
THE FAMILY-TRYST.

THE fire had received an addition of a large ash-root and a heap of peats, and was beginning both to crackle and blaze; the hearth-stone was tidily swept—the supper-table set—and every seat, bench, chair, and stool occupied by its customary owner, except the high-backed, carved, antique oaken armed-chair belonging exclusively to the Goodman. Innocence, labour, contentment, and mirth were here all assembled together in the wide low-roofed kitchen of this sheltered farm-house, called, from its situation in a low woody dell, The How; and all that was wanting to make the happiness complete was Abel Alison himself, the master and father of the family. It seemed to them that he was rather later than usual in returning from the city, whither he went every market-day. But though it was a boisterous night in April, with a good drift of snow going, they had no apprehensions whatever of his safety; and when they heard the trampling of his horse's feet on the gravel, up sprung half-a-dozen creatures of various sizes to hail

him at the door, and to conduct the colt, for so they continued to call a horse now about fifteen years old, to his fresh-strawed stall in the byre. All was right—Abel entered with his usual smile, his wife helped him off with his great-coat, which had a respectable sprinkling of snow, and stiffening of frost; he assumed his usual seat, or, as his youngest son and namesake, who was the wit of the family, called it, his throne, and supper immediately smoking on the board, a blessing was said, and a flourish of wooden spoons ensued.

Supper being over, and a contented silence prevailing, with an occasional whispered remark of merriment or affection circling round, Abel Alison rested himself with more than his usual formality against the back of his chair, and putting on not an unhappy, but a grave face, told his wife, and family, and servants, all to make up their minds to hear some very bad news nearly affecting themselves. There was something too anxiously serious in his look, voice, and attitude, to permit a thought of his wishing to startle them for a moment by some false alarm. So at once they were all hushed—young and old—and turned towards their father with fixed countenances and anxious eyes.

“Wife—and children—there is no need, surely, to go round about the bush—I will tell you the worst in a word. I am ruined. That is to say, all my property is lost—gone—and we must leave the How. There is no help for it—we must leave the How.”

His wife’s face grew pale, and for a short space she

said nothing. A slight convulsive motion went over all the circle as if they had been one body, or an electric shock had struck them all sitting together with locked hands. "Leave the How!" one voice sobbing exclaimed—it was a female voice—but it was not repeated, and it was uncertain from whom it came. "Why, Abel,"—said his wife calmly, who had now perfectly recovered herself, "if we must leave the How, we must leave a bonny sheltered spot, where we have seen many happy days. But what then? surely there may be contentment found many a where else besides in this cheerful room, and round about our birken banks and braes. For mysel, I shall not lose a night's rest at the thought, if you, Abel, can bear it—and, God bless you, I have known you bear a severer blow than this!"

Abel Alison was a free, warm-hearted man, of a happy disposition, and always inclined to look at every thing in a favourable light. He was also a most industrious hard-working man. But he could not always say "nay,"—and what he earned with a month's toil he had more than once lost by a moment's easy good-nature. He had some time before imprudently become surety for an acquaintance, who had no such rightful claim upon him—that acquaintance was a man of no principle—and Abel was now ruined—utterly and irretrievably ruined. Under such circumstances, he could not be altogether without self-reproach—and the kind magnanimity of his wife now brought the

tear into his eye. "Aye—aye—I was just the old man in that foolish business. I should have remembered you, Alice—and all my bairns. But I hope—I know you will forgive me—for having thus been the means of bringing you all to poverty."

Upon this, Abel's eldest son—a young man about twenty years of age, stood up, and first looking with the most respectful tenderness upon his Father, and then with a cheerful smile upon all around, said, "Father, never more utter these words—never more have these thoughts. You have fed us—clothed us—educated us—taught us what is our duty to God and man. It rests with ourselves to practise it. We all love you—Father—we are all grateful—we would all lay down our lives to save yours. But there is no need for that now. What has happened? Nothing. Are we not all well—all strong—cannot we all work? As God is my witness, and knows my heart, I now declare, before you, Father, that this is not a visitation, but it is a blessing. Now it will be tried whether we love you, Father—whether you have prayed every morning and every night for more than twenty years for ungrateful children—whether your toil in sun and rain, and snow, has been thankless toil—or whether we will not all rally round your grey head, and find it a pleasant shelter—a smooth pillow—and a plentiful board;"—and with that he unconsciously planted his foot more firmly on the floor, and stretched out his right arm, standing there a tall, straight, powerful

stripling, in whom there was visible protection and succour for his parents and their declining age.

