them. It will serve them right, and be a warning against wagging their tattling tongues so freely for the future. Have done with them! They are a worthless set.'

'Fie, Mary! What are any of us but poor worthless creatures? We who have education and an income, should not be hard on the poor souls. The world must appear very different to them, from what it does to us. Think what it must be to look into the half empty meal-girnel, and at the little heap of potatoes, and know that that is all between them and starvation, till more is earned,--that the smallest miscarriage, a delay in receiving the weekly wage, a stumble ending in a sprain, sickness of a child, even an accident to a horse or a car, may entail a supperless night, or a day of hunger! And when all the energy and care are needed to stave off from day to day their physical destitution, is it not too much to look for those more graceful and spiritual charities which make our life pleasant? It takes so much of light and heat and moisture to support the mere plant life; and when these are so stintedly supplied, it is surely over-exacting to look for the same profusion of flower and fruit on the bare hill-side as one expects in a sheltered garden. In visiting among

the poor, I have often felt humbled at the view of their sturdy fortitude under privation, and the extent of their unostentatious charities to one another. They will stint themselves of the necessaries of life to help those worse provided than themselves, but they cannot talk about it. Indeed, the beautiful act and the gracious word are never to be met with both on the same bush among these wind-swept hills, and I am thankful to say it is the deed I have oftenest observed. I feel bound to make allowance for much rugged speech which might sound hard and uncharitable to a stranger. You may sow mignonette and gilly-flower in your garden, but it is the heather, tough and sturdy, which grows upon the braes, and defies the blasts; and that, too, has its beauty and its sweetness, and we value it less only because it is more abundant and common.'

'Poor Roderick! The hebdomadal orator had broken out in him after his long rest in bed,—the habit of prelecting before a silent auditory, which many find so difficult to acquire, and which, when learnt, makes so many long-winded and pragmatistical nuisances in private life. It did not trouble Mary. Born in a manse, she had been used to prelections all her life, and as the periods would grow longer and more resonant, she would know that no answer was expected, and would go on with her work. Perhaps she regarded it as practise for Sunday, most likely she did not think of it at all, as she settled more steadily to her tatting and crochet work—the Penelope's web, always beginning and never apparently coming to an end,—which kept her fingers pleasantly busy, and left her mind in perfect peace.

There is no saying to what heights and depths of wisdom, or, mayhap, nonsense, Roderick might have attained. The muse theologic, after a week's inaction, inclined to long and discursive flight, but was interrupted in full career by the entrance of Mr. Sangster.

Mr. Sangster was always a welcome visitor, being indeed the only man in the congregation of education or judgment sufficient to warrant confidential consultation. His rugged face and burly form showed some discomposure, as, after a greeting of unusual warmth, for him, he took his seat.

'This is not a mere friendly visit, Mr. Roderick,' he said; 'I wish it was. I am the advanced guard, if I may say so, of a deputation which is going to wait on you; and I wish you distinctly to understand, that I have no sympathy with it whatever. I would say that their errand is both impertinent and absurd, but that these expressions are not half strong enough to convey what I think; and, as I have told them, I only accompany them to assure you that, though they are taking upon them to speak in the name of your flock, we are not all to be taken as represented by them. Quite the contrary!'

Mary flushed and looked disturbed, and presently she left the room.

Roderick's face showed only astonishment. 'But what is it about, Mr. Sangster? Mary has used the word *'rumours'* more than once, but she has not explained it, and you know I have been shut up here for a week past. There must be something the matter, for none of the people have come to see me, and scarcely any so far as I know have even asked how I am. I have been so ill as scarcely to have noted the neglect, but to-day, when I am again able to think, it seems strange. There are so many warm hearts among them.'

'A set of born idiots!' muttered the Laird testily. But at that moment the door opened, and the deputation appeared. Ebenezer Prittie and Peter Malloch were grave and austere of demeanour, and dignified withal, but a little uncertain. They had thought to gather facts, hints, and experience for this more weighty visitation, in their preliminary raid on Tibbie Tirpie; but when they had arrived before her shieling, the door was locked, and no sign of life showed around the premises but a starveling black cat, which arched its back threateningly at their approach, and guarded the threshold with a display of needle-sharp claws and teeth.

Mr. Geddie's deportment also was grave, but solemn rather than severe. He was minded that his disapproval should be chastened with much love, and expected thereby to win the culprit to repentance, and what would be especially convenient in the present unripe and ill-gotten-up state of their case, to confession.

Roderick greeted them with his wonted cordiality, provided them with seats, and sat down facing them to hear what they would say, while the Laird twirled his thumbs in expectancy; but they said nothing.

The laymen exchanged shakes of the head and glances of sorrowful reprobation at the tranquil composure of this impenitent sinner, then they sighed despondingly and looked at the carpet, till their clerical leader should begin. Mr. Geddie had his voice and demeanour attuned to sad solemnity and love, but the words which these sentiments were to clothe were slow to arrive. He looked secretly at his intended penitent, as if inviting him to open the conference, but the invitation was unheeded. Curiosity and a well-mannered patience only were apparent in his bearing, and these were gradually changed into astonished amusement as the silence continued, and perhaps some slight gleam of mischief, as Mr. Geddie's regard grew more appealing. It was evident that their errand, whatever it might be, was hardly a friendly one, or they would not feel so much difficulty in putting it into words; and there was no reason why he should assist them to get into position the artillery with which they were about to open a cannonade on himself.

Mr. Geddie was an accomplished preacher. He could preach from any text, at any length, and

what was more, on any subject,--at least he could work round to the subject he meant to discuss, from any text or subject whatever, in a way the most natural. But a text or starting point of some kind he must have, and hence his desire that Roderick should speak. Had he even spoken of the weather, there would have been an opening to compare present climatic conditions with those which the impenitent wicked shall hereafter experience, and the whole affair would then have been open before him, to discourse on such points and phases as appeared expedient. But this obdurate person remained persistently silent, instead of helping with becoming meekness to prepare the discipline for his own shoulders. Mr. Geddie at length bethought him of his Bible, and, like any other proper-minded person, had recourse to that in his difficulty. Lifting his voice in a melancholy cadence, while he opened the book--

'Let us read,' he cried, 'for edification and correction, a few of the Psalms.'

His voice rose and fell according to his peculiar theory of elocution, getting fuller and louder as he warmed to the work, till he had read through the seven penitential Psalms. Then he paused and closed the book.

'Brother!' he said, 'the words which we have read are the inspired expression of contrition and penitence. They give fitting voice to every agonized soul that has--stumbled in the miry ways of life. Still, they are but in the general. Each case must bring its own particular specification of transgression--must bring forth its own dead out of its secret chambers, must lay bare its own moral wounds, and expose them to the healing sight of truth. The passer-by may shoot out the tongue and say, 'Aha!' but thou, my brother, hast purged thy skirts by open confession and separation, and mayhap thou mayest save thy soul! And oh! my brother, it is above price!'

Roderick sat speechless and amazed. Had Mr. Geddie been alone, he would have supposed that he had lost his wits, or, in view of the weight he attached to the penitential Psalms and to penitence, which might perhaps mean penance, especially when coupled with confession, he might have supposed that he had joined the Jesuits, who were believed to be especially active at that time, and to be using all manner of crafty devices to secure converts; but after what the Laird had said, and in view of the lay delegates present, some other explanation was needed.

'And art thou still speechless, Oh, my brother?' the exhorter went on, 'Thou for whom our hearts have yearned with many tears? Think not longer to shelter in delusive secrecy. Thy refuges of lies are overthrown, thy sin discovered. Come forth and make submission to the Church, while there is time! lest no place be found for repentance, though thou seek it with tears!'

Mr. Geddie's own handkerchief here came into requisition. If we would raise the sluices of our neighbours' tears, it is not amiss to begin by letting loose our own. Hysteria is infinitely infectious, as more than one pulpit orator, blessed with the gift of tears, has found in his brilliantly successful experience.

Roderick caught at the momentary silence to enquire what it all meant, and to what circumstance he could possibly be indebted for the singular scene. He looked to Ebenezer and Peter Malloch, but both turned their eyes austere away, and fixed them on the carpet. He next addressed the Laird; but the Laird replied that they must state their own errand, he would not soil his lips with it, and if they had sense enough left to let decent shame keep them even yet from speaking, the best thing they could do would be to leave it unsaid, and trust to the whole exhibition being condoned as a mistake.

Mr. Geddie, handkerchief in hand, eyes fixed on the ground, was gathering his forces for a fresh onslaught on this hard and obdurate conscience. Mr. Sangster's remark appeared singularly inopportune, treacherous even, and most censurable. What hope of reducing the garrison if his own followers, his auxiliaries at least, were thus to turn and raise a diversion in favour of the besieged? He turned to the Laird in sorrow rather than in anger--

'Surely, Mr. Sangster, in view of the heavy responsibility we yesterday undertook, it is not well to encourage our brother in hardening his heart!'

'What responsibilities have you undertaken, Mr. Geddie?' asked Roderick; 'and who has laid them upon you?' I have listened to your reading and your exhortation, which I assume are meant for my benefit, but you have not condescended to explain their object, and I am at a loss to understand what it is you want.'

Mr. Geddie looked to his two associates, appalled at such persistence, and sadly shook his head. The associates shook their heads also, and looked uncomfortable. They were aware from the attitude of the Laird that there was a certain degree of thinness as yet in their case, when it came to be stated in detail without inference and insinuation; and they had been hoping that the solemn exercises in which they had engaged were to move the sinner to repentance and compel him to confess his fault. For they began to fear it might be hard for the present to prove the fault, and would have preferred to be left only the easier parts, rebuking the offender, and figuring before the Church as its zealous and victorious champions. The silence continued. Mr. Geddie had been dwelling on the moral and emotional aspects of the case, rather than the circumstantial. To his excellent, and even devout, but far from legal mind, the question had appeared to be one of sin, repentance, and church discipline; the more secular considerations of

guilty or not guilty, facts, proofs, and probabilities, had never occurred to him at all. The case had been presented to him by persons whom he believed to be excellent and of sound evangelical views, and he had never dreamed of questioning what they said, revising the grounds of their suspicions, or asking what there might be to urge on the other side. When, therefore, the defendant requested, as it were, to hear the indictment against him, his thoughts and ideas had to be called in from the wide and very different field over which they were scattered, and brought to bear on a different and entirely new aspect of the case. While he had been deeply moved and interested in the case, viewed as one of established ill-doing, and had thought out very fully the relations of the church to the sinner and the sin, he found that his mind had entirely left out of consideration the grounds on which the accusation had been based, and that if it came to discussing the question of guilty or not guilty, he knew nothing about it and had nothing to say. It is not to be supposed, however, that on that account he believed any the less utterly in the guilt of the accused. He felt that he could not discuss it, being unprepared; but his mind, though well-meaning and incapable of intentional disingenuousness, was of the tenacious rather than that facile and self-styled candid order which, because it is incapable of taking strong hold, and is easily moved by every fresh suggestion, claims to be dispassionate and judicial. This man had been represented to him by what he considered good authority, as a sinner, and a sinner he would continue to regard him till irrefragable proof or higher authority declared the reverse. Mr. Geddie, therefore, kept silence under the new aspect of the case. He was clearly entitled to do so, seeing that in a question of circumstance, a parishioner with local knowledge must be able to speak with more understanding than a stranger, even though an ordained minister. On Ebenezer it naturally devolved to speak. He straightened himself in his seat, opened his mouth even and drew in the needful breath; but while he considered how the 'winged words' ought to arrange themselves, the vital wind escaped unmodulated from the doubting chest. A henpecked person, his verbal ventures had so often come to grief, that he had learned so to think and think, before he hazarded an utterance, that the opportunity, the breath, and even the idea were generally gone before he had strung himself to the utterance. The duty, therefore, fell to Peter Malloch, on whom no suspicion of henpecking could rest, as witness the mild apologetic sister who sometimes waited in the shop, and the meek old mother who was always stitching shirts for him, and spoke of him as the Convener;--and then there was no wife.

Peter cleared his voice and leant forward. Nothing could have pleased him more than thus to hold forth before a minister and the Laird; a success might lead to his being admitted to the eldership, and would certainly add to his weight in the church, so he resolved to do himself justice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORE FAITHFULNESS BUT LESS LOVE.

'We have been compelled, sir,' said Peter Malloch, and he fixed his eyes sternly on the tie of Roderick's cravat (he would have liked to frown into the face of the culprit, and to wither him up with the sternness of his regard, but the amused astonishment in his eyes was discomposing). 'Me, that's to say an' Mester Prittie there, or may be I suld say the Deacons' Court an' the Eldership, though they arena a' Israel that are *of* Israel. An' there was a Tummas even among the Apostles,' (and here he glanced reproachfully at the Laird). 'Aweel, sir, to come to the tail o' 't at ance, we hae just been haudin' a bit meetin' wi' the Presbytery, as ane micht say, or wi' twa o' the ministers ony gate, to consider yer terrible on-gaein's, Mester Brown! An' I'm just fairly dumfounded to see the brazen effrontery o' ye, man! To be sittin' there an' glowerin' frae ye, as though ye had dune nae wrang, when the hale glen's ringin' wi' the din o' yer iniquities, an' the enemies o' the truth's lachin' i' their sleeve, an' cryin' aha! as they pass on the ither side. An' we hae been app'inted, hiz four that is, though I'm feared we hae gotten an enemy among us 'at's no takin' kindly t'ey wark' (another glance at the Laird), 'a Gallio 'at cares for non *of* these things, to ca' on ye an' to dale faithfully wi' ye anent yer transgressions. We're wullin' to dale wi' ye in luve, my brither, my little brither, I micht say; for I can mind ye a bit hafflin callant no lang syne; an' we'll allow 'at youth's ill to haud e'y strecht gate, an' 'at flesh is waik; we'll allow a' that, an' dale wi' ye in a' kindness for yer saul's sake, but ye maun e'en mak a clean breast o' 't, an' speak out afore waur comes o' 't. It's a' kenned! Sae just up an' own til't, for we're busy folk, me and Ebenezer here, an' we hae nae mair time to waur on parryin' an' senseless havers. Ye beut to repent o' yer misdeeds, seeing they're a' fand out, and the very first step is to confess them. Sae out wi' 't a' like a gude laud, for ye can be nae mair a minister, an' the less fash an' din ye mak ower't noo, the less ill ye'll do to the kirk ye hae disgraced.'

'What do you mean? demanded Roderick, beginning to flush indignantly. 'State what it is you accuse me of! You appear to have found me guilty and condemned me already, without troubling

yourselves to try me; but if you wish me to confess anything, you must at least state your accusation.'

'An' winna ye take my word for it, 'at a' is kenned 'at ye hae dune? An' wull ye gar folk gang ower yer shame word for word, afore the very face o' yer auld father there? Him 'at was sae gude a man, for a' he was a Moderate, lookin' doon on ye frae the wa'! I'm misdoubtin' but he couldna lie still e'y moulds this day, gin he kenned o' yer on-gaein's!'

'Mr. Sangster!' exclaimed Roderick, 'this is growing intolerable! I must request you to state the purpose of these persons' visit. What do they accuse me of? And on what grounds? They seem unable themselves to say intelligibly what is their errand.'

'I certainly will not soil my lips,' said the Laird, 'with anything so outrageous as well as absurd; and I am not surprised that even in the midst of this ridiculous scene, they should have sufficient sense left, and good feeling, to make it difficult for them to clothe their preposterous accusation in words. Forgive them, and overlook the whole escapade. It is the wisest and kindest thing to do.'

'Mr. Sangster!' remonstrated Mr. Geddie, 'I do think, and you must permit me to say, that your language is not judicious. Even although in your overflowing charity, which I admit is beautiful and refreshing to see, and will no doubt be fruitful of blessing to your own soul, you are still (though I confess it seems unaccountable to me) persuaded of the innocence of (alas, that I should have to use the words!) our erring brother, even you must admit that there prevails in this parish a *fama clamosa* of the most crying and distressing kind, affecting the moral character of the misguided young man whom the Presbytery has set over it for the present to minister to it in spiritual things. His teaching may be within the letter of the Standards. I am thankful to say I have heard nothing of false doctrine and soul-destroying error; but, alas! his example is not what it ought to be! His teaching may be orthodox, his head knowledge of the mysteries not to be impugned; but if the heart is wrong, if his walk and conversation are not convenient, if his conformity to common morality is not what it should be, we must rebuke and chasten him till he repents of his evil life,—we must cut off the withered branch, and cast it out of the vineyard. Oh! my brother!' he cried, 'repent and confess! Put an end to this clamour! Enable us to bring the matter before the Presbytery in such form that it may be able to deal with it promptly if sharply, and without delay. Why should this clamour of indignation go forth over all Scotland to put us to shame?'

'Say what it is you accuse me of, Mr. Geddie. I certainly shall confess if I am guilty.'

'Alas! my brother! Will you still hide your head in a bush like the ostrich, and believe yourself concealed? Think you that the pursuer will overpass thus easily? I tell you nay! But if you will force us to discuss in detail your lamentable backslidings, tell us how the infant which you lately presented for baptism, and which, as I understand, you continue to nourish under this roof—tell us how it came into your hands.'

'The child was saved almost miraculously from a shipwreck, I believe. At least I saw the ship perish, and afterwards picked up the child on the sea-shore near the place, where it appeared to be the only living thing that had come to land. Being impatient to get home, and yet bound to render succour to the little one, I picked it up and brought it home with me, rather than carry it the four miles back to Inverlyon, where the bodies of the drowned were conveyed later in the morning, when the fishermen and coastguard had made their rounds. From the clothing of the child, as well as from reading in the newspapers that the ship was an East Indiaman, I believe that it is the child of some Indian officer who has perished in the wreck, and I have advertised in an Edinburgh newspaper regarding the child, but have received no communication or enquiry from any one whatever; but I cannot imagine how any *fama* can have arisen in the parish over such a matter, which can only be looked on, I should imagine, as an ordinary exercise of Christian charity.'

'Hech!' sighed Ebenezer, 'but he sticks til't weel! But, I'm sayin', sir, Wasna some o' yer ain folk i' the Indies? An' wasna there siller an' gear cam to ye frae there? I'm thinkin' I mind hearin' tell o' kists o' plenissin' an' bonny things 'at was brocht t'ey auld manse frae there awa.'

