

THE
Gold Thread
and
WEE DAVIE.
by
Norman Macleod.



THE
GOLD THREAD.

BY THE LATE
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His Son," "Wee Davie," etc.

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TO MY CHILDREN.

I DEDICATE this story to you, because it was for you I first wrote it, and to you I first read it among the green hills of Moffat. It was afterwards printed in *Good Words*, and now you see it again appears as a little book for other children, who, I hope, will like it as much as you do.

I wish to help and encourage you, and all who read this story, to learn the great lesson which it is intended to teach; that lesson is, that we should always trust God and do what is right, and thus hold fast our gold thread in spite of every temptation and danger, being certain that

in this way only will God lead us in safety and peace to His home.

Now, God gives each of you this gold thread to hold fast in your own house or in school, in the nursery or in the play-ground, on every day and in every place. His voice in your heart, and in His Word, will also tell you always what is right, if you only listen to it. You, too, will be constantly tempted in some way or other to give up your gold thread, and to be selfish, disobedient, lazy, or untruthful. Many things, in short, will tempt you to do your own will rather than God's will.

You already know, and I hope you will always love and remember, those true stories in the Bible about the good men of the olden time, whose lives are there written. Now, what shewed that they were good? It was this, that *they trusted God, and did what was right.* If they ever let this their gold thread go, they

lost their way and became unhappy ; but when they held it fast. it led them in a way of peace and safety. To see how true this is, you have only to recall such stories as those of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, Caleb and Joshua, Samuel, David and Jonathan, Elijah and Elisha, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and his three companions, &c., &c., with those told you in the Book of Acts, not to mention the history of Jesus Christ, the perfect example for us all.

That you, my dear children, may be "followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises," and thus be "followers of God as dear children," is the constant prayer of your mother, and of your father,

NORMAN MACLEOD.

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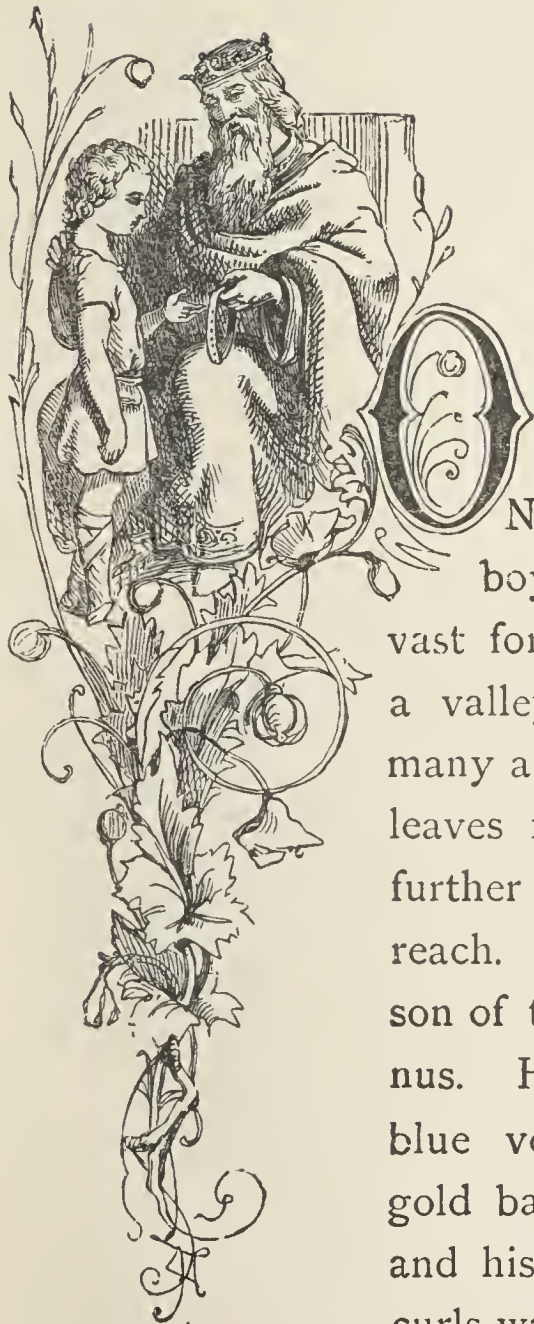
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CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER—WOLF
THE SWINEHERD.

