

SHETLAND FIRESIDE TALES.

CHAPTER I.

Then pilgrim turn, thy cares forego,
All earthly cares are wrong;
Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long.

GOLDSMITH.

ON the eastern extremity of Trosswickness,¹ near an ancient Pictish ruin, once stood a lonely hut far remote from any other human habitation. Its solitary occupant was a man named Olla Ollison, whose strange mode of life and peculiar habits had long rendered him an object of suspicion in the eyes of his ignorant and superstitious countrymen. For reasons which will afterwards appear, Olla Ollison had become a hermit, and it was his custom to retire to the sea-shore after sunset, and there, seated by himself under the dark shadow of some frowning rock, he would give vent to his grief, and find in the solitude of the scene, and the memory of events which it recalled, some relief from the sorrows which oppressed his heart.

In an age when belief in the supernatural was almost universal, and when in the awe-struck imagination of a rude seafaring population the earth, air, and sea teemed with grim creations of Scandinavian mythology, it need not be wondered at if even that education and intelligence which he so fully possessed should not altogether prevent Olla Ollison from being influenced by

¹ See Note A. Trosswickness.

prevailing beliefs, and that, in his ignorance of the true cause of the calamity which had befallen him, he should seek in the supernatural for the revelation of a mystery he could not otherwise penetrate.

Olla Ollison was at this time a man about thirty years of age, of somewhat slender make, and about 5 feet 6 inches in height. His erect gait and polished manners showed that the earlier period of his life had been spent under the softening influence of education and refinement. His beard, which grief had prematurely tinged with grey, descended in luxuriant growth to his waist, while his hair hung in careless profusion around his shoulders. When engaged in conversation, his countenance was pleasant, animated, and expressive; but, when alone, it constantly wore an air of pensive thought and settled melancholy.

His dress consisted of jacket and knee-breeches of blue cloth of native manufacture. On his head he wore a worsted knitted cap, and on his feet the common native wooden-soled slippers. A few patches of cultivated soil around his hut produced a scanty supply of potatoes and black oats; and a cow, with a few sheep, which cropped the wild herbage of the headland, more than supplied all his other wants.¹ During the spring and autumn, his time was chiefly spent about his little croft. In summer, he employed much of his time in fishing the small red cod and pilticks² which abound around the shores of the Shetland Isles; but during winter, owing to the tempests which frequently sweep over those headlands, he seldom left his hut.

The autumn had now far advanced, and the hermit had just finished his harvest, and put his sheaves in little stooks behind his hut. His day's work being done, he returned to his solitary home to partake of the humble meal which his own

¹ See Note B. Shetland Manners and Customs.

² Coal fish (*Merlangus Carbonarius*) one to three years old.

hands had prepared, and to rest until the moon had risen, when he intended to return to the sea-shore, as was his nightly custom at this particular season of the year.

The night was calm and beautiful, and no sound fell upon the ear, save that of the murmuring waves, which gently rose and fell around the dark rocky shore of Trosswickness. In a cloudless sky, a full-orbed moon rode in silent glory, casting a flickering belt of silvery light across the dark waters which extended far to the distant horizon. The seafowl had gone to rest on the lofty ledges of the Ness, and the wild cries of the seamew and kittywake were hushed in the silence of night.

After quitting his cottage, the hermit directed his steps to the northern extremity of the headland, where the rock in many places shelves in a steep descent of several hundred feet to the sea. He was about midway down this steep pathway, when he observed an old man ascending the rock, and coming towards him with a heavy "büddie" or creel of sillocks[†] on his back. This old man was Yacob of Trosswick, who had remained unusually late at the fishing that night, and was now on his way home. On looking up, the old man saw the hermit coming towards him, and in his anxiety to move to one side so as to allow him to pass, he failed to notice a deep fissure in the rock before him, and into which he at that moment stumbled; but just as he was falling, the hermit quickly caught him by the back of the neck, and dragging him up, disentangled his neck from the band of the creel which threatened to strangle him.

"My friend," cried the hermit, "why would you so endanger your own life in trying to avoid a fellow creature who never did, and never can do you any harm?"

"Ay, ay; Lord kens," exclaimed Yacob; "ye never did me ony ill, an' noo ye're düne me muckle guid, an' sae may

[†] Coal fish, one year old.

my blissen an' da Lord's blissen be on you fir it, though I'm gotten a sair shack,¹ an' lost a hantle o' my sillicks inta da bargain ; bit as the auld sayin' is, 'it's never ill bit it micht a been warr.' I micht a been misackered² for a' my days ; bit whaur may ye be gaen at dis oor o' da nicht, if it may be a fair question ?"³

"The question is fair enough, my friend," replied the hermit. "I come here for the purpose of meditation, to hold communion with the rocks and the rippling waves, and to listen to their voice, as they soothe the anguish of my soul. I come here to ask the great sea to give me back the treasure of my heart, which it has kept from me these many long years."

"Ah, weel," responded Yacob, "I'm been up an' doon ower dis heilik,⁴ an' roond aboot dis banks, fir da last tretty year o' my life, bit never yet saw or heard onything warr nor mysell, nor ony idder soond bit da roar o' da brack,⁵ or da rumble o' da winter sea ; bit ye're a man o' eddication, ye see, an' I can dü little mair nor read a shapter i' da Bible, an' dats bit ill-santafied sometimes, sae muckle as da warr. In my young days, ye see, we learned wir *Abersay* fae da Cattages, an' tocht we wir far enouch whin we cud spell com-mand-de-ment ; bit dis is awa fae da point. Ir ye no oorie⁶ sitten yoursell doon here like a sleepin baukie⁷ on a rudderie⁸ skerrie ? In coorse ye hae nae wife at hame ta haud you oot o' langer wi' ;⁹ though, faith, atween you an' me, an' I hoop it'll geng ha farder, ye're mebbe as weel withoot her ; adumes¹⁰ o' mysell, I hae a wife, and der's mebbe warr atween dis an' Sumburgh Head, if shü wid only haud her tongue aff me, bit fae da dim¹¹ rives till

¹ Shake.

² Seriously injured.

³ See Note C. Peculiarities of the Shetland dialect.

⁴ Slanting rock dipping towards the sea.

⁵ Breaking waves ; foam.

⁶ Feeling dread or lonesomeness.

⁷ Guilemot (*Uria*).

⁸ Rock submerged at high-water, and covered with *Balanoides*.

⁹ Prevented from wearying.

¹⁰ For example.

¹¹ Daybreak.

black dayset shü's yaag, yaag, yaagin,¹ Yacob dis, and Yacob dat ; as I says till her sometimes, deil clumpse² dee an' haud dy tongue sometime—Lord forgie me for swearin'. In coorse ye're a man o' eddication, an' micht a hed a wife dat wid a kent whin ta hadden her tongue, an' ane dat wid a been blide³ ta made you happy, dats ta say if da clash⁴ da folk has about you is no true ; and dis is my ain opinion noo whin I luik closer at you ; ye're no like a bodie ava dat hes düins wi' evil speerits—tangies, brownies, witches, warlocks, or hillfolk."⁵

To this harangue the hermit listened attentively ; but when old Yacob mentioned the words, "an' ane dat wid a made you happy," he heaved a deep sigh, and a tear was seen to tremble down his cheek.

"My honest friend !" exclaimed the hermit, wiping away the tear, "I sympathise with you in your troubles, and I thank you for your sympathy in mine, and for your good opinion of me ; but I desire to be now at my meditations, and if you will come to-morrow to my humble dwelling, I shall be happy to have further conversation with you."

"Yea dat sall I," said old Yacob ; "if da Lord spares me ta see da morn, I sall truly come up an' see you ; an' sae guid nicht be wi' you, an' sit nae langer ipa da cauld stanes nor ye can help."

Saying this, the old man trudged up the heilik with what remained of his sillicks, and the hermit retired under the dark shadow of the overhanging rock which stood close by.

Next day old Yacob kept his promise to visit the hermit ; and on approaching the cottage, tapped gently at the door, when a voice from within cried, "Come in, friend."

"Guid day be here," was Yacob's salutation as he entered ; "I'm blide ta see ye' naithen the warr o' your sittin'

¹ Incessant angry talk.

³ Glad.

⁵ Fairies.

² Choke.