One spirit kindled over all—not a momentary flash of enthusiasm, not a mere movement of pity and love towards their Father, which might give way to dissatisfaction and despondency,—but a true, deep, clear reconciliation of their souls to their lot, and a resolution not to be shaken in its unquaking power by any hardships either in anticipation or reality. Abel Alison saw and felt this, and his soul burned within him. “We shall all go to service—no shame in that. But we shall have time enough to consider of all these points before the term-day. We have some weeks before us at the How—and let us make the most of them. Wife, children, are you all happy?”

“All—all—perfectly happy—happier than ever,”—was the general burst of the reply.

“Stir up that fire—my merry little Abel,”—said the mother,—“and let us have a good, full, bright blaze on your father’s face—God bless him!”

Abel brandished an immense poker in both hands, and after knitting his brows, and threatening to aim a murderous blow on the temples of the beautiful little Alice on her stool close to the ingle, and at her father’s feet, a practical joke that seemed infinitely amusing, he gave the great ash root a thump that sent a thousand sparkling gems up the wide chimney, and then placing the poker under it like a lever, he hoisted up the burning mass, till a blaze of brightness dazzled all

their eyes, and made Luath start up from his slumbers on the hearth.

“Come, Alice”—said the father, for we must not be cheated out of our music as well as our money—“let us have your song as usual, my bonny linnet—something that suits the season—cheerful and mournful at the same time—“Auld lang syne” or “Lochaber no more.” “I will sing them baith—Father—first the ane and then the ither”—and as her sweet silver pipe trilled plaintively along, now and then other voices, and among them that of old Abel’s himself, were heard joining in the touching air.

“What think you o’ the singing this night—my gude dog, Luath?” quoth little cunning Abel, taking the dumb creature’s offered paw into his hand. “But do you know, Luath—you greedy fellow, who have often stolen my cheese and bread on the hill when my head was turned—though you are no thief either Luath—I say, Sir, do you know that we are all going to be—starved? Come—here is the last mouthful of cake you will ever have all the days of your life—henceforth you must eat grass like a sheep. Hold your nose—Sir—there—one—two—three! Steady—snap—swallow! Well caught! Digest that and be thankful.”

“Children,” said the old Man, “suppose we make a Family-Tryst, which, if we be all alive, let us religiously keep—aye—religiously, for it will be a day either of fast or of thanksgiving. Let us all meet on the term-

day, that is, I believe, the twelfth of May come a twelve-month, on the green plot of ground beside the Shaw Linn, in which we have for so many years washed our sheep. It is a bonny, lown, quiet spot, where nobody will come to disturb us. We will all meet together before the gloaming, and compare the stories of our year's life and doings, and say our prayers together in the open air, and beneath the moon and stars." The proposal was joyfully agreed to by all.

Family worship was now performed. Abel Alison prayed as fervently, and with as grateful a heart as he had done the night before. For his piety did not keep an account current of debtor and creditor with God. All was God's—of his own he had nothing. God had chosen to vary to him the mode and place of his few remaining years on earth. Was that a cause for re-pining? God had given him health, strength, a loving wife, dutiful children, a good conscience. No palsy had stricken him—no fever devoured him—no blindness darkened his path. Only a few grey hairs were as yet sprinkled among the black. His boys could bear being looked at, and spoken to in any company, gentle or simple; and his daughters, they were like the water-lilies, that are serene in the calm clear water, but no less serene among the black and scowling waves. So Abel Alison and all his family lay down on their beds; and long before midnight they were all fast asleep.

The time came when the farm—the bonny farm of

the How was given up, and another family took possession. Abel's whole stock was taken by the new tenant, who was a good, and honest, and merciful man, at a fair valuation. With the sum thus got, Abel paid all his debts—that large fatal one—and his few small ones at the Carpenter's shop, the Smithy, and Widow Anderson's, the green, grey, black, brown, and white grocer of the village; and then he and his family were left without a shilling. Yet none pitied them—they were above pity. They would all have scorned either to beg or borrow, for many of their neighbours were as poor, and not a great many much richer than themselves after all; and therefore they set their cheerful faces against the blast, and it was never felt to touch them. The eldest son immediately hired himself at high wages, for his abilities, skill, and strength were well known, as head servant with the richest farmer in the next parish—which was famous for its agriculture. The second son, who was of an ingenious and thoughtful cast of character, engaged himself as one of the under gardeners at Pollock-Castle—and the third, Abel the wag, became a shepherd with an old friend of his father's, within a few hundred yards of the How. The eldest daughter went into service in the family of the Laird of Southfield, one of the most respectable in the parish. The second was kindly taken into the Manse as a nurse to the younger children, and a companion to the elder—and Alice, who, from her sweet voice, was always called the Linnet,