'Certainly. I had an uncle who died in India and left his property to my mother.'

'Aweel, then, the claes 'at ye say cam wi' the bairnie wad pruve naething, sin ye had plenty sic like e'y house. Ye nicht just hae dressed up the puir thing in ony auld duds ye fand i' thae kists. But what o' the bairnie's mither, sir? Tell's about Tibbie Tirpie!'

'Tibbie Tirpie? What connection is there between her and the baby?'

'Mither an' bairn, I'm thinkin'; or sae the folk say.'

'They must be mad! or most abominable slanderers to trifle so with the good name of a decent young woman.'

'An' ye ken naething about it, minister?' demanded Peter; 'an' wull ye really be for haudin' to that when I have seen ye slidin' hame frae there mysel' after dark? Ye *ken* ye gaed there ae forenicht, it was Sawbith by the same token, an' ye gied them siller, ye ken that! to gar them

keep a calm sough. I hae had that siller through my ain fingers, sae ye needna deny't!

'Deny what? Deny that I gave charity to widow Tirpie? Why should I? She is poor and deserving, I believe, and I gave to her as I hope I should give to any other in like case, so long as I had it to give, and the recipient appeared to need it.'

'An' what was't ye gae her, sir? Was na't a note? It's braw crackin' about *charity!* an' a bawbee til a puir body, or aiblins a penny gin ye haena the change is a godly ac'; but folk dinna part wi' their pund notes that lichtly!

'I regret to observe, Peter, that my ministrations have made so little impression on your memory. Let us hope my successor may be more blest. Have you forgotten the words of David? "Shall I offer to the Lord of that which cost me nothing?" Or of another, "Sell that which thou hast and give to the poor?" The gift of the bawbee would show little self-sacrifice in either you or me!'

'Speak for yersel', sir! I hae muckle fash gatherin' the bawbees 'at ye lichtly sae; an' I care na to waur mony o' them on a curran feckless gowks, 'at suld be garred get for themsel's; but I'm thinkin' it's the ither gate wi' you an' yer like--easy come easy gang. Arena we a' payin' intil the Sustentation Fund? An' ye hae naething to do but tak yer share, an' read yer books an' crack til's. My certie, but it's a braw tred the preachin'! But I'm just winderin' hoo ye can gar't gree wi' yer principles, 'at whan ye gie sae muckle, ye dinna support mair the tred o' them 'at's contreebutin' to support yersel'! We're no a' beggars i' Glen Effick, but gin a' body did as ye do, there's Mester Prittie an' mysel nicht tak t'ey beggin' afore lang for a' the tred we'd do.'

'As to that, Peter, we live in a free country. You take your Gospel in any church you have a mind to, and no one has a right to gainsay your choice; and so, also, my sister buys her groceries where she thinks proper. As it happens, she continues, I believe, to buy them mostly in Inverlyon, where her mother bought them before her. And as to the people in the Glen having a claim to our custom, because they contribute to the Sustentation Fund, and I am paid out of it, I can only say that I distribute among them all I receive from that source, and more, though I make no merit of it. I have lived on my own means ever since I have been among you. My residence, however, is drawing to an end. My physician warns me, it will be at the risk of my life if I remain here during the winter. I have been unwilling to follow his advice, believing it my duty to remain and labour while strength lasted; but after this conversation and the state of feeling in the parish which it betrays, I see clearly that all hope of usefulness for me here is at an end, and so soon as I am sufficiently recovered, I shall go. The discovery that such suspicions are entertained against me, coming too so suddenly and unexpectedly, is deeply painful; but if I am to suffer, it is a consolation to know that it is for my good deeds, and not for evil. Saint Peter's words, which Mr. Geddie there can point out to you, are my assured consolation.'

'Ye maunna be thinkin', sir,' urged Ebenezer, somewhat overawed by the bold front and indignant tone assumed by Roderick, whom he had expected to see humbled in the dust, in tearful penitence, and for whose benefit he had actually prepared a little speech full of superior pity, to be delivered before taking leave, 'ye maunna be thinkin' 'at there's nae evidence against ye but the pund note 'at Peter there has traced. The first o't cam frae Inchbracken, I'm thinkin', frae the very castle o' the persecutors; for the puir lass gaes working up there whiles, I'm thinkin'. An', oh sir! but it was an ill-faured trick o' ye, 'at ye wad expose our shame an' our nakedness up yonder!--tillin' t' in Gath, as a body nicht say, publishin' 't in Askelon! An' ye beut to confess afore ye gang, sir, an' mak reparation to the puir lass, an' syne ye an' her nicht begin ower again, whaur ye wisna kenned, an' ye nicht do weel yet, afore ye dee!'

'I must protest,' said Mr. Geddie, 'against removal out of the parish at present! though it is only right that your ministrations should cease. Brother Dowlas will have seen the Moderator of the Presbytery ere now, and I doubt not a *pro re nata* meeting is already called to investigate this terrible *fama*. The case will be taken up forthwith, and it would be a fleeing from discipline, which you are aware, my poor brother, is a most serious ecclesiastical offence, were you to remove yourself beyond the bounds. The law of the Church requires that you should be tried and put to open shame, that your soul may be saved. Accept the chastening in a fitting spirit. And oh! my brother! confess! confess! if peradventure the publicity and the discredit which it will bring upon the Church be averted!'

Roderick rose to his feet. 'Enough! Mr. Geddie,' he said. 'I can permit no more of this! I have told you how the innocent cause of this misunderstanding came into my hands, and I cannot consent to hear my statements treated as falsehood in my own study. I would say more, but I know well that when you come at last to perceive the truth of the case, there is no man living who will be more ashamed of his acceptance of a preposterous calumny.'

Mr. Geddie would have made still another heart-moving appeal to the sinner to confess, but the Laird had risen, so too had Peter and Ebenezer, and he found himself borne along to the door. With a last great cry he raised his hands aloft, and as he crossed the threshold he exclaimed--'Ephraim is joined to his idols! Let him alone!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONSULTATION.

The Laird returned into the room with Roderick, and it was well that he did so. But for his sturdy arm the young man would have fallen; and, as it was, he dropped breathless and trembling into the nearest chair. Weakened by his illness, the agitation had nearly overcome him, and, but for the salutary presence of the Laird, might have found some hysterical mode of relief. As it was, the pain in his side had returned with renewed violence, he gasped for breath, and, with the Laird's assistance, had to throw himself on his bed.

He, who believed he had been striving after so lofty an ideal, who had been leading, and as he fondly hoped with some success, the majority of his flock towards the same high standard, to be thus cast down! What must his walk and conversation really have been, notwithstanding his approving conscience, that he should so lightly have been suspected of such abominable hypocrisy and vulgar debauchery? He groaned as he thought of it; his temples burned, and, despite the presence of a stranger, the tears at last oozed abundantly through the fingers which he had pressed against his eyes.

The Laird flourished his large silk handkerchief, bepatterned over in yellow and crimson like a small carpet. He coughed, he blew his nose like a trumpet, and then he crumpled up the handkerchief and mopped his eyelids in a very suspicious way. 'Hoots! Mr. Roderick!' he said, while he laid his enormous paw as tenderly on the young man's forehead as Mary might have done. 'Never mind, man! A set of born idiots! But you answered them well, lad, and nobody with any sense that knows you will care a snap o' the thumb for all their havers. Keep up your heart, man! There's nobody whose good opinion is worth the having will think a bit the worse of you. Just leave them alone, and if their whole case does na fall to pieces like a girdless tub, my name's no James Sangster! A set o' senseless pridefu' bodies! that dinna ken which end o' them's uppermost for pure conceit!'

Mary came in presently, and behind her was Captain Kenneth. He had ridden over to enquire for his old friend Roderick (that was how he worded it), and arrived just after the 'deputation' had been admitted to the study. Mary received him, and led him for the present 'ben the house,' where Eppie, and the baby, and herself were holding a little conclave of their own. The conference in the adjoining room naturally furnished a subject of conversation. Mary was indignant and bitter, but not very precise; and Kenneth imagined that Roderick had become unhinged in his theology, and was being set up as a mark to sling at by all the orthodox in the parish, and expressed himself more freely than reverently on polemical hair-splitting, even girding somewhat at the Headship, the pet doctrine of the Free Church, but here Eppie's patience broke down.

'It's naething o' the kind, sir!' she cried; 'Mister Brown's as sound as a bell on a' p'int's o' doctrine, an' nane has ever ventured to say the contrar. It's a daftlike story o' ill livin' 'at they're wantin' to pruve on him, an' they canna do 't, an' sae they hae come here til himsel', to gar him confess an' save mair fash. I hae heard my granny tellin' the gate they gaed to wark wi' the wutches lang syne, hoo they garred them confess whether they wad or no, an' I'm thinkin' gin they daured, they'd be for tryin' sic like on him. Drobbin' him wi' prins, an' what no. But it's a terrible daftlike haver, an' I'm thinkin', sir, ye'll hae heard tell o't afore noo.'

Captain Drysdale had not heard of it, but Eppie very speedily made him acquainted with the whole story, while Mary and the baby were out looking at his horse tethered to a post hard by.

Kenneth's entrance brought composure alike to Roderick and the Laird, both from necessitating more self-control, and also from the satisfaction of seeing that not quite all the world had turned their backs on him. Roderick could not speak above a whisper, but the Laird gave a very full account of the late visitation.

'There is one point, Captain Drysdale,' he added after a lengthy narrative, 'on which you may be able to throw light. One of the points they made against him was that this story of his exploits had originally come from Inchbracken.'

'I cannot imagine how that could be. Ah!' he added after a pause, 'it must be one of my uncle's heavy jokes! I do remember, now I think of it, his telling us how he had met Roderick carrying home a baby, and the clumsy joke he made over it. You know my uncle is a very good fellow, but he can scarcely be called a wit, though he would vastly like to be thought one, and when by any chance he has struck out some little smartness he *will* repeat it till every one for ten miles round has heard it. I remember it perfectly now, and Tibbie Tirpie's name got into the conversation about that same time somehow, and so the servants combined the two. Oh, Rod! He will be so awfully sorry. But this poor little baby who has been the innocent cause of all the annoyance.

Such a pretty little thing it is too! How did you come by it?'

Roderick was lying on the bed, calmer now, and soothed by the friendly sympathy of his two friends, but his voice was weak and the pain in his side made speaking irksome. He looked to Mary, and she repeated to Kenneth the story of the shipwreck and the finding of the baby.

'And what was the name of the ship?' asked Kenneth; 'was that ever discovered? To know it would be the first step towards finding out who the child belongs to, and after all the annoyance it has brought, you would no doubt be glad to restore it to its lawful guardians.'

'Indeed, then, we shall be very sorry to part with it. It is the dearest little thing in the world. I should cry my eyes out if it were taken from us, I do believe. The sweet little pet! And it is so wonderfully pretty. No doubt of its gentle birth, poor little waif! To think it has not a relation in the world!'

'And the name of the ship was?'

'We saw the ship's name in the *Witness* the following week. 'The Maid of Cashmere,' was it not, Roddie?'

Roderick nodded.

'That,' said Kenneth, 'was the name of the ship in which my poor friend Jack Steele lost his wife. He is Major in the Dourgapore Light Cavalry, and they are not two years married yet. They were both to have come home in her, but a week before sailing his leave was cancelled, owing to a threatened rising in the Mahratta country. His wife was ordered home by the doctors, who said her only chance of life was the sea voyage, so she sailed alone with a child only a week or two old, I believe, and the nurse. Poor things! both were lost. After making the voyage round the Cape in safety, to be lost upon the Scotch coast, within a few hours of home! Was it not sad? The Mahratta alarm died out as fast as it arose; and six weeks after Mrs. Steele had sailed, Jack was able to set out himself. He knew nothing of the disaster till he reached his father's house in Edinburgh, and you may suppose what a shock it was to him. He arrived at home just three weeks after his wife's funeral. His, you see, had been a quick passage, while the ship his wife sailed in was considerably overdue before the wreck occurred. Poor fellow! when he asked for his wife and child, and why they had not come to meet him, you may suppose how terrible it was; they had nothing to show him but his wife's grave, and the shock nearly killed him. He was in bed for three weeks after it, and is only able to creep about now. The old judge took to his bed after his daughter-in-law's funeral, so you may suppose the dismal house it was. Jack is an only child, and the old man had set his heart on having a grandchild, and he was cut up in a way you would not think possible, if you had ever seen the hard grim way he has of dealing out justice to offenders. It appears that the child was not born till a fortnight before Mrs. Steele sailed, and that the letter announcing that Jack and his wife were going home was posted before its birth; and so the old people did not know they had a grandchild till Jack's letters, written after his wife had sailed, reached them. They did not know of its existence, in fact, till after they were assured of its death, but the poor old lady cries and laments, I am told, over this--I must call it an imaginary bereavement (for she had never seen or even heard of the little thing till after its death) as bitterly as if it were a child of her own she had lost. The body of this child, too, has never been found; and they say it has been a great aggravation of poor Jack's grief, to think what may have become of it. How old would you suppose your baby to be, Mary? Would it not be strange if it turned out to be Jack's little daughter?'

'We saw in the *Witness* that Lord Briarhill and Mrs. Steele had gone to Inverlyon and claimed their daughter-in-law and took the body back with them to Edinburgh; and we advertised in the *Witness* that we had picked up an infant apparently washed ashore from the wreck, but no one took any notice, and we have not had a single enquiry.'

'It might still be quite possible, nevertheless, that your little foundling is the Steeles' lost baby. The old judge was bearing the loss of his daughter-in-law, I understand, with very proper resignation. He had never seen her, so that there was no room for personal grief or deep feeling, beyond what the melancholy manner of her death must necessarily call forth, and sympathy for his son. But the next mail brought letters which mentioned the birth of the child, and its having accompanied its mother on the homeward voyage, and then they say the poor old man was completely overcome--took to his bed--and the old lady sat beside him and cried by the hour. As for Jack, he was like one out of his mind when they told him, and he has been very ill since. His oldest friends dare scarcely intrude on him yet; he is so badly cut up. By and bye he will want a change, and I have asked him to come to Inchbracken for a few weeks.'

'And do you think then that he ought to be told about our little waif! I quite dread to tell any one about it now lest he should claim it, and I cannot bear to think of losing our pretty plaything.'

'Surely he ought to be told, if there is the smallest possibility of its being his own child; and if you like, Roderick, I will relieve you of that duty. In your present health you will probably not be sorry to avoid unnecessary letter-writing.'

Roderick nodded.

'I fear, Captain Drysdale,' interrupted the Laird, 'that is to say if a stranger can judge correctly

in the matter, you will find it rather a difficult piece of news to break to this Major Steele. Do you think the probability of the child being his is sufficiently strong to justify you in subjecting him to the dreadful disappointment that would follow, if it proves not to be his after all? It appears to me scarcely warrantable to raise hopes which, if unfounded, will cause a disappointment more cruel than was the original loss. If I might suggest, I would urge very great caution.'

'I see what you mean, Mr. Sangster, but how are we to avoid it? Nobody in this country has ever seen the child or could identify it but himself, and surely it is due both to him and the child that he should be informed of its history, if there be even the slightest possibility of his being its father.'

'Undoubtedly, but did you not say just now that you expected him to visit you at Inchbracken very shortly? Might it not be well to wait till then before saying anything to him whatever? It could then be mentioned to him carefully and gradually. Any clothing of the child that he might perhaps recognize, or even the child itself might be shown him, and then its story could be told. That would spare him the misery of suspense, and the possibility of disappointment; whereas if you write, the man will order post horses at once, and set out to investigate your story. Think of his impatience and suspense as he sits in the post chaise, thinking and thinking about it till he grows giddy. It will be twenty-four or perhaps thirty-six hours from the time he gets your letter till he can reach Glen Effick. He may fret himself into a fever in that time. You say he has been ill already, and he will be sure of a relapse if the child turns out not to be his.'

'I believe you are right, Mr. Sangster. I will merely write and urge him to come as early as possible. The season for shooting and visitors is about over, and he may be as quiet as he likes.'

'And are you really going to leave us, Mr. Roderick?' asked the Laird. 'I remarked your saying so to Mr. Geddie, and was really tickled at his unwillingness to let you go away, even while he would not let you stay in the Church. That man would have made a fine grand inquisitor if he had been born in a Catholic country.'

Roderick smiled, and answered in a low voice--'He is a good man, and very zealous. But it is quite true. If he had lived two centuries ago he would have wanted to burn every one who saw things differently from himself, and he would have thought he did God service in burning them. He thinks if he is right every body who differs from him must be wrong. He does not comprehend toleration, and he has no common sense. As my father would have said--"he wants a wife!" if only to teach him that there is a world of daily providence and common things, as well as the world of doctrines and theologies he lives in. But he is a worthy creature!' 'Yes!' he continued, still almost in a whisper. 'We shall go south--Ventnor or Torquay--for the winter. I shall write to enquire at once; but I am not fleeing from discipline, Mr. Sangster! I shall appoint an agent to protect my interests before the Presbytery.'

'Then,' said Mary, 'might we not stop over in Edinburgh, and show Major Steele the baby?'

'I did not propose to take it with us. Supposing Major Steele is unable to recognise it, it would have to come back here and raise more talk; and I fear we should not know what to do with it during our travels if we carried it south, so I think we shall have to leave it here with Eppie for the winter.'

The tears stood in Mary's eyes. 'Oh, Roderick,' she said, 'I shall be so sorry to part with it.'

'Could you not remain too, Mary?' whispered Kenneth.

Mary coloured and shook her head, but a smile peeped from her eyes in a passing glance, which effectually dissipated the threatening shower. 'I shall look out poor baby's chain, and the things she was picked up in, and give them to you to show Major Steele. So mind you come for them before we go.'

CHAPTER XXX.

TIBBIE'S TROUBLES.

Elsbeth Macaulay sat in her doorway and basked in the autumn sun repining, and browning herself like the hazel nuts in the adjoining thicket, which, like herself, were hard of shell, though sweet and sound of heart when you could reach it,--and wrapped in thin wrinkled leathery husks, not far different from the withered parchment which served her aged bones for a fleshly covering. She was very old, but her eye had not grown dim, and her bodily force had not abated.