ONCE upon a time, a boy lost his way in a vast forest that filled many a valley, and passed over many a hill, a rolling sea of leaves for miles and miles, further than the eye could reach. His name was Eric, son of the good King Magnus. He was dressed in a blue velvet dress, with a gold band round his waist, and his fair locks in silken curls waved from his beau-

tiful head. But his hands and face were scratched, and his clothes torn with the briars, as he ran here and there like one much perplexed. Sometimes he made his way through tangled brushwood, or crossed the little grassy plains in the forest, now losing himself in dark ravines, then climbing up their steep sides, or crossing with difficulty the streams that hurried through them. For a long time he kept his heart up, and always said to himself, "I shall find it, I shall find it;" until, as the day advanced, he was wearied and hungry; and every now and then he cried, "Oh, my father! where is my father! I'm lost! I'm lost!" Or, "Where, oh, where is my gold thread!" All day the forest seemed to him to be very sad. He had never seen it so gloomy. There was a strange sadness in the rustle of the leaves, and a sadness in the noise of the streams. He did not hear the birds sing as they used to do. But he heard the ravens croak with their hoarse voice, as their black forms swept along the precipices which here and there rose above the trees. The large hawks, too, always

appeared to be wheeling over his head, pausing, and fluttering as if about to dart down upon him. Why was he so sad? Why was he so afraid?

But on Eric journeyed, in the hope of finding his way out of the boundless forest, or of meeting some one who would be his guide. At last, the sun appeared to be near its setting, and he could see the high branches of the trees, shining like gold, as its last rays fell upon them. But underneath, the foliage was getting darker and darker; the birds were preparing to sleep, and everything soon became so still that he could hear his steps echoing through the wood, and when he stopped, he heard his heart beating, or a leaf falling; but nowhere did he see a house, and no human being had he met since morning. Then the wind suddenly began to rise, and he heard it at first creeping along the tree-tops like a gentle whisper, and by and by to call louder and louder for the storm to come. Dark clouds gathered over the sky, and rushed along chased by the winds, that were soon to fight with the giant trees.

At last, he sat down at the root of a great old

oak, burying his face in his hands, not knowing what to do. He then tried to climb the tree, in order to spend the night among its branches, in case wild beasts should attack him. But as he was climbing it, he heard some one singing with a loud voice. Listening attentively, and looking eagerly through the leaves, he saw a boy apparently older than himself, dressed in rough shaggy clothes, made from skins of wild animals. His long matted hair escaped over his cheeks from under a black bearskin cap. With a short thick stick he was driving a herd of swine through the wood. "Hey there, you black porker!" cried the boy, as he threw a stone at some pig which was running away. "Get along, you lazy long-snout!" he shouted to another, as he came thump on its back with his cudgel. And then he sung this song with a loud voice which made the woods ring :—

“ Oh, there ’s nothing half so fine,
As to drive a herd of swine,
And through the forest toddle,
With nothing in my noddle,
But rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo!

“When I wish to have some fun,
Then I make the porkers run,
Till they gallop, snort, and wheeze,
Among the leafy trees ;
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo !

“How their backs begin to bristle,
When I shout aloud and whistle !
How they kick at every lick
That I give them with my stick !
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up, halloo !”

“Get along, you rascals,” cried the savage-looking herd, “or I’ll kill and roast you before your time.” But soon the herd, with his swine, were concealed from Eric’s sight by the wood ; though he still heard his “rub-a-dub” chorus, to which he beat time with a sort of rude drum, made with a dried skin and hoop. Eric determined to make his acquaintance, or at all events to follow him to some house ; so he descended from the tree, and ran off in the direction from which he heard the song coming. He soon overtook him.

“Hollo!” said the wild-looking lad, with as much astonishment as if Eric had fallen from

the clouds: "Who? where from? where to?" "I have lost my way in the wood," said Eric, "and want you to guide me." "To Ralph?" asked the swineherd. "Ralph! pray, who is he?" "Master, chief, captain, everything, everybody," replied the young savage. "I will go anywhere for shelter, as night is coming on; but I will reward you if you bring me to my father's home." "Who is your father, my fine fellow?" inquired the swineherd, leaning on his stick. "The king," replied Eric. "You lie, Sir Prince! Ralph is king." "I speak the truth, swineherd." The swineherd by this time was examining Eric's dress with an impudent look. "Pay me now," said he; "give me this gold band, and I will guide you." "I cannot give you this gold band, for my father gave it to me, and I have lost enough to-day. By the by, did you see a gold thread waving anywhere among the trees?" "A gold thread! what do you mean? I saw nothing but pigs until I saw you, and I shall treat you like a pig, d'ye hear? and lick you too, for I have no time to put off. So give me your

band. Come, be quick!" said he, with his fierce face, and holding up his stick as he came up to Eric. "Keep off, swineherd; don't touch me!" "Don't touch you! why shouldn't I touch you? Do you see this stick? How would you like to have it among your fine curls, as I drive it among the pigs' bristles?" And he began to flourish it over his head, and to press nearer and nearer. "Once, twice, when I say thrice, if you do not unbuckle, I shall save you the trouble, and leave you to the wild beasts, who would like a tender bit of prince's flesh better than pork. Come; once! twice!" Eric was on his guard, and said, "I shall fight you, you young robber, till death, rather than give you this band,—so keep off." "Thrice!" shouted the herd, and down came his thick cudgel, which he intended should fall on Eric's head. But Eric sprang aside, and before he could recover himself, dashed in upon him, tripped him up, and threw him on the grass, seizing him by the throat in a moment. The herd, in his efforts to get out of Eric's grasp, let go his cudgel, which Eric seized, and held over