⁴ Gossip ; scandal.

stirnin¹ ipa da cauld ebb stanes last nicht ; it's cauld enouch whin ye're takin da sillicks aff da huik as fast as ye can cleek dem up, bit ta sit stourin² i' da laybrack wi' naithen ta dü ^{ava,} it palls³ me ta tink hoo ye can hae da patience ta dü it ; bit as I said afore, ye're a man o' eddication, an' it may be presumption in a puir bodie like me ta express my opinions sae freely, bit I hoop ye'll excüse me ; an' I'm süre if der's ony wy I can obleege you, I'll be ower blide ta dü it, and niver ax for idder pay or tanks."

"Take a seat, my friend," said the hermit, pointing to a settle or "restin' chair" which stood at one side of the fire-place. "I am glad to see you, and thank you for those kind sentiments which you have now expressed, and which indeed sound strangely in my ears, so long unaccustomed as they have been to any other sound but the echo of my own voice and the voice of Nature, whose gentle whispers have inspired me with hope, and sustained me amid the solitude of many years of sorrow. I feel that I can trust you with what I am about to disclose. I have been long anxious to confide the secret of my sorrow to one who would sympathize with me, and who, when I am gone to join my love in the better land, will tell the story of my life, and show that I was not the wicked person I have been supposed to be ; and that I have never consorted with evil spirits or demons in my retirement to the sea-shore."

"Deed no ! deed no !" exclaimed old Yacob ; "what guid cud dey dü bit frichten you oot o' ycur seven senses. Lord keep us fae a' dat's unearhtly. I aye keep a sherp e'e about me in da mirkinnen⁴ whin I'm passin' crubdykes,⁵ muckle grey stanes, or hill-folks' knowes ; an' whin I'm just passin' da warst places, I canna help rinnin, auld as I am, for I tink I just hear da sough o' dem close at my heels, an' if I gie a

1 Shivering.

3 Puzzles or perplexes.

5 A small enclosure where cabbage plants are grown.

2 Staring.

4 Dusk of the evening.

gluffed¹ luik ower my shouder, I see der ill-faured een glowerin' efter me in da dark, just as veesably as I see you affore my face dis minit.

“Ye'll hae nae doot heard aboot auld Peggy Moad da maidwife ;² ye ken shü wis taen awa ta ane o' da hill-folks' wives, an' efter da bairn wis born, shü got sontin³ in a perrie⁴ gless ta rub its een wi' ; whin shü wis düin dis, shü felt her ain e'e a kind a yuckie,⁵ an' pitten up her haand ta claw it, just as you or I wid dü, a nirty⁶ corn o' da smearin gets intil her e'e, whin, Lord be aboot 'is, what does shü see bit a lock⁷ o' hill-folk ipa da middle o' da flüir, makin' a image o' a coo dat dey wir gaen ta tak awa fae a püir man dat nicht. An' what wir dey makin' da image o', tink ye? just oot o' a lock o' auld cashies,⁸ flakies,⁹ an meshies,¹⁰ an' ony idder truss dey cud get. Whin shü sees dis, shü slips awa oot by dem, and as shü wis passin' shü slips her keys inta da hert o' dis concern without dem seein' her, sae der wis nae mair o' dis till da neist day whin shü gengs hame, whin da first news dat shü hears is dat Eddie Lourie o' Yaafeld's best coo wis stark dead ; aff shü sends wurd ta him no ta touch a hair o' her, bit ta yird¹¹ her within da eart ; an' if he'll no believe Peggy's wurd, ta open da coo, an' he'll fin a steel airrow stickin' trow her hert, an' da bundle o' keys lian atween her hert an' her lichts ; sae dey opens da coo, an' fin's it just as Peggy hed sed. A while efter dis, ae Sunday whin shü wis gaen ta da kirk, wha sud shü meet bit da man o' da hill-wife dat shü wis aside. Says he, ‘Hoo is a' wi' you da day, Peggy ;’ an' wi' dat he blew his breath in her face, an' fae dat day ta dis shü never saw a stime¹ more. Bit

¹ Frightened.

³ Something.

⁶ Small.

⁸ Creel made of straw, which is bound together by ropes of bent, or rashes twisted by the fingers.

⁹ A large mat for winnowing corn on, and made of the same material as creels.

¹¹ Pannier holders made of rashes or bent, and having bands of the same material for attaching to the clibber or pony saddle.

¹¹ Bury.

¹² Blink, or small portion of light.

² See Note D. Fairies.

⁴ Little.

⁷ Number or quantity.

⁵ Itching.

I'm keepin' you standin' ower lang ipa your feet wi' my lang tale. As da auld wife says sometimes whin I fin' faut wi' her yatterin', I'm no atagedder free mysell o' sayin' sometimes mair den I sud say. Bit noo I'm düne, an' I'll be blide ta hear onything ye're pleased ta say ta me, an' I'll keep it like blue murder till da time ye tell me ta speak o' it."

CHAPTER II.

"I saw her, and the passionate heart of man entered the breast of the wild dreaming boy, and from that hour I grew what to the last I shall be—her adorer."

BULWER LYTTON.

"THE story of my life," said the hermit, seating himself on a chair close to the settle on which the old man sat, "is indeed a strange and romantic one, and I shall now begin it.

"My name is not Ollison—the name I am hereabout known by. My real name is Roderick Douglas. Ollison was my mother's maiden name—a name adopted by me in accordance with my grandfather's wish after we left Scotland.¹ My father fell on the blood-red field of Culloden, on that sad day when the star of the House of Stuart was for ever quenched in the blood of Scotland's bravest sons.

"My mother in her sorrow decided to leave Scotland, and return to Shetland, her native country, taking me, her only son, with her, then a lad of about twelve years of age. Arriving at her father's house, who lived in the island of Bressay, we met with a cordial welcome, and experienced every kindness and sympathy. I was shortly afterwards sent to the parish school, which was reckoned the best of the kind in the islands, and continued there for two years, making great progress in Latin and mathematics, which I was then chiefly studying.

"About this time my mother decided to go and live with a sister of hers, who was married to a factor on one of the estates in the parish of Dunrossness, and I accompanied her. Several weeks after our arrival at the village of Skelaburgh, where my aunt lived, it was decided that I should go to a

¹ See Note E. Shetland surnames.

neighbouring school to learn navigation, in case I might one day follow the example of the youth of the islands, and go to sea.

“ After I had been a few weeks at this school, I was sitting one day on a form near the fire, deeply absorbed in studying a problem in plane trigonometry, when, happening to look over the top of my slate at the children who were seated on a form on the opposite side, my eyes fell upon a face and form which sent a thrill through my veins, and went out at the points of my toes and fingers. The shock made me look hard at the work on my slate, and to hold my breath as if I had done some offence, and expected the teacher’s switch across my back. I tried to get hold of the lost thread of my problem, but found my sines and tangents all playing at hide-and-seek on my slate. After a little I ventured to take another peep, when a sharper thrill went through my frame, making my cheeks glow, and my heart beat quickly.

“ The cause of all this was a girl, about two years younger than myself, who had come to the school that day for the first time, and whom I had never seen before. Oh ! how shall I describe her ? Her dark auburn hair fell in rich careless ringlets down her snow-white neck and shoulders ; her round rosy cheeks blushing their softest tints, and pure as the bloom of the crimson-tipped daisy ; her mouth like a little rosebud ; and her eyes—heaven itself was reflected in their soft depths when she smiled (for she smiled once or twice while whispering to the girl who sat next her). My heart beat like an imprisoned bird against the bars of its cage. Oh ! how I was entranced, spell-bound, as I watched, from behind my slate, the various expressions that passed over her countenance ; like gleams of sunshine on a summer day, when the floating silvery clouds cast a faint shadow here and there. While thus gazing upon her, for I had almost forgotten where I was, her eyes met mine, when a kind of timid, wondering, inquiring expression

passed over her countenance, as if she had recognised a friend, and then found she was mistaken. I blushed the deepest crimson, and held down my head."