She lived all alone in her shieling perched high on a steep brae looking down the glen, but she felt quite able to do for herself, and carried her eggs and butter to market as blythely as the youngest. The hearth within was clean swept, and the turf on it burned brightly; while the oaten cakes toasting before it diffused a nutty fragrance through the house. As Elspeth sat knitting her stocking and looking down the glen extended beneath her, she spied a white mutch on the highroad wending towards her. Presently it reached the 'slap' in the stone and divot dyke, where the footpath leading to her own residence debouched on the road. The wearer of the mutch passed through the slap and proceeded to thread the upward path.

'Preserve us a!' she muttered to herself, 'wha's this? It's no mony comes in as they gae by to see Elspeth noo a days! I'se fesh out the kebbock, it looks hearty. An' there's few comes to pree't noo. Na! na! They're a' yartet maist, my cronies, by noo. An' them 'at's t'ey fore yet's ower dottle to travel that far! I'm no wantin' the young gomerals either, 'at stuffs their head i' bannets, an' thinks to be mista'en for their betters! But here's a decent auld wife 'at's no abune wearin' a mutch like her mither 'at gaed afore her.'

The huge cheese was produced from the awmry, the toasting cakes turned before the fire, and Elspeth was back in her place before the guest had mounted the brae.

'An' is that yersel', Tibbie Tirpie?' she presently exclaimed as the wearer of the mutch, slowly mounting, began to raise her head over the edge where the hill slid down out of sight. 'Hoo's wi' ye, woman? I'm blythe to get a sicht o' ye.'

'An hoo's yoursel', Elspeth! Hech sirs! But that's a stey brae for auld folk! It's braw when ye're up, but it's a sair job to clim't.'

The two old women partook of the cheer provided; after that they took snuff together, and then they settled themselves in the sunshine for their 'crack.' Elspeth's walking powers were not what they had been, and she had not been present at the ceremonies of the day before, so there was much for Tibbie to tell. Both of them would have been classed, I fear, as 'of the world,' by the more devout. Kirks and preachings were not by any means to them the most important matters in life, still they were the news of the day, and, as such, interesting.

'An' what said our ain young minister himsel', Tibbie?' inquired Elspeth at last, after all the fine things said by the others had been duly discussed.

'Hoot, woman! He wasna there ava. Did ye no ken he was lyin'? an' rael ill. I winder Jean didna tell ye that! For it was Mistress Sangster, the folk's tellin', 'at cam near giein' him his death. Ye see they gaed stravaigin' ower the hills, an' what suld come ower my leddy but she maun coup in a burn! Up comes the minister to pu' her out, and a sair job he'd hae fand it at the best, for she's a muckle hefty wife; but the daft auld rinketer, whan ance she'd gotten a grip o' him, she gied a screech an' a fling, an' pu'ed him in ower aside her, an' baith gat a sair drookin', an' a wamefu' o' cauld water. Aweel! Stephen Boague's wife, she dried the claes o' my leddy, an' she's nae waur; but the puir minister beut to gang hame as he was--a' drouket--an' he's gotten a sair host 'at's like to be the death o' him.'

'Puir chield! The cauld water he drank was ower strong for him. I ne'er thocht muckle o' that for a drink mysel'. It wants whusky peuten til't, to gar't lie licht on the staumick. But if a' folk says be true, it's het water he's gotten amang noo! honest man. Think ye he'll thole that better nor the cauld?' with a sidelong glance which was not observed.

'I ken there's daft-like clashes rinnin' round, but I ne'er mind them. There's folk 'at maun aye be blatherin' some gate. But he's a gude man, I'll say! an' a worthy son o' the gude auld minister 'at gaed afore him.'

'An' ye think it's lees the folk's tellin' about him?' with a quizzical smile. Elspeth had heard all the rumours, and after a lengthened experience of her fellow-creatures, she was disposed to credit all she heard against any of them, without thinking much the worse of them for merely being found out, which she supposed to be the only difference between them and their accusers; but it was a tempting amusement to prod Tibbie on the subject of these reports, and to hover about the edge of what must not be said to a friend or a guest.

'I'll believe naething on Mester Brown till there's pruif for't! He's a gude lad, an' a free-handet as I hae cause to ken.'

'Ay! What is't ye ken, Tibbie?'

'Aweel! he has gien me siller like the fine gentleman he is! An' me no seekin't frae him either.'

'An' hoo was that, Tibbie?'

'He heard tell I was a lanesome widdie an' no weel aff, an' he cam to speer after me. An' he out wi' his siller an' gied it til me, an' me no seekin't, mind! An' no the gate ye wad fling a bawbee til a beggar, or a bane til a dug; but just like's he was a man, an' me a woman made o' flesh an' bluid like himsel'.'

'Ay? But wha's yon wi' Jean, coming danderin' alang at this time o' day. I maun gie that lassie a

bit o' my mind about a' this galavantin'. We'll be haein' the folk's tongues waggin' after *her* next, with a mischievous glance at Tibbie; but the latter's eyes were fixed on Jean's companion.

'She's a gude bairn, Jean,' Elspeth went on, 'an' rael mindfu' o' her granny. There's ane o' my kye like to gang frae her milk, an' I can do naething wi' her, but Jean's a grand milker, an' she comes ower ilka day an' milks the puir beast hersel'. I'm thinkin', yon chield's comin' up here wi' her, an' if it's no that auld sneckdrawer Joseph Smiley! I'm thinkin' we'll be for haein' a waddin' here afore lang; but gin I was Jean, it's no a shilpet auld tike like yon wad be the lad, an' mair to wale amang. But it's Jean's waddin' ye see an' no mine, sae she beut to wale her ain ground; an' gin she brews gude yale, she'll drink the better. But sit ye still!'

Tibbie was rising to go. 'It's time I was hame,' she said. 'But I'll gie a look till yer coo afore I gang. Ye ken I'm skilly on kye! or sae the Inchbracken folk thinks. Bide still an' hae yer crack wi' Jean. I'se find my road t'ey byre mysel!'

Tibbie's wrath was aflame against Joseph. She dared not trust herself in his presence, with Elspeth and Jean for audience or chorus in the scene that might follow, so she stole off to the byre before the young people could reach the brow of the hill. Their eyes having been engrossed with each other, they had not observed her while they were still at a distance, and Joseph was not aware how near she was, or his heart would have failed him.

Tibbie placed herself conveniently to overhear the conversation, and as usual with eavesdroppers, heard little that could gratify her feelings.

'Behave yersel', Joseph Smiley,' were the first words that reached her ear, spoken with energy, 'or I'se gar yer lugs dirl! Ye muckle calf! I'se hae nane o' yer slaverin' an' kissin', sae stand aff! Wha gae ye the last ane til, I winder?'

'I gae the last til yer ain bonny sel' last nicht, Jean. Think ye I'd let ony body--'

'Ye leein' rascal! Tak ye that!' followed by a resounding crack, as though a palm and a cheek had come in violent contact.

'Od, woman! That's sair!'

'I'se gie ye a harder skelp nor that next time, sae mind yer tongue!'

There were sounds of scuffling after this, but eventually they were calmed by Elspeth's.

'Whisht, bairns! Behave yersels! Ye kenna wha nicht be hearkenin'. An' what's yer news, Joseph? Hae ye nae cracks to divert a lane auld body, forby daffin' wi' Jean? Is there naething steerin' e'y glen ava?'

'There's plenty steerin', granny! Muckle din, but aiblins little 'oo, as the dei'l said whan he scrapit the soo.'

'Mind what ye're sayin', Joseph Smiley! She's no' *your* granny, she's mines; an' what's mair, gin ye dinna talc yersel' up, she'll ne'er be yours ava! Sae dinna let yer tongue wag ower soople!'

'Be quiet, Jean, ye fechtin' hempie, an' let the man speak! I'm juist wearyin' to hear the news. An' what's a' the din for, Joseph?'

'It's just about the minister an' his bairn, an' his carryin's on amang the lasses.'

'Ay? An' is't a' true, think ye?'

'Wha kens? The lad's but young yet, an' the lass is no that ill faured. The Kirk Session's taen't up, an' the Presbytery, an' there'll be sair wark afore a''s dune.'

'An' what'll be dune wi' them, think ye, Joseph?'

'Oo! The minister '11 be peuten oot, nae doubt o' that, gin a' 'at's said be true. An' the puir quine, she beut to be sotten e'y cuttie stule, an' be rebuket afore the hale congregation. Hech! but it's weel for Angus Tirpie he's no t'ey fore this day to see his dochter come to sic shame. An' I'm wae for the lass hersel'. There's naebody wud hae thocht it o' her; but she's a randie auld tinkler yon mither o' her's, an' it's sma' winder 'at them she had the guidin' o' suld come to harm.'

Tibbie clenched her teeth, and seized a heather besom leaning near her. She could scarcely contain herself, and would gladly have broken the slanderer's head; but the women, his companions, would be sure to side with him either by words or blows, seeing it was but another woman's character that was in question! And then the after-talk in the glen! Naturally she heard less than other people, but still she had a candid friend or two, as who has not? and the averted looks of the neighbours when she appeared gave full confirmation of all the candid friends had to say. She dared not furnish new food for talk. Turning round, she hurried away, choosing a path which sheltered her from the view of Elspeth and the rest, and vowing bitter vengeance on Joseph Smiley's treacherous head.

Home she hurried with panting speed. Her perturbed mind deprived of other utterance,

vented itself in tumultuous motion, and by the time she reached her cottage she was comparatively calm. She unlocked her door, entered, revived her fire, and sat down to meditate on revenge: but not for long. As Mr. Geddie and his companions were coming out from their interview with Roderick, Tibbie was passing homewards. Ebenezer, discontented with the result of their mission, and foreboding diminished honour at his own fireside from her who acted Little Conscience there, and had kept him to his duty through years of wedded life, with the whipcracks of her stinging tongue,—Ebenezer saw her, and proposed that they should follow her home, and 'deal' with her as they had meant to do when they visited her earlier in the day. Mr. Geddie consented, 'and I take it as a token for good,' he added, 'that we have seen her returning home at the very time we had given up hope of being able to find her.'

It was not long, therefore, before Tibbie's meditations were interrupted by the entrance of the inquisitors. They saluted her but briefly, and seated themselves on such chairs and stools as appeared, without waiting for much invitation, and disregarding Tibbie's enquiry of 'What's yer wull?' Mr. Geddie opened his book, lifted up his voice and held forth. It was a discourse on the vanity of concealment in the matter of sin, and an exhortation to confession as some measure of atonement, and the first step to repentance. Having concluded, he fixed his eyes on her and sat waiting to see what effect his words would have on her moral nature. Apparently they had none.

'Do you know, my woman, what brings us here today?'

'The very thing I hae been wantin' ye to tell me.'

'Where is your daughter?'

'What's yer wyll wi' my dochter?'

'Behave yersel', Tibbie Tirpie!' said Peter. 'Ye're no blate to speak that gate til a gentleman far less a minister.'

'I see little signs o' the *gentleman!* Stappin' richt in ower o' my house, an' never wi' yer leave, gude wife,' an' just settin' himsel' down, an' syne t'ey preaching'! Wad ye daar noo, my birkie, to stap that gate intil my Leddy Drysdale's parlour? I'm no thinkin' 't! Do ye think a puir body maun aye be like a cadger's tike, 'at ilka gowk can gie the ither kick til? An' then ne'er venture to bite? Gin I had mair siller, ye wad tak mair tent! An' as for my dochter, just mind what ye're after! gin ye daar say an ill word o' her I'se hae ye up afore the Shirra, an' I'se hae there twa freends o' yours for witnesses against ye. I hae some notion o' the ill tales they hae been tellin' through the glen, an' I'se gar them swear afore the Shirra against ye for the very tales they hae telled ye themsel's, sae tak ye tent! Them 'at lie doon wi' dugs, rise up wi' fleas! An' it's little worth company ye hae been keepin', for a' their holy sough an' their lang faces. They'll rin round spyin' an' keekin' intil ilka kale-pat but their ain. (It's no in Mig Prittie's kale-pat 'at Ebenezer there daar stick his neb, I'm thinkin'). An' syne they rin round wi' a curran clashes, swallowin' ilka gowk's head wi' their clavers. But gin they dinna gie ower prankin' wi' my gude name an', my dochter's, I'se gie them something they're no lookin' for, an' they'll wuss they had steiket their jaws afore they meddled wi' Tibbie Tirpie!'

Wull ye no' whisht, an' hear til the man o' God? ye rantin' auld tinkler!' cried Peter. 'Ye hae a tongue 'at wad clip clouts!'

An' ye hae a conscience like a mill-door, for a' yer whingin', retorted Tibbie, grown louder at the interruption. It wad set yer man o' God better nor bautherin' a puir auld wife, gin he wad dale wi' *you*. Wi' yer saul, I mean, for he'll better leave the shop alane. Echtponce the pund for saand frae the burn-side, is ower dear to pay, an' I hae coosten the last sugar at echtponce I gat frae ye t'ey hens! It's no fit meat for christian folk!'

'Ye jad! But whaur gat *ye* the siller to be buyin' sugar? That's just what we're comin' til!'

'I cam by't honest, an' that's mair nor ye can say for yer pose e'y savin's bank.'

'It was the waages o' sin, Tibbie, yon siller! an' that ye ken.'

'I tak you twa men to witness, what Peter Malloch has said! an' I'se hae the law o' him! An' there's plenty witness e'y glen forby, whan the time comes!'

'Alas! alas! poor woman!' cried Mr. Geddie, 'you are sinning with the high hand and brazening out your iniquity. Confession would better become you, and repentance, and public penitence before the church, for the public scandal you have brought on it.'

'Ay! an' the cuttie stule for them baith,' ejaculated Peter as he made for the door, for Tibbie was reaching up for her porridge-stick on the shelf, and an onslaught seemed imminent. The other two followed without the ceremony of leave-taking, further 'dealing' with the enraged old woman, being manifestly out of the question. Slowly and disappointedly they wended back to the village, while Tibbie stood out in the road before her cottage shaking her fist and scolding at the top of her voice. Doubtless she had reason; but the wind caught up her words as they flew, and they never reached the ears of her retreating enemies.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CATECHIST.

Mr. Geddie parted from his companions in the village, and finding he had missed the Laird, set forth on a solitary walk back to Auchlippie. It had been but a sorry day's work, with much that was painful in its course, and no good done to show for it. He sighed as he passed in the waning light the remembered landmarks of the morning, and recalled the very different state of feeling in which he had then remarked them. The light had faded in himself as well as in the sky overhead. Then, was he not going forth in his might? a Gideon in armour to vanquish the armies of the aliens? or Ithuriel, perhaps, his bright pinions flashing in the sun, the long sharp spear of truth in his hand, gleaming like a star, and ready to pierce through sin and falsehood? Now it was different. The spear was blunted or had lost its point, the wings hung limp and useless from his shoulders, and the feathers were all in disarray, like some poor game-bird worsted in the fight, or caught in heavy rain; the gay plumage draggled pitifully and dim, the neck and tail, that erst stood so erect, now drooping and forlorn in wisps of humiliation. The day had faded and the sun had gone down. It was a new chapter added to his ministerial experience. Alas, for the persistency of the besotted human heart in sin, and its callous insensibility to words in season, spoken in love and faithfulness. Mankind must be wickeder even than he had thought, and he had been taught to believe in their total depravity. It never occurred to him that there might be some mistake. The accusers comprised nearly the whole body of office-bearers in the church--the excellent of the earth, men with the same 'views' and shibboleths as himself; and more than that, most attentive hearers and great admirers of his preaching--the strongest possible proof in favour of their credibility and soundness of judgment. He felt fully justified in adopting their suspicions and accepting them as certainties--facts either already established or about to be proved, and then with the characteristic tenacity of the clerical mind, he held them fast. It was true that this accused brother had hitherto led an exemplary life, that, refusing opportunities of greater ease and emolument, he had declined to be a candidate for more than one city charge, and that his life in the parish had hitherto been an almost apostolic example of all the charities and virtues; still, to err was human; and had not the most conspicuous saints been permitted at times, (doubtless for wise purposes and the good of their souls, in saving them from spiritual pride), to fall into grievous sin? 'Humanly speaking,' and 'to the eye of sense,' the man's whole walk and conversation' stamped the charge with improbability. But what was that to the theologian equipped at all points to contend with error? The doctrine of total depravity removed all difficulty on that point, and the more improbable from a mere worldly point of view, the more likely it became when attributed to a wile of the enemy. He felt that his erring brother must have been over confident, hence his fall. Still it was a new view of total depravity, and an appalling one, that it should have been able to withstand his preaching. He went over in his mind all the telling things he had said, and considered how they might have been intensified, but he found that he could have added little to their force. And yet all had been in vain. His words had fallen like drops of rain on the flinty hardness of that obdurate heart, and failed of any effect. It was a bitter experience, but he resolved to profit by it, and as he went along he thought over the heads for a discourse to backsliders, in which this sad incident should be introduced, and might perhaps even turn to good in the end, if it warned some wayward sheep to retrace his steps.

Thus meditating, Mr. Geddie beguiled the time away. He had come within sight of Auchlippie gate, whence Joseph Smiley was issuing at that moment, and coming towards him. Joseph descried his reverence simultaneously, and prepared for an interview by passing his sleeve across his lips. 'I wuss he mayna be findin' out the dram on me,' he muttered to himself; but added reassuringly--'Hoot, no! They're glaiket bodies thae ministers! They wadna ken their ain parritch gin ye didna haud the spune fornent their nebs.'

'Well, my friend!' said Mr. Geddie, with outstretched hand and a condescending smile. 'I am glad to have another opportunity of speaking to you. That was a very sad meeting at which I saw you give your evidence yesterday--a sad and a humbling investigation!'

'Hech, sir, an' it was a' that. Terrible backslidings were na they, sir? But ye see, sir, it's just the flesh 'at's sae weak. We canna a' houpe to be strong in the word, an' able to resist, sir, as *ye* can, an' sae there's aye some o' 's gettin' a tum'le.'