his head. "Unless you promise, Master Swineherd, to leave me alone, I may leave *you* alone with the wild beasts." "You are stronger than I thought," said the herd. "Let me up, or I shall be choked. Let me up, I say, and I promise to guide you." "I shall trust you," said Eric, "though you would not trust me. Rise!" So the herd rose, and picked up his cap, but Eric would not give him his stick until he guided him to some house. "Come along," said he, sulkily. "What is your name?" asked Eric. "They call me Wolf. I killed a wolf once with my boar-spear." "Why, Wolf, did you try to kill me?" "Because I wanted your gold belt." "But it is a great sin to rob and kill." "Other people rob me, and would kill me too, if I did not take care of their pigs," said Wolf, carelessly. "You should fear God, Wolf." "I fear that name truly, for Ralph always swears by it when he is in a rage. But I do not know what it means." "Oh, Wolf, surely your father and mother told you about God, who made all things, and made you and me; God, who loves



us, and wishes us to love Him, and to do what is right?" "I have no father or mother," replied Wolf, "nor brothers or sisters, and I do not know God. No one cares for me but my pigs, and so I sleep with them, and eat with them." "Poor fellow!" said Eric with a look of kindness, "I am sorry for you. Here is all the money I have. Take it. I wish to shew you that I have no ill-will to you;" and Eric gave him a gold coin. Wolf gave a grunt like one of his pigs, and began his song of "Rub-a-dub." "No one ever gave me money before," remarked Wolf almost to himself, as he examined the coin on his rough hand, which looked like tanned leather. "How much is this?" inquired Wolf. Eric explained its value. The herd was astonished, and began to think what he could purchase with it. "It would buy a large pig," he said. He seemed very anxious to conceal the coin, and so he hid it in the top of his hairy cap. "See that tall tower," said Wolf, "which looks like a rock above the trees; that is the only house near for twenty miles round. You can reach it soon;

and when you do reach it," said Wolf, speaking low, as if some one might hear him, "take my advice, and get away as fast as you can from my master Ralph, for"—and Wolf gave a number of winks, as much as to say, I know something. "What do you mean?" asked Eric. "Oh, nothing, nothing; but take Wolf's advice, and say to Ralph you are a beggar. Put the gold band in your pocket, and swear to remain with him, but run off when you can. Cheat him; that's my way." "It is not my way," replied Eric, "and, come what may, never can be, for a voice says to me,

" 'Better to die
Than ever to lie.' "

"Ha! ha!" said Wolf; "I wish you lived with Ralph. He would teach you another lesson, my lad." "I would rather that I had you, Wolf, to live in my house. I would be kind to you, and help you to be good, and tell you about God, who lives in the sky." "And is that He who is speaking? Listen!" Thunder began to mutter in the clouds. "Yes, it is He," replied Eric; "and if you will only listen, you can also

hear Him often speak with a small, still voice in your heart." "I never heard Him," replied Wolf; "but I cannot stay longer with you, for my pigs will wander: there is a black rascal who always leads them astray. Now, king's son, give Wolf the stick; it is all he has." "Here it is to you, and I am sure you will not use it wrongly; you will try and be good, Wolf? for it will make you happy." "Humph," said Wolf, "I am happy when I get my pigs home, and Ralph does not strike me. But I must away, and see you don't tell any one you gave me money. They would rob me." And away he ran among the trees in search of his pigs, while Eric heard his little drum, and his song of "Rub-a-dub, halloo!" die away in the distance. Another loud peal and flash of lightning made Eric start, and off he ran towards a light which now beamed from the tower. But he thought to himself, "I am much worse than that poor Wolf, for I knew what was right, and did not do it. I heard the voice, but did not attend to it. Oh, my father, why did I not obey you!"



CHAPTER II.

THE ROBBER'S TOWER.