became a shepherdess along with her brother Abel. The mother went to the Hall to manage the dairy—the Baronet being a great man for cheese and butter—and the father lived with her in a small cottage near the Hall-gate, employing himself in every kind of work that offered itself, for he was a neat-handed man, and few things, our of doors or in, came amiss to his fingers, whether it required a delicate touch or a strong blow. Thus were they all settled to their hearts' content before the hedgerows were quite green—and though somewhat scattered, yet were they all within two hours' journey of each other, and their hearts were all as close together as when inhabiting the sweet, low, bird-nest-like cottage of the How.

The year with all its seasons fled happily by—the long warm months of summer, when the night brings coolness rather than the shut of light—the fitful, broken, and tempestuous Autumn—the Winter, whose short, but severe days of toil in the barn, and cheerful fireside-nights, with all their work, and all their amusements—soon—too soon, it is often felt, give way to the open weather and active life of Spring—the busy, working, enlivening Spring itself—were now flown by—and it was now the day of the *Family-Tryst*, the dear Twelfth Day of the beautiful but capricious month of May.

Had any one died whose absence would damp the joy and hilarity of the Family-Tryst, and make it a meeting for the shedding of tears? No. A kind God

had counted the beatings of every pulse, and kept the blood of them all in a tranquil flow. The year had not passed by without many happy greetings—they had met often and often—at church—at market—on chance visits at neighbours' houses—and not rarely at the cottage at the Hall-gate. There had been nothing deserving the name of separation. Yet, now that the hour of the *Family-Tryst* was near at hand, all their hearts bounded within them, and they saw before them all day, that smooth verdant plat, and heard the delightful sound of that Waterfall.

The day had been cheerful, both with breezes and with sunshine, and not a rain-cloud had shown itself in the sky. Towards the afternoon the wind fell, and nature became more serenely beautiful every minute as the evening was coming on with its silent dews. The Parents came first to the Trysting-place, cheered, as they approached it down the woody glen, by the deepening voice of the Shaw-linn. Was that small turf-built Altar, and the circular turf-seat that surrounded it, built by fairy hands? They knew at once that some of their happy children had so employed a few leisure evening hours, and they sat down on the little mound with hearts overflowing with silent—perhaps speechless gratitude.

But they sat not long there by themselves—beloved faces, at short intervals, came smiling upon them—one through the coppice-wood, where there was no path—another across the meadow—a third appeared

with a gladsome shout on the cliff of the waterfall—a fourth seemed to rise out of the very ground before them—and last of all came, preceded by the sound of laughter and of song, with which the calm air was stirred, Abel and Alice, the fairies who had reared that green grassy Altar, and who, from their covert in the shade, had been enjoying the gradual assemblage. “ Blessings be to our God—not a head is wanting,” said the Father, unable to contain his tears—“ this night could I die in peace !”

Little Abel and Alice, who, from their living so near the spot, had taken upon themselves the whole management of the evening’s ceremonial, brought forth from a bush where they had concealed them, a basket of bread and cheese and butter, a jar of milk, and another of honey—and placed them upon the turf—as if they had been a rural gift to some rural deity. “ I thought you would be all hungry,” said Abel, “ after your trudge—and as for Simon there, the jolly gardener, he will eat all the kibbock himself, if I do not keep a sharp eye upon him. Simon was always a sure hand at a meal. But, Alice, reach me over the milk-jar. Ladies and gentlemen, all your very good healths—Our noble selves.” This was felt to be very fair wit of Abel’s—and there was an end to the old Man’s tears.

“ I vote,” quoth Abel, “ that every man (beginning with myself, who will be the oldest man among you when I have lived long enough) give an account of

himself, and produce whatever of the ready rhino he may have made, found, or stolen, since he left the How. However, I will give way to my Father—now for it, Father—let us hear if you have been a good boy.” “Will that imp never hold its tongue?” cried the mother, making room for him at the same time on the turf seat by her side—and beckoning him with a smile, which he obeyed, to occupy it.