'I fear, my friend, I must not venture to rejoice in my strength,' replied the minister, much gratified, and smiling with pensive radiance, as one who, after long neglect, is appreciated at last. 'It is humility alone that can hope to pass scatheless along the seductive paths of life.'

'Deed ay, sir. Let him 'at thinks he's stan'in' tak tent he dizna fa', says Scriptor. We're but puir craeters! That's me an' my likes, I mean, sir. As for a godly minister an' a powerfu' preacher, wha's praise is in a' the churches, I wadna venture to say the like o' him.'

'I fear we are all alike, Joseph! (is not that your name?) said Mr. Geddie, slowly shaking his head, and blushing with pleasure so far as his drab and yellow complexion would allow. 'I fear we are all alike,' he repeated, still toying with the sweet morsel before he swallowed it.

'Ou ay, sir! Dawvit was a man, an' sae was Sant Paul! A man of like paussions, an' sae aiblins a body nicht ventur to say o' yersel'; but it's terrible odds atween the likes o' ye, an' hiz 'at's creepin' on wur bellies, as I may say, just worms o' the dust!'

'Alas! alas! Joseph, there are no exceptions! Just look at the unhappy man who has created so sad a scandal in this very parish!'

'Nae doubt, sir, an' I'm wae to think o't. But after a' he's but young--an' he's no ordeened--an' ye ken, sir, his faither was a moderate! That maks a terrible odds! What says Scripiter? "The faithers hae aeten soor grapes," (gye an' like the grossets, I'm thinkin', afore they're just ripe), an' the bairns' teeth is set on edge. (I see na sae weel what that means, but I'm thinkin' it's just 'at it gars their rotten teeth dirl). An' again the sins o' the faithers on the children til the third an' fourth generation. Hech, sirse! It's weel for me my granny wasna a moderate! an' as for my faither, I ne'er heard tell o' him.'

'Yes, Joseph! (I believe I am right in calling you Joseph?) But you have a fine lively knowledge of Scripture, and I think--I hope--I may almost say I am sure, from what I have seen, that the root of the matter is in you. Now, my friend, would you not like to come forward openly, to take a plainer, bolder, stronger, nobler stand for the truth? Does not your heart burn within you? when you see this glen and other glens too, my brother, there are so many other glens, given over to sin and worldliness, or it may be to moderatism--as soul-destroying an error as any of them. Does not your heart burn within you? And do you not feel constrained to cry aloud--"Here am I, send me?" To put it to you in plainer, if less moving words, how would you like to be a catechist?'

Joseph's heart did indeed burn at the suggestion, though not perhaps exactly in the sense intended by Mr. Geddie. It had been promotion for him when he was made beadle and appointed to carry the great Bible up and down the pulpit stairs,--a ministrant, and in his own opinion an essential one, in all the public functions of religion; and he loved to skip about among the hushed and reverent worshippers, showing one where he might sit, and admonishing another to behave. But what was all that to being a catechist? which was 'the next door,' as he told himself, 'to a minister a' thegither;' not merely to go up the pulpit stairs, but to go into the pulpit and sit down, while future beadles would meekly follow, and close the pulpit door behind his reverence. It was too delightful! An utterly beatific vision! He had just parted from Jean Macaulay, and his mind had been full of schemings how to secure her for a wife. But would Jean make a help-meet for a catechist? Even with Elspeth's croft and her savings, he feared Jean would scarcely be equal to that higher sphere; and before even he had replied to Mr. Geddie, he had almost made up his mind that she would not suit.

'Aweel, sir! there's nae misdoubtin' but it wad be a preevilege to be layin' out the truith afore the neglecket puir. But whaur was't ye was wantin't for?'

'There is a neglected district along the coast, where the people are too poor to support a minister; but yet they should not be left a prey to Erastianism, and it has been proposed to send some pious man to labour among them who would read to them and talk to them, enlighten them on Free Church principles, and address them occasionally. How would the work suit you? And would you like to give it a trial?'

'Aweel sir! I wad like weel to be direckin' the puir bodies the gate they suld gang. An' what's the waages, sir? Or I'm thinkin' I hae heard tell it's saalary ye ca' a catechist's pay, being mair honorable.'

'About thirty pounds a-year we think we could raise. You would live among them, of course, and you would find it a most interesting and constant employment. I should think for an earnest and active man like you it would be the very thing.'

'But thirty pound the year's no twal shilling e'y week, an' the folk ye say's puir, an' gin a man gaed out an' in amang them, he beut to help them whiles wi' siller. I see na hoo yer catechist cud do't at the price.'

'Think on the privilege, Joseph! And if you do well no doubt we will be able to find higher work for you.'

'Ay! But a man canna just eat an' drink his preevileges, an' he canna sell them for siller to buy shune! I'm but a bederal, sir, but week out an' week in, it 's liker twunty shillin's, what I can mak atween that an' my tred.'

'Well! we must think it over, Joseph, and you can write to me what you think you could undertake the work for, and we'll consider how much we can give. Mr. Sangster! I am so sorry to have missed you, but I understood you had gone home.'

'I have been waiting for you at the inn for an hour past. Never mind! get in now.'

The Laird in his gig had driven up during the negotiation with the proposed catechist. He now

caught up Mr. Geddie, and left Joseph in the middle of the road to pursue his reflections.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHANGES.

Three weeks passed after the sitting of the Congregational Council which had agreed that there was a 'fama clamosa' in the parish. The Presbytery had sat with closed doors to consider the case. It had adjourned, and met again to further consider, decide, and order under the circumstances. Enquiry into the facts, and such like trifles, would come later, when the evidence for the prosecution was matured. Clearly there could be no defence until there was an indictment, a defence in its very nature being a reply; and until the thesis of accusation could be formulated, there was nothing to reply to. Wherefore Mr. Brown could not be heard either in person or through his friends at this early stage of the proceedings. Still he was suspected, though not formally accused; and, although he possessed the common right of all men to be deemed innocent till found guilty, he was by no means in the position of an innocent man. The immortal interests of the Free Church adherents in the Parish of Kilrundle were at stake, and could by no means be left for a single day exposed to the influence of a perhaps improper person. He had been notified to discontinue his duties till further notice, and another young man had been sent to fill his place, as well as (but these were his private instructions from the leaders and wire-pullers who guided the Presbytery's movements) to act as amateur detective in ferreting out evidence for the prosecution, which, singularly enough, was yet too defective to warrant bringing the case into court.

There is no power like a democracy for precipitate and arbitrary action. The units composing it so fully realize their authority, and so like to exercise it; while, being many, and co-ordinate, they have little or no sense of individual responsibility. They propose, vote, and order, each in obedience to his individual whim or impulse, and imagine that they are doing great things; but it is the body corporate, the official abstraction, which is left to bear the blame when justice or policy miscarry. In this respect, if in no other, the one-man power has the advantage, the king or bishop is personally identified with each transaction of his reign, and when a failure occurs he feels himself personally discredited; he has therefore the strongest incentive to walk circumspectly, that he may not have hereafter to retrace his steps, while with popular assemblies, a reversal of policy or a change of front is immaterial, so long as the majority has its way.

Roderick, therefore, being suspected, was now placed under a vigorous taboo--boycotted we would have called it thirty-five years later, but boycotted under a wisely modified form. Ebenezer Prittie or Peter Malloch would still have been happy to sell him all they had in their shops,--at a proper advance on cost--seeing that the coin of an excommunicate is no worse than other people's, and money, however come by, is 'all right,' as Vespasian found out long ago. There was no fear, therefore, of his being starved out so long as he continued able to buy. But intercourse with his parishioners had come to an end. Some few were veritably unwilling to have dealings with iniquity, but the majority dared not offend public opinion by appearing to hold communication with him; and these secretly knowing the shakiness of their own principles were the loudest in denouncing any one who should venture to approach the Browns, thereby contributing much of the strength of that public opinion which tyrannized over themselves. The only exceptions were Roderick's pensioners. These, defying the censorious, presented themselves in shy and deprecatory fashion (deprecatory alike to the offended righteous without, and to the indignant and maligned within), each as his pay-day came round. The money had become an established item in their income, which those who disapproved would assuredly not make good; wherefore, they felt constrained to revisit the flesh pots. After all, even if the worst were true, what was it but a spoiling of the Egyptians? A perfectly allowable, perhaps a praiseworthy act, which Moses himself had suggested, and even recommended to the chosen people of old. They took the money, therefore, in defiance of such as shook their heads, and, finding it retained its old purchasing power, were none the worse.

The days dragged wearily along for Roderick and his sister. October, which began in summer sunshine, relieved but not chilled by bracing airs, was waning in cloud and gloom; dull foggy days of rain, or windy tempests ending in early frosts. The sick room was close and damp. The ruddier the blaze upon the hearth, the stronger the flavour of mould and damp drawn out from the oozy walls and cold clay floor. The chamber would grow close but never warm, and the capacious chimney seemed powerless for ventilation, and served only as an escape for the heat. After undergoing the visitation of Mr. Geddie and his companions, Roderick had had a return of his more serious symptoms. Indignation and outraged feelings sent the blood boiling in stormy

tumult through his veins, and he was not weak enough to obtain the relief of tears. Self-respect required him to preserve calmness before the friends who were with him; and his irritation, deprived of vent in speech or action, settled in the morbid part of his system, and rekindled the expiring inflammation in his chest. He was therefore a prisoner once more to his bed, when he would gladly have been removing himself from the scene of his mortifications, and had no alleviation save the visits of Kenneth and the Laird; but these were frequent.

Whenever other matters brought the former to the village he made a point of calling to enquire; and it was remarkable how frequently business demanded his presence there at this time. During the first week the gossips observed him ride three alternate days down their street, and the traders began seriously to consider whether they could not so improve their stocks as to tempt some share of the Inchbracken petty custom from Inverlyon. After that, however, his visits became daily, there was no longer even a pretence of other business, and Ebenezer Prittie abandoned the hope of supplying the Drysdale property with nails and ironmongery. Kenneth was sincerely interested in his friend's health, and sat sympathizingly by his bedside, but the patient was not able to talk much, and even if he had been, was forbidden to try. He was often drowsy, too, and sometimes slept, owing to the restless wakefulness of his nights. It fell, therefore, on Mary to make the conversation, a duty which she fulfilled apparently to their mutual satisfaction, seeing that the visits grew more frequent and of longer and longer duration. What they found to talk about no one can say, for their voices were pitched in the lowest tones--of course that the patient might not be disturbed; and apparently he was not, if we may judge from the ease with which he soon fell into an established routine. He would welcome his visitor with a cordial handshake, answer the regulation questions about his health, hear any little item of news that might be stirring, and then calmly close his eyes, and turn round for another nap.

When two people find pleasure in each other's conversation, surrounding circumstances are of little account. The most momentous questions have ere now been asked and answered during the gyrations of a waltz, or the intervals of a square dance. Pyramus and Thisbe were happy in whispering to each other through the chink in a paling, and my neighbour next door used to save shoelather by chatting to a young lady at the other end of the town down the pipe of a telephone. That turned out badly, however, in the end, as one night his soft engaging whisper was replied to in the gruff and stormy tones of papa! who bade him have done with his nonsense, or he would put the d--d wire out of the house! He had done something of the same kind to my poor friend already. It was nothing new, therefore, if these two young people forgot for the time the stuffy little room in which they sat, and the gruesome army of medicine bottles, getting more and more numerous every day. They were as utterly content as though they had been sitting under one of the great shady trees of Eden, with only birds, flowers, and tame lions to listen to their discourse. The flowers, at least, they had in ever increasing profusion, as poor Colewort knew to his cost, in the sad devastation that fell on his most sacred preserves in the greenhouses of Inchbracken. Their sweetness brought something like the freshness of spring, (or was it only of hope?) into that close and frowsy place; even the fumes of damp and mouldiness fled before the breath of these children of dew and sunshine.

At length there came a day, after many others that had been made bright with flowers, and fragrant with sweeter words, when Kenneth brought nothing in his hand but a bunch of violets, which he told her his mother had sent. A slip of paper was tied to them on which was written, 'For dearest Mary.' 'And so you may know, Mary,' he said, 'that everything between us is known at home, and you will be made welcome. My mother will come and see you, or if that cannot be managed she will write to you, after you have left Glen Effick; and I think you will overlook her not coming here. After the decided stand our family has taken against this church secession, she would rather not do that; and as you are going to be one of the family yourself, you will not wish us to stultify ourselves. That is what the old gentleman calls it at least, though I daresay it is nonsense. Still, he is an old man, and he is going to be very fond of you, so we must humour him.' There came a tear in Mary's eye, a smile to her lip, a blush, and words presently. She said exactly what was prettiest and nicest, or so thought Kenneth. Every nice girl knows what the words would be, they were just what she would say herself on a like occasion. As for the men, they will hear them, each for himself let us hope, when the time comes; therefore let us not rub the bloom from the plum by unwise anticipation.

The visits of the Laird were somewhat less frequent; but he was fortunate in always finding Roderick awake, and, after the first few days following the relapse, eager to converse; and as the visits were repeated two or three times a week, an intimacy sprung up between the two men which had not existed before. The Laird was pleased to find what he had not hitherto looked for, a sound and mature judgment and abundant common sense where he had been wont to expect only pious good intentions and a youthful enthusiasm, beautiful and interesting enough but somewhat raw, and needing much of the pressure of time and circumstance to squeeze out the green and vivid whey of youth and inexperience. Roderick was equally surprised to find that the husk of hard dry business shrewdness, which he had hitherto looked upon as the man himself, was but the dried or hardened scars or cicatrices of rubs and bruises long since endured by a true and gentle nature, now healed and wholesome, and that beneath the somewhat repulsive exterior, there were rich stores of experience, charity and christian wisdom. Heretofore their intercourse had consisted in visits from Roderick to Auchlippie on parochial business; and on these occasions Mrs. Sangster in her character of Mother in Israel, high patroness and Lady Bountiful to the congregation, was always present. It might be Roderick who proposed the subject to be considered or it might be the Laird, but at the first opening Mrs. Sangster would

take up her parable, and after that there was little opportunity for any one else to slip in a word even edgewise. She loved the sound of her own sweet voice better than any other music, and with a silent, perforce an attentive audience, her periods would swell and round themselves with evangelical commonplaces, and a general overflowing of conventional piety. When his lady opened her mouth on any subject, it was the Laird's practice to close his for good and all; that was his mode of fulfilling the apostolic precept to honour the weaker vessel. Had he spoken, he would have been compelled to distinguish and except, to rip up sophisms and show that the conclusion arrived at was not deducible from the premises stated, and endless altercation would have ensued. Wherefore, like a sensible man, he held his peace, and left his fair partner to discourse at her own sweet will. When, also, it became necessary for him to express his own views, he would do it in the driest, clearest, and most concise form, leaving no room for question or debate from his better and more loquacious half. It was therefore as if for the first time that these two met and became acquainted in that sickroom; and the discovery each made of the other was an unexpected happiness to both. Timidly and doubtfully Roderick would sometimes bring the conversation round to Sophia, but it was in a diffident and uncertain way. He hungered to hear or talk of her, but as regarded his hopes and aspirations he felt bound to keep silence. His instinct of what was fitting withheld him from attempting to entangle his friend in his more genial moments, in any kind of promise or consent, so long as a breath, however groundless, hung over his reputation. It was true that the Laird did not believe a syllable to his disadvantage, but on that very account he felt so deeply indebted to him, when all the world beside had turned its back, that he could not take advantage of the old man's goodwill.

Whether the Laird saw more than Roderick put in words, it would not be easy to say; but it is certain that at that time an understanding sprung up between himself and his daughter which had not existed before. He had hitherto regarded her simply as a child, female child, belonging to his wife, and rather a dull one as that. It now first seemed to dawn on him that she was a woman, a distinct person, and his own daughter, and that it was in her to become the dearest companion of his life. What he may have known of her relations with her mother, incident to Roderick's letter, cannot be known, for he never told; but from the evening after the congregational council, when she plucked up courage to enter into conversation with him, and glean such news about the proceedings as she could ask or he communicate, they found they had entered upon new relations with each other. It may have been the Sangster element in her, of which her mother so loudly complained that engaged his sympathy so directly, or it may have been the incense of her feminine hero worship, seeing that he appeared to her so great, and strong, and good, in opposing himself singly to the universal prejudice, and manfully espousing the cause of worth and innocence maligned, but certainly from that day forth, father and daughter became fast friends and constant companions. Often she would accompany him in his walks to the village, and though she would not defy her mother by accompanying him to the Browns', still her father would carry messages to and fro between her and Mary, which brought assurance both to Roderick and herself that they were not parted. The old lady was the only party dissatisfied with these new combinations. She felt her authority slipping from her fingers. Her daughter had, she could not tell how, developed an independent personality of her own, and was evidently now held in allegiance to herself only by a sense of duty. The daughter was also establishing a hold on her father's regard, which her mother herself had long since allowed to pass from her, as costing too much trouble to retain; and Mrs. Sangster beheld already in prophetic vision, herself as a meek old lady seated by her work-table near the fire, while Sophia, the mistress of Auchlippie, ruled the roast! The meekness of her future rôle had not as yet, however, come to Mrs. Sangster. She fumed and fretted like a spirit in chains, and the mornings which mother and daughter spent together were by no means smooth or enjoyable for poor Sophia. Her mother's grievance being incapable of statement, the ebullitions thence arising could neither be foreseen nor assigned to any specific cause. The scandalous rumours relating to the Browns were retailed and enlarged on in a way that, but a few short weeks before, Mrs. Sangster would have been shocked to think she could indulge in before her carefully nurtured child; and Sophia, as her only defence, had to fall back on the paternal gift of silence. But that invariably drove her mother vanquished from the field, seeing that it takes two to fight, and with a parting shot at the dull *dour* blood of the Sangsters, she would seek relief in the privacy of her chamber from that sovereign remedy, 'a good cry.'

At the end of three weeks Roderick was found well enough to travel, and it was time that they should start, if, in those ante-railway days, they would avoid the delays, discomforts, and extra fatigue of bad roads. They took the stage coach as far as Dundee, where they would embark in the steamer for London. Thence there was railway westward, and with more staging, they would reach their destination.