"Ay, ay," exclaimed old Yacob, "just like calf-love, as da sayin' is: it's winderful guid while it lests; but it's just ower guid ta lest lang. I hed a sma brash¹ o' calf-love mysell whin I was i' my day o' douch;² an' tho' I say it dat sudna say it, I wis as prunk³ a young man as wis eneath da 'Wart Hill';⁴ an' wir auld wife wis den just about as trig a bit lass is cam in da door o' da Ness Kirk. Bit, leck o' me! a' dat's by an' gane; an' da cauld winter o' auld age sets in efter the simmer o' youth, an' da hairst of middle life, an' leaves us naithin bit frosty pows, widdered shafts, an' cankersome, countermashious natur. Bit dis wis no what I wis gaen to say. Ye hae a winderful poor o' unction,⁵ Mr Ollison. In listenin' ta you describin' da bonnie bit lass ye met wi' at da schüle, I just tocht how weel ye cud gie wis a bit screed⁶ some Sunday, fae da 'Sang o' Solomon,' if ye wid only just come da lent o' da kirk. I'm sure Mr Shürtiends wid no hinder you da üse o' da poopit. I tink da 'Sang o' Solomon' is muckle in da wy o' your gift o' unction. It's a' aboot da kirk, ye ken; though, owin' ta my want o' laer,⁷ I never cud ken yet hoo dey fand dis oot,—mair by token, as Solomon adümes o' mysell, in his young days cared little for idder kirk or minister. Bit beggin' your pardon for pittin' you aff da treed o' your story. Ye wir sayin' da bit lass hed fairly pitten you in a swidder,⁸ an nae doot ye wid get warr afore ye got better."

"Yes," continued the hermit, "this lovely child, for so I might call her, won my heart, young as I was. I left the school that day scarcely knowing what to do with myself. Arriving home, I could neither eat nor study. I felt a kind of

¹ A slight attack of fever or illness.

³ Smart, manly.

⁵ Power of speech, eloquence.

⁷ Learning.

² In the prime of life.

⁴ A hill near Fitful Head.

⁶ Portion, sample.

⁸ Flurry, state of excitement.

longing pain at my heart, similar to that caused by home-sickness, and sat looking vacantly in the fire, every now and then heaving a deep sigh. My mother seemed distressed about me, and tried, by every endearing expression, to learn from me the cause of my trouble ; but I could not tell her. I just said, 'O, never mind ; it's nothing at all. I just feel tired, and will be all right to-morrow.' I retired to bed early that night, just that I might lie with my eyes shut and see her in the dark ; and I *did see* her. There was her glorious sweet face still before me, so full of sunny smiles ; and the merry twinkle of her soft lustrous eyes—how they made my heart dance. How thankful I was that it was dark, for I could lie still and see her, and nobody there to disturb me, or to break the spell which gave me such happiness. At last I fell asleep ; and then, oh, such dreams ! There she was a little distance from me, smiling and looking as if she wished to speak to me. In my joy I tried to get near her, but my limbs were so weak I could not walk. Then I tried to speak to her, but found my voice was gone. I tried again and again to speak, and at last succeeded ; but the effort awakened me, when I found my mother at my bedside, wiping the perspiration from my face, and in a state of alarm concerning me. I persuaded her to leave me, telling her that I was only dreaming, and would go to sleep again. I slept again, and brighter visions passed before me. I now got near her, talked to her, caressed her, pressed her to my heart ; and, in the midst of my bliss, I awakened with the morning light streaming into my room, and my arms entwined around a portion of the bedclothes.

"I got up and dressed, and that same morning, on my way to school, settled in my mind the course I should follow. 'I must not be a child,' I said to myself, 'I must be a man ; and the path to her heart must be through that by which I can win distinction, and show myself, in some way or other, superior to all other boys.' And I would here remark, that

this new impulse which I felt stirred within me, sprang from the same source as *hass prung true chivalry* in all ages. The fountain of love bursting forth for the first time in the virgin soil of the human heart, how purely it wells up, rippling and sparkling in the sunbeams of hope and noble ambition. Under its influence the boy in thought becomes a hero, and longs for manhood and distinction; and the hero, in the glory of his manhood, draws his noblest inspiration from the smiles of his lady love.

“Give me a man with a heart so ennobled, and a soul so animated by the purest and loftiest of human passions, and he stands there a hero, ready to do, to dare, or to die in the cause of duty and honour.”

“Ay, ay, ye’re richt,” ejaculated old Yacob; “although I dunno ken if I tak up da meanin’ o’ da fine lang wirds ye hae sae weel at your finger ends. Yet I tink I ken whaur ye ir, by da meethes¹ o’ da subjeck, as we wid say at da haaf.² I aye tocht a’ my days dat it wis a graand thing ta be earnest an’ leethful³ at your wark, whidder by laand or by sea; and dis a’m tinkin is sontin laek what ye mean in spaekin’ o’ love affairs. For instance, if ye’re at da sillicks, an’ layin’ on some leethe, sprootin’ da soe⁴ weel oot, till da water is clear wi’ da lumie,⁵ an’ keepin’ a sharp e’e on your bait, sae as ye can gie your waand⁶ a rick⁷ da minnit your bait is oot o’ sicht, ye’ll pilk⁸ up da sillicks laek stour, an’ your büddie is fue in twa claps o’ a lamb’s tail; but if ye sit ipa da stane in a kind o’ lazy wy, your huik gets inta da waar,⁹ an’ da sillicks geng dozin’ about as if dey wir clumpsed. An’ sae at da haaf, I aye saw a lucky man was a leethfû’ man; up as da Lave-rock rave da dim, first at da eela¹⁰ for bait, sets along da

¹ Landmarks. ² Deep-sea fishing ground. ³ Active, industrious.

⁴ Limpits chewed and spit in the water to collect the fish.

⁵ Oil on the surface of the water. ⁶ A fishing-rod.

⁷ A sharp upward motion of the rod. ⁸ Catch quickly.

⁹ Sea-weed. ¹⁰ Place where sillicks or pilticks are caught.

shudder¹ o' da hard grund, catches the snaar² o' da tide, hails wi' a easy tow,³ and comes ashore wi' forty wys o' white fish for twa nichts oot. On da idder hand, da lazy man comes draiglan⁴ ashore wi' twa tüogs⁵ an' twa brumplicks,⁶ an' a lot o' soor yoägs⁷ an' ill-washin' scags,⁸ id da shot⁹ o' his boat; an' den he says it's a' fir want o' luck he canna mak a fishin'.

“Again, no ta mak da comparishun, dere wis my auld saunted grandmidder (rest her soul wi' da Lord). Shü wis a earnest woman in a' shü said an' did. Ay, I mind weel whin shü üsed ta hear wis wir Cattages,¹⁰ an' spak ta wis fir da guid o' wir souls, her een grew bricht wi' a kind o' heavenly licht, an' dan da tears wid trinkle doon her auld widdered cheeks. It aye set me a-greetin mysell; bit catch me ever greetin under a sermon fae da poopit—na, na; no gin I wis ta sit till da day o' Pentecost. Bit Lord be aboot me, I'm clean firyatten mysell, an' keepin' you frae gaen on wi' your story.”

“Next day,” resumed the hermit, “as I told you, I went to the school, and as I entered I looked anxiously around to see if the dear child had come, but she had not then arrived. I sat down, and commenced to my work, but kept my eyes constantly fixed at the door—my heart beating quick with excitement. After a few minutes' suspense as she entered along with another girl, I almost started from my seat. I breathed so hard, and looked so flurried, that the boy who sat next me said, ‘Hilloa! Olla, what's up?’ ‘Nothing,’ I said, and at once recovering myself, I proceeded to carry out the plan I had fixed upon in my own mind. I went up to the teacher, and said, if he pleased, as I could do the most of my work at home, I would be glad to assist him in setting headlines of copies, or helping the scholars with their lessons in

¹ Ridge. ² Change or turning of the tide, when still water is favourable for fish taking the bait. ³ Fishing-line.

⁴ Slow or lazy motion.

⁵ Small ling.

⁶ Small tusk.

⁷ Mussels.

⁸ Herrings taken from the stomach of a fish.

⁹ The aft division of a boat.

