

# TALES AND SKETCHES.

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## I.

### RECOLLECTIONS OF FERGUSON.

#### CHAPTER I.

Of Ferguson, the bauld and slee.

BURNS.

I HAVE, I believe, as little of the egotist in my composition as most men; nor would I deem the story of my life, though by no means unvaried by incident, of interest enough to repay the trouble of either writing or perusing it were it the story of my one life only; but, though an obscure man myself, I have been singularly fortunate in my friends. The party-colored tissue of my recollections is strangely interwoven, if I may so speak, with pieces of the domestic history of men whose names have become as familiar to our ears as that of our country itself; and I have been induced to struggle with the delicacy which renders one unwilling to speak much of one's self, and to overcome the dread of exertion natural to a period of life greatly advanced, through a desire of preserving to my countrymen a few notices, which would otherwise be lost to them, of two of their greatest favor-

ites. I could once reckon among my dearest and most familiar friends, Robert Burns and Robert Ferguson.

It is now rather more than sixty years since I studied for a few weeks at the University of St. Andrews. I was the son of very poor parents, who resided in a seaport town on the west coast of Scotland. My father was a house-carpenter;—a quiet, serious man, of industrious habits and great simplicity of character, but miserably depressed in his circumstances through a sickly habit of body. My mother was a warm-hearted, excellent woman, endowed with no ordinary share of shrewd good sense and sound feeling, and indefatigable in her exertions for my father and the family. I was taught to read, at a very early age, by an old woman in the neighborhood, — such a person as Shenstone describes in his “Schoolmistress,” — and, being naturally of a reflective turn, I had begun, long ere I had attained my tenth year, to derive almost my sole amusement from books. I read incessantly; and, after exhausting the shelves of all the neighbors, and reading every variety of work that fell in my way, — from the “Pilgrim’s Progress” of Bunyan, and the “Gospel Sonnets” of Erskine, to a “Treatise on Fortification” by Vauban, and the “History of the Heavens” by the Abbé Pluche, — I would have pined away for lack of my accustomed exercise, had not a benevolent baronet in the neighborhood, for whom my father occasionally wrought, taken a fancy to me, and thrown open to my perusal a large and well-selected library. Nor did his kindness terminate until, after having secured to me all of learning that the parish afforded, he had settled me, now in my seventeenth year, at the University.

Youth is the season of warm friendships and romantic wishes and hopes. We say of the child in its first at-

tempts to totter along the wall, or when it has first learned to rise beside its mother's knee, that it is yet too weak to stand alone; and we may employ the same language in describing a young and ardent mind. It is, like the child, too weak to stand alone, and anxiously seeks out some kindred mind on which to lean. I had had my intimates at school, who, though of no very superior cast, had served me, if I may so speak, as resting-places when wearied with my studies, or when I had exhausted my lighter reading; and now, at St. Andrews, where I knew no one, I began to experience the unhappiness of an unsatisfied sociality. My school-fellows were mostly stiff, illiterate lads, who, with a little bad Latin and worse Greek, plumed themselves mightily on their scholarship, and I had little inducement to form any intimacies among them; for of all men the ignorant scholar is the least amusing. Among the students of the upper classes, however, there was at least one individual with whom I longed to be acquainted. He was apparently much about my own age, rather below than above the middle size, and rather delicately than robustly formed; but I have rarely seen a more elegant figure or more interesting face. His features were small, and there was what might perhaps be deemed a too feminine delicacy in the whole contour; but there was a broad and very high expansion of forehead; which, even in those days, when we were acquainted with only the phrenology taught by Plato, might be regarded as the index of a capacious and powerful mind; and the brilliant light of his large black eyes seemed to give earnest of its activity.

“Who, in the name of wonder, is that?” I inquired of a class-fellow, as this interesting-looking young man passed me for the first time.

“A clever but very unsettled fellow from Edinburgh,” replied the lad; “a capital linguist, for he gained our first bursary three years ago; but our Professor says he is certain he will never do any good. He cares nothing for the company of scholars like himself, and employs himself — though he excels, I believe, in English composition — in writing vulgar Scotch rhymes, like Allan Ramsay. His name is Robert Ferguson.”

I felt from this moment a strong desire to rank among the friends of one who cared nothing for the company of such men as my class-fellow, and who, though acquainted with the literature of England and Rome, could dwell with interest on the simple poetry of his native country.

There is no place in the neighborhood of St. Andrews where a leisure hour may be spent more agreeably than among the ruins of the cathedral. I was not slow in discovering the eligibilities of the spot, and it soon became one of my favorite haunts. One evening, a few weeks after I had entered on my course at college, I had seated myself among the ruins, in a little ivied nook fronting the setting sun, and was deeply engaged with the melancholy Jaques in the forest of Ardennes, when, on hearing a light footstep, I looked up, and saw the Edinburgh student, whose appearance had so interested me, not four yards away. He was busied with his pencil and his tablets, and muttering, as he went, in a half-audible voice, what, from the inflection of the tones, seemed to be verse. On seeing me, he started, and apologizing in a few hurried but courteous words for what he termed the involuntary intrusion, would have passed, but, on my rising and stepping up to him, he stood.

“I am afraid, Mr. Ferguson,” I said, ’tis I who owe *you* an apology; the ruins have long been yours, and I am but

an intruder. But you must pardon me; I have often heard of them in the west, where they are hallowed, even more than they are here, from their connection with the history of some of our noblest Reformers; and, besides, I see no place in the neighborhood where Shakspeare can be read to more advantage."

"Ah," said he, taking the volume out of my hand, "a reader of Shakspeare and an admirer of Knox! I question whether the heresiarch and the poet had much in common."

"Nay, now, Mr. Ferguson," I replied, "you are too true a Scot to question that. They had much, very much, in common. Knox was no rude Jack Cade, but a great and powerful-minded man; decidedly as much so as any of the noble conceptions of the dramatist, his Cæsars, Brutuses, or Othellos. Buchanan could have told you that he had even much of the spirit of the poet in him, and wanted only the art. And just remember how Milton speaks of him in his 'Areopagitica.' Had the poet of 'Paradise Lost' thought regarding him as it has become fashionable to think and speak now, he would hardly have apostrophized him as *Knox, the reformer of a nation, — a great man animated by the Spirit of God.*"

"Pardon me," said the young man; "I am little acquainted with the prose writings of Milton, and have, indeed, picked up most of my opinions of Knox at second-hand. But I have read his *merry* account of the murder of Beaton, and found nothing to alter my preconceived notions of him from either the matter or manner of the narrative. Now that I think of it, however, my opinion of Bacon would be no very adequate one were it formed solely from the extract of his history of Henry VII. given

by Kames in his late publication. Will you not extend your walk?"

We quitted the ruins together, and went sauntering along the shore. There was a rich sunset glow on the water, and the hills that rise on the opposite side of the Frith stretched their undulating line of azure under a gorgeous canopy of crimson and gold. My companion pointed to the scene. "These glorious clouds," he said, "are but wreaths of vapor, and these lovely hills accumulations of earth and stone. And it is thus with all the past, — with the past of our own little histories, that borrows so much of its golden beauty from the medium through which we survey it; with the past too of all history. There is poetry in the remote; the bleak hill seems a darker firmament, and the chill wreath of vapor a river of fire. And you, Sir, seem to have contemplated the history of our stern Reformers through this poetical medium, till you forget that the poetry was not in them, but in that through which you surveyed them."

"Ah, Mr. Ferguson," I replied, "you must permit me to make a distinction. I acquiesce fully in the justice of your remark: the analogy, too, is nice and striking; but I would fain carry it a little further. Every eye can see the beauty of the remote; but there is beauty in the near, an interest at least, which every eye cannot see. Each of the thousand little plants that spring up at our feet has an interest and beauty to the botanist; the mineralogist would find something to engage him in every little stone. And it is thus with the poetry of life; all have a sense of it in the remote and the distant, but it is only the men who stand high in the art, its men of profound science, that can discover it in the near. The *mediocre* poet shares but the commoner gift, and so he seeks his themes in ages

or countries far removed from his own; whilst the man of nobler powers, knowing that all nature is instinct with poetry, seeks and finds it in the men and scenes in his immediate neighborhood. As to our Reformers" —

"Pardon me," said the young poet; "the remark strikes me, and, ere we lose it in something else, I must furnish you with an illustration. There is an acquaintance of mine, a lad much about my own age, greatly addicted to the study of poetry. He has been making verses all his life-long: he began ere he had learned to write them even; and his judgment has been gradually overgrowing his earlier compositions, as you see the advancing tide rising on the beach, and obliterating the prints on the sand. Now, I have observed that in all his earlier compositions he went far from home; he could not attempt a pastoral without first transporting himself to the vales of Arcadia, or an ode to Pity or Hope without losing the warm, living sentiment in the dead, cold personification of the Greek. The Hope and Pity he addressed were, not the undying attendants of human nature, but the shadowy spectres of a remote age. Now, however, I feel that a change has come over me. I seek for poetry among the fields and cottages of my own land. I — a — a — the friend of whom I speak — But I interrupted your remark on the Reformers."