It need scarcely be said that Eppie and the baby stood on the inn steps to watch the travellers drive away, and wish them 'God-speed.' Mary kissed them both, hoping a father might shortly be found for the little one, but grudgingly, for she deeply loved it herself. Kenneth was there, likewise, with regretful adieux and repetition of the already-made promises to write soon and often. So too was the Laird, and this time Sophy was on his arm, and Roderick thenceforth had at least one smile and handshake to treasure in his memory, unspoken answers to his letter of a month back, and tokens from which to bode hopefully of the future.

There were other onlookers, but they peered from windows, over averted shoulders, or from behind corners. The parishioners had begun to find out many differences between their new pastor and his predecessor. There were no alms now, for the new man had no money to give; and

there was less sympathy, for he was a stranger in the parish, and likewise new to ministerial work. Shame kept them from coming forward; but when the guard blew his horn, the coachman tipped up his leaders with the whip, and the lumbering vehicle rolled up the eastern brae, every one felt that he had a friend the less left in Glen Effick.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DISCOMFITED.

Within the Post Office as well as in other places, there stood a group watching Roderick's departure, and among them, as might be supposed, was Joseph Smiley. It would have been a very unexpected event indeed that could have transpired in the village without his being there to see.

'I wuss we may na hae dune the laad some wrang,' sighed Angus Kilgour. 'He gangs like's he thocht nae shame, an' gin there cam few to bid him "Gude bi wi' ye," thae few war the first e'y land. See to the young Captain, hoo he's crackin' til Eppie an' the bairn 'at a' body said was merry-begotten. That looks like 's he didna think sae.'

'Hoot awa!' said Ebenezer, who had become a man of consequence through the prominent part he had taken in the minister hunt, and would tolerate no gainsaying. 'Hae na we scripiter for't, Angus, 'at evil men an' seducers wax warse an' warse? An' think ye, 'at gin a chield was sae far left til himsel as yon puir laad maun hae been, he wad turn round that easy an' own til his fau't? Na, na! The De'il's a hard master 'at's aye wantin' mair service. An' as for puir Mester Brown, I'm sure I wuss him nae ill, but juist 'at he may be brocht til own til his transgressions. He's gangin' the gate o' thae wanderin' staars for whum is reserved the blackness o' darkness! I think naething o' yer young Captain comin' to see him awa. He's been danderin' round him ilka day sin' he fell out wi' his flock, or sin' they *fand* him out I suld say. He's juist a laad o' Belial 'at cares naething for the sauls o' hiz puir folk, (dizna he get a' the nails an' the pleughs an' the iron wark for the property doon by at Inverlyon?) an' he wants to pu' down the wa's o' Zion. He's juist like Tobiah the Ammonite 'at fashed Nehemiah langsyne, but it's no a tod like him rinnin' on the wa's o' our Jerusalem, 'at's gaun to kick them ower. An' as for the Laird comin' wi' his dochter, he's been sair left til himsel', but we a' ken he's pridefu' an' winna be direcket by puirer folk, an' that's what's made him sae camstairy. But I'm juist winnerin' 'at Mistress Sangster (an' sic a graand christian as she is!) lets him gang sic daftlike gates!'

Joseph listened to the harangue with respectful attention, looking approval but saying nothing. Instinctively he had the wisdom in conduct by which men have become Roman Popes or American Presidents. If he had few friends, he gave no offence, and made no enemies. The friends are but broken reeds to lean upon in getting one in, but the *unfriends* are omnipotent in keeping him out. It was popedom in a small way that Joseph contemplated, catechist being as great a rise in life for the Glen Effick beadle as Pope for the Archbishops and Princes of the Church. The emoluments, as stated by Mr. Geddie, were, of course, altogether inadequate, but then Free Trade principles were just about that time being established as the economic faith of the nation, and he understood perfectly that even Mr. Geddie, a merchantman in search of goodly pearls, felt disposed to dabble in the law of supply and demand, and if he could pick up a catechist at half price, would not 'feel justified' in paying him more. Economic piety is apt to be economical as well, and alas, alas, for the Church and the world! it is the spurious article for sale that is best able to haggle with the greedy religiousness that would buy. Sainly holiness is sent at half price to labour in the slums, while sensational pretence gets the velvet-mounted pulpit, the snug parsonage, and the comfortable living.

Joseph was not much of a letter writer. He never had had opportunity to practise the craft, or doubtless his pen would have grown as glib as his tongue. If he wrote to Mr. Geddie himself, his letter might stamp him illiterate, and consequently a half price article; and even if not, being but an obscure person, he could not hope to influence conveners, committees, contributors, and the rest of the sacred machinery in Mr. Geddie's church, whence the money was to come. He thought therefore to procure intercession. He would petition Mrs. Sangster to write on his behalf, and by and by he would ask Ebenezer to say a word in his favour, after he knew the lady's letter had been sent.

With this view he set out for Auchlippie, whither he had gone less frequently of late, fearing to compromise himself with Jean Macaulay.

As already said, Jean's expectations made her unquestionably 'a catch' for the beadle, but Joseph found she might prove a millstone about the neck of a catechist. For Joseph was far-

seeing. Such imaginative faculty as had been vouchsafed him was circumscribed within the hopes or possible achievements of Joseph Smiley, but within these bounds at times they soared! Once a catechist he might find favour in zealous and wealthy eyes, and he might be enabled to attend the Divinity Hall, whence he would issue a full-fledged minister. Favouring circumstances might work out so much for a bachelor, but who would undertake a man already weighted with a wife and family? Vulgar too! and unfit to associate with the upper classes as minister's wife! If, however, he should fail to secure any such enthusiastic person, and he knew they were rare, Jean would not be so far amiss as spouse to a catechist for life. The *placens uxor* he could appreciate when more substantial considerations did not stand in the way, and her tocher would be 'a help,' and enable him, if still subordinate to the Established clergy and those of the Free Church, to hold his own with 'Seceder bodies' (there were no U.P.'s in those days), 'Baptists, Methodists, and sic like.' At that time there was no word of voluntary principles in the Free Church, and it required a good many years 'in opposition,' as politicians would say, before it even was suggested to drop the twenty-third chapter of the Confession of Faith, and along with it the old feeling of superiority to the dissenting communions.

When Joseph reached Auchlippie, he was considerably taken aback by Jean's extreme coolness. He had been considering as he fared along, the exact degree of friendliness it would be prudent to show to Jean. He must be kind but not quite fond, friendly but not intimate, with just a suggestion of the superiority which he hoped was hovering over him and he trusted might alight. Distinctly then, he felt taken aback by Jean's reception.

'Ye want to see the mistress? Gang intil the laundry than, an' set ye doon, an' whan I'm through here I'll gang ben an' speer gin ye can see her.'

'But I cud help ye to shell the peas, Jean.'

'Wha's seekin' yer help? Tak yer guttery shune out ower the clean kitchen, an' gang intil the laundry or I'se prin the dish-clout til yer tail! Think ye I haena gowks enuegh e'y stable-yard to shell my peas gin I wanted their help? Awa' wi' ye!'

Nothing like a little cool repulsion to draw on the young men when they begin to hang back. The cherries a little out of reach are always redder than those which hang ready to the hand. Looking at the buxom lass and the saucy twinkle in her merry black eye, Joseph's foreseeing circumspection began insensibly to abate, or rather he forgot all about it.

'What ails ye, Jean, woman?' he poured out in his most insinuating tones, and his queer little eyes looked plaintive or nearly so. 'An' me juist hungerin' for a glint o' yer bonny eyen!'

'Get out my gate, ye blatherin' skate!' with a jaunty toss of her head. It is pleasant to be appreciated, is it not? No matter by whom. But she had no thought of relenting yet awhile. 'It's like's ye cudna bide awa frae me, ye leein' twa-faced body! It'll be four weeks come Thursday sin' I hae seen a sicht o' ye, an' I hae dune brawly wantin' ye. Gae back to them ye saw last an' bide there. It's no Jean Macaulay 'at's wantin' ye. An' gang out ower the clean kitchen! See til the jaups o' glaar, about yer guttery trotters! Gang out ower, I'm sayin'! or I'se lay the taings about yer cantle.'

'Whisht, woman! an' I'se tell ye a' about it,' said Joseph, sideling nearer. Then throwing the right arm round her waist, he drew up the left to protect his face from nails or accidents, and attempted to steal a salute.

Jean screamed and sprang aside, catching hold of a broomstick, and her face aflame with crimson wrath, ordered him out of the kitchen. At that moment an inner door opened and Mrs. Sangster stood on the threshold surveying the scene.

'Jean Macaulay! what is the meaning of this? Do you take my kitchen for a country tavern, to go touzellin' with strange men in it in that unseemly way? When I engaged you I said distinctly that no followers were allowed.'

'There's nae touzellan' here, mem; an' what's mair, I winna hae 't said o' me by ony body, sae ye can suit yersel' wi' anither lass 'at taks less tent o' her gude name nor I do! The man's nae follower o' mine; it was yersel' he came speerin' for, sae I cudna tak on mysel' to pet him out, an' syne the impident rascal he grippet me about the waist, an' I skirled, an' ye see the lave o't.'

'It's Joseph Smiley, the minister's man! I declare. What do you want? You may well be ashamed, and hang your head! What will the session say? You, that ought to be an example of sober and godly deportment, to be raising a riot in a gentleman's kitchen!'

Joseph was abashed. All his bright schemes seemed to dissipate themselves before his eyes, like a morning mist, and he could only wish himself away. He coughed behind his hand, and stood balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other.

'I'm sair dumfoundered, mem!' he said at last. 'An' I'm thinkin' I juist canna be very weel. My head gaed clean soomin' ey noo, an' I cudna keep my feet, an' sae I out wi' my arm to catch something, an' it was her I grippet, pur lass. An' Jean, it's like she thocht it wasna mo-odest, an' sae she gae the bit skirl. But there was nae wrang intil't ava, mem, as ye may weel ken. Wad it be likely noo, mem, e'en gin I was ane o' the licht mindet kind, as a' the folk in Kilrundle Free Kirk

kens weel I'm no', for me to be comin' intil the kitchen o' the first leddy e'y laand, an' carryin' on wi' rigs, an' daffin', an' touzellin's? Weel I wat, mem, ye'll own I hae mair sense nor that.'

Joseph's demeanor was so deeply humble, and his way of putting the case so respectfully argumentative that Mrs. Sangster was considerably mollified, but consistency required some continuance of rigour.

'I fear, Joseph Smiley, you must have been drinking this morning. That would explain the giddiness you describe, as well as your trying to steady yourself against Jean Macaulay, which was not like the conduct of a sober man. And, after all, from what you say, Jean's conduct seems to have been perfectly proper. So, Jean, I will not consider that you have given me notice to suit myself with a new maid until you say it again!'

'There's naething but a wheen parritch gane down my craig this day, mem, an' I'm wae 'at ye suld think sae ill o' me,' said Joseph, feeling his way back into the usual sanctimonious groove. 'I'm no' weel, mem, an' I'm juist fear'd I'm no' lang for this world, an' that's what's brocht me here this day. I cam seekin' a word o' ye, mem!'

'Then follow me, Joseph.'

Joseph followed, and laid before Mrs. Sangster the statement of his hopes and desires. 'I'm no' lang for this warld, mem, an' gin I cud do some gude first I wad be mair contented like, but they wad need to double the steepend, mem. I cudna gang for less.'

'If you are going to die so soon, Joseph, I should think the temporal reward would be of little consequence to you.'

'Ou ay, mem! But ye ken the labourer is worthy of his hire.'

'I should doubt your ability for the work, Joseph; and at any rate you must wait till your giddiness is cured. A giddy catechist, to judge from the scene in my kitchen to-day, might give rise to serious scandals! I know a person who will exactly suit Mr. Geddie, if the salary can be made sufficient; and I am much obliged to you, Joseph, for having brought me the information. You may rest assured too, Joseph, that if you will but do your duty with all your might, in the circumstances in which Providence has placed you, you are making the very best preparation for the great change which, sooner or later, will overtake us all.' And with this moral sentiment still ringing in his ears, Joseph found himself dismissed and on the gravel in front of the house, not only a disappointed, but an utterly discomfited man. He retraced his steps to the village, and went back to his joiner-work thinking how little good had come to him out of his idle morning.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WOED AN' MARRIED AN' A'."

Joseph Smiley lived in a small cottage all by himself. It was not on the main street, but built in what should have been the back yard of a house on that thoroughfare, and was approached by a narrow passage round the end of the house in front. It was just the place for any one who desired retirement, being extremely private, which, strangely enough, seems the great desideratum of all inquisitive people. Joseph was extremely expert in spelling out the affairs of his neighbours from external signs, and it may have been owing to that, that he kept his own life so studiously in the shade, knowing so well how much may be divined from passing glimpses. He spoke of his home as 'juist the bit placey whaur he bed,' 'weel enough for a quiet lanesome chield like himsel', but no' fit to tak folk til,' which was scarcely doing it justice, seeing that it was perhaps the snugest little cabin in the village; for Joseph was a Sybarite according to his lights. It was the best feather bed in the village on which he took his nightly rest, and there was a comfortably cushioned chair or two in which he might repose during the day. The cupboard contained pickles, spices, and a good many bottles; for his fare was dainty, and far different from the vigorous parritch on which he professed to subsist. Parritch may be said to have been the food of his imagination, for he continually spoke of it, but it was with something considerably more succulent that he nourished his material frame.

Yet Joseph enjoyed a high reputation for saving thrift.

This was owing to the fierceness of his principles, his tenacity in holding them, and the vigour with which he carried them out. There is nothing in the world so helpful as a clear understanding between a man and himself as to what it really is which he wants, and a consistent pertinacity in

meaning to have it; and yet it seems even rarer than the self-knowledge so highly recommended. Think of the force wasted in desultory effort for the attainment of what is really not desired!

Joseph's principles might all have been resolved into one, and that was to take care of Joseph Smiley. Nothing was too good for that cherished person, so he got the lead; and as nobody else ever got anything at all, it was not more costly than an unprincipled life of impulse, and much more comfortable to the beloved object. Had his brother man been allowed to dip with him in the dish, both must have contented themselves with plain fare, but by letting the brother forage elsewhere, a smaller and choicer mess would be enough for the rest of the party.

When Joseph went out in the morning he locked his door and handed the key to Peggy Mathieson, his neighbour, whom he employed to make his bed, cook his meals, and 'do' for him generally. Peggy was a lone widow, who supplied the youth of the village with bullseyes and marbles. She was discreet and silent, asked no questions and told no tales, and knew how to make him comfortable.

On the evening of the day which had witnessed Joseph's discomfiture at Auchlippie, Peggy was engaged as usual in preparing his evening meal. The fire was lit, and the kettle set to boil, the floor swept, the tea things arranged on the table, and a neat rasher stood ready for the frying pan when he should come in. She was giving a last look around to see that all was in order before retiring to her own premises, when the door opened and Tibbie Tirpie walked in, followed by her daughter carrying a baby. Each had a basket on her arm, and both took seats, which they drew up to the hearth, and seated themselves, before either appeared to observe that any one else was present. As for Peggy, she was a woman of few words, and her employer she knew to be what in higher circles is called a peculiar person, that is one with whose affairs it is safest not to meddle, except by his particular request; therefore she stood silent waiting to be addressed.

'I wuss ye gude e'en, Peggy!' said Tibbie. 'We're juist waitin' for Joseph to come in, and we'll bide till then, e'en gin he be late; sae ye needna mind stoppin' here for hiz. We'se mak out brawly our lane!'

'Aweel, Tibbie, I'se leave ye, for my yett's steikit, an' aiblins there's bairns wantin' some o' my sma' trokes, an' wearyin' to get in.'

'An' noo, Tibbie,' said the mother when they were left alone, 'gie me the bairn, an' gang ye til yer bed. Aiblins ye'll can sleep. Ony gate steik yer eyen ticht, an' dinna cheep, what e'er may come o't; an' let's see gin I canna gar this balksome naig o' yours tak baith bridle an' saidle, ay, an' a lick or twa o' the whup as weel afore I'm through wi' him. Heest ye, lass! an' dinna staand there fummlin' wi' prins. Aff wi' yer bannet an' in wi' ye! Juist hap up weel. It's a kittle job at the best, but gin I'm to hae ye at the greetin' on my haands, forby him, I may lay by afore I begin. In wi'ye!'

Thus exhorted, the daughter lay down in the bed, and covered herself with the blankets.

'Turn round t'ey wa', Tibbie! Ye'd be for keekin' at ween yer eyen, an' greetin', (wha kens?) an' gin he catches sicht o' a sign o' saftness in ye, it's a' ower wi' you an' the bairn!'

The daughter complied, and Tibbie, seated before the fire, brought out certain little habiliments from her basket, and proceeded to array her grandchild for the night, hanging his daylight apparel on chairs, on all the chairs she could find, and marshalling them before the fire, till that staid apartment assumed the appearance not only of a nursery, but of one for a dozen infants. Having got so far, she had leisure to survey the refreshments provided for her son-in-law.

'Od, Tibbie! ye'll be rael crouse here, woman! The best o' a' thing, an' plenty! An' here's as bonny a fry o' bacon as e'er was seen! I'se on wi' 't til the fire. It gars a body's mouth water juist to see til 't! He little thocht, honest man, it wad be his gudemother wad fry his supper for him the nicht! Ay faigs! 'An' eat her share o' 't as weel. But there's little enough for twa here,' she added, going to the cupboard where the remainder of the flitch was discovered, as well as the other little comforts and supplies with which Joseph had provided himself.

'My certie, laad! But ye live weel! An' ye'll do credit to yer gudemither or a's dune! He was aye ane o' the unco gude, an' here's the gude livin'! Whether it be holy livin' or no!'

Another plentiful rasher was cut, the frying-pan laid on the coals, and Tibbie returned to her seat. But now, disturbed by so many gettings-up and sittings-down, the babe began to whimper.