“Well then,” quoth the Father, “I have not been sitting with my hands folded, or leaning on my elbows. Among other small matters, I have helped to lay about half-a-mile of high road on the Macadam plan, across the lang quagmire on the Mearns Muir, so that nobody need be sucked in there again for fifty years to come at the very soonest. With my own single pair of hands I have built about thirty rood of stone-dike five feet high, with two rows of through-stones, connecting Saunders Mill’s garden-wall with the fence round the Fir Belt. I have delved to some decent purpose on some half score of neighbours’ kail-yards, and clipped their hedges round and straight, not forgetting to dock a bit off the tails o’ some o’ the peacocks and outlandish birds on that queer auld-fashioned terrace at Mallets-Heugh. I cannot have mown under some ten braid Scots acres of rye-grass and meadow hay together, but finding my back stiff in the stooping, I was a stoker and a bandster on the Corn-rigs. I have threshed a few thrieves in the minister’s barn—prime oats they were, for the glebe

had been seven years in lea. I have gone some dozen times to Lesmahago for the clear-losing coals, a drive of forty miles back and forward I'se warrant it. I have felled and boughed about forty ash-trees, and lent a hand now and then in the saw-pit. I also let some o' the daylight into the fir wood at Hallside, and made a bonny bit winding walk along the burn-side for the young ladies' feet. So, to make a long story short, there is a receipt (clap a bit o' turf on't, Abel, to keep it frae fleeing off the daisies) from the Savings Bank, for L. 25, 13s. signed by Baillie Trumbell's ain hand. That is a sight gude for sair een! Now, Mrs Alison, for I must give you the title you bear at the Hall, what say you?"

"I have done nothing but superintend the making o' butter and cheese, the one as rich as Dutch, and the other preferable to Stilton. My wages are just fifteen pounds, and there they are. Lay them down beside your Father's receipt. But I have more to tell. If ever we are able to take a bit farm of our own again, my Lady has promised to give me the Ayrshire Hawkie, that yields sixteen pints a-day for months at a time, o' real rich milkness. She would bring L. 20 in any market. So count that L. 35, my bonny bairns. Speak out my Willy, no fear but you have a good tale to tell."

"There is a receipt for thirty pounds, lent this blessed day, at five per cent. to auld Laird Shaw—as safe as the ground we tread upon. My wages are

forty pounds a-year—as you know—and I have twice got the first prize at the Competition o' Ploughmen—thanks to you father for that. The rest of the money is gone upon fine clothes and upon the bonny lasses on a Fair-day. Why should not we have our enjoyments in this world as well as richer folk?" "God bless you, Willy," said the old Man; "you would not let me nor your mother part with our Sunday's clothes, when that crash came upon us—though we were willing to do so, to right all our creditors. You became surety for the amount—and you have paid it—I know that. Well—it may not be worth speaking about—but it is worth thinking about—Willy—and a Father need not be ashamed to receive a kindness from his own flesh and blood."

"It is my turn now," said Andrew, the young gardener. "There is twelve pounds—and next year it will be twenty. I am to take the flower-garden into my own hand—and let the Paisley florists look after their pinks, and tulips, and anemones, or I know where the prizes will come after this. There's a bunch o' flowers for you, Alice—if you put them in water they will live till the Sabbath-day, and you may put some of them into your bonnet. Father, William said he had to thank you for his ploughmanship—so have I for my gardening. And wide and rich as the flower-garden is that I am to take now under my own hand, do you think I will ever love it better, or sa weel, as the bit plot on the bank-side, with its bower in the

corner, the birks hanging ower it without keeping off the sun, and the clear burnie wimpling away at its foot? There I first delved with a small spade o' my ain—you put the shaft in yourself—Father—and, trust me, it will be a while before that piece o' wood gangs into the fire."

"Now for my speech,"—said Abel,—“short and sweet is my motto. I like something pithy. Lo and behold a mowdiwart's skin, with five and forty shillings in silver! It goes to my heart to part with them. Mind, father, I only lend them to you. And if you do not repay them with two shillings and better of interest next May-day, Old Style, I will put the affair into the hands of scranky Pate Orr, the writer at Thorny-Bank. But, hold—will you give me what is called heritable security? That means land, doesn't it? Well, then, turf is land—and I thus fling down the mowdiwart purse on the turf—and that is lending money on heritable security.” A general laugh rewarded this ebullition of genius from Abel, who received such plaudits with a face of cunning solemnity,—and then the eldest daughter meekly took up the word and said—“My wages were nine pounds—there they are!” “Oh! ho,” cried Abel, “who gave you, Agnes, that bonny blue spotted silk handkerchief round your neck, and that bonny but gae droll pattern'd gown? You had not these at the How—may be you got them from your sweetheart;”—and Agnes

blushed in her innocence like the beautiful flower, "Celestial rosy red, Love's proper hue."