"Nay," I replied, "if you go on so, I would much rather listen than speak. I only meant to say that the Knoxes and Melvilles of our country have been robbed of the admiration and sympathy of many a kindred spirit, by the strangely erroneous notions that have been abroad regarding them for at least the last two ages. Knox, I am convinced, would have been as great as Jeremy Taylor, if not even greater."

We sauntered along the shore till the evening had darkened into night, lost in an agreeable interchange of thought. "Ah!" at length exclaimed my companion, "I had almost forgotten my engagement, Mr. Lindsay; but it must not part us. You are a stranger here, and I must introduce you to some of my acquaintance. There are a few of us — choice spirits, of course — who meet every Saturday evening at John Hogg's; and I must just bring you to see them. There may be much less wit than mirth among us; but you will find us all sober, when at the gayest; and old John will be quite a study for you."

## CHAPTER II.

Say, ye red gowns, that aften here  
 Hae toasted cakes to Katie's beer,  
 Gin e'er thir days hae had their peer,  
                   Sae blythe, sae daft!  
 Ye'll ne'er again in life's career  
                   Sit half sae saft.

ELEGY ON JOHN HOGG.

WE returned to town; and, after threading a few of the narrower lanes, entered by a low door into a long dark room, dimly lighted by a fire. A tall thin woman was employed in skinning a bundle of dried fish at a table in a corner.

"Where's the gudeman, Kate?" said my companion, changing the sweet pure English in which he had hitherto spoken for his mother tongue.

"John's ben in the spence," replied the woman. "Little



Andrew, the wratch, has been makin' a totum wi' his faither's a'e razor; an' the puir man's trying to shave himsel' yonder, an' girnan like a sheep's head on the tangs."

"O the wratch! the ill-deedie wratch!" said John, stalking into the room in a towering passion, his face covered with suds and scratches, — "I might as weel shave mysel' wi' a mussel shillet. Rob Ferguson, man, is that you?"

"Wearie warld, John," said the poet, "for a' oor philosophy."

"Philosophy! — it's but a snare, Rab, — just vanity an' vexation o' speerit, as Solomon says. An' isna it clear heterodox besides? Ye study an' study till your brains gang about like a whirligig; an' then, like bairns in a boat that see the land sailin', ye think it's the solid yearth that's turnin' roun'. An' this ye ca' philosophy; as if David hadna tauld us that the warld sits coshly on the waters, an' canna be moved."

"Hoot, John," rejoined my companion; "it's no me, but Jamie Brown, that differs wi' you on thae matters. I'm a Hoggonian, ye ken. The auld Jews were, doubtless, gran' Christians; an' wherefore no gude philosophers too? But it was cruel o' you to unkennel me this mornin' afore six, an' I up sae lang at my studies the nicht afore."

"Ah, Rob, Rob!" said John, — "studying in *Tam Dun's* kirk. Ye'll be a minister, like a' the lave."

"Mindin' fast, John," rejoined the poet. "I was in your kirk on Sabbath last, hearing worthy Mr. Corkindale. Whatever else he may hae to fear, he's in nae danger a' *'thinking his ain thoughts,'* honest man."

"In oor kirk!" said John; "ye're dunc, then, wi' precentin' in yer ain; an' troth, uae wonder. What could

hae possessed ye to gie up the puir chield's name i' the prayer, an' him sittin' at yer lug?"

I was unacquainted with the circumstance to which he alluded, and requested an explanation. "Oh, ye see," said John, "Rob, amang a' the ither gifts that he misguides, has the gift o' a sweet voice; an' naething less would ser' some o' oor professors than to hae him for their precentor. They micht as weel hae thoct o' an organ,—it wad be just as devout; but the soun's everything now, laddie, ye ken, an' the heart naething. Weel, Rob, as ye may think, was less than pleased wi' the job, an' tauld them he could whistle better than sing; but it wasna that they wanted, and sae it behoved him to tak' his seat in the box. An' lest the folk should be no pleased wi' a'e key to a'e tune, he gied them, for the first twa or three days, a hale bunch to each; an' there was never sic singing in St. Andrews afore. Weel, but for a' that, it behoved him still to precent, though he has got rid o' it at last; for what did he do twa Sabbaths agane, but put up drunken Tam Moffat's name in the prayer,—the very chield that was sittin' at his elbow, though the minister couldna see him. An' when the puir stibbler was prayin' for the reprobate as weel's he could, a'e half o' the kirk was needcessitated to come oot, that they micht keep decent, an' the ither half to swallow their pocket-napkins. But what think ye" —

"Hoot, John, now leave oot the moral," said the poet. "Here's a' the lads."

Half-a-dozen young students entered as he spoke; and, after a hearty greeting, and when he had introduced me to them one by one, as a choice fellow of immense reading, the door was barred, and we sat down to half-a-dozen of home-brewed, and a huge platter of dried fish. There

was much mirth, and no little humor. Ferguson sat at the head of the table, and old John Hogg at the foot. I thought of Eastcheap, and the revels of Prince Henry; but our Falstaff was an old Scotch Seceder, and our Prince a gifted young fellow, who owed all his influence over his fellows to the force of his genius alone.

“Prythee, Hall,” I said, “let us drink to Sir John.”

“Why, yes,” said the poet, “with all my heart. Not quite so fine a fellow, though, ’bating his Scotch honesty. Half Sir John’s genius would have served for an epic poet, — half his courage for a hero.”

“His courage!” exclaimed one of the lads.

“Yes, Willie, his courage, man. Do you think a coward could have run away with half the coolness? With a title of the courage necessary for such a retreat, a man would have stood and fought till he died. Sir John must have been a fine fellow in his youth.”

“In mony a droll way may a man fa’ on the drap drink,” remarked John; “an’ meikle ill, dootless, does it do in takin’ aff the edge o’ the speerit, — the mair if the edge be a fine razor edge, an’ no the edge o’ a whittle. I mind, about fifty years ago, when I was a slip o’ a callant,” —

“Losh, John!” exclaimed one of the lads, “hae ye been fechtin wi’ the cats? Sic a scrapit face!”

“Whoesht,” said Ferguson; “we owe the illustration to that; but dinna interrupt the story.”

“Fifty years ago, when I was a slip o’ a callant,” continued John, “unco curious, an’ fond o’ kennin everything, as callants will be,” —

“Hoot, John,” said one of the students, interrupting him, “can ye no cut short, man? Rob promised last

Saturday to gie us, 'Fie, let us a' to the Bridal,' an' ye see the ale an' the nicht's baith wearin' dune."

"The song, Rob, the song!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once; and John's story was lost in the clamor.

"Nay, now," said the good-natured poet, "that's less than kind; the auld man's stories are aye worth the hearing, an' he can relish the auld-warld fisher song wi' the best o' ye. But we maun hae the story yet."

He struck up the old Scotch ditty, "Fie, let us a' to the Bridal," which he sung with great power and brilliancy; for his voice was a richly-modulated one, and there was a fulness of meaning imparted to the words which wonderfully heightened the effect. "How strange it is," he remarked to me when he had finished, "that our English neighbors deny us humor! The songs of no country equal our Scotch ones in that quality. Are you acquainted with 'The Gudewife of Auchtermuchty?'"

"Well," I replied; "but so are not the English. It strikes me that, with the exception of Smollett's novels, all our Scotch humor is locked up in our native tongue. No man can employ in works of humor any language of which he is not a thorough master; and few of our Scotch writers, with all their elegance, have attained the necessary command of that colloquial English which Addison and Swift employed when they were merry."

"A braw redd delivery," said John, addressing me. "Are ye gaun to be a minister too?"

"Not quite sure yet," I replied.

"Ah," rejoined the old man, "'twas better for the Kirk when the minister just made himsel' ready for it, an' then waited till he kent whether it wanted him. There's young Rob Ferguson beside you," —

"Setting oot for the Kirk," said the young poet, inter-

rupting him, "an' yet drinkin' ale on Saturday at e'en wi' old John Hogg."