'Whist, my bonny man! Ye'se hae yer share o' yer daddie's supper as weel as the lave!' And thereupon she emptied the contents of Joseph's milk jug into a basin. Then she cut the nice new loaf and broke some of the bread into the milk; after that a contribution was levied on the sugar basin, and lastly the singing kettle completed the gracious mess, of which the wandering heir thus unexpectedly returned to his father's halls partook with appetite. Then stretching himself out in his grandmother's arms, he fell asleep.

Joseph Smiley being a beadle, and liable to be called away at all times and seasons, worked by the piece. He was a good workman, and so could dictate in some measure his terms. He was working on the new church, and having lost so much time fruitlessly in the morning, he remained at work after the other men had left. It was nearly dark, therefore, when at last he laid aside his

tools and moved homewards very much beyond his usual hour.

He had been depressed and disgusted with himself all day. How could he, a man of sense as he had always supposed, and one accustomed to play upon the weaknesses of his fellows--how had it ever come to pass that he, so clear-sighted as he thought, should have come to grief in this utterly discreditable fashion? To himself it was incomprehensible, though to the perspicuous reader plain enough. Joseph had been trying to do two things at once--to capture both Jean and her Mistress, meaning to use whichever might happen to answer best in the end; and he had missed both, as any man of his intelligence should have known would come of it. But then small successes make a man conceited, and conceit makes a man blind (Pray to be defended from small successes, my reader!) It is the single eye which hits the mark.

As Joseph walked along the main street, a subtle fragrance seemed to hover in the air, thin, bright, appetizing, but undefined.

'Hech!' he said to himself, 'somebody has a gude supper the nicht! I wuss I was there.'

As he neared the approach to his own dwelling the odour began to grow specific.

'That's bacon, an' gye an' like my ain!'

The '*close*' reached, the whole air seemed greasily aromatic. 'Can Peggy be eatin' my bacon hersel'? I ne'er caught her yet at ony sic tricks; but still water's rael deep. I'se drap on her an' her no thinkin', an' hae my share o' 't, an' gin I dinna eat an' drink tea an' sugar and bread to the vailey o' a' she's stealt, I'm no Joseph Smiley!'

Joseph hurried homeward so quickly, and so full of thief-catching thoughts, that he failed to observe the gleam of the candle from his casement. Joseph always lighted his candle himself. It was therefore as if some one had struck him when he threw the door open, and the cheerful light of the fire and two candles fell on his sight. Tibbie seeing a spare candlestick and a number of candles, thought that if the candle on the table was necessary along with the fire-light for a solitary man, it would need at least one more candle to lighten his family fittingly. Wherefore she stuck a candle in the spare candlestick, and when the daylight outside had altogether faded away, she lit the two candles and heaped fresh fuel on the hearth.

Joseph stood in the doorway contemplating the scene. Had he been drinking? The candle was double. But no! He had washed down his dinner with a draft of buttermilk, and that was never known to go to anybody's head.

The air was heavy with the richness of frizzling bacon. The chairs were gathered like a palisade around the hearth, and hung all over with baby linen. Joseph's next idea was that he had mistaken the house, turned up the wrong close or entry. No! There was Peggy at her back door, ostensibly sweeping something out, but, as Joseph knew full well, in reality watching to see what he would do or say. Was she partner in some plot against him? Then he would leave her no excuse or opportunity to intervene and join forces with the enemy. He entered with as resolute a stride as he could assume, and banged the door behind him.

'Hm!' he coughed with a mighty effort, endeavouring to rally his sinking heart, where black foreboding sat heavily and blocked the lagging current of his blood, while cobwebs of misgiving seemed gathering in his throat, till the nearly stifled voice could hardly come.

'Whisht man! whisht!' hissed Tibbie in her loudest whisper, from the hearth where she sat, and throwing up a warning hand. 'Ye'll waaken yer wife! Hsh! She's beddet! an' she's sleepin'.

'Tibbie Tirpie!' The exclamation hovered feebly about Joseph's lips, like the thin grey smoke that hangs over a hill of burnt whins, when food for fire has been exhausted, and nothing remains but black and hopeless desolation. The bag of tools slipped from his nerveless fingers with a clatter.

'Ca' canny! Joseph! or ye'll waaken yer bairn! Yer supper's juist ready, sae set ye down.'



"An' wha bade ye come here, an' mak' my supper, gudewife?"

Page 271.

"An' wha bade ye come here, an' mak my supper, gudewife?" Page 271.

'An' wha bade *ye* come here? an' mak my supper, gudewife?'

'Hoot, toot, Joseph! Say naething! It's nae fash ava! Think ye yer gude-mither wadna do faar mair nor that for ye? Juist bide or ye see!'

Here the baby, aroused by the talking, opened its eyes, and the grand-mother began to shake and addle him after the usual manner of nurses.

'Bonny man! An' did his daddie waaken him?'

'He's gotten yer ain glint o' the e'e, Joseph! Ye pawkie rascal! I'se tell ye he's the gleg ane like his faither afore him.'

'Lay by, gudewife! an' get ye hame! you an' a' belangin' to ye! Ye hae carried on eneugh for ae nicht, an' I'se hae nae din here!'

Tibbie made no reply. She merely regarded the speaker with a shrug of amusement, mingled with a dash of humorous pity, while she lifted the frying-pan from the coals and deposited the bacon done to a nicety on the dish. She then began to place the second rasher which she had cut in the pan; but this was more than Joseph could endure.

'Let alane o' my baacon, ye auld jad!' he cried, 'an' get ye gane! you an' a' yer tribe.'

Then followed a silence of some duration, for Tibbie did not seem to think the last observation worthy of notice. At length, however, she spoke again.

'Are ye for nae baacon the nicht, than, Joseph? I'm thinkin' I cud eat maist a' 'at's fried mysel'. An' I wadna say but Tibbie micht be for tryin' juist a bittie, whan she waakens out o' her first sleep.'

'Tibbie! say ye?' gasped Joseph, looking around. His eyes fell on the disordered bed, and there they fastened, widening and rolling as though they beheld a ghost.

'Gudesakes! Pity me! gin there's no' a wummin' i' my very bed! To the de'il wi' the weemin', say I! gin ye gang na to *them*, they'se come efter *ye*! Sae there's nae haudin' awa frae them!'

'Deed no! Joseph! an' that's sae. Whan it's a likely bit chappie, like yersel'. They're no that plenty, ye see. But keep up yer heart, laad! Atween yer wife an' yer gude-mither, ye'll be clear o' the lave. Ye needna misdoubt o' that.'

'But set ye doon an' eat yer supper, or it grows cauld,' she continued, at the same time selecting a piece of the bacon from the dish and putting it in her mouth with manifest relish.

'Lay by! ye auld wutch. An' awa wi' ye!' cried Joseph, roused into vigour by the raid on his provisions. 'I'se pet ye out gin ye winna gang!'

'No ye winna! Joseph. Ye hae mair sense nor raise a din whan it's yersel' wad get the dirdom o't.'

'Gang quiet then, an' gang smart!'

'An' wad ye? Honest noo! wad ye raelly pet 's a' out e'y the dark this nicht? There's yer ain wee bairn no sax month auld. An' him juist in his wee sark, an' a' his coats hingin' afore the fire! Wad ye noo?'

'Deed then, Luckie, an' I wad!' cried Joseph, gathering courage at the tone of remonstrance he thought he detected in the old woman's voice. 'An' it's no afore my fire but intil't, the duds o' yer

dochter's brat sall gang, ay! an' her ain as weel! gin ye tak na them out o' here. The shameless limmer! to lay hersel' down in a decent man's bed, an' never "wi' yer leave?" He even got so far as to begin tossing the child's clothing together in a heap, when the old woman, snatching a brand from the hearth, struck him across the hand with the red hot end, making him desist with a scream of pain. He glared at her for an instant as if about to rush on her, then wavered and turned round as if about to call for help.

'Noo! set ye doon, Joseph Smiley! an' hear sense. Gin ye gang yaupin' an' skirlin' out there, ye'se raise a din wull do far mair scaith to yersel', nor it can til hiz. An' gin ye aince raise 't, ye'll ne'er can lay't again! sae keep ye a calm sough, an' let me hae my say.'

It wasna muckle,' she continued, "at I kenned o' you an' Tibbie's on-gaein's, whan I spak to ye first, an' I spak ye fair, an' ye ken what cam o' 't--juist naething ava, sae noo I hae fand out a'thing, an' I hae ta'en advice, an' ye beut to yield, or I can gar ye. I'll pruve yer contrac' an' promise o' mairriage by auld Forsyth 'at I ance named to ye afore, an' hoo ye garred puir Tibbie swear no' to let on, sae lang as Jess Clapperton be'd a single woman, for fear she suld hae ye up afore the shirra for breach o' promise, an' get a' yer siller frae ye for daamage. Weel she's waddet noo, sae the steek's aff Tibbie's mouth, an' sae she's gane an' brocht hame yer bairn, an' ye beut to tak them hame til ye, or I'se gar ye! ye dirty tinkler's tyke! Ye wad hae gotten them to set the puir lass on the cuttie stule, alang o' the minister's bairn, an' *ye* kennin' the very contrar yer ain sel'! But, my certie! gin scaith or scorn e'er fa's on *her*, it's *ye* sall stand aside her, an' tak yer share! An' Jean Macaulay wad be the first to fling the rotten eggs at ye--ye leein' brock! Didna I hear ye evenin' my dochter t'ey cuttie stule afore Jean, wi' my ain lugs, an' garrin' auld Elspeth lauch? Od! but I'd hae liket to pu' the ill scrapit tongue out o' yer leein' head! An' what's mair, I'se do't yet, gin ye tak na tent. But there's nae gude, ye an' me to gang fechtin'. We ken ane anither by noo--yer character's gane, and yer name o' godliness in Glen Effick, an' ye'se be peuten out o' the beadleship, gin ye mak a fash--an' the shirra wad gar ye tak her after a'. Sae juist ye tak thocht in time, an' say naething ava! Ye hae na sped sae waur as mony anither birkie laad, 'at wad before tryin' on his gemms. For Tibbie's a decent lass an' a bonny, tho' it's me 'at says't, (an' ne'er a word wad there hae been o' her, gin it hadna been for that auld rinketer Briggs, my leddy's wumman up by), an' she liket ye rael weel ance, an' she may again, gin ye're juist ordnar gude til her.'

Joseph sat and listened with a lengthening visage, and his finger in his mouth. He felt very foolish. A scandal would ruin him in Glen Effick, and after the scene of the morning he had nothing to hope from the good opinion of his whilom patroness Mrs. Sangster, or his late sweetheart Jean Macaulay. He would become the common talk, and no girl worth anything would have a word to say to him. He felt like some gay butterfly caught by the heel in a cobweb of gossamer. Why flutter his pretty wings any more? They would only get broken for nothing. He would never fly again! The admiring flowers would spread their rosy bosoms all in vain, and breathe their fragrant sighs. Poor, poor Lothario! His day was done. He was caught at last. And there like a dreadful spider sat Tibbie, his (to be) mother-in-law, regarding him with red-rimmed eyes, and opening her mouth to devour--well, if not him, at least his bacon. As he looked, she selected another tempting slice (it was cooling now), and her jaws closed on it with a snap, followed by a snort of relish.

'Aweel, Tibbie! Ye can gang hame for the nicht, you an' yer dochter. I wad like to think ower't, an' sleep on't.'

'Fient a stap her or me sall gang out ower yer door, Joseph Smiley, afore Sawbith! We nicht na get in sae chancey next time. O' Sawbith she'll gang linket wi' ye t'ey Kirk, an' I'se walk ahint ye, carryin' yer bairn. Sae ye maun speak t'ey minister the morn, an' speir him to baptise't. An' sae ye'll can explain a' thing t'ey minister yersel', afore they hae time to raise clashes. Ye can juist tell the tale about Jess Clapperton, 'at ye made a fule o' puir Tib wi'. I wad na say but it nicht do for the minister very weel, an' *ye* ken hoo to put legs an' arms til't as weel as the next ane. Ye was ne'er at a loss for a lee in yer life, Josey, my man, I'm thinkin'! Losh keep me! I'm thinkin' I've begood to like ye a'ready! It'll be yer ain fau't gin I be na the *gude* mither to ye, forby the *gude-mither*. Set ye doon noo, an' tak yer supper. I'm fear'd it's cauld for ye, an' ye'll hae to drink yer tea wantin' the milk. Wee Josey drank that a while syne. It's a' e'y family! An' syne, I'm fear'd ye'll hae to sleep e'y fluur for the nicht; for me an' the bairn's gaun in aside Tibbie.'

Joseph groaned in spirit, and ate his supper in silent despair. Not one kick of resistance was left in his miserable soul, and he submitted to his fate as meekly as Sindbad, after some experience of the old man of the sea, found it best to do.

Tibbie devoted her attention to the entertainment of the young heir, who seemed to enjoy his return to the paternal hall, and rode on her knee crowing in the highest spirits, to the enlivening strains of--

'Wooded sn' married an' a','

which his grandam lilted to him, with just a suspicion of malice in her humorous triumph.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FOUND.

Time hung rather heavily on Kenneth's hand. The raw damp autumn offered little temptation to exercise out of doors. His daily ride to Glen Effick was discontinued, his friends having left; and he smoked cigars in the billiard-room, or wrote letters in his own, the live-long day. Julia, hitherto so available, was now never to be found when wanted, or if she did appear, her ready sympathy with the whim of the moment, and her quickness to suggest congenial pastime, seemed to have forsaken her. She sat mostly in her own room now, or in Lady Caroline's, which, as far as Kenneth's entertainment was concerned, was much the same thing. She, who had formerly taken so much interest in mess-room reminiscences and general gossip, would now look up vacantly when she was addressed, as though her thoughts had been far away, and were only induced to return for a moment by a sense of politeness. The distribution of the morning letters would rouse her a little--there appeared always to be letters for her now--but having secured her own, she would relapse into abstraction, and seize the earliest opportunity to withdraw.

Kenneth had letters of his own to write now, and knew all about the coming in and going out of mails for Torquay. But that occupied only a portion of his time, and he felt aggrieved that Julia should be so pre-occupied. 'What is the use of a girl in the house if she is always to be busy?' He expressed his discontent to Lady Caroline, who was immensely amused.

'Julia is engaged, Kenneth, or almost; for it is not announced yet.'

'I am very glad to hear it, mother, I am sure. If the girl had stayed here much longer without marrying, she might have felt herself badly used if I did not marry her myself. And I do not know that I am equal to marrying for politeness. But why should that prevent her being jolly at home? unless, indeed, the man is Bluebeard, and she expects a bad time? *I* am engaged myself, but I think I could be jolly on that account, if only there was opportunity.'

Lady Caroline said nothing; but she was amused, as often before, at the single-minded egotism of his lordly sex, which knows no law but its own pleasure, and imagines that must be equally delightful to every one else. The male baby graciously believes that it pleases his nurse to sing herself hoarse in coaxing him to sleep, and he is pleased that she should make herself happy, shaking his rattle till her arm aches, in endeavouring to amuse him; and all subsequent female ministrations to his solacement are accepted in the like simple good faith that it must be joy to the girl to be merry in his company, and that mirth is its own reward.

Lady Caroline liked her son better for his unreasonableness, and felt proud of herself, in being the mother of such a rajah. Wherever the idolatrous instinct exists, there must be a love of the unreasonable. Who could worship a being capable of being argued with, persuaded, coaxed, or bullied? It is the utter passiveness of Juggernaut that attracts his devotees. No matter how ugly he may be, he sits there serene among his gilded carved work, while the crashing wheels of his car grind on their course regardless of the blood and groans of mangled victims--force un pitying and inflexible.

It was some weeks before Major Steele would come to Inchbracken, not, indeed, till the last shred of autumn had been withered up by foot or swept away by wintry storms. He lingered on by the sea shore, wandering for hours by the hungry waves which swallowed up his love, accompanied by his old mother, in whose unspoken sympathy alone he seemed to find comfort. He seldom spoke to her, but he shunned every one else. When, however, winter became established, her health compelled them to return to town. There the closer contact with his fellows inseparable from city life became intolerable, and he was glad to avail himself of Kenneth's invitation, reminding him at the same time of the freedom and privacy he had promised.

Lady Caroline agreed that they should see as few visitors as possible during the poor man's stay; 'but, indeed,' she added, 'we have all grown so unsociable since we became engaged, that the excluded will have nothing to regret.'

'Indeed I am not engaged, dear Lady Caroline!' remonstrated Julia in a subdued voice.

'And indeed, mother, I am not unsociable,' added Kenneth, who was going on to 'define his position,' as precisely as an American senator does, but his voice was drowned in the uproarious guffaw with which his uncle greeted his opening words.

'Poor man!' moralized Julia, 'the quiet of the country will soothe him. His was indeed a fearful calamity.'

'Ah yes!' sighed Lady Caroline, 'and I declare I like him the better for being inconsolable! They are not all so tender-hearted and faithful, Julia, by any means. Now, my General! Do you think *I* can count on leaving so much desolation behind me? The idea would almost console one for having to go.'

'You forget, my dearest lady,' said the General finishing his egg (it was at breakfast), Major Steele had been less than two years married. Providence has been far kinder to us than that, and I doubt not, when the time of our separation shall arrive at last, that you will wear your weeds admirably, and continue to justify the opinion I have always held of you as the best dressed woman of my acquaintance.'

It was December when Major Steele arrived at Inchbracken. The ground was powdered with early snow, and the higher hilltops looked solidly white and alpine. The sharp air and the movement had stirred his torpid blood into some appearance of animation, but as the excitement of arrival wore off, he relapsed into wan despondency, and was indeed a melancholy object.

The two older men from the first gave up the case in reverent despair. What had there ever been in their most comfortable but burdensome lives, to entitle them to intrude their ignorant sympathy on the unparalleled tragedy of this man's sore bereavement? Like Job's three friends, they would have sat by him without speaking for three days and three nights, with eyes fixed sorrowfully on the carpet, had human life been still as of old, a majestic but monotonous sequence extending over centuries; but in its modern abbreviated form, with so many things to attend to in the brief threescore and ten, that was impossible. They sighed and looked gloomy when they found themselves near him, and then escaped to some other quarter of the house with all decent speed.