The little Nourice from the Manse laid down on the turf without speaking, but with a heartsome smile, her small wage of four pounds—and, last of all, the little, fair-haired, blue-eyed, snowy-skinned Alice the shepherdess, with motion soft as light, and with a voice sweet as an air-harp, placed her wages too beside the rest—"There is a golden guinea—it is to be two next year, and so on till I am fifteen. Every little helps." And her father took her to his heart, and kissed her glistening ringlets and her smiling eyes, that happily shut beneath the touch of his loving lips.

By this time the sun had declined—and the sweet sober gloaming was about to melt into the somewhat darker beauty of a summer night. The air was now still and silent, as if unseen creatures that had been busy there had all gone to rest. The mavis that had been singing loud, and mellow, and clear, on the highest point of a larch, now and then heard by the party in their happiness, had flitted down to be near his mate on her nest within the hollow root of an old ivy-wreathed yew-tree. The snow-white coney looked out from the coppice, and bending his long ears towards the laughing scene, drew back unstartled into the thicket. "Nay—nay—Luath," whispered Abel, patting his dog, that was between his feet, "you must not kill the poor bit white raker. But if a maukin would show herself, I would be glad to see a

brattle after her through the wood. For she could only cock her fud at a' thy yelping, and land thee in a net o' briars to scratch thy hide and tangle thy tail in. You canna catch a maukin—Luath—they're ower soople for you, you fat lazy tyke."

The old man now addressed his children with a fervent voice, and told them that their dutiful behaviour to him, their industrious habits, their moral conduct in general, and their regard to their religious duties, all made them a blessing to him, for which he never could be sufficiently thankful to the Giver of all mercies. "Money," said he, "is well called the root of all evil—but not so now. There it lies—upon that turf—an offering from poor children to their poor parents. It is a beautiful sight—my bairns—but your parents need it not. They have enough. May God for ever bless you—my dear bairns.—That night at the How, I said this meeting would be either a fast or a thanksgiving; and that we would praise God with a prayer, and also the voice of psalms. No house is near—no path by which any one will be coming at this quiet hour. So let us worship our Maker—here is the Bible."

"Father," said the eldest son, "will you wait a few minutes—for I am every moment expecting two dear friends to join us? Listen, I hear footsteps, and the sound of voices round the corner of the coppice. They are at hand."

A *she* young woman, dressed almost in the *san* as a farmer's daughter, but with a sort of

sylvan grace about her, that seemed to denote a somewhat higher station, now appeared, along with a youth, who might be her brother. Kindly greetings were interchanged, and room being made for them, they formed part of the circle round the Altar of turf. A sweet surprise was in the hearts of the party at this addition to their number, and every face brightened with a new delight. "That is bonny Sally Mather of the Burn-House," whispered little Alice to her brother Abel. "She passed me ae day on the brae, and made me the present of a comb for my hair you ken, when you happened to be on the ither side o' the wood! Oh! Abel, has nae she the bonniest and the sweetest een that ever you saw smile?"

This young woman, who appeared justly so beautiful in the eyes of little Alice, was even more so in those of her eldest brother. She was sitting at his side, and the wide earth did not contain two happier human beings than these humble, virtuous, and sincere lovers. Sally Mather was the beauty of the parish; and she was also an heiress, or rather now the owner of the Burn-House, a farm worth about a hundred a-year, and one of the pleasantest situations in a parish remarkable for the picturesque and romantic character of its scenery. She had received a much better education than young women generally do in her rank of life, her father having been a common farmer, but, by successful skill and industry, having been enabled, in the decline of life, to purchase the farm

which he had improved to such a pitch of beautiful cultivation. Her heart William Alison had won—and now she had been for some days betrothed to him as his bride. He now informed his parents, and his brothers and sisters of this; and proud was he, and better than proud, when they all bade God bless her, and when his father and mother took her each by the hand, and kissed her, and wept over her in the fullness of their exceeding joy.

“We are to be married at mid-summer; and, father and mother, before the winter sets in, there shall be a dwelling ready for you, not quite so roomy as our old house at the How, but a bonny bield for you; I hope, for many a year to come. It is not a quarter of a mile from our own house, and we shall not charge you a high rent for it, and the two three fields about it. You shall be a farmer again, Father, and no fear of ever being turned out again, be the lease short or long.”