"Weel, weel, laddie, it's easier for the best o' us to find fault wi' ithers than to mend oorsels. Ye have the head, onyhow; but Jamie Brown tells me it's a doctor ye're gaun to be, after a'."

"Nonsense, John Hogg; I wonder how a man o' your standing" —

"Nonsense, I grant you," said one of the students; "but true enough for a' that, Bob. Ye see, John, Bob an' I were at the King's Muirs last Saturday, and ca'ed at the *pendicle*, in the passing, for a cup o' whey, when the gudewife tell't us there was ane o' the callants, who had broken into the milk-house twa nichts afore, lying ill o' a surfeit. 'Dangerous case,' said Bob; 'but let me see him. I have studied to small purpose if I know nothing o' medicine, my good woman.' Weel, the woman was just glad enough to bring him to the bed-side; an' no wonder: ye never saw a wiser phiz in your lives, — Dr. Dumpie's was naething till't; an', after he had sucked the head o' his stick for ten minutes, an' fand the loon's pulse, an' asked mair questions than the gudewife liked to answer, he prescribed. But, losh! sic a prescription! A day's fasting an' twa ladles o' nettle kail was the gist o't; but then there went mair Latin to the tail o' that than oor neebour the doctor ever had to lose."

But I dwell too long on the conversation of this evening. I feel, however, a deep interest in recalling it to memory. The education of Ferguson was of a twofold character: he studied in the schools, and among the people; but it was in the latter tract alone that he acquired the materials of all his better poetry; and I feel as if, for at least one brief evening, I was admitted to the priv-

ileges of a class-fellow, and sat with him on the same form. The company broke up a little after ten; and I did not again hear of John Hogg till I read his elegy, about four years after, among the poems of my friend. It is by no means one of the happiest pieces in the volume, nor, it strikes me, highly characteristic; but I have often perused it with interest very independent of its merits.

### CHAPTER III.

But he is weak; — both man and boy  
Has been an idler in the land.

WORDSWORTH.

I WAS attempting to listen, on the evening of the following Sunday, to a dull, listless discourse, — one of the discourses so common at this period, in which there was fine writing without genius, and fine religion without Christianity, — when a person who had just taken his place beside me tapped me on the shoulder, and thrust a letter into my hand. It was my newly-acquired friend of the previous evening; and we shook hands heartily under the pew.

“That letter has just been handed me by an acquaintance from your part of the country,” he whispered; “I trust it contains nothing unpleasant.”

I raised it to the light; and, on ascertaining that it was sealed and edged with black, rose and quitted the church, followed by my friend. It intimated, in two brief lines, that my patron, the baronet, had been killed by a fall

from his horse a few evenings before ; and that, dying intestate, the allowance which had hitherto enabled me to prosecute my studies necessarily dropped. I crumpled up the paper in my hand.

“You have learned something very unpleasant,” said Ferguson. “Pardon me, I have no wish to intrude ; but, if at all agreeable, I would fain spend the evening with you.”

My heart filled, and, grasping his hand, I briefly intimated the purport of my communication ; and we walked out together in the direction of the ruins.

“It is perhaps as hard, Mr. Ferguson,” I said, “to fall from one’s hopes as from the place to which they pointed. I was ambitious, — too ambitious it may be, — to rise from that level on which man acts the part of a machine, and tasks merely his body, to that higher level on which he performs the part of a rational creature, and employs only his mind. But that ambition need influence me no longer. My poor mother, too, — I had trusted to be of use to her.”

“Ah ! my friend,” said Ferguson, “I can tell you of a case quite as hopeless as your own — perhaps more so. But it will make you deem my sympathy the result of mere selfishness. In scarce any respect do our circumstances differ.”

We had reached the ruins. The evening was calm and mild as when I had walked out on the preceding one ; but the hour was earlier, and the sun hung higher over the hill. A newly-formed grave occupied the level spot in front of the little ivied corner.

“Let us seat ourselves here,” said my companion, “and I will tell you a story, — I am afraid a rather tame one ; for there is nothing of adventure in it, and nothing of

incident; but it may at least show you that I am not unfitted to be your friend. It is now nearly two years since I lost my father. He was no common man,—common neither in intellect nor in sentiment,—but, though he once fondly hoped it should be otherwise,—for in early youth he indulged in all the dreams of the poet,—he now fills a grave as nameless as the one before us. He was a native of Aberdeenshire, but held lately an inferior situation in the office of the British Linen Company in Edinburgh, where I was born. Ever since I remember him, he had awakened too fully to the realities of life, and they pressed too hard on his spirits to leave him space for the indulgence of his earlier fancies; but he could dream for his children, though not for himself; or, as I should perhaps rather say, his children fell heir to all his more juvenile hopes of fortune and influence and space in the world's eye; and, for himself, he indulged in hopes of a later growth and firmer texture, which pointed from the present scene of things to the future. I have an only brother, my senior by several years, a lad of much energy, both physical and mental; in brief, one of those mixtures of reflection and activity which seemed best formed for rising in the world. My father deemed him most fitted for commerce, and had influence enough to get him introduced into the counting-house of a respectable Edinburgh merchant. I was always of a graver turn,—in part, perhaps, the effect of less robust health,—and me he intended for the church. I have been a dreamer, Mr. Lindsay, from my earliest years,—prone to melancholy, and fond of books and of solitude; and the peculiarities of this temperament the sanguine old man, though no mean judge of character, had mistaken for a serious and reflective disposition. You are acquainted



with literature, and know something, from books at least, of the lives of literary men. Judge, then, of his prospect of usefulness in any profession, who has lived ever since he knew himself among the poets. My hopes from my earliest years have been hopes of celebrity as a writer; not of wealth, or of influence, or of accomplishing any of the thousand aims which furnish the great bulk of mankind with motives. You will laugh at me. There is something so emphatically shadowy and unreal in the object of this ambition, that even the full attainment of it provokes a smile. For who does not know

How vain that second life in others' breath, —  
The estate which wits inherit after death!

And what can be more fraught with the ludicrous than a union of this shadowy ambition with mediocere parts and attainments? But I digress.

“It is now rather more than three years since I entered the classes here. I competed for a bursary, and was fortunate enough to secure one. Believe me, Mr. Lindsay, I am little ambitious of the fame of mere scholarship, and yet I cannot express to you the triumph of that day. I had seen my poor father laboring far, far beyond his strength, for my brother and myself, — closely engaged during the day with his duties in the bank, and copying at night in a lawyer's office. I had seen, with a throbbing heart, his tall wasted frame becoming tremulous and bent, and the gray hair thinning on his temples; and now I felt that I could ease him of at least part of the burden. In the excitement of the moment, I could hope that I was destined to rise in the world, — to gain a name in it, and something more. You know how a slight success grows

in importance when we can deem it the earnest of future good fortune. I met, too, with a kind and influential friend in one of the professors, the late Dr. Wilkie, — alas! good, benevolent man! you may see his tomb yonder beside the wall; and on my return from St. Andrews at the close of the session, I found my father on his death-bed. My brother Henry, who had been unfortunate, and, I am afraid, something worse, had quitted the counting-house, and entered aboard of a man-of-war as a common sailor; and the poor old man, whose heart had been bound up in him, never held up his head after.

“On the evening of my father’s funeral I could have lain down and died. I never before felt how thoroughly I am unfitted for the world, how totally I want strength. My father, I have said, had intended me for the church; and in my progress onward from class to class, and from school to college, I had thought but little of each particular step as it engaged me for the time, and nothing of the ultimate objects to which it led. All my more vigorous aspirations were directed to a remote future and an unsubstantial shadow. But I had witnessed beside my father’s bed what had led me seriously to reflect on the ostensible aim for which I lived and studied; and the more carefully I weighed myself in the balance, the more did I find myself wanting. You have heard of Mr. Brown of the Secession, the author of the ‘Dictionary of the Bible.’ He was an old acquaintance of my father’s, and, on hearing of his illness, had come all the way from Haddington to see him. I felt, for the first time, as, kneeling beside his bed, I heard my father’s breathings becoming every moment shorter and more difficult, and listened to the prayers of the clergyman, that I had no business in the church. And thus I still

continue to feel. 'Twere an easy matter to produce such things as pass for sermons among us, and to go respectably enough through the mere routine of the profession; but I cannot help feeling that, though I might do all this and more, my duty as a clergyman would be still left undone. I want singleness of aim, — I want earnestness of heart. I cannot teach men effectually how to live well; I cannot show them, with aught of confidence, how they may die safe. I cannot enter the church without acting the part of a hypocrite; and the miserable part of a hypocrite it shall never be mine to act. Heaven help me! I am too little of a practical moralist myself to attempt teaching morals to others.