It was on Kenneth, as old friend and special host, that the full duty of condolence devolved. He led his friend to the smoking-room where they could sit together by the hour in silent amity, watching the blue smokerings widen and disappear, companionable to each other's sight, yet leaving the mind at rest from disturbing talk. Fearing to touch unwisely on the open wound, Kenneth did not venture on any allusion to his friend's bereavement. Mary's commission was ever present in his mind, but he dared not approach the subject to raise a hope that might only be quenched again in deeper gloom. He dared not question him even, that he might judge of the probability for himself; he simply waited, hoping that in time the other would give the opening which he desired.

Julia was perhaps the most successful sympathizer in the household. Her fine dramatic instinct enabled her to throw herself into the artificial mood, and play the part with an abandon relieved and varied by graceful little touches which she could never have displayed in her natural character. She was a woman with a head rather than a heart, and it was when feeling was presented to her through the imagination rather than her own emotions, that she was able to realize, seize and clothe it in expression. Her performance in the new rôle of 'Woman the Consoler,' was delicate, but beautiful and touching in the extreme, and more than once brought the handkerchief to honest Lady Caroline's eyes, who declared in confidence to her General that Julia was a 'fine creature,' and far too good for that vulgar Crœsus in Manchester. Perhaps the same idea may have struck Julia, or it may have been that the artist in her was engrossed by the new delineation of character, and revelled, for the time, in the artificial emotions of her own creation. It is certain that the Manchester correspondence lost much of its interest. The morning letter was slipped into her pocket as usual, at breakfast, but she no longer seized the first opportunity to escape with it to her own room, and by the end of the week she found three of them still in her pocket unopened. They were all opened at once, glanced over, and locked up in the drawer with those that had gone before them, and some sort of an answer was scrawled to 'Dear Augustus.' It was scarcely so charming a letter as some that had preceded it, and Augustus thought so, with his first twinge of love, pain, and jealousy; for hitherto his path had been one of rose-strewn triumph. But the letter did not take long to knock off--that was the main point at the moment--and she descended the stairs, gloved and bonneted, for a stroll by the lake, before Major Steele had begun to think of growing impatient.

When the bereaved widower first arrived at Inchbracken, Julia was very silent. Young innocence and awakening womanhood stood appalled before the revelation of grief and mystery in human life. Her eyes and voice drooped plaintively, but it was not till the following morning that she and the sufferer exchanged a word. Even then it was but little that was said, some civil words of routine, but the gentle pensive droop in word and look, distilled like heavenly dew over some acrid waste. Even so the Angel of Pity may look down on the vanquished and sore wounded in the battle of life; and the poor woe-begone Major felt grateful and consoled at the gentle tribute to his grief. She would linger in the breakfast-room with needle work or a book, and the Major got into a way of hovering round, as some frost-benumbed toad might creep from under his cold stone, to stretch his stiffened limbs, and thaw them in the watery sunshine of a February afternoon. When this arrangement seemed growing into a habit, Julia betook herself to the morning-room, which she could count on having to herself at that hour, for pursuing her work or studies. Presently the door would open and the widower would appear, asking her permission to sit awhile, and apologizing for his intrusion. There must have been companionship in each other's presence, for there was not much conversation, and what there was was vapid enough; but the divine pity in Julia's pensive droop transfused itself through each syllable, and the desolate one felt soothed and refreshed.

What Julia felt, it is difficult to say, and one cannot but wonder that, after the first three days, she did not find the whole business a lackadaisical bore. We can only suppose that life in the proper character and circumstance of Julia Finlayson had become intolerably dull, and that she had adopted those of the Angel of Pity by way of a change. She could not have seriously contemplated capturing the broken-hearted widower, especially since Lady Caroline had just secured Mr. MacSiccar's report as to the fortune and standing of Augustus Wallowby, Esquire. The report had been most satisfactory, in fact had so far exceeded expectation, that good Lady Caroline had been seduced into a momentary irreverence at the ways of Providence, in giving vulgar people so much money. She was sorry for it immediately after, however, for she was a good Tory, and honoured the powers that be, among which Providence admittedly takes the first place. As to the vulgarity even, Lady Caroline might have been brought to admit that she had seen examples of it in circles bordering very closely on the Court, and she would not have been at all reluctant to acknowledge that it existed in the army, and when found there was quite as offensive as any thing that the proverbial Manchester of her day could produce.

At last a morning came, when, over a sympathetic pipe, the Major expressed a wish to go and look at the Effick water, where all his happiness and love had come to such dismal shipwreck.

'All right,' said Kenneth; 'would you like to drive over to-day? We shall have plenty of time if we start at once. The dog-cart can be got out in twenty minutes, and we may be off in half an hour.'

He had now the opportunity he had been waiting for to fulfil Mary's commission, and already he felt himself writing to her in triumph, and describing how judiciously he had fulfilled her wish. He took the proofs she had given him of the poor baby's identity from his desk, and placing them in his pocket, was ready to mount the dogcart when it was brought round. The brotherhood of so many silent pipes had at last established itself between him and his friend Steele. The poor fellow at last felt able to speak the thoughts that were gnawing at his heart, and as they drove along that wintry road down to the sea, he spoke freely of his misery and of the shipwreck.

'Were there any passengers by the 'Maid of Cashmere' besides Mrs. Steele?' Kenneth ventured to ask.

'Old Brigadier Currie had engaged the state-room on one side of the cabin for himself and his native servants, and I had taken the other.'

'And had the captain or crew any women and children on board, do you think?'

'My wife, her maid, and the baby were the only females on board.'

'Then cheer up, old fellow! Perhaps things are not so bad as we have been thinking! Do you know that, now, for instance?' he added, pulling out the gold chain from his pocket.

'Know it? That? If I could believe my eyes I would say it belonged to my wife!' He took the chain and handled it very tenderly, and then went on. 'There was an old Begum we had been able to be kind to. A hill tribe had attacked her town, and she had fled for protection to Dourgapore, where we were stationed. My wife was the only lady in the station, therefore she was put under her care, and when she went back to her principality, after we had driven off the marauders, she made my wife some presents, and among the rest a bag of gold mohurs. I was doubtful how receiving a money present would sound at head-quarters, but our Colonel said it was a matter between the women, I could not be held to know anything about. However, to prevent misrepresentation, we determined to make it into jewellery, so we got a native goldsmith to string the pieces into a long chain. He sat in our compound and riveted the coins together with bits of gold wire, while we sat under the verandah looking on. You know these creatures are always watched while they work, to prevent their swallowing the gold, they are such inveterate thieves. But how came this into your possession? A piece of it was found clutched in my poor Lydia's hands when she was found.'

'Then I may tell you. I would have written weeks ago, but I was afraid to add disappointment to your other misfortunes, so I asked you to come here, and when you had come I found I could not speak to you about it. A man's grief seems such a sacred thing. But now. There was a friend of mine actually saw that ship caught up by the storm, and carried in shore and dashed against the rocks. They are rocks completely surrounded by water and surf at a high tide, and with an easterly wind. He could not possibly get near, and there was no human dwelling within sight, or for miles around, so he could give no help. But the following morning he was riding along the shore very early--earlier than the fisher folk, who, of course, came prowling along later in search of plunder and sea wreck. He came on the bodies of several of the drowned, and at last on a lady with her Indian maid. The lady had a piece of that chain twisted in her fingers, and not far off he came on a little baby so carefully tied up, and still alive. He had his own duties for the day, and he could be of no service to the dead, who, he knew besides, would be cared for by the proper authorities in a very little while, so he left them where they lay. But the baby was alive, and while he was examining it looked up in his face with such a friendly trustful look that he could not help taking it up and vowing to be a father to it till its own should be found.'

'And so he has been keeping my child hidden away through all these months of desolation!'

'My dear fellow, he had' no intention of that whatever. He wrote to the Edinburgh newspapers at once; but you must remember that at the time of the shipwreck your father was not aware that he had a grandchild at all, nor for weeks after. If Roderick Brown had left the child beside its mother to be found by the coastguards or the fishermen, it would have been handed over to the mercy of parish charity, which is perhaps not over tender. And who can tell if it would have survived till you went to claim it? The chain, too, is heavy and valuable, and who knows but that might have been temptation enough to keep the child out of your sight for ever?'

'Let us go to the child at once, then, Kenneth! and not to the shore with its miserable memories of wrecks and corpses.'

So the horse was put about, and they struck across the moor to Glen Effick.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AUGUSTUS WALLOWBY.

Eppie Ness was at her door when Kenneth and his friend drew up before it. She had a foreboding, when she saw two of them, that the other must be the father of her baby, and that he was come to take it away; and tears rose plentifully to her eyes and trickled over her withered cheeks as she led them into her house.

The baby was in its cradle and asleep, and however homely might be the cottage surroundings, no one could say that it had suffered from neglect or privation. It lay among dainty coverings of cambric and lace, like some infant princess, or a sacred image before which a perpetual oblation of praise and incense is offered up.

It was impossible that Steele should recognize his child, seeing that its life had been measured only by days when he last saw it, but he *thought* he recognized it, and no one would dispute his right to do so. He also observed a strong resemblance in it to its deceased mother, which confirmed his faith in its identity, if that were possible. Yet, when one recalls that only a few weeks before Mrs. Sangster had seen with equal clearness its strong family likeness to Tibbie Tirpie, one may doubt if the likeness test is of much consequence.

The clothing in which it had been wrapped up when found was produced. It consisted entirely of Indian fabrics. Even Steele could tell that much, but not having the feminine eye for embroideries and tissues, he could not identify any of the articles. He was able to recognize his wife's cipher, however, embroidered on a handkerchief, so that all possibility of doubt was at an end.

He thanked Eppie profusely, and handed her his purse as some instalment of the debt he owed her.

'Na na, sir!' she said, 'Miss Brown pays me weel, an' it's her ye're awin' yer thanks til, for the care o' yer bairn, for she cudna hae ta'en mair tent on't gin it had been her ain. I'm misdoubtin' but she'll be wae to ken it's to be ta'en frae her. An', oh sir! gin ye hae nae body partic'lar to mind it for ye, will ye tak *me* for its nurse? It wad be a sair heartbreak to me to be parted frae the wee dawtie, an', I'm thinkin', she wad miss me hersel!'

Steele felt a twinge of jealousy already. To think that any one should have a nearer place than himself in his child's regard; but he consented, and with thanks, that his daughter should remain for the present where she was, till he had time to consider of her future disposal. After hanging over the cradle, awakening the baby and making it cry with his awkward endearments, he was at last persuaded to hand back the new and incomprehensible possession to Eppie to be soothed and comforted, and then after lingering and talking, and repetition manifold, Kenneth was able to get him away and to carry him home.

All the village idlers were in the street to admire the dog-cart and the groom, and wonder what the gentlemen could have to say in so long an interview with Eppie Ness. No sooner had they gone, however, than Eppie herself came forth brimming over with the news, and mightily uplifted, if also sad at the possible chance of being parted from her charge, to tell the neighbours that a great gentleman was claiming her nursing for his own child, that it was to be brought up as one of the first ladies of the land, and that aiblins she, Eppie Ness, might have to journey into foreign parts in attendance on the precious infant.

'An' it's wae gude Mister Brown wull be, to hae the wee dawtie ta'en frae him!'

'An' it's blate the Presbytery may weel be,' added Peter Malloch 'for a' the daftlike clavers they hae set rinnin' fornent him.'

Mrs. Sangster was in Ebenezer Prittie's shop when the news was brought in of the father that had appeared to claim the minister's bairn. They both listened to the tale with much curiosity and interest, but without one twinge of compunction at their own uncharitable constructions in time past. They were both far too excellent for that, and the lady's mind too well regulated to suppose that she could possibly have acted or thought amiss. On the contrary, she was disposed to draw improvement and instruction from the whole matter in the usual way, by moralizing on the inscrutable ways of Providence, and hoping that it would be 'a warning to the church office-bearers to practice a more abundant charity in the future, and to refrain from hasty judgments.'

'Hech! ay, mem,' sighed Ebenezer, 'it's juist hum'lin' to think what haste an' uncharitableness the Presbytery hae leuten themsel's be betrayed intil! An' Mester Dowlas! an' Mester Geddie! twa sic gude men. That they suld sae far hae forgotten a' christian charity! It's juist hum'lin'! But the best o' us wull gae wrang whiles!'

Joseph Smiley was the last man in the village to hear the news. His wife was cooking, while he sat rocking the cradle till the food should be prepared. Tibbie came bustling in from the street.

'There's news steerin', Tib!' she cried, 'but I haena juist gotten the richts o't yet. Get up! Joseph Smiley, I win'er ye dinna think shame! A muckle man like you, hingin' about the house like a singet cat, at this time o' day! Out wi' ye! an' bring back word what's steerin'. An' de'il a bite ye'se get, till ye can tell us a' about it!'

'Poor Joseph! He had come to this! Laid by the heels at last! and no mistake. The jaunty bachelor, so alert and brisk, was quenched for ever, and a poor, meek, hen-pecked creature had taken his place, sighing under a mother-in-law's iron yoke, which grew heavier each day as the victim developed new capacity of endurance.

After Tibbie's bold stroke of invasion, there was nothing left for him but to succumb. Resistance would have raised such a scandal as must have lost him his headship, and would probably have driven him from the parish, so he had felt compelled to admit his marriage as the lesser evil, even although it involved a severe private *rebuke* before the assembled kirk-session for the matrimonial irregularity.

The bitterest day of his life was probably the Sunday on which he 'kirket' his wife. Shambling down the village street in front of his mother-in-law, who stepped out behind with the briskness and precision of a corporal's guard, he seemed 'going,' as Mrs. Ebenezer Prittie, who surveyed them out of her window, observed to her spouse, 'like a fool to the correction of the stocks,' and Mrs. P. was not sorry for him. There was a twinkle of scornful pity in the eye of the onlookers at seeing this notorious lady-killer thus taken in charge, which stung Joseph's self-love like the cut of a whip; but his discomfiture was not complete till they met Jean Macaulay. Jean surveyed their procession with open eyes, and then looking her old sweetheart full in the face, she threw back her head and uttered an echoing laugh. There was a ring of vexation in the sound which might have brought consolation for the affront, but Joseph was already too miserable to be nicely observant. His eyes fell before her, and his head hung forward in abject confusion; and he crept about his duties that day around the tent more like a whipped cur than the brisk and consequential beadle of other days.

As Kenneth drove his friend home to Inchbracken, his kind heart was rejoicing to note the improvement in his condition. The happy discovery had acted on him like a cordial given to a fainting man. His very bearing was altered. He sat squarely in his seat looking about him with clear and animated eyes, a different person from the limp and nerveless invalid, seeing nothing left to him in earth or sky worth a moment's regard, whom he had driven out a few hours before. Finding there was still something left in his own life to interest him, Steele began also to interest himself in the life of his fellows. He talked to Kenneth about the Browns who had so tenderly cared for his child, and the Browns with Kenneth was an inexhaustible subject. Now that he had found a friendly listener, he talked about them freely enough, and by the time they had reached Inchbracken, Steele knew all about his engagement.

Understanding in what direction the morning drive had been made, the sympathetic Julia had arranged herself for dinner in a species of half mourning, and her voice and mien were more subduedly sorrowful than ever. As the disconsolate entered the drawing room, she lifted her head from a book over which she had been drooping in willowy fashion, all mournful sympathy for the haggard desolation she expected to see depicted on his face; but for once she found herself completely out of tune.

Major Steele sat down beside Lady Caroline and began to recount the discovery he had made--what a miracle had occurred on his behalf, and what a paragon among infants was his new found daughter.

'Mary Brown's baby! your daughter?' cried Lady Caroline. 'That is perfectly delightful! Would you like me to send over for it, that you may have it here under your own eye?'

She was probably not very sorry, however, that Major Steele thought it would be better for

him to make a daily visit to his offspring, until he could arrange to remove it to Edinburgh.

The two elder men were agreeably surprised by the brightened manner of their guest. He seemed transformed since morning from a dismal hypochondriac, into a person cheerful and companionable; or, as Captain John put it, 'he seemed to have completely picked himself up.' He in particular was well pleased to meet some one who could talk to him of India, and enable him to live over again the years he spent there in his youth. It followed that they sat longer than usual in the dining room, drank their coffee there, and adjourned straight to the smoking room, so that the ladies saw no more of them that evening.

This was just as well for Julia, whose artistic soul had been sadly jarred by finding herself pitched in a wrong key. It took her hours to modulate down into a more everyday state of feeling,-for there must be a kind of feeling at the back even of make-believe emotion, if it is to be a successful representation. But that was only part of what she would have to do. The spectator must be led down by easy gradation, or her revulsion from pensive melancholy to a chastened cheerfulness might seem abrupt, intentional, and ridiculous. Artificial feeling has this advantage in displaying itself, that it is single, and free from the complexities and contradictions which confuse and distract the real, in its manifestation; and hence grief on the stage is often beautiful, while in private life it is generally revolting and grotesque. But this very singleness and clear definition makes it more difficult for the artificial to change front; while the real, having been always blurred and muddy and indistinct, can readily transfer itself to a new category. The floating cloud passes readily enough from the form of an eagle to a ship, a horse or a whale; but clay once trimmed and modelled into a given shape must be broken down and worked up afresh in order to take a new form. Julia therefore kept in the background for a day or two, before coming forward prominently in a new rôle. Prominence, however, was by no means so very easy now. Since Major Steele's mind had recovered a healthier tone, the men in the house were all eager for his company. The General had Blue-Books and Reports of the Board of Control on which he desired information, and Captain John talked pig-sticking and tigerhunts by the hour.

If Julia would only have taken some personal interest in the baby, she might have succeeded, but she was much too clever and artistic to try any course so obvious as that. Besides, she abominated babies. 'Damp, sticky little abominations, which always squalled when you did anything to them! and scabbled their little wet fingers over your face, which was always unpleasant, and sometimes inconvenient.' If she would have talked about bringing up young children, infant health and disease, baths, powders, pap and teething, she might have kept the Major at her side by the hour; for the new responsibilities of a parent weighed heavily upon him, and he had no one to advise with, Lady Caroline having forgotten all she ever knew on such matters, if she ever knew anything. He rode over to Eppie every day and had long talks with her on the engrossing subject; but when he returned, the billiard room or smoking room were his usual haunts.