¹⁰ Catechism.

arithmetic ; to which he replied, 'That's very kind of you, Olla ; yes, go and help Lelah Halcro with her sum.' O, that I did not faint with joy ! Was this my dream of last week come back again to deceive me, or was it reality ? Here was the scheme I had been planning all the way to the school just come as I wished it. Did the teacher really know all about my little love affair ? I mentally asked ; and has his consideration and kindness thus raised me to the highest pitch and pinnacle of human happiness as a reward for my offered services ? With downcast looks, and my cheeks glowing like live coals, I timidly crossed the floor, and went to the table where she was seated. Blushing, and almost out of breath, I faltered out, in a kind of a whisper, 'Shall I help you with your sums ?' 'Oh yes, if you please,' she answered, in the most silvery tones that had ever fallen upon my ear, at the same time looking in my face with a kind of innocent child-like wonder in the expression of her face, which nearly put me as far from solving the problem as herself, plain as it had been to me for years. I need scarcely say, that after this I omitted no opportunity of making myself useful and agreeable to this object of my affections. In setting the headlines of her copy, how beautifully I swept round the hair-strokes of my capitals ! how smooth and perfect the dashes were ! Her presence was the good genius which inspired me, and made me perform everything I touched as with the hand of a master."

CHAPTER III.

Love various minds does variously inspire :
He stirs in gentle natures gentle fire,
Like that of incense on the altars laid ;
But raging flames tempestuous souls invade.

DRYDEN.

“ ONE day Lelah’s surns were more than usually troublesome, and, instead of standing in front of the desk, I came and sat down beside her, mentally following her nimble pencil on the slate, and answering her enquiries in the softest and most loving tone of voice I could command. I crept close to her side, and, almost unconsciously, put my arm round her waist, which she perceiving, put her hand round and pushed my arm away ; but she did it so gently, and with such a blush, and giving my hand at the same time, as I imagined, a gentle squeeze. Oh, how can I tell my ecstasy ! As the poet says—

‘ It was bliss beyond compare.’

Such an amount of perfect happiness—so pure, so heavenlike—so free from all the dross of earthly pleasures ! It was enough to sweeten a whole life of grief and disappointment. But I was not destined to bask long in the sunshine of my happiness. Clouds were gathering upon the horizon of the future, and I was not to be allowed to sip the sweet nectar of love without being stung by the thorns which too often surround it. And so it has ever been in human life : light and darkness, sunshine and showers, fall upon our heads as we travel onwards to the tomb. The Creator has ordered it so for the best and wisest purposes ; and, could we comprehend the complex plan of His moral government, we should see harmony, beauty, goodness, and love, where, as it is, we sometimes can only discern faint glimmerings of light amid darkness and mystery.”

“Ay, ay,” responded old Yacob, “dats effectua~~l~~ callin’, I’m tinkin, ye’re at; an’ it’s just ipa da point o’ my tongue ta say dat da minister, I tink, says ower muckle aboot effectua~~l~~ callin’, da elect, ordination, and idder lang-nebbed doctrines.¹ Da idder day, whin I happened ta be spaekin ta Rasmie o’ da Heilik, an’ he was tellin’ me what a hardship he was in fir meal dis year, afore he got it aff da eart;² an’ noo dat every craeter he hed wis sauld, an’ he ower head an’ ears in debt ta da laird, he wid just hae ta geng an’ set aff da land.³ Says I ta him, says I, ‘Rasmie, hoo is it dat du’s sae ill aff, whin dy neebor man hes a fouth o’ a’ thing, an’ a well-stocked byre o’ baith kye and horses?’ Says he, ‘I’m süre I never ken. Some wy or idder it’s no ordeened dat things süd dü wi’ me.’ ‘Na, na,’ says I, ‘Rasmie; dere’s naithin’ ordeened aboot it. Du kens last voar⁴ du lüte⁵ dy horse eat tangles an’ redwir till he wis at da bons⁶ o’ meesery, an’ in coorse he hed ta dee; an’ da hairst afore dat du didna maw da half o’ dy girs; an’ whin da voar cam, dy kye fell a-liftin’⁷ fir want o’ meat; sae du needna blame ordination fir what ordination hes naithin’ ta dü wi’.’ An’ sae say I noo; it’s a’ weel eneuch fir da minister ta preach aboot ordination dat hes his teinds as süre as da bank, an’ his pouter fools,⁸ fat kye, Scots horses, an’ glebe wi’ a weel-bigged wa’ roond aboot it, and wha needs na care whidder it snaws or rains. Bit it’ll no dü for wis dat has ta fecht i’da face o’ da sea, an’ elt⁹ i’da dirt o’ da eart for a meal bannock or a tatie skin. Providence ordeened dat we sud wirk leithfully; an’, if we dunna dü dat, He ordeened dat we sud sterve. Bit ye wir sayin’ dat things wir beginnin’ to luik unkin¹⁰ blate wi’ you at da schule.”

“Yes,” continued the hermit; “I found that others were

¹ See Note F. Calvinism.

² Earth.

³ Give up the farm.

⁴ Spring.

⁵ Let, or allowed.

⁶ Resembling a skeleton.

⁷ Unable to rise from weakness; requiring to be assisted.

⁸ Tithe poultry, formerly exacted by Shetland lairds and ministers.

⁹ Grovel.

¹⁰ Very.

smitten as well as myself with the fascinating charms of this beautiful child—*my* Lelah, as I loved to call her, when nobody heard me ; and I found that I had rivals in boys older than I was—and one especially, who greatly alarmed me, not because he was bigger than I was—for, had he been like Goliath, it would have been no difference to me—but my dread of him was because he was a more handsome boy than myself ; and I watched him as a trusty sentinel watches a spy from the enemy's camp. One day, after the school had assembled, he went and sat down on the form beside Lelah, and commenced whispering to her, and laughing ; and I thought I saw her once or twice give him a look of fondness. Oh, how my blood boiled within my veins ! I felt sick with rage, and would have dashed at him there and then, if it had not been for disgracing myself and the school. The play-hour was at one o'clock, and I bottled up my indignation till then. After we got out on the green, I went up to him, pale and trembling with rage, and said, 'I want to speak to you, Jack' (his name was Jack Smith). Says he, 'What is it?' Says I, 'What business had you to speak to Lelah Halcro the way you did to day?' (I knew this was an impertinent question, but I was boiling with rage, and wished to fight him). Says he, 'What's your business who I speak to? I have a precious good mind to thrash you within an inch of your life for your impertinence, you young good-for-nothing Scotch sodger that you are.' 'Say that again!' cried I, as, with clenched fist, I dashed a blow in his face that brought the blood in a stream down his breast.

"'Here's a row,' shouted the boys, as they closed in a ring around us. We now stripped, and throwing our jackets as signals in the arms of our respective comrades whom we expected to act as seconds, we went scientifically to work—wheeling, backing, dodging. We fought shy for a time, parting at each round without drawing blood, for we were the two best boxers in the school. But at length getting a smart whip

under the right ear, I struck him hard, and we fought where we stood, darting our fists like little engines of war into each other's faces. My opponent showed more coolness than I did, and did not expend his strength so fast, and my error in this respect I had bitterly to rue; for as I felt my strength failing through loss of blood (my shirt was saturated with it), my foe struck harder than ever. One or two more rounds, and I sank exhausted on the ground. 'Have you got enough now?' exclaimed my adversary with a sneer. 'Say beat,' roared the boys. 'Never!' I replied, as I sprang to my feet with all the energy of love and despair, and dashed such a terrific blow on his left temple as laid him prostrate on the earth, and there he lay motionless. 'A drawn battle—no more of that,' exclaimed the boys, as they rushed betwixt us. 'There's the master,' shouted a boy in the outer part of the ring; and all scampered into the school as fast as they could, leaving me and my vanquished adversary, who had now revived, to huddle to our respective homes as fast as our stiff and sore limbs could carry us. On my way home I went to a burn and washed my face, buttoning my jacket close about me, so as to conceal my blood-stained shirt. As I entered the house, and my mother saw my swollen and discoloured face, she threw her arms around my neck, and sobbed till her heart was like to break. 'O! who has touched you?' she cried, as the tears coursed down her cheeks. 'Tell me, tell me, who did it?' 'I fought Jack Smith—that's all,' I replied; 'and I'll fight him again, as soon as I am able, mother.' 'Oh! you wicked boy,' she exclaimed, as she unbuttoned my jacket and helped me off with my bloody shirt, getting me a clean one, and putting me to bed. I slept none that night—not that I thought of my wounds and bruises; my distress and anxiety was what Lelah would think of it all when she heard it. In the morning my mother brought my breakfast on a small tray, and on it a little neat letter sealed with blue wax. I knew the writing in a

moment, and my heart bounded in a flutter. A strange expression passed over my mother's face as she withdrew and left me, not to eat my breakfast, but first with trembling hand to break the seal of this most precious billet-doux. I did so, and read as follows :—

‘DEAREST OLLA—Oh ! you bad boy, you foolish boy, why would you fight Jack Smith, and get yourself hurt so, and all about such a worthless thing as me ? Oh dear ! what shall I do ? I am so grieved about it. Dearest Olla, are you much hurt ? do tell me. How much I will miss you at the school ; do get better for my sake. Oh ! you foolish boy, how could you think I cared anything for Jack Smith ? Now I hope that will please you and make you better, and then you will not fight him any more. Write me if you cannot come to school to-morrow.—Your (I cannot say more)

‘LELAH HALCRO.’