“But I must conclude my story, if story it may be called. I saw my poor mother and my little sister deprived, by my father's death, of their sole stay, and strove to exert myself in their behalf. In the daytime I copied in a lawyer's office; my nights were spent among the poets. You will deem it the very madness of vanity, Mr. Lindsay, but I could not live without my dreams of literary eminence. I felt that life would be a blank waste without them; and I feel so still. Do not laugh at my weakness, when I say I would rather live in the memory of my country than enjoy her fairest lands, — that I dread a nameless grave many times more than the grave itself. But I am afraid the life of the literary aspirant is rarely a happy one; and I, alas! am one of the weakest of the class. It is of importance that the means of living be not disjoined from the end for which we live; and I feel that in my case the disunion is complete. The wants and evils of life are around me; but the energies through which those should be provided for, and these warded off, are otherwise employed. I am like a man

pressing onward through a hot and bloody fight, his breast open to every blow, and tremblingly alive to the sense of injury and the feeling of pain, but totally unprepared either to attack or defend. And then those miserable depressions of spirit, to which all men who draw largely on their imagination are so subject, and that wavering irregularity of effort which seems so unavoidably the effect of pursuing a distant and doubtful aim, and which proves so hostile to the formation of every better habit, — alas! to a steady morality itself. But I weary you, Mr. Lindsay; besides, my story is told. I am groping onward, I know not whither; and in a few months hence, when my last session shall have closed, I shall be exactly where you are at present.”

He ceased speaking, and there was a pause of several minutes. I felt soothed and gratified. There was a sweet melancholy music in the tones of his voice that sunk to my very heart; and the confidence he reposed in me flattered my pride. “How was it,” I at length said, “that you were the gayest in the party of last night?”

“I do not know that I can better answer you,” he replied, “than by telling you a singular dream which I had about the time of my father’s death. I dreamed that I had suddenly quitted the world, and was journeying, by a long and dreary passage, to the place of final punishment. A blue, dismal light glimmered along the lower wall of the vault, and from the darkness above, where there flickered a thousand undefined shapes, — things without form or outline, — I could hear deeply-drawn sighs, and long hollow groans, and convulsive sobbings, and the prolonged moanings of an unceasing anguish. I was aware, however, though I know not how, that these were but the expressions of a lesser misery, and that the seats of se-

verer torment were still before me. I went on and on, and the vault widened; and the light increased and the sounds changed. There were loud laughers and low mutterings, in the tone of ridicule; and shouts of triumph and exultation; and, in brief, all the thousand mingled tones of a gay and joyous revel. Can these, I exclaimed, be the sounds of misery when at the deepest? ‘Bethink thee,’ said a shadowy form beside me,—‘bethink thee if it be so on earth.’ And as I remembered that it was so, and bethought me of the mad revels of shipwrecked seamen and of plague-stricken cities, I awoke. But on this subject you must spare me.”

“Forgive me,” I said; “to-morrow I leave college, and not with the less reluctance that I must part from you. But I shall yet find you occupying a place among the *literati* of our country, and shall remember with pride that you were my friend.”

He sighed deeply. “My hopes rise and fall with my spirits,” he said; “and to-night I am melancholy. Do you ever go to buffets with yourself, Mr. Lindsay? Do you ever mock, in your sadder moods, the hopes which render you happiest when you are gay? Ah! ’tis bitter warfare when a man contends with Hope!—when he sees her, with little aid from the personifying influence, as a thing distinct from himself,—a lying spirit that comes to flatter and deceive him. It is thus I see her to-night.

See'st thou that grave? — does mortal know  
 Aught of the dust that lies below?  
 'Tis foul, 'tis damp, 'tis void of form, —  
 A bed where winds the loathsome worm!  
 A little heap, mould'ring and brown,  
 Like that on flowerless meadow thrown  
 By mossy stream, when winter reigns

O'er leafless woods and wasted plains:  
And yet, that brown, damp, formless heap  
Once glowed with feelings keen and deep;  
Once eyed the light, once heard each sound  
Of earth, air, wave, that murmurs round.  
But now, ah! now, the name it bore —  
Sex, age, or form — is known no more.  
This, this alone, O Hope! I know,  
That once the dust that lies below  
Was, like myself, of human race,  
And made this world its dwelling-place.  
Ah! this, when earth has swept away  
The myriads of life's present day,  
Though bright the visions raised by thee,  
Will all my fame, my history be!

We quitted the ruins, and returned to town.

“Have you yet formed,” inquired my companion, “any plan for the future?”

“I quit St. Andrews,” I replied, “to-morrow morning. I have an uncle, the master of a West Indiaman now in the Clyde. Some years ago I had a fancy for the life of a sailor, which has evaporated, however, with many of my other boyish fancies and predilections; but I am strong and active, and it strikes me there is less competition on sea at present than on land. A man of tolerable steadiness and intelligence has a better chance of rising as a sailor than as a mechanic. I shall set out therefore with my uncle on his first voyage.”

## CHAPTER IV.

At first I thought the swankie didna ill,—  
 Again I glowr'd, to hear him better still;  
 Bauld, slee, an' sweet, his lines more glorious grew,  
 Glowed round the heart, an' glanced the soul out through.

ALEXANDER WILSON.

I HAD seen both the Indies and traversed the wide Pacific ere I again set foot on the eastern coast of Scotland. My uncle, the shipmaster, was dead, and I was still a common sailor; but I was light-hearted and skilful in my profession, and as much inclined to hope as ever. Besides, I had begun to doubt—and there cannot be a more consoling doubt when one is unfortunate—whether a man may not enjoy as much happiness in the lower walks of life as in the upper. In one of my later voyages, the vessel in which I sailed had lain for several weeks in Boston in North America, then a scene of those fierce and angry contentions which eventually separated the colonies from the mother country; and when in this place, I had become acquainted, by the merest accident in the world, with the brother of my friend the poet. I was passing through one of the meaner lanes, when I saw my my old friend, as I thought, looking out at me from the window of a crazy-looking building,—a sort of fencing academy, much frequented, I was told, by the Federalists of Boston. I crossed the lane in two huge strides.

“Mr. Ferguson,” I said, — “Mr. Ferguson,” — for he was withdrawing his head, — “do you not remember me?”

“Not quite sure,” he replied; “I have met with many sailors in my time; but I must just see.”

He had stepped down to the door ere I had discovered my mistake. He was a taller and stronger-looking man than my friend, and his senior, apparently, by six or eight years; but nothing could be more striking than the resemblance which he bore to him, both in face and figure. I apologized.

“But have you not a brother, a native of Edinburgh,” I inquired, “who studied at St. Andrews about four years ago? Never before, certainly, did I see so remarkable a likeness.”

“As that which I bear Robert?” he said. “Happy to hear it. Robert is a brother of whom a man may well be proud, and I am glad to resemble him in any way. But you must go in with me, and tell me all you know regarding him. He was a thin, pale slip of a boy when I left Scotland,—a mighty reader, and fond of sauntering into by-holes and corners; I scarcely knew what to make of him; but he has made much of himself. His name has been blown far and wide within the last two years.”

He showed me through a large waste apartment, furnished with a few deal seats, and with here and there a fencing foil leaning against the wall, into a sort of closet at the upper end, separated from the main room by a partition of undressed slabs. There was a charcoal stove in one corner, and a truckle-bed in the other. A few shelves laden with books ran along the wall. There was a small chest raised on a stool immediately below the window, to serve as a writing-desk, and another stool standing beside it. A few cooking utensils, scattered round the room, and a corner cupboard, completed the entire furniture of the place.



“There is a certain limited number born to be rich, Jack,” said my new companion, “and I just don’t happen to be among them; but I have one stool for myself, you see, and, now that I have unshipped my desk, another for a visitor, and so get on well enough.”

I related briefly the story of my intimacy with his brother, and we were soon on such terms as to be in a fair way of emptying a bottle of rum together.

“You remind me of old times,” said my new acquaintance. “I am weary of these illiterate, boisterous, long-sided Americans, who talk only of politics and dollars. And yet there are first-rate men among them too. I met, some years since, with a Philadelphia printer, whom I cannot help regarding as one of the ablest, best-informed men I ever conversed with. But there is nothing like general knowledge among the average class,—a mighty privilege of conceit, however.”