It was not long too before Julia had other matters of her own to attend to. Since the awakening of her fantastical interest in Major Steele, Augustus Wallowby's daily offerings of amorous rubbish had grown wearisome, and reply to them a positive bore. Her letters had grown intermittent, and dwindled down to the shortest billets. Augustus remonstrated--waxed plaintive--drivelled--Julia lost patience and ceased to write altogether. Had Augustus followed suit, it is likely the correspondence would not have remained long in abeyance, and that it would have been the lady who would have revived it; but Augustus dared not venture on that experiment, indeed he had become too deeply in earnest to think of it. He had thought over her pretty speeches spoken, and written in her earlier letters, and the delight of having a lord for a cousin and visitor, till from merely supposing that she must admire him very much, he had worked himself up to an almost crazy eagerness about *her*, believed himself to be cherishing a most ardent attachment, and began to feel deeply touched at his own sensibility.

Likewise he had cut the ground from under his own feet; or perhaps 'burned his ships' is the more usual metaphor. On returning home from the North, his good fortune with the ladies and this new conquest were much in his thoughts, weighty hints and dark sayings babbled from his lips before he was aware, and then, to mend matters, he would explain and confide till they were made much worse. All his acquaintance knew that he was going to be married, and the younger men revered him in advance on account of the noble family he was about to enter, 'related to half the peerage.'

The news did not act so pleasantly for him on his lady friends. No one should say that they had been jilted, or had made fruitless attempts to win him! and they took care that the cooling of the intimacy should begin on their side. His neighbour Sir Timothy Kettlebotham had three fine daughters, with £20,000 certain to their fortunes a-piece, and he had been wont to practise a good deal of archery with them on the lawn, as well as to sing numberless duets and glees, and assist at small carpet dances in the evening. But now Miss Kitura had strained her wrist and could not draw a bow, Miss Felicia had medical orders not to sing until her chest grew stronger, and Miss Frances was away on a visit. He found himself condemned to dine at home four or five times in the week, and to knock about the billiard hall of an evening if he could secure a companion, or to fall asleep in his chair if he could not, without a chance of the female society and admiration to which he had grown accustomed.

He wrote more and more pleadingly, which to Julia was more and more tiresome, and therefore elicited no reply. In sheer desperation, he packed his portmanteau and hurried to the

north. He had a standing invitation to return when he pleased from Mrs. Sangster, who still cherished fatuous hopes of making him a son-in-law. Therefore, when one frosty evening about Christmas time he drew up at the door, he was made as welcome as the flowers in spring. Since the vindication of Roderick Brown's character, that lady had an uncomfortable intuition that her all-wisdom was set less store on both by her husband and daughter. But here was the prize returned; it could be with only one object, and these ingrates would have to admit her judicious management after all.

Augustus drove over to Inchbracken the following day very early. When his card was brought to Julia she was greatly surprised, and better pleased with the man than she had been yet. This long journey at such a season, and over muddy roads showed some energy and strength of purpose, and if only he would talk like a rational being and a gentleman, instead of maundering like a lackadaisical idiot as he had been doing of late in his letters, she believed she might bring herself to respect and even like him. She was beginning to realize, too, that her sympathy for Major Steele was so much brain power thrown away. There had been something respectable, nay more, touching, and almost grand, in such abandonment of grief and utter desolation on the part of a widower crushed by the untimely loss of his wife and child; but that a distinguished officer should ride away from good company every day to drivel for hours with an old woman over a sticky infant was preposterous, nay it was disgusting!

There were half-a-dozen of Augustus' latest letters on her table still unopened. She tore them open now, and glanced at the contents to place herself *au courant* with the gentleman's ideas, but the reading nearly destroyed her good resolutions. The letters were both abject and ridiculous, and she wondered how she would even learn to tolerate such a husband, and hesitated whether to go down to him at all. Being, however, a business minded person, who meant to settle herself comfortably and respectably in life, and knew she could not have everything, she choked down the unpractical idea, and after a critical survey of herself in the glass, she went down to receive her visitor.

Her manner was all gracious friendliness, and Augustus was disarmed for the moment, and saved from doing anything absurd, which might have been the death of his hopes. He had expected to be received with coldness, and had prepared many moving protestations; he had even selected the precise spot of the carpet on which he was prepared to kneel; and surely that, he thought, with perhaps a tear or two (and he had a misgiving that in certain contingencies they would not be far off!) would finish the matter. And so it would have done, for in spite of self-command, Julia would have laughed, and Augustus Wallowby's love, his infatuation,--whatever it should be called,--would never have survived a laugh. He would have rushed from the house, and no apology would ever have induced him to return.

They chatted as pleasantly as possible, thanks to Julia, who kept the conversation well on the ordinary track, carefully avoiding sentiment and everything tiresome. Augustus regained his equanimity under this treatment, and was saved from making a fool of himself. He had come with a purpose, however; and that purpose must be fulfilled, if not in the melodramatic fashion he had intended, at least in such form as circumstances would permit. He told her that his life was a burden to him at so great a distance from her, and begged that she would let the marriage take place the following month.

She replied that it was very nice of him to be so impatient, of course; but really he must allow her a little time to prepare for so momentous a change in her life. He pressed her to name a time. She supposed in a year. 'And you must not, dear Augustus, be so exacting as you have shown signs of being lately. A woman should be allowed to take the full enjoyment out of her last year of freedom. You know, after that, you expect us to be obedient slaves. Oh yes! Don't protest! Men are all alike!' with an engaging smile, which gratified Augustus, and made him pull out his whiskers to their greatest length.

He remonstrated about the year, however, with great earnestness, and there were threatenings of a watery look in his eyes, which induced her to relent so far; for her gracious blandishments being really well done, had had a reflex action, and she was getting into a less hard humour herself.

'Six months! then,' she said. 'Now see what influence you have already! It quite frightens me.'

But Augustus was not yet content. He reminded her of the discomforts of a northern spring. 'Would she not like to spend the dreariest months of the year in Italy, with its blue skies and its--' The special descriptive attributes of Italy forsook him at the moment, but, 'and all that sort of thing' answered as well. 'And we might spend Holy Week in Rome, and see all the church ceremonies; and there are to be an unusual number of foreign princes there this year, I am told. Would you not like to be there?'

Julia thought that she *would* like it. And after all, if it was to be, the sooner she entered on her fortune, and the less time she had to think about it beforehand, perhaps the better. So March was fixed on as the date of their happiness, and Wallowby was led up stairs to Lady Caroline's sitting-room, to be presented as an expectant relative, and to be duly congratulated. The interview did not last long, however; Lady Caroline speedily got tired of tiresome people, and Julia, knowing the signs, bundled her admirer off in good time. He was invited to dinner for the following day, with instructions to go back to Manchester the day after, and to remain there till the day of the

wedding, as the settlements could be arranged between Mr. MacSiccar (who had Lady Caroline and the General's instructions as to what was proper) and his solicitors.

He returned to Auchlippie in exuberant delight, and unburdened himself of his good news to his hostess, who made shift to receive it as well as she could. So he had come north with matrimonial intent after all! And yet he had turned his eyes elsewhere! It was too bad! And her husband and daughter would think less of her wisdom than ever.

She was not very effusive in her congratulations, and she told him that he would no doubt stay at Inchbracken when he came north next time; from which he was left to infer that the Lady of Auchlippie had no wish to see his face again.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE END.

Roderick Brown's health rapidly improved under the milder and more genial airs of Devon. The threatening symptoms of impending disease were speedily mitigated, and gradually disappeared altogether. Torquay was but a quiet little place in those days. The carriages filled with much dressed company, and the depressing trains of hopelessly sick and dying, were not as yet. He and his sister could go in and out as inclination led them, and wander little disturbed by other sojourners along the shore.

Roderick revelled in the ease and repose that comes of the cessation of long continued worry. He knew that there he could go, and say, and do as he listed, with none to criticise; and for once after several years he found himself with nothing whatever to do but amuse himself.

He had frequent letters from the Laird, which told him all the news he cared to know of Glen Effick, whose dust he vowed to himself he had shaken from his feet for ever. The beadle's appearance at church in the new character of married man had overturned and shivered to pieces the whole fabric of scandal under which he had lain, and the old gentleman grew quite humorous over the consternation and recriminations of his brother elders in Session assembled. A scapegoat had at first appeared necessary to these wiseacres, and poor Joseph was selected as the victim on whom they might lay the punishment of their stupid credulity, sending it and him forth into the wilderness to be no more heard of or remembered; and it had taken all the Laird's and the new minister's eloquence and influence to dissuade them from their vindictive intentions, and let the poor wretch work out in peace the heavy domestic retribution he had brought upon himself. 'I might say,' he added, 'that we all congratulate you; but you know we never supposed that there was anything in it, and we only regretted that you should have taken a nonsensical accusation so seriously to heart.'

'We all' Roderick understood to be the old gentleman's way of including Sophia with himself, and he was greatly cheered. He kept up a constant correspondence with the Laird himself, and took care that Mary's letterwriting to Sophia should never flag, so that he felt by no means cut off from her. He might have adventured a letter to her himself now, with far greater hope than he had felt on a previous occasion, but he had begun to doubt and wonder as to his own future plans in life, and he misgave as to his moral right to commit another to the hazy uncertainties he begun to see before him. His utter outrooting from Glen Effick was not a process which could take place without leaving changes and permanent effects on his whole nature. It was no mere transplanting-process, in which the fibres retain some clod of the old for stay and nourishment until they are able to spread themselves and take hold on the new soil. His clerical brethren had treated him as a diseased and withered branch, a weed to be plucked up by the root and cast out of the vineyard; and finding himself thus out for the moment, he was minded to look well about him before he returned.

In England he came for the first time in contact with a national church differing from his own, and to which the traditions and prejudices of his early training were opposed. The written prayers, rubrical directions, and instrumental music, were all opposed to his experience and prepossessions, so much that, in a sense, and apart from controversial considerations, Prelacy and Popery had appeared as nearly convertible terms. But as the novelty wore off there was much in them conducive to devout feeling, and he could not close his eyes to the signal and thousandfold examples of holy living which flourished under the system. The extension of railways has assisted to bring similar suggestions to many of his fellow countrymen. Roderick began to realize what, perhaps, he would only have admitted in a speculative but doubtful way before, that there are more folds than one; or, to speak more orthodoxly, that the limits of the

one fold are not conterminous with those of one special pen in which some portion of the faithful flock have chosen to house themselves. He began to read more foreign theology than had been his wont, and with less of his old feeling that he knew more and better than any dweller in lands of a dimmer Gospel light could possibly tell him.

Mary, of course, was not long in hearing from Kenneth that baby Steele had been reclaimed by its new found family, and the delighted father wrote her a letter overflowing with gratitude. He told her that he had persuaded Eppie, who understood her constitution so wonderfully, to remain in charge of his little Mary, and assured her that she should be brought up to remember for life the debt of gratitude she owed to her name-mother's charity. Mary cried a little to think that she had lost her winsome plaything, but admitted it was perhaps just as well. Lady Caroline might not have relished an infant in the house, not of her kindred, and belonging to none knew whom.

In March came the county *Courier*, describing the marriage in high life at Inchbracken, 'Augustus Wallowby, Esquire, to the beautiful and accomplished,' etc., with all the great doings and high festival kept on the occasion. This was especially welcome news to Mary. She had known of it from the beginning, but she had feared something might happen to delay or break it off; the attachment seemed so unreal, to judge from Kenneth's cynical observations made on the spot. Her acquaintance with Julia had been slight, and she felt as if they did not like each other, though she could not have said why. Julia had always been quite civil, but Mary knew this, that she did not understand her (Julia) in the very least, Inchbracken was going to become her own home in the coming autumn, and she had feared that the presence of Julia would not be conducive to her happy relations with her mother-in-law. But that was settled, and Mary received an occasional billet from Lady Caroline, who felt lonely and dull now that she was deprived of Julia's companionship, and whose thoughts naturally turned to the coming daughter-in-law.

Roderick and Mary broke up their winter quarters soon after hearing of Julia's marriage. They had no occasion to move northward before May or June, but having as yet seen little of England, they determined to move along the south coast by easy stages, stopping at famous towns on their way, and seeing all that they could--Exeter, Dorchester, Winchester, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, Canterbury, and finally Dover. They were sorely tempted to cross the straits, but it was now May, and if they were to see London, it was time for them to hurry thither, for they were due in Edinburgh at the end of the month.

They strolled down the pier to watch the steamer come in, and had the consolation of seeing by the forlorn aspect of the landing passengers, that their inability to cross was not an unmixed evil. The wind blew from the east, and the confused chopping waves betokened a detestable passage, and the seagreen visages of the people, as they followed their baggage into the customhouse sheds, showed plainly what they had suffered. In time there issued from the sheds a party, the chief members of which struck them as familiar, though they could not recall when they had seen them. A lady, whose long ringlets had somewhat lost their curl in the damp sea air, but who did not appear to be otherwise discomposed, walked first; a courier came next carrying her reticule, her Murray, and her smelling bottle; a gentleman followed, dismal of countenance and rumpled in attire. Manifestly he had not been happy during the voyage, and he appeared to have lain down or leant up in undesirable places. It appeared an exertion to him to drag himself to the neighbouring 'Lord Warden,' whither their steps were bent, and yet he had other burdens to carry. On one arm hung a voluminous fur cloak,--evidently a lady's,--and he had also a parasol. Clutched to his side under the other arm was a French poodle, caught below the shoulders, with its after-part dangling helpless like a hairy caterpillar about his legs. It appeared to be in much discomfort, blinked piteously, and would have yelped and bitten also, but that the breath was squeezed out of its body by the elbow which kept it in place. A maid followed with a vast bundle of shawls, and then came a man with a folding stool, who lingered to watch the baggage being conveyed to the hotel.

'Adolphe!' said the lady to the courier, 'go and bid Mr. Wallowby take better care of that poor Fidele. I *know* he is handling the tender darling roughly! Men are so coarse and indifferent. I am *sure* I heard a whimper!'

The delivery of Adolphe's message was followed by a shrill yelp, cut short in the middle by want of breath, as its aggravated bearer bent in a few more of its ribs with a jerk of his elbow, and wished it in the sea. The lady stopped in her saunter and turned round.

'Augustus!' she said in a severe and injured tone, 'Had you not better wait till you get indoors, before giving way to your disgusting brutality of temper? The servants cannot possibly admire the exhibition.'

At this moment she descried the Browns, and her face cleared as she approached them with cordial alacrity.

'Oh, Miss Brown! or Mary you must allow me to call you, we are so soon to be cousins you know. So nice to meet old friends on setting foot in dear Old England once more!' She was as enthusiastic over her return as if she had been abroad for years; but then she knew Mary had never crossed the Channel, and this was the civillest way to remind her of it.

Mary returned her salutation with as much effusion as she could call up, and then turned to greet Mr. Wallowby who stood a step behind, like the attendant of a princess on the stage. He

could only bow himself, with a weakly smile to his encumbered hands and arms, for there was a vicious twitch about Fidele's mouth and eye, which warned him that any relaxation of watchfulness or elbow would be followed by a snap or perhaps an ugly bite.

'Ah! To be sure you know each other! I had forgotten that. Met at Auchlippie last summer, of course. It was there *we* met first, too, by the way, in our days of young love and inexperience. How long ago it all seems now! And how droll! Does it not, Wallowby?'

'Very droll,' returned the husband in a dull and absent voice, as if he might have added, 'And very wretched, too,' but had still so much self-respect as kept him from parading his disappointment.

He had tasted more of gall than sweetness during his honeymoon, and had found himself matched to so expert a manager that it was harder to struggle than submit; and he had meekly subsided into poodle-bearer and banker before the honeymoon was half gone through. Julia made no pretence of admiring him now, and this was so strange an experience that he worshipped her for her superiority, and probably loved her in some weak and querulous fashion. Do not people love and reverence all the queer idols they set up, if only they are strong and heavy enough to crush their worshippers? But Julia would have none of his endearments or devotion. They bored, and after a few days did not even amuse her. Adolphe the courier spoke French and Italian, and she practised herself in those tongues under his direction, which was better than talking vapid sentiment with her husband; and so long as their expenditure was liberal, there were plenty of talkative foreigners--counts--princes--all sorts of interesting creatures to be had, who conversed delightfully, and were so romantic, realizing to her mind some of the most charming passages in the French novels she doted on. Thus Julia enjoyed her tour immensely, and was returning home in the best of good humour, prepared to queen it over the Misses Kettlebotham and all the people who should come within her circle.

Roderick stood in the back-ground. A distant bow was all the recognition he either expected or received from the lady, and when they moved on he followed with Wallowby. He offered to relieve him of some of his burdens, but the poor man declined--he clung to his service as the only hold left him on the woman he had married--though he did wish that something would happen to Fidele; that its morning cream, for instance, would disagree with its liver, and that it might shortly die.

The Browns parted with their friends at the hotel door, and hastened to London, whence in due time they returned to Scotland.

There is little to record in what afterwards befell them. Like those fortunate nations which have little or no history, their lives were happy, monotonous to the onlooker, but full of various and engrossing interest to themselves. Mary returned to Inchbracken as daughter-in-law in the autumn, and Lady Caroline speedily ceased to regret that her son had not made a more splendid alliance.

Roderick met the Laird and his family in Edinburgh, where the Laird was a delegate from his Presbytery to the General Assembly, and before the young man well knew it, he had said all that was in his mind both to Sophia and her father. He spent two years in Germany to the no small anxiety of Mrs. Sangster, who felt certain that his principles would be sapped, and that he would come back a rationalist, or imbued with peculiar German views, whatever that may mean. But on his return he was called to an influential city charge, and duly married, realizing in the end the original hopes of that worthy but somewhat mixed old lady for the wellbeing of her daughter--a comfortable provision for this life, and the glorious certainties of a minister's wife for that which is to come.

Roderick has preached and published many remarkable sermons; he is highly respected for personal piety; and as his lucky star has more than once interposed to prevent his being made a professor, there is every likelihood that he will live to a good old age in peace, contentment, and universal esteem.

THE END.

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