Before I got to the end, the tears were running down my cheeks. I folded the letter, and putting it in my bosom, covered my face with my hands, and sobbed in the fulness of my joy.

“After I got calm, I ate my breakfast, and then got up and dressed. Looking in the glass, I was surprised to find what a strange-looking face I had ; but never did warrior feel more proud of his scars ; never did knight in the age of chivalry shed his blood in defence of youth and beauty, and feel more pleasure in its loss. I danced about the room in perfect ecstasy at the thought of my good fortune, and that I had the pluck to fight Jack Smith. But for this, how long I might have waited without knowing whether Lelah loved me or not ; and without the fight I would not have got that dear little letter from her. I sat down on a chair and read it over and over again ; and as I read the words I thought I just heard her sweet silvery voice speaking them, and saw the soft timid glance of her lustrous loving eyes beaming upon me. I pressed to my lips that part of the letter where her name was, put it in my bosom, and then went to an old desk where I kept my pens

and paper, and other odds and ends, and set about answering her letter as follows, for I kept a copy of it, and will now read it to you :—

‘MY DEAR LELAH—Oh ! how kind of you to send me a letter, and to say you do not love Jack Smith. Dear Lelah, how happy I am that I fought him, or else you would not have sent me this nice letter. I know you did not want me to fight, but I loved to do it for your sake ; and when my shirt was all wet with blood, I was happy it was for you. Dear Lelah, now when you say you do not love him, I will not fight him any more, nor any boy you don’t love. I will come to the school in two or three days, when my face is better, and then I will help you with your sums or anything else. Don’t let Jack Smith help you if he comes to the school before me. Dearest Lelah, I love you very much, and dream beautiful dreams about you, but I know you will not tell any one about it. I am going to send this by Tom Flaws when he comes, as I think he will call to see me to-day. Your ever loving till death,

‘OLLA OLLISON.

‘P.S.—Tom Flaws has not come yet, so, as I had nothing else to do, I have made some verses about you which I hope you will like. You will find them enclosed in this letter. O. O.’

‘THE VERSES.

- ‘ Like the sweet fragrant primrose when summer is nigh,
 Like the crimson-tipped daisy with bright golden eye ;
 So sweet is my Lelah, so lovely and fair ;
 Wherever she wanders, my heart wanders there.
 O Lelah, dear Lelah, how oft do I sigh
 For the day that unites us, dear Lelah and I.
- ‘ Like a sportive young lammie that skips o’er the green,
 When white wi’ bright daisies in beauty ’tis seen,
 My Lelah wi’ feet like a fairy does flee ;
 O weel I love Lelah, and Lelah loves me.
 O Lelah, dear Lelah, how oft do I sigh
 For the cot we shall live in, dear Lelah and I.
- ‘ Like the soft murmuring waves at the close of the day,
 Like the caloo’s soft note when she soars far away,
 So sweet is thy voice when it sounds in mine ear,
 When it thrills my fond heart, O Lelah, my dear.

O Lelah, dear Lelah, how oft do I sigh
For dear wedded love between Lelah and I.

‘ Like the fairest azure of serene summer sky,
So soft and so lovely is Lelah’s bright eye ;
Her smile is like sunshine on a soft rippling sea—
O long be that sunshine, dear Lelah, on me.
O Lelah, dear Lelah, how oft do I sigh
For the hearth of our home, my dear Lelah and I.

‘ O Lelah, great ships may sail without sails,
The smallest of fishes may be turned into whales ;
The rocks they may rend, and the mountains remove,
But I ne’er shall prove false to thee, Lelah, my love.
O Lelah, dear Lelah, oft this do I sigh,
“ For Lelah I live, and for Lelah I’d die.”

‘N.B.—I think this sings to the tune of a song I have heard my grandmother sing, called ‘Logie o’ Buchan.’ If you know that tune, try, dear Lelah, and sing my verses when nobody hears you.’”

CHAPTER IV.

Sweet as first love, and wild with all regret,
O! death in life, the days that are no more.
TENNYSON.

“YE wir quite richt dere, Mr Ollison,” exclaimed old Yacob; “dere is a sang ca’d ‘Logie o’ Buchan,’ an’ a bonnie sang it is, though I wadna care ta remark dat your ain is no far ahint it, barrin’ da last verse, dat just soonds a sma’ thing ower strong for an auld lug; for it taks a hantle less den turnin’ sillicks into whaales, or rivin’ up hills an’ muntins to cüil doon da heat o’ calf-love. An, leck o’ me! what a difference is atween young love and auld—I wis gaen ta say auld love, bit Lord kens if ever sic a thing wis kent o’. Dere is na muckle love atween a auld horse an’ his tether, whin dat tether keeps him fae gettin’ a mouthfu’ o’ girse aff a bonnie green bank, just a peerie bit farder awa den he can rake tae. No ta geng farder awa, dere wis Solomon himsell, in his young days, wha could say bonnier things aboot da lasses den he did? ca’in’ dem lillies, an’ roses, an’ idder far awa floors, dat I never saw a’ my days, nor ken I what like dey ir; bit hear him whin he turns auld, though he hed sae mony o’ dem ta wale among, he says—‘It’s naithen bit vanity and vexation o’ speerit.’ Lord pity him if ony o’ dem hed a tongue like wir auld wife, for den he might weel say it wis vexation o’ speerit. Bit dis is no what I wis ettlin ta speak o’; what I was gaen for to remark wis da great difference atween wratin’ verses whin ye’re young an’ whin ye’re auld. I never hed muckle gift i’ da wy o’ makin’ verses a’ my days; for as for wratin’ dem, I could wrate nane; but ae nicht whin I wis sittin’ windin¹ simmits² at wir fireside, an’ da auld wife’s tongue wis gaen laek da clapper o’ a

¹ Twisting.

² Ropes made of straw, bent, or rashes.

mill, says I ta mysell, says I, if I could bit mak twa or tree verses o' a bit sang, an just begin ta sing whin shü begins ta yatter,¹ it might truly deaden da noise, if it did na pit her aff o' it atagedder ; sae I sets ta wark i' my ain mind, an' gets it ta clink brawly weel ; an' dis wis it—

' Laek da clapper o' da mill
In a muckle speet o' water,
Wir auld wife's tongue
Gengs yatter, yatter, yatter.

' Laek da roar o' winter brack,
Laek da rumble o' da sea, /sɪ:/
Her din in my lugs,
Maks a waefu melodie.

' Fae da rivin' o' da dim,
Till da sun is in da water, /water/
Her auld waggin tongue,
Gengs yatter, yatter, yatter.

' Lord, make her dumb,
Or me stane deaf ; /di:f/
Idder wy is welcome,
If I get relief.'

"Whin I sang dis shü was perfectly dumfoondered, an' we hed a quiet sough for a ^{weel} oök or sae efter dat, an' I tocht it wis gaen to be a perfect success, till shü got inta da wy o' firin' shots atween da verses. Whin it cam ta dat, dan my sang wis o' nae mair üse nor a penny whistle in a norwast storm, sae I maun just thole it noo da best wy I can till by da coorse o' natur I get as deaf as a door nail, an dat canna come ower shüne ; although I'm just tinkin dat whin my lugs gets even as close as da sole o' your fit, I'll still hear da soond o' her in trow my skull, just as ye hear da ring o' da metal whin ye gie a knock ipa da boddom o' dat muckle kettle dats lvin' whombled dere under your kist ; bit Lord be aboot me, I'm surely for-

¹ Scold.

² Weck.

yattin mysell atagedder, and keepin' you frae gettin on wi' your ain story, Mr Ollison."

"A few days after this," continued the hermit. "I went to the school, and as I entered I observed an expression of pleasure pass over Lelah's lovely face; and, going up to the table where she sat, I whispered, 'I am all right now, Lelah.'"