“They are just in that stage,” I remarked, “in which it needs all the vigor of an able man to bring his mind into anything like cultivation. There must be many more facilities of improvement ere the mediocritist can develop himself. He is in the egg still in America, and must sleep there till the next age.—But when last heard you of your brother?”

“Why,” he replied, “when all the world heard of him,—with the last number of ‘Ruddiman’s Magazine.’ Where can you have been bottled up from literature of late? Why, man, Robert stands first among our Scotch poets.”

“Ah! ’tis long since I have anticipated something like that for him,” I said; “but for the last two years I have seen only two books,—Shakspeare and the ‘Spectator.’ Pray, do show me some of the magazines.”

The magazines were produced; and I heard for the first time, in a foreign land, and from the recitation of the poet's brother, some of the most national and most highly-finished of his productions. My eyes filled, and my heart wandered to Scotland and her cottage homes, as, shutting the book, he repeated to me, in a voice faltering with emotion, stanza after stanza of the "Farmer's Ingle."

"Do you not see it?—do you not see it all?" exclaimed my companion; "the wide smoky room, with the bright turf-fire, the blackened rafters shining above, the straw-wrought settle below, the farmer and the farmer's wife, and auld grannie and the bairns. Never was there truer painting; and oh, how it works on a Scotch heart! But hear this other piece."

He read "Sandy and Willie."

"Far, far ahead of Ramsay," I exclaimed,—"more imagination, more spirit, more intellect, and as much truth and nature. Robert has gained his end already. Hurrah for poor old Scotland!—these pieces must live for ever. But do repeat to me the 'Farmer's Ingle' once more."

We read, one by one, all the poems in the Magazine, dwelling on each stanza, and expatiating on every recollection of home which the images awakened. My companion was, like his brother, a kind, open-hearted man, of superior intellect; much less prone to despondency, however, and of a more equal temperament. Ere we parted, which was not until next morning, he had communicated to me all his plans for the future, and all his fondly-cherished hopes of returning to Scotland with wealth enough to be of use to his friends. He seemed to be one of those universal geniuses who do a thousand things well, but want steadiness enough to turn any of them to good account. He showed me a treatise on the use of the

sword, which he had just prepared for the press, and a series of letters on the Stamp Act, which had appeared from time to time in one of the Boston newspapers, and in which he had taken part with the Americans.

“I make a good many dollars in these stirring times,” he said. “All the Yankees seem to be of opinion that they will be best heard across the water when they have got arms in their hands, and have learned how to use them; and I know a little of both the sword and the musket. But the warlike spirit is frightfully thirsty, somehow, and consumes a world of rum; and so I have not yet begun to make rich.”

He shared with me his supper and bed for the night; and, after rising in the morning ere I awoke, and writing a long letter for Robert, which he gave me in the hope I might soon meet with him, he accompanied me to the vessel, then on the eve of sailing, and we parted, as it proved, for ever. I know nothing of his after-life, or how or where it terminated; but I have learned that, shortly before the death of his gifted brother, his circumstances enabled him to send his mother a small remittance for the use of the family. He was evidently one of the kind-hearted, improvident few who can share a very little, and whose destiny it is to have only a very little to share.

## CHAPTER V.

O, Ferguson ! thy glorious parts  
Ill suited law's dry, musty arts!  
My curse upon your whunstone hearts,  
Ye Embrugh gentry!  
The tithe o' what ye waste at eartes  
Wad stowed his pantry!

BURNS.

I VISITED Edinburgh for the first time in the latter part of the autumn of 1773, about two months after I had sailed from Boston. It was on a fine calm morning, — one of those clear sunshiny mornings of October when the gossamer goes sailing about in long cottony threads, so light and fleecy that they seem the skeleton remains of extinct cloudlets, and when the distant hills, with their covering of gray frost-rime, seem, through the clear close atmosphere, as if chiselled in marble. The sun was rising over the town through a deep blood-colored haze, — the smoke of a thousand fires; and the huge fantastic piles of masonry that stretched along the ridge looked dim and spectral through the cloud, like the ghosts of an army of giants. I felt half a foot taller as I strode on towards the town. It was Edinburgh I was approaching, — the scene of so many proud associations to a lover of Scotland; and I was going to meet, as an early friend, one of the first of Scottish poets. I entered the town. There was a book-stall in a corner of the street, and I turned aside for half a minute to glance my eye over the books.

“Ferguson's Poems!” I exclaimed, taking up a little

volume. "I was not aware they had appeared in a separate form. How do you sell this?"

"Just like a' the ither booksellers," said the man who kept the stall, — "that's nane o' the buiks that come down in a hurry, — just for the marked selling price." I threw down the money.

"Could you tell me anything of the writer?" I said. "I have a letter for him from America."

"Oh, that'll be frae his brother Henry, I'll wad; a clever chield too, but ower fond o' the drap drink, maybe, like Rob himsel'. Baith o' them fine humane chields though, without a grain o' pride. Rob takes a stan' wi' me sometimes o' half an hour at a time, an' we clatter ower the buiks; an', if I'm no mista'en, you's him just yonder, — the thin, pale slip o' a lad wi' the broad brow. Ay, an' he's just comin' this way."

"Anything new to-day, Thomas?" said the young man, coming up to the stall. "I want a cheap second-hand copy of Ramsay's 'Evergreen'; and, like a good man as you are, you must just try and find it for me."

Though considerably altered, — for he was taller and thinner than when at college, and his complexion had assumed a deep sallow hue, — I recognized him at once, and presented him with the letter.

"Ah, from brother Henry," he said, breaking it open, and glancing his eye over the contents. "What! *old college chum*, Mr. *Lindsay!*" he exclaimed, turning to me. "Yes, sure enough; how happy I am we should have met! Come this way; — let us get out of the streets."

We passed hurriedly through the Canongate and along the front of Holyrood House, and were soon in the

King's Park, which seemed this morning as if left to ourselves.

"Dear me, and this is you yourself! and we have again met, Mr. Lindsay!" said Ferguson: "I thought we were never to meet more. Nothing, for a long time, has made me half so glad. And so you have been a sailor for the last four years. Do let us sit down here in the warm sunshine, beside St. Anthony's Well; and tell me all your story, and how you happened to meet with brother Henry."

We sat down, and I briefly related, at his bidding, all that had befallen me since we had parted at St. Andrews, and how I was still a common sailor; but, in the main, perhaps, not less happy than many who commanded a fleet.

"Ah, you have been a fortunate fellow," he said; "you have seen much and enjoyed much; and I have been rusting in unhappiness at home. Would that I had gone to sea along with you!"

"Nay, now, that won't do," I replied. "But you are merely taking Bacon's method of blunting the edge of envy. You have scarcely yet attained the years of mature manhood, and yet your name has gone abroad over the whole length and breadth of the land, and over many other lands besides. I have cried over your poems three thousand miles away, and felt all the prouder of my country for the sake of my friend. And yet you would fain persuade me that you wish the charm reversed, and that you were just such an obscure salt-water man as myself!"

"You remember," said my companion, "the story of the half-man, half-marble prince of the Arabian tale. One part was a living creature, one part a stone; but the

parts were incorporated, and the mixture was misery. I am just such a poor unhappy creature as the enchanted prince of the story."

"You surprise and distress me," I rejoined. "Have you not accomplished all you so fondly purposed,—realized even your warmest wishes? And this, too, in early life. Your most sanguine hopes pointed but to a name, which you yourself perhaps was never to hear, but which was to dwell on men's tongues when the grave had closed over you. And now the name is gained, and you live to enjoy it. I see the *living* part of your lot, and it seems instinct with happiness; but in what does the *dead*, the stony part, consist?"

He shook his head, and looked up mournfully into my face. There was a pause of a few seconds. "You, Mr. Lindsay," he at length replied,—“you, who are of an equable, steady temperament, can know little from experience of the unhappiness of a man who lives only in extremes, who is either madly gay or miserably depressed. Try and realize the feelings of one whose mind is like a broken harp,—all the medium tones gone, and only the higher and lower left; of one, too, whose circumstances seem of a piece with his mind, who can enjoy the exercise of his better powers, and yet can only live by the monotonous drudgery of copying page after page in a clerk's office; of one who is continually either groping his way amid a chill melancholy fog of nervous depression, or carried headlong by a wild gayety to all which his better judgment would instruct him to avoid; of one who, when he indulges most in the pride of superior intellect, cannot away with the thought that that intellect is on the eve of breaking up, and that he must yet rate infinitely lower in the scale of rationality than

any of the nameless thousands who carry on the ordinary concerns of life around him."