SOMETIMES he lost sight of the light, and again he caught it, till it became brighter and brighter, and very soon he came to a high rock, on the top of which was perched a tall, dark tower. After groping about, he found a narrow path that led up to the tower, from one of the windows of which the light was brightly shining. He ascended

a flight of steep steps till he reached a massive door covered with iron. He knocked as loud as he could, when a large dog began barking furiously inside, and springing up to the door, as if it would tear it down. Then a gruff voice called out of a window over the door, "Who is there? Who disturbs me in this way?" The little boy replied, "Please, sir, I am Eric, son of King Magnus, and I have lost my way in this wood." "The son of the king, are you?" asked the voice. "That is a grand joke! Let me have a sight of you." Then the window was shut, and he heard footsteps coming tramp, tramp, down the stairs, and the voice said to the dog, "Lie down, hound, and don't be greedy! You would not eat a young prince, would you? Lie down, Tuscar!" The door was then opened by a fierce-looking man, with a long beard. The man bid him enter, and examined him about himself and his journey. Eric answered truly every question. Then the man rang a bell for an old woman who lived in the house, and bid her take the boy with her, and give him his

supper. The old woman looked very ugly and very cross, and led him up, up, a great number of dark, gloomy stairs, until she reached a small room, with a bed and table in it, where she bade Eric wait till she brought him supper. The big hound followed them, and stayed in the room while the woman went away. Eric was at first afraid of the dog, he was so large and wild-looking, but he came and laid his head on his knee, and he scratched his ears, and patted him, and was very kind to him. The supper came, and the boy managed to keep a few bits of meat out of his own supper for the dog, and when the old woman went out of the room, he fed the hound, who seemed very hungry, and said to him, "Tuscar, old fellow, I like you very much. Take another bit, good dog, and be happy!" The dog wagged his tail, and looked up kindly with his large eyes, for he was thankful for his supper, and ate much more than Eric. "Now," said the old woman gruffly, when she took away the remains of the supper, "you have ate what would do me for a week. You won't starve,

Master Prince. Go to bed." The old woman left him, but suddenly returning, she discovered Eric on his knees. As he rose, she scoffed and jeered him, and asked, "Do you always say your prayers?" "Yes, always," replied the boy. "Who taught you?" "My mother, who is dead." The old woman heaved a deep sigh, but the boy did not know why. Perhaps she used to pray when she was a little girl herself, and had given up speaking to God, or even thinking of Him, and so had become wicked; or perhaps she thought of some child of her own whom she had never taught to pray. She soon went away without speaking a word more, and Eric was left in darkness. He looked out through the narrow window of his room, but could see nothing but black clouds rushing over the sky. Far down he heard a stream roaring, and the wind, which now blew a gale, came booming over the tree-tops, and howling round the tower. Every now and then a flash lighted up the forest, and the thunder crashed in the sky. It was a fearful night!

Some time after, he heard footsteps at his door, and immediately the man with the beard entered, and sat down. "Do you know," he asked, "where your father is?" "No," said Eric; "as I told you, I lost my way in the forest, and have been wandering all day, and cannot find him; but perhaps you will send some one to-morrow with me to shew me the way to his castle, and I am sure my kind, good father will give you a rich reward." "You are very, very far from your father's house," said the man, "and I fear you will never see him again; but come with me, and I shall shew you some beautiful things that will please you." So the man took Eric by the hand, and, carrying a lamp, he led him into a room that seemed full of gold and silver, with beautiful dresses, sparkling with diamonds, and every kind of splendour, and he said, "Stay with me, my boy, and I will give you all this, for I am a king too, and will make you my heir." "Oh, no, no," said Eric; "I will never forsake my own father." The man then said, "If you stay with me, you need



never go to school all day, but may amuse yourself from morning till night, and have a beautiful pony to ride, and a gun to shoot deer with, and also fishing-rods, and a servant to attend you, and any kind of meat and drink you like best. Do stay with me!" "You are very kind," said Eric, "but I cannot be happy without my father." "Come then with me, my fine fellow, and I shall shew you something different," said the man, seizing Eric firmly by the arm, and looking very angry. After walking along a passage, from the end of which confused noises came, a door was opened, and in a large hall, round a great oak table, sat a company of fierce-looking men, drinking from large flagons which stood before them. Their faces were red, and their eyes gleamed like fire. Ralph placed Eric on the table. One of the robbers was singing this song:—

"We're the famous robber band—
Hurrah!
The lords of all the land—
Hurrah!

A fig for law or duty,
If we only get our booty ;
With a fa, la, la, la, la !

“ ‘ Every man to mind himself,’
Hurrah !
Is the rule of Captain Ralph !
Hurrah !
Then let the greatest thief
And robber be our chief—
With a fa, la, la, la, la !”

No wonder poor Eric trembled as he heard that lawless band thus glorying in their shame, and like demons singing their horrid song in praise of all that was most dreadful and most wicked. He had read stories of robbers, which sometimes made him think that they were fine, brave fellows ; but now that he was among them, he saw how depraved, cruel, and frightful they were. Their savage, coarse looks terrified him ; but he was held by Ralph on the table. When the song was ended, one of them asked, “ Whom have we got here ?” “ Who do you think ?” replied Ralph. “ What would you say, my men, to a young prince,—no less than the son of our great enemy, King Magnus ?” “ A young

prince! The son of Magnus! What a prize!" they exclaimed. "What shall we do with him?" "First of all