Fair Sally Mather joined her lover in this request with her kindly smiling eyes, and what greater happiness could there be to such parents than to think of passing the remainder of their declining life near such a son, and such a pleasant being as their new daughter? “Abel and I,” cried little Alice, unable to repress her joyful affection, “will live with you again—I will do all the work about the house that I am strong enough for, and Abel, you ken, is as busy as the unwearied bee, and will help my Father about

the fields, better and better every year. May we come home to you from service, Abel and I?" "Are you not happy enough where you are?" asked the Mother, with a loving voice. "Happy or not happy," quoth Abel, "home we come at the term, as sure as that is the cuckoo. Harken how the dunce keeps repeating his own name, as if any body did not know it already. Yonder he goes—with his titling at his tail—people talk of the cuckoo never being seen—why, I cannot open my eyes without seeing either him or his wife. Well, as I was saying—Father—home Alice and I come at the term. Pray, what wages?"

But what brought the young Laird of Southfield here? thought the Mother—while a dim and remote suspicion, too pleasant, too happy, to be true, past across her maternal heart. Her sweet Agnes was a servant in his father's house—and though that father was a laird, and lived on his own land, yet he was in the very same condition of life as her husband, Abel Alison—they had often sat at each other's table—and her bonny daughter was come of an honest kind, and would not disgrace any husband either in his own house, or a neighbour's, or in his seat in the kirk. Such passing thoughts were thickening in the Mother's breast, and perhaps not wholly unknown also to the Father's, when the young man, looking towards Agnes, who could not lift up her eyes from the ground, said, "My Father is willing and happy that I should marry the daughter of Abel Alison. For he wishes me

no other wife than the virtuous daughter of an honest man. And I will be happy—if my Agnes make as good a wife as her mother.”

A perfect blessedness now filled the souls of Abel Alison and his wife. One year ago, and they were, what is called, utterly ruined—they put their trust in God—and now they received their reward. But their pious and humble hearts did not feel it to be a reward, for in themselves they were conscious of no desert. The joy came from Heaven, undeserved by them, and with silent thanksgiving and adoration did they receive it, like dew into their opening spirits.

“ Rise up, Alice, and let us have a dance,” and with these words little Abel caught his unreluctant sister round the waist and whirled her off into the open green, as smooth as a floor. The young gardener took from his pocket a German-flute, and began warbling away, with much flourishing execution, the gay lively air of “ Oure the water to Charlie,” and the happy children, who had been one winter at the dancing-school, and had often danced by themselves on the fairy rings on the hill-side, glided through the gloaming in all the mazes of a voluntary and extemporaneous duett. And then, descending suddenly and beautifully from the very height of glee into a composed gladness, left off the dance in a moment, and again seated themselves in the applauding circle.

“ I have dropped my library out of my pocket,” said Abel, springing up again—“ yonder it is lying

on the green. That last touch of the Highland Fling jerked it out. Here it is—bonny Robbie Burns—the Twa Dogs—the Vision—the Cottar's Saturday Night—and many—many a gay sang—and some sad anes, which I leave to Alice there, and other bits o' tender-hearted lassies—but fun and frolic for my money."

"I would not give my copy o' Allan Ramsay," replied Alice, "for a stall fu' of Burns's,—at least gin the Saturday Night was clipped out. When did he ever make sic a poem as the Gentle Shepherd? Tell me that, Abel? Dear me, but is na this sweet quiet place, and the linn there, and the trees, and this green plat, just as bonnie as Habbie's How? Might na a bonny poem be made just about ourselves a' sitting here sae happy—and my brother going to marry bonny Sally Mather, and my sister the young laird o' Southfield? I'se warrant, if Allan Ramsay had been alive, and one of the party, he would have put us a' into a poem—and aiblins called it the Family-Tryst." "I will do that myself," said Abel—"I am a dab at verse. I made some capital ones just yesterday afternoon—I wrote them down on my sclave below the sum total; but some crumbs had fallen out o' my pouch on the sclave, and Luath, licking them up, licked out a' my fine poems.—I could greet to think o't."

But now the moon showed her dazzling crescent right over their heads,—as if she had issued gleaming forth from the deep blue of that very spot of heaven in which she hung; and fainter or brighter, far and wide

over the firmament, was seen the great host of stars. The Old Man reverently uncovered his head; and, looking up to the diffused brilliancy of the magnificent arch of heaven, he solemnly exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth forth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. My children let us kneel down and pray." They did so; and, on rising from that prayer, the mother, looking towards her husband, said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."