I was grieved and astonished, and knew not what to answer. "You are in a gloomy mood to-day," I at length said; "you are immersed in one of the fogs you describe, and all the surrounding objects take a tinge of darkness from the medium through which you survey them. Come, now, you must make an exertion, and shake off your melancholy. I have told you all my story as I best could, and you must tell me all yours in return."

"Well," he replied, "I shall, though it mayn't be the best way in the world of dissipating my melancholy. I think I must have told you, when at college, that I had a maternal uncle of considerable wealth, and, as the world goes, respectability, who resided in Aberdeenshire. He was placed on what one may term the table-land of society; and my poor mother, whose recollections of him were limited to a period when there is warmth in the feelings of the most ordinary minds, had hoped that he would willingly exert his influence in my behalf. Much, doubtless, depends on one's setting out in life; and it would have been something to have been enabled to step into it from a level like that occupied by my relative. I paid him a visit shortly after leaving college, and met with apparent kindness. But I can see beyond the surface, Mr. Lindsay, and I soon saw that my uncle was entirely a different man from the brother whom my mother remembered. He had risen, by a course of slow industry, from comparative poverty, and his feelings had worn out by the process. The character was case-hardened all over; and the polish it bore — for I have rarely met a smoother man — seemed no improvement. He was, in brief, one of the class content to dwell for ever



in mere decencies, with consciences made up of the conventional moralities, who think by precedent, bow to public opinion as their god, and estimate merit by its weight in guineas."

"And so your visit," I said, "was a very brief one?"

"You distress me," he replied. "It should have been so; but it was not. But what could I do? Ever since my father's death I had been taught to consider this man as my natural guardian, and I was now unwilling to part with my last hope. But this is not all. Under much apparent activity, my friend, there is a substratum of apathetical indolence in my disposition: I move rapidly when in motion; but when at rest, there is a dull inertness in the character, which the will, when unassisted by passion, is too feeble to overcome. Poor, weak creature that I am! I had set down by my uncle's fireside, and felt unwilling to rise. Pity me, my friend, — I deserve your pity; but oh! do not despise me!"

"Forgive me, Mr. Ferguson," I said; "I have given you pain, but surely most unwittingly."

"I am ever a fool," he continued. "But my story lags; and, surely, there is little in it on which it were pleasure to dwell. I sat at this man's table for six months, and saw, day after day, his manner towards me becoming more constrained, and his politeness more cold; and yet I staid on, till at last my clothes were worn threadbare, and he began to feel that the shabbiness of the nephew affected the respectability of the uncle. His friend the soap-boiler, and his friend the oil-merchant, and his friend the manager of the hemp manufactory, with their wives and daughters, — all people of high standing in the world, — occasionally honored his table with their presence; and how could he be other than ashamed of mine? It

vexes me that I cannot even yet be cool on the subject: it vexes me that a creature so sordid should have so much power to move me; but I cannot, I cannot master my feelings. He — he told me, — and with whom should the blame rest, but with the weak, spiritless thing who lingered on in mean, bitter dependence, to hear what he had to tell? — he told me that all his friends were respectable, and that my appearance was no longer that of a person whom he could wish to see at his table, or introduce to any one as his nephew. And I had staid to hear all this!

“I can hardly tell you how I got home. I travelled, stage after stage, along the rough dusty roads, with a weak and feverish body, and almost despairing mind. On meeting with my mother, I could have laid my head on her bosom and cried like a child. I took to my bed in a high fever, and trusted that all my troubles were soon to terminate; but when the die was cast, it turned up life. I resumed my old miserable employments, — for what could I else? — and, that I might be less unhappy in the prosecution of them, my old amusements too. I copied during the day in a clerk’s office that I might live, and wrote during the night that I might be known. And I have in part, perhaps, attained my object. I have pursued and caught hold of the shadow on which my heart had been so long set; and if it prove empty and intangible and unsatisfactory, like every other shadow, the blame surely must rest with the pursuer, not with the thing pursued. I weary you, Mr. Lindsay; but one word more. There are hours when the mind, weakened by exertion or by the teasing monotony of an employment which tasks without exercising it, can no longer exert its powers, and when, feeling that sociality is a law of our nature, we

seek the society of our fellow-men. With a creature so much the sport of impulse as I am, it is of these hours of weakness that conscience takes most note. God help me! I have been told that life is short; but it stretches on and on and on before me; and I know not how it is to be passed through."

My spirits had so sunk during this singular conversation that I had no heart to reply.

"You are silent, Mr. Lindsay," said the poet; "I have made you as melancholy as myself; but look around you, and say if ever you have seen a lovelier spot. See how richly the yellow sunshine slants along the green sides of Arthur's Seat; and how the thin blue smoke, that has come floating from the town, fills the bottom of yonder grassy dell as if it were a little lake! Mark, too, how boldly the cliffs stand out along its sides, each with its little patch of shadow. And here, beside us, is St. Anthony's Well, so famous in song, coming gushing out to the sunshine, and then gliding away through the grass like a snake. Had the Deity purposed that man should be miserable, he would surely never have placed him in so fair a world. Perhaps much of our unhappiness originates in our mistaking our proper scope, and thus setting out from the first with a false aim."

"Unquestionably," I replied. "There is no man who has not some part to perform; and if it be a great and uncommon part, and the powers which fit him for it proportionably great and uncommon, nature would be in error could he slight it with impunity. See! there is a wild bee bending the flower beside you. Even that little creature has a capacity of happiness and misery: it derives its sense of pleasure from whatever runs in the line of its instincts, its experience of unhappiness from

whatever thwarts and opposes them; and can it be supposed that so wise a law should regulate the instincts of only inferior creatures? No, my friend; it is surely a law of our nature also."

"And have you not something else to infer?" said the poet.

"Yes," I replied; "that you are occupied differently from what the scope and constitution of your mind demand, — differently both in your hours of enjoyment and of relaxation. But do take heart; you will yet find your proper place, and all shall be well."

"Alas! no, my friend," said he, rising from the sward. "I could once entertain such a hope, but I cannot now. My mind is no longer what it was to me in my happier days, a sort of *terra incognita* without bounds or limits. I can see over and beyond it, and have fallen from all my hopes regarding it. It is not so much the gloom of present circumstances that disheartens me as a depressing knowledge of myself, — an abiding conviction that I am a weak dreamer, unfitted for every occupation of life, and not less so for the greater employments of literature than for any of the others. I feel that I am a little man and a little poet, with barely vigor enough to make one half-effort at a time, but wholly devoid of the sustaining will — that highest faculty of the highest order of minds — which can direct a thousand vigorous efforts to the accomplishment of one important object. Would that I could exchange my half-celebrity — and it can never be other than a half-celebrity — for a temper as equable and a fortitude as unshrinking as yours! But I weary you with my complaints: I am a very coward; and you will deem me as selfish as I am weak."

We parted. The poet, sadly and unwillingly, went to copy deeds in the office of the commissary-clerk; and I, almost reconciled to obscurity and hard labor, to assist in unlading a Baltic trader in the harbor of Leith.

### CHAPTER VI.

Speech without aim, and without end employ.

CRABBE.

AFTER the lapse of nine months, I again returned to Edinburgh. During that period I had been so shut out from literature and the world, that I had heard nothing of my friend the poet; and it was with a beating heart I left the vessel, on my first leisure evening, to pay him a visit. It was about the middle of July. The day had been close and sultry, and the heavens overcharged with gray ponderous clouds; and as I passed hurriedly along the walk which leads from Leith to Edinburgh, I could hear the newly-awakened thunder, bellowing far in the south, peal after peal, like the artillery of two hostile armies. I reached the door of the poet's humble domicile, and had raised my hand to the knocker, when I heard some one singing from within, in a voice by far the most touchingly mournful I had ever listened to. The tones struck on my heart; and a frightful suspicion crossed my mind, as I set down the knocker, that the singer was no other than my friend. But in what wretched circumstances! what fearful state of mind! I shuddered as I listened, and heard the strain waxing louder and yet more

mournful, and could distinguish that the words were those of a simple old ballad, —

O, Marti'mas wind! when wilt thou blaw,  
 An' shake the green leaves aff the tree?  
 O, gentle death! when wilt thou come,  
 An' tak a life that wearies me?