"I now began to excel in everything I did—my Lelah was the very sun and centre of my being, the object to which all my hopes and aims pointed, the genius which presided over me while I pursued the path of duty and progress. In everything I attempted to do, the ever-recurring questions which arose in my mind were, what will Lelah think of it? Will she think more of me when she hears I have done this? At home I studied hard, revising what I had learned, and reading the few books I possessed so often that I could almost repeat their contents from memory. In this way I acquired a large stock of information far beyond that possessed by anyone in the parish, either old or young. In continuing to assist the teacher, how proud I was to show off my superior knowledge before the school, as I stood in front of a class acting the dominie, and astonishing the children by the wonderful things I could tell them; and how intense was my delight when Lelah would steal a glance at me, and show, by the expression of joy which passed over her countenance, how much she was delighted in my success.

"All my spare time at home was employed as an amateur mechanic. I constructed miniature watermills, windmills, full-rigged ships, chairs, tables, tubs, cogs, &c.—all perfect models on a perfect scale; and all this with no other tool but my jockteleg,¹ so that by-and-by all over the parish I got the name of 'the wonderful boy.'

"I take pleasure in dwelling upon these sweet reminiscences of the past, because they are dear to my heart, and can

¹ Pocket knife.

only perish from my memory with life itself ; and I also prize them for this other reason, that I believe no power on earth but religion itself can so truly ennoble human nature as virtuous love when it is felt as a pure passion, and unalloyed by any selfish or worldly consideration.

“ See it budding forth in that boy or girl’s heart for the first time, how tenderly it grows ! How sweetly it blossoms ! Its perfumes are born in soft sighs, and wafted in loving whispers to the dear loved one. Alas ! that ever avarice, selfishness, or worldly interest should like a mildew blight its tender bloom. Alas ! that vice, like a canker, should strike at its slender root, or scatter its bright blossoms in the dust.

“ The tender passion in early youth comes forth like a mountain stream, sparkling in joyous murmurs, and reflecting heaven in its transparent beauty. As such God made it, and as such He intended it to flow through all time, gladdening and blessing mankind ; but, alas ! how soon, and how often, does the stream grow muddy, as in its onward progress it stirs the impurities which lie hidden in the dark channels of the human heart ; or, bounding away like a mountain torrent, it dashes on in whirling eddies of uncontrolled passion, carrying its victims into the awful maelstrom of inevitable and irretrievable ruin.

“ Eh ! Mr Ollison, what a gift ye hae,” exclaimed old Yacob, lifting both his hands and looking up to the roof ; “ in place o’ livin’ in a bit hovel here by yoursell, an’ makin’ your ain bit meat like a boddie that gengs wi’ der staff¹ an’ der cashie, ye sud a been waggin’ your pow in a poopit, wi’ a muckle stipend, a grand manse, servants an’ sairin men to wait ipa you ; wi’ a glebe o’ guid infield² laud, fat chuckies³ ta your dinner, an’ ance in da ouk ta luik ower a lock o’ auld sermons, an’ wale ane o’ dem fir da Sunday ; an’ dis pits in my mind to say dat I never cud see da meanin’ o’ feeding da minister sae weel, fir a’ my days I aye fan dat a fat man wis a lazy man.

¹ Meaning a beggar.

² Older cultivated land.

³ Fowls.

Dere wis Willie Bigiltie dat rowed ta da sea wi' me ae simmer. He never wis düne eatin' liver muggies¹ till, Lord bliss me, as he turned as fat as a tiestie,² and as round as a pellick,³ and yet for a' dat, he wis o' nae mair üse in da boat nor a ballish stane.⁴ An' sae I'm just tinkin' it's wi' da ministers—da mair dey hae o' da flesh, the less de'll hae o' da Speeret; an' whin onything o' dat kind is gaen, I'm tinkin' it comes mair fae da whiskey keg den fae da Lord. Bit whin I speak dis wy, ye mauna tink dat I'm an infeedel for a' dat. I'm read my Bible, bit aftener da Testament—for der's mony fiklie wirds i' da Bible dat I can mak bit little o'—bit as far as I'm read, I come ta dis conclusion, dat it maun be easier to mak Christians noo-a-days den it wis lang sin syne, or da wark is no sae weel düne. Dere was Paul da apostle, luik at him in his wanderin', watchin', prayin', fastin', an' sufferin' a' kinds o' ill-usage by da haethens he hed to fecht among—an' a' dis afore he could mak Christians o' dem. Noo readin' a bit sermon as yallow in da paper as my wellicot⁵ ance upon a Sunday is a' dats tocht o'. Nae doot it's easier for da minister tae ca' his flock inta da crue⁶ ance i' da ouk den rin efter dem here an' dere trow da ouk-days, whin da horses an' kye, an' da hubbleshue o' oot door wark taks a' his time; sae dat a mony a pur body may be crossin' da waters o' Jordan atween da Monaday an' da Setterday, an' he kens little aboot it. Puir craters! mony a ane o' dem wid need a bit prayer or a wurd o' comfort whin der in da 'vailey o' da sheddo' o' death,' as da Scriptor ca's it. Noo, it's no sae muckle wi' da ministers I fin' fau't as wi' da kirk dat maks da ministers. Human nater is human nater; an' if onybody is paid weel for düin naethin', or da neist tae it, wha wid be sic a füle as wirk mair den he can help. Whin a young chap gets a kirk, dü ye no think, Mr

¹ Fish stomachs filled with liver, and boiled.

² Black Gullimot (*Uria Grylle.*)

³ Porpoise (*Phocæna Communis.*)

⁴ Ballast.

⁵ Flannel shirt.

⁶ Enclosure for driving sheep in when they are to be "rued," or shorn.

Ollison, dat it wid be a great advantage tae himsell if da kirk wis ta say ta him, 'Noo, Mr Minister, we're no gaen to gie you a selery by da year, bit just pay you by da piece ; sae if ye wirk weel ye'll be weel paid for it, an' your sermons will be fae half-a-croon ta twinty shillens, accordin' tae da quality.' If dis wis düne, ye wid shüne see a mony a burnin' an' a shinin' licht, whaur noo we hae na da blink o' a üllie collie.' Bit it's no a lee dat wir auld wife says 'Whin I ance begin to speak, I never ken whin ta haud my tongue.' Whaur wir ye wi' your story agen, Mr Ollison (an beggin' mony pardons for interrupin' you).'

¹ The most primitive form of lamp now known, and similar in some respects to that used by the ancient Romans, and found in the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

CHAPTER V.

A mermaid sat in her emerald ha',
And played on her coral lute.

Ballad.

“AFTER I had been at the school,” resumed the hermit, “Adam Yunson, the ruling elder of the district, called at the school one day, and said he wished to speak to me. So I followed him outside, when he said, ‘Olla, I hear that you are a very clever lad, and as we want a teacher at Hallowmas for the Chancein School, we have decided to give you the offer of it, as we believe there is no lad in the parish better qualified.’

“In reply, I thanked him for what I considered the highest honour that could have been conferred upon me ; and said I would do my utmost to give satisfaction, and should be ready to commence the school at the time mentioned. My remuneration was to be £4 in the half-year ; and this, to my mind, looked like a sum that I should not know how to spend ; as up to this time I had never possessed a shilling of my own. After shaking hands with my kind friend, I bounded into the school, but slackened my pace as I passed the inner door, for the teacher maintained very rigid discipline. I went up to where Lelah was sitting, and whispered, ‘Lelah, I am going to be a teacher. I have got the Chancein School.’

“‘No!’ she exclaimed in a whisper, while her lovely eyes beamed with a mixed expression of wonder and delight, and a soft blush passed over her face, but quickly leaving the white and crimson as pure as before.

“‘Yes,’ I replied ; ‘it is quite true, but I will tell you all about it when we get out.’ After the school was dismissed, I got the opportunity of telling Lelah that it was all settled that I

was to get the school ; that I was to have £4 in the half-year, and that I was to buy her a present when I got my first quarter's salary.

“The harvest now being near at hand, I did not go longer to school, as I wished to assist my uncle in the fields ; for I was an expert hand at binding sheaves, and all kinds of harvest work. The season happened to be unusually fine ; and during the time of the harvest moon, Lelah and I used to walk together down to the sea-shore. How beautiful it was when, in a cloudless sky, the full-orbed moon rode in silent glory in the star-spangled firmament, and cast a silvery sheen on the grey lichen-covered stones, moss-covered knolls, and every object around. One such lovely evening we were both seated on a fragment of rock at the top of the heilik where I met you last night, and we sat gazing silently at the moon. Above the moon was a bright star, so bright and beautiful that it cast a halo of light around it as it shone and twinkled in its glorious soft light against the dark-blue sky. Upon this star Lelah fixed her gaze, and seemed lost in thought. O ! how beautiful she looked then—just like an angel adoring some great Being above. Her eyes were so full of heavenly light, and her features looked so beautiful in the pale-moonshine, that I drew closer towards her, and, almost before she was aware, impressed a kiss upon her soft rosy lips. This awakened her from her reverie, and she exclaimed with something like a frown, ‘Oh ! Olla, you bad boy.’

“This was my first kiss (for I was the most bashful boy that ever lived). O ! how shall I express the bliss of that moment. How often have I wished since then that some power from above could have fixed me in that state of happiness, and rendered me for ever incapable of feeling any other emotion ; but, alas ! like our first parents, this Eden of love was destined one day to become a valley of tears, full of sighings and heart-rending grief. But let me not dwell upon this

sad part of my story just yet. After a little I said—‘Dear Lelah, what were you thinking about when you were looking so earnestly at yon bright star?’ ‘O! Olla,’ she replied, ‘I was thinking how far it might be from us to the star; and then if we were there, how far it might be to something else; and so on and on: and I wondered if ever there could be an end; when, you bad boy, you put me off the thought. Do you think, Olla, there is any end to the sky away there?’ I said, ‘Dear Lelah, what strange questions you ask. No, I think there can be no end to the sky; for when you come to the end of anything, there must always be something beyond that—either space or substance. But it makes my head reel to think of it, so let us speak about mermaids, or something of that sort.’”

“Ay, ay,” exclaimed old Yacob; “Your spaekin’ o’ mermaids pits in my mind da story o’ Simon o’ Gott, dat ye hae mebbe heard o’. He was hailen his lines aff da Scord o’ Bressa, wi’ a sooth lipper¹ ida water an’ da fa’ o’ a slack tide. Efter he hed about twa packies² an’ a half in, he fan a heavy wecht ipa da tow. Says he ta da boy dat sat ida cavil,³ says he, ‘boy, hae da fish-staff⁴ clair,⁵ an lüik oot for a licht.’ Sae efter a peerie⁶ start da boy says, says he, ‘I see a licht.’ ‘What is it?’ says Simon; is it a masgum⁷ or a turbot?’ ‘Na, na,’ says da boy, ‘it’s a boddie.’ ‘Boy,’ says Simon, ‘if du maks a füle o’ me, I’ll lay dis boatic⁸ across dy back.’ ‘Na, na,’ says da boy, ‘I’m truly no makin’ a füle o’ you;’ an’ wi dat, Lord preserve us, if dere didna hout⁹ up afore his very face a most beautiful mermaid, wi’ lang yallow hair hingin’ doon her back, an’ a

¹ The wavelet or ripple.

² The quantity of lines each fisherman owns.

³ To take the hook from the mouth of a fish; also the place in the boat where a man or boy performs this operation.

⁴ Large iron hook with woden handle for striking into the fish, and lifting them into the boat.

⁵ Ready.

⁶ Short time.

⁷ Common Angler, or Fishing Frog (*Rana Piscatrix*).

⁸ A long pole with a hook and spike at the end.

⁹ To rise quickly above the surface.

muckle turbot gogar¹ caught her right under da shin. 'Haund me da tullie,'² roared Simon, an' wi' dat he caa'd da knife inta da puir crater's breist, an' snappin da tome³ shü fell back i' da sea cryin', 'Ales ! ales !' and sank awa doon, lavin' a straem o' red bluid a' da wy efter her. Fae dat day ta da day o' his death Simon o' Gott never trave.⁴ Dat year da storrie⁵ wirm üte his corn an' taties oot o' da rüit. His kye fell a liftin' an' deid, da taen efter da tidder spriklin⁶ an' sküil-brüilin⁷ in da most awfil wy. His horses guid ower da banks, an' he wüor up till he cam ta da bones o' meesery himsell, an' da last time dat he wis seen wis standin' doon a peerie bit abüin da laybrak ; whin a winderful kind o' green mist cam up oot o' da sea, an' closed aroond him, an' whin it cleared awa, dere wis da place, an' awa wis Simon ; never seen or heard tell o' more.

'Den dere wis Maikie o' Fradigal : ae simmer mornin' whin he wis i' da ebb—it wis just aboot da first taws⁸ o' daylight, an' as beautiful a mornin' as could come oot o' da lift.⁹ It was a ream¹⁰ calm, an' no a lipper aboot da shore ; he wis pickin' at da side o' a muckle ebb stane, whin liftin' up his head ta rake¹¹ ower his hovie,¹² Lord preserve us, if dere wisna sittin' upon a aff skerrie, a perrie bit fae da shore, a most beautiful mermaid, combin' her bonnie yallow hair ; an' happenin' to luik a bit nearer ta him, he sees a bonnie silkey¹³ skin lyin' ipa da tap o' a stane, rowed togedder just as if it hed been a shald dat a woman bodie hed flung aff her shudders. Whin he sees dis, he maks a spang¹⁴ for it, an' rowin it up anunder his airm, he sits doon a peerie¹⁵ start just ta see what shü wid dü. He said he never saw a prettier woman fae da

¹ A large fish hook.

² A fisherman's knife.

⁵ A grub.

⁸ First streaks of twilight.

¹¹ Reach.

¹⁴ Spring.

¹⁵ A moment.

³ A hair line.

⁶ Struggling.

¹² A small lempit creel.

⁴ Throve.

⁷ Moaning ; low bellowing.

⁹ Sky.

¹⁰ Soft.

¹³ A seal.

oor dat he wis born. The sun wis just comin' oot o' da water, an' da bonnie saft mornin' licht fell apon her face, an' doon ower her body. Shü wis dat white an' pure, an' sae beautifully formed every wy. He hed aye heard dat mermaids wis laek a fish fae da wais' an' doon : bit, Lord save him, he said, shü hed as bonny a pair o' legs an' feet as ever cam in da door o' da Ness Kirk. Efter sittin' twa or tree minnits, he gae a kind o' a host,¹ whin shü luiked aboot an' jumped aff da skerrie, an' cam weddin' in till shü wis aboot half oot o' da water, whin shü saw dat he hed her skin under his airm—for dis skin wis hers—an' its da wy dat mermaids wupples der feet in dis skin o' ders dat made folk tink dat dey hed da tail o' a fish. Sae as I wis sayin', shü staunds in da water, an' pointin' her bonnie haund till him, says (she spak English, an' I'm no very guid at dat): 'Mortal, give me back my skin. Why wouldst thou steal from me that which can do thee little good, and makes me poor indeed?' "Na, na, my bonnie leddie," says Maikie; 'Lord forbid dat I sud hurt a hair o' your bonnie head, or tak awa your bit skin, unless it wis ta get you sontin far better to pit on; an' if ye wid just bide a glisk whaur ye ir, I wid rin hame for a sark o' my midder's; her dimity coat, an' her pepper an' saut mantle, wid hap ye weel; for though its simmer, ye canna be ower warm at dis time o' da mornin', staundin' i' da cauld water yonder.'

"'Mortal,' says da mermaid again, 'tempt me not. I desire to return to the emerald halls and the coral caves of my ancestors, and to sing sweet songs to my brave Knight Coraldova, who fights the sea-lions, and slays the great sea-serpent. Last night, by the pale moonlight, he left me to hunt in the great sea-plains, and this morning he returns to find me absent. O! kind mortal, give me my skin, and let me go.'

¹ Cough.

“ ‘Ye’r richt dere, my bonnie leddie,’ says Maikie; ‘a kinder mortal never stüd upo’ twa legs den Maikie o’ Fradigal; an’ dis is what I wid ask you ta fin’ oot better efter dis. Sae I’ll awa hame for da claes, for I’m wae to see you staundin’ ony langer dere in da cauld air, although ye’r da bonniest sicht dat ever my twa een saw i’ dis world.’ Sae wi’ dis Maikie spangs up da banks, an’ in a jiffey comes back wi’ da claes, an’ a piece o’ wid upon his shudder, dat maybe wid a made sax pair o’ clog soles. Sae whin he comes ta da water’s edge, he sooms¹ da pièce o’ wid,² an’ lays da claes upo’ da tap o’ it; an’ den gies it a bit o’ a shiv, an’ awa it sails richt till her. Shü seemed ta feel a kind o’ saftened at dis, for Maikie wis a decent lad, an’ shü seemed ta tink muckle o’ his guid sense. Sae shü tüik up da sark an’ slippit it ower her head, an’ den pat on da rest o’ da claes as shü waded ashore. Sae whiniver shü cam upo’ da stanes, Maikie cam close up till her, an’ cüllied³ aboot her da best way dat he cud; an’ says he, ‘Oh! my dear bonnie leddie, I’m sure ye maun hae gotten your death o’ cauld. Come hame wi’ me dis moment an’ get a cup o’ tae; it’ll revive you, an’ den if ye winna bide wi’ me, I’ll gie ye back your skin wi’ a blessin’. But I’ll never laeve you mair. If ye tak ta da sea again, I’ll follow you, though I sud be smored⁴ in da blue deep, or glaped⁵ up by a masgum. Sae dünna be angry wi’ me, for your bonnie winsome face has set a beatin’ ta my heart, an’ a birrin’ oot at da points o’ my taes.’ Bit I needna tell mair o’ what Maikie said, for, as you will see, he wis in love, as da sayin’ is; an’ dats a time dat da less dats kent aboot what we say da better; for if wir gettin’ inta da kirk or da excise depended upo’ da sense o’ what we say den, wir shance o’ promotion wid be bit sma. = /sma./

“Bit what I wis gaen ta say wis dis, dat mermaids is just like idder folk—weel pleased ta hear der ain praise. I’m seen

¹ Floats.

⁴ Smothered; choked.

² Wood.

³ Fondled; caressed.

⁵ Swallowed.

a auld osmal lüikin'¹ auld maid, wi' a mooth laek a horse happrick,² an' a nose dat could steer a seventy-four, blinkin' her een wi' delicht whin some haveril chap wis makin' a füil o' her, an' tellin' her dat shü wis winderful bonnie. An' sae it's no ta be windered at dat da mermaid wis weel pleased ta hear what shü kent wis true. An' da upshot o' dis wis dat shü güid hame wi' Maikie, an' said naithin' mair about her graund Coral-dova nor a' his winderful exploits; an' maybe shü said ta her-sell da auld proverb, wi' a sma' alteration—'Der's as guid fish oot o' da sea as ever yet wis in it.' In coorse Maikie couldna tell his folk dat shü wis a sea-woman, for dat wid a pitten dem oot o' der judgment; although, as fur his midder, as a' body kent, shü wid na hae far ta gaen. Sae he said shü hed come ashore fae a wrack ship, an' dis made a' thing richt; an' he telled dem dat her name wis Mary Mermaid, an', puir bodies, dey kent nae better den dat dis wis her rael surname. Sae after a time shu cam in winderfully weel ta der wys o' livin', though, as nicht a been expecked, she had a awful likin' for fish; an' shü left her fine English, an' spak just as plain as idder you or me; an' dey wir a' sae weel pleased wi' her dat sax monts after dis her an' Maikie got mairied, an' dey lived wi' da auld folk, an' wir as happy as da day wis lang. Sae dis gengs on for a lock o' years, and der auldest bairns wis grown up ta be muckle rinnin sheelds, whin ae hairst, whin da fedder wis biggin' da screws³ i' da yard, da peerie boy wis rinnin aboot, whin he sees his fedder layin' a auld dried skin anunder a sheaf (for he aye keeped da skin hoided⁴ fae her); sae ders nae mair o' dis, bit in gengs da peerie boy, and tells his midder what he hed seen. Shü hears a' bit says naethin, bit gengs ta her bed as peaceable as ever shü did in her days. Maikie fa's asleep, an' snores awa till daylight, whin he opens his een, bit his bonnie Mary wis awa. He jimps up, an' slips on upon him,

¹ Ugly; haggard
³ Corn stacks.

² A small "cashie," or pannier.
⁴ Hid; concealed.

an' rins oot ta da yard, whin he sees da hale screw a' tirded¹ an' torn aboot da eart, an' da skin clean aff; sae, puir man, he kent what wis what den. He hed a kind o' doot sometime afore dis dat a' wis no richt wi' her; for aye whin shü wid be dandlin' da bairn upon her knee, shü wid sing a sang dat Maikie did no like ower weel. An' dis wis it:—

- ' A mermaid sat in her emerald ha',
 An' played on her coral lute ;
 An' da fishes a' stood on their tails in a raw,
 An' danced wi' a finny foot.
- ' The whaal and the pellick were at it once,
 An' shook their fat sides wi' glee,
 To see queer fishes prance in a new fashioned dance,
 Ower da bottom o' da deep blue sea.
- ' Then gie me back my bonnie coral caves,
 O gie them back ta me !
 For though this is my home, I still love to roam
 O'er da shells o' da deep blue sea.
- ' Sing hey dim diddle, dim diddle, dim diddle,
 Sing hey dim diddle, dim dee ;
 Though this is my home, I still love to roam
 O'er da shells o' da deep blue sea ?

“ Puir woman ! I'm just tinkin she *diddled* hersell oot o' a guid hame; and dat her grand Coraldova widna just be up i' da skies aboot her whin shü cam back. Bit dey woman bodies ir kittle ware ta manage, whidder dey come fae da sea or da land. Mony is da time I'm wissed wir auld wife hed been a mermaid. If shü wid bit rin aff, an' wanted a skin, I wid a gien her a hale coo's hide wi' her, altho' I'd no hed a rivelin² on my fit for a twalmont. Bit what's da time wi' your sun marks, Mr Ollison; I'm tinkin it's just time I wis lüikin' efter some lempits for da sillocks da nicht?”

“ It is past two o'clock when the sun comes to that part of the floor,” replied the hermit, pointing to a square illuminated

¹ Scattered.

² A kind of shoe made of untanned cowhide.

spot on the floor, caused by a volume of bright sunlight streaming through a skylight on the roof.

“Ah ! well, den I’ll just awa’, an’ I’ll be ower blid ta come up da morn, efter brakwast¹ time, an’ hear da rest o’ your story ; for I’m tinkin da best o’ it is no come yet.”

“Alas ! no,” exclaimed the hermit, as a tear stole down his cheek ; “my tale is soon to become a tale of sorrow, which will harrow my soul to tell ; but I am no less anxious that you should hear it ; and, indeed, it was chiefly for this purpose I asked you to come to my humble dwelling. But the first portion of my story has occupied more time than I expected.”

“Ye may weel say dat, Mr Ollison,” exclaimed Yacob. “Ye wir no laek ta ken dat I wis gaen ta tak up da half o’ da time wi’ my ain clash an’ havers ; bit dey auld stories an’ bits o’ sangs o’ my young days comes jimpin in ta my mind whin ye’re spakin’ o’ da sam subjek, dat I canna haud my tongue.”

“And there is no reason you should,” rejoined the hermit ; “for it is really my opinion, that if what we have both said were written down, your stories would be considered more interesting than mine.”

“Oh ! you’re makin’ a füle o’ me noo, Mr Ollison,” said Yacob. “Ye see I just spak by rule o’ toom,² an’ accordin’ ta nater.”

“And that is just where the merit lies, my friend,” rejoined the hermit. “It is only the few out of countless multitudes of writers in all ages who have followed your rule ; and those few now stand like great land-marks along the pathway of time, flourishing in immortal fame ; and this because they came as little children, and sat at the feet of Nature, drank deep of her spirit, and became inspired by the divine power which she imparts to all her true disciples.

“Those who failed were too learned to be taught of simple Nature. They soared above her head, and, like Icarus, lost

¹ Breakfast.

² Thumb.

their wings, fell, and perished in the dust of the countless forgotten.

“But I am detaining you. I shall be happy to see you to-morrow, as early as you can call.”

“Yea, dat sall I,” replied old Yacob. “I’ll be up efter brakwist time, if da Lord spares me ta see da morn; an’ sae guid day be wi’ you, Mr Ollison.”

And with this parting salutation the old man lifted the wooden latch of the low door of the hermit’s cottage, and was soon far on his way down the rugged slope which descends from the top of the Ness to the village of Trosswick.