I could listen no longer, but raised the latch and went in. The evening was gloomy, and the apartment ill-lighted; but I could see the singer, a spectral-looking figure, sitting on a bed in the corner, with the bed-clothes wrapped round his shoulders, and a napkin deeply stained with blood on his head. An elderly female, who stood beside him, was striving to soothe him, and busied from time to time in adjusting the clothes, which were ever and anon falling off as he nodded his head in time to the music. A young girl of great beauty sat weeping at the bed-foot.

“O, dearest Robert!” said the woman, “you will destroy your poor head; and Margaret, your sister, whom you used to love so much, will break her heart. Do lie down, dearest, and take a little rest. Your head is fearfully gashed; and if the bandages loose a second time, you will bleed to death. Do, dearest Robert! for your poor old mother, to whom you were always so kind and dutiful a son till now, — for your poor old mother’s sake, do lie down.”

The song ceased for a moment, and the tears came bursting from my eyes as the tune changed, and he again sang, —

O, mither dear! make ye my bed,  
 For my heart it’s flichterin’ sair;  
 An’ oh! gin I’ve vex’d ye, mither dear,  
 I’ll never vex ye mair.

I've staid ar'out the lang dark nicht,  
I' the sleet and the plashy rain;  
But, mither dear, make ye my bed,  
An' I'll ne'er gang out again.

“Dearest, dearest Robert!” continued the poor, heart-broken woman, “do lie down, — for your poor old mother’s sake, do lie down.”

“No, no,” he exclaimed, in a hurried voice, “not just now, mother, not just now. Here is my friend Mr. Lindsay come to see me, — my true friend, Mr. Lindsay the sailor, who has sailed all round and round the world; and I have much, much to ask him. A chair, Margaret, for Mr. Lindsay. I must be a preacher like John Knox, you know, — like the great John Knox, the reformer of a nation, — and Mr. Lindsay knows all about him. A chair, Margaret, for Mr. Lindsay.”

I am not ashamed to say it was with tears, and in a voice faltering with emotion, that I apologized to the poor woman for my intrusion at such a time. Were it otherwise, I might well conclude my heart grown hard as a piece of the nether millstone.

“I had known Robert at college,” I said; “had loved and respected him; and had now come to pay him a visit, after an absence for several months, wholly unprepared for finding him in his present condition.” And it would seem that my tears plead for me, and proved to the poor afflicted woman and her daughter by far the most efficient part of my apology.

“All my friends have left me now, Mr. Lindsay,” said the unfortunate poet, — “they have all left me now; they love this present world. We were all going down, down, down; there was the roll of a river behind us; it came bursting over the high rocks, roaring, rolling, foaming,

down upon us; and, though the fog was thick and dark below, — far below, in the place to which we were going, — I could see the red fire shining through, — the red, hot, unquenchable fire; and we were all going down, down, down. Mother, mother, tell Mr. Lindsay I am going to be put on my trials to-morrow. Careless creature that I am! life is short, and I have lost much time; but I am going to be put on my trials to-morrow, and shall come forth a preacher of the Word.”

The thunder, which had hitherto been muttering at a distance, — each peal, however, nearer and louder than the preceding one, — now began to roll overhead, and the lightning, as it passed the window, to illumine every object within. The hapless poet stretched out his thin, wasted arm, as if addressing a congregation from the pulpit.

“There were the flashings of lightning,” he said, “and the roll of thunder; and the trumpet waxed louder and louder. And around the summit of the mountain were the foldings of thick clouds, and the shadow fell brown and dark over the wide expanse of the desert. And the wild beasts lay trembling in their dens. But, lo! where the sun breaks through the opening of the cloud, there is the glitter of tents, — the glitter of ten thousand tents, — that rise over the sandy waste thick as waves of the sea. And there, there is the voice of the dance, and of the revel, and the winding of horns, and the clash of cymbals. Oh, sit nearer me, dearest mother, for the room is growing dark, dark; and oh, my poor head!

The lady sat on the castle wa',  
 Looked owre baith dale and down,  
 And then she spied Gil-Morice head  
 Come steering through the town.



Do, dearest mother, put your cool hand on my brow, and do hold it fast ere it part. How fearfully, oh, how fearfully it aches!—and oh, how it thunders!” He sunk backward on the pillow, apparently exhausted. “Gone, gone, gone,” he muttered, —“my mind gone forever. But God’s will be done.”

I rose to leave the room; for I could restrain my feelings no longer.

“Stay, Mr. Lindsay,” said the poet, in a feeble voice. “I hear the rain dashing on the pavement; you must not go till it abates. Would that you could pray beside me! But no; you are not like the dissolute companions who have now all left me, but you are not yet fitted for that; and, alas! I cannot pray for myself. Mother, mother, see that there be prayers at my lykewake; for, —

Her lykewake, it was piously spent  
 In social prayer and praise,  
 Performed by judicious men,  
 Who stricken were in days;  
 And many a heavy, heavy heart,  
 Was in that mournful place,  
 And many a weary, weary thought  
 On her who slept in peace.

They will come all to my lykewake, mother, won’t they? Yes, all, though they have left me now. Yes, and they will come far to see my grave. I was poor, very poor, you know, and they looked down upon me; and I was no son or cousin of theirs, and so they could do nothing for me. Oh, but they might have looked less coldly! But they will all come to my grave, mother; they will come all to my grave; and they will say, ‘Would he were living now, to know how kind we are!’ But they will look as coldly as ever on the living poet beside them, — yes, till

they have broken his heart; and then they will go to his grave too. O, dearest mother! do lay your cool hand on my brow."

He lay silent and exhausted, and in a few minutes I could hope, from the hardness of his breathing, that he had fallen asleep.

"How long," I inquired of his sister, in a low whisper, "has Mr. Ferguson been so unwell; and what has injured his head?"

"Alas!" said the girl, "my brother has been unsettled in mind for nearly the last six months. We first knew it one evening on his coming home from the country, where he had been for a few days with a friend. He burnt a large heap of papers that he had been employed on for weeks before, — songs and poems that, his friends say, were the finest things he ever wrote; but he burnt them all, for he was going to be a preacher of the Word, he said, and it did not become a preacher of the Word to be a writer of light rhymes. And O, sir! his mind has been carried ever since; but he has been always gentle and affectionate, and his sole delight has lain in reading the Bible. Good Dr. Erskine, of the Gray-friars, often comes to our house, and sits with him for hours together: for there are times when his mind seems stronger than ever; and he sees wonderful things, that seem to hover, the minister says, between the extravagance natural to his present sad condition, and the higher flights of a philosophic genius. And we had hoped that he was getting better; but O, sir! our hopes have had a sad ending. He went out, a few evenings ago, to call on an old acquaintance; and, in descending a stair, missed footing, and fell to the bottom; and his head has been fearfully injured by the stones. He has been just as you have seen

him ever since; and oh! I much fear he cannot now recover. Alas! my poor brother!—never, never was there a more affectionate heart.”

### CHAPTER VII.

A lowly muse!

She sings of reptiles yet in song unknown.

I RETURNED to the vessel with a heavy heart; and it was nearly three months from this time ere I again set foot in Edinburgh. Alas for my unfortunate friend! He was now an inmate of the asylum, and on the verge of dissolution. I was thrown by accident, shortly after my arrival at this time, into the company of one of his boon companions. I had gone into a tavern with a brother sailor, — a shrewd, honest skipper from the north country; and, finding the place occupied by half-a-dozen young fellows, who were growing noisy over their liquor, I would have immediately gone out again, had I not caught, in the passing, a few words regarding my friend. And so, drawing to a side-table, I sat down.

“Believe me,” said one of the toppers, a dissolute-looking young man, “it’s all over with Bob Ferguson, — all over; and I knew it from the moment he grew religious. Had old Brown tried to convert me, I would have broken his face.”

“What Brown?” inquired one of his companions.

“Is that all you know?” rejoined the other. “Why, John Brown, of Haddington, the Seceder. Bob was at

Haddington last year at the election; and one morning, when in the horrors, after holding a rum night of it, who should he meet in the churchyard but old John Brown. He writes, you know, a big book on the Bible. Well, he lectured Bob at a pretty rate about election and the call, I suppose; and the poor fellow has been mad ever since. Your health, Jamie. For my own part, I'm a freewill man, and detest all cant and humbug."

"And what has come of Ferguson now?" asked one of the others.

"Oh, mad, sir, mad!" rejoined the toper,—"reading the Bible all day, and cooped up in the asylum yonder. 'Twas I who brought him to it. But, lads, the glass has been standing for the last half-hour. 'Twas I and Jack Robinson who brought him to it, as I say. He was getting wild; and so we got a sedan for him, and trumped a story of an invitation for tea from a lady, and he came with us as quietly as a lamb. But if you could have heard the shriek he gave when the chair stopped, and he saw where we had brought him! I never heard anything half so horrible; it rung in my ears for a week after; and then, how the mad people in the upper rooms howled and gibbered in reply, till the very roof echoed! People say he is getting better; but when I last saw him he was as religious as ever, and spoke so much about heaven that it was uncomfortable to hear him. Great loss to his friends, after all the expense they have been at with his education."

"You seem to have been intimate with Mr. Ferguson," I said.

"Oh, intimate with Bob!" he rejoined; "we were hand and glove, man. I have sat with him in Lucky Middlemass's almost every evening for two years; and I have

given him hints for some of the best things in his book. 'Twas I who tumbled down the cage in the Meadows, and began breaking the lamps.

Ye who oft finish care in Lethe's cup, —  
 Who love to swear and roar, and *keep it up*, —  
 List to a brother's voice, whose sole delight  
 Is sleep all day, and riot all the night.

“There's spirit for you! But Bob was never sound at bottom; and I have told him so. ‘Bob,’ I have said, — ‘Bob, you're but a hypocrite after all, man, — without half the spunk you pretend to. Why don't you take a pattern by me, who fear nothing, and believe only the agreeable? But, poor fellow, he had weak nerves, and a church-going propensity that did him no good; and you see the effects. 'Twas all nonsense, Tom, of his throwing the squib into the Glassite meeting-house. Between you and I, that was a cut far beyond him in his best days, poet as he was. 'Twas I who did it, man; and never was there a cleaner row in Auld Reekie.”

“Heartless, contemptible puppy!” said my comrade the sailor, as we left the room. “Your poor friend must be ill indeed if he be but half as insane as his quondam companion. But he cannot: there is no madness like that of the heart. What could have induced a man of genius to associate with a thing so thoroughly despicable?”

“The same misery, Miller,” I said, “that brings a man acquainted with *strange bed-fellows*.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

O, thou, my elder brother in misfortune! —  
By far my elder brother in the muses, —  
With tears I pity thy unhappy fate!

BURNS.

THE asylum in which my unfortunate friend was confined — at this time the only one in Edinburgh — was situated in an angle of the city wall. It was a dismal-looking mansion, shut in on every side by the neighboring houses from the view of the surrounding country, and so effectually covered up from the nearer street by a large building in front that it seemed possible enough to pass a lifetime in Edinburgh without coming to the knowledge of its existence. I shuddered as I looked up to its blackened walls, thinly sprinkled with miserable-looking windows barred with iron, and thought of it as a sort of burial-place of dead minds. But it was a Golgotha which, with more than the horrors of the grave, had neither its rest nor its silence. I was startled, as I entered the cell of the hapless poet, by a shout of laughter from a neighboring room, which was answered from a dark recess behind me by a fearfully-prolonged shriek and the clanking of chains. The mother and sister of Ferguson were sitting beside his pallet, on a sort of stone settle, which stood out from the wall; and the poet himself — weak and exhausted and worn to a shadow, but apparently in his right mind — lay extended on the straw. He made an attempt to rise as I entered;

but the effort was above his strength, and, again lying down, he extended his hand.

"This is kind, Mr. Lindsay," he said; "it is ill for me to be alone in these days; and yet I have few visitors save my poor old mother and Margaret. But who cares for the unhappy?"

I sat down on the settle beside him, still retaining his hand. "I have been at sea, and in foreign countries," I said, "since I last saw you, Mr. Ferguson, and it was only this morning I returned; but, believe me, there are many, many of your countrymen who sympathize sincerely in your affliction, and take a warm interest in your recovery."

He sighed deeply. "Ah," he replied, "I know too well the nature of that sympathy. You never find it at the bedside of the sufferer; it evaporates in a few barren expressions of idle pity! and yet, after all, it is but a paying the poet in kind. He calls so often on the world to sympathize over fictitious misfortune that the feeling wears out, and becomes a mere mood of the imagination; and with this light, attenuated pity, of his own weaving, it regards his own real sorrows. Dearest mother, the evening is damp and chill. Do gather the bed-clothes around me, and sit on my feet: they are so very cold, and so dead that they cannot be colder a week hence."

"O, Robert! why do you speak so?" said the poor woman, as she gathered the clothes around him, and sat on his feet. "You know you are coming home to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" he said; "if I see to-morrow, I shall have completed my twenty-fourth year, — a small part, surely, of the threescore and ten; but what matters it when 'tis past?"

“You were ever, my friend, of a melancholy temperament,” I said, “and too little disposed to hope. Indulge in brighter views of the future, and all shall yet be well.”

“I can now hope that it shall,” he said. “Yes, all shall be well with me, and that very soon. But oh, how this nature of ours shrinks from dissolution! — yes, and all the lower natures too. You remember, mother, the poor starling that was killed in the room beside us? Oh, how it struggled with its ruthless enemy, and filled the whole place with its shrieks of terror and agony! And yet, poor little thing, it had been true, all life long, to the laws of its nature, and had no sins to account for and no Judge to meet. There is a shrinking of heart as I look before me; and yet I can hope that all shall yet be well with me, and that very soon. Would that I had been wise in time! Would that I had thought more and earlier of the things which pertain to my eternal peace! — more of a living soul, and less of a dying name! But oh! ’tis a glorious provision, through which a way of return is opened up, even at the eleventh hour.”

We sat around him in silence. An indescribable feeling of awe pervaded my whole mind; and his sister was affected to tears.

“Margaret,” he said, in a feeble voice, — “Margaret, you will find my Bible in yonder little recess: ’tis all I have to leave you; but keep it, dearest sister, and use it, and in times of sorrow and suffering, that come to all, you will know how to prize the legacy of your poor brother. Many, many books do well enough for life; but there is only one of any value when we come to die.

“You have been a voyager of late, Mr. Lindsay,” he continued, “and I have been a voyager too. I have been journeying in darkness and discomfort, amid strange un-



earthly shapes of dread and horror, with no reason to direct, and no will to govern. Oh, the unspeakable unhappiness of these wanderings! — these dreams of suspicion, and fear, and hatred, in which shadow and substance, the true and the false, were so wrought up and mingled together that they formed but one fantastic and miserable whole. And oh, the unutterable horror of every momentary return to a recollection of what I had been once, and a sense of what I had become! Oh, when I awoke amid the terrors of the night; when I turned me on the rustling straw, and heard the wild wail, and yet wilder laugh; when I heard, and shuddered, and then felt the demon in all his might coming over me, till I laughed and wailed with the others, — oh, the misery! the utter misery! But 'tis over, my friend, — 'tis all over. A few, few tedious days — a few, few weary nights — and all my sufferings shall be over."

I had covered my face with my hands, but the tears came bursting through my fingers. The mother and sister of the poet sobbed aloud.

"Why sorrow for me, sirs?" he said; "why grieve for me? I am well, quite well, and want for nothing. But 'tis cold, oh, 'tis very cold, and the blood seems freezing at my heart. Ah, but there is neither pain nor cold where I am going, and I trust it will be well with my soul. Dearest, dearest mother, I always told you it would come to this at last."

The keeper had entered, to intimate to us that the hour for locking up the cells was already past; and we now rose to leave the place. I stretched out my hand to my unfortunate friend. He took it in silence; and his thin, attenuated fingers felt cold within my grasp, like those of a corpse. His mother stooped down to embrace him.

“Oh, do not go yet, mother,” he said, — “do not go yet, — do not leave me. But it must be so, and I only distress you. Pray for me, dearest mother, and oh, forgive me. I have been a grief and a burden to you all life long; but I ever loved you, mother; and oh, you have been kind, kind and forgiving; and now your task is over. May God bless and reward you! Margaret, dearest Margaret, farewell!”

We parted, and, as it proved, forever. Robert Ferguson expired during the night; and when the keeper entered the cell next morning to prepare him for quitting the asylum, all that remained of this most hapless of the children of genius was a pallid and wasted corpse, that lay stiffening on the straw. I am now a very old man, and the feelings wear out; but I find that my heart is even yet susceptible of emotion, and that the source of tears is not yet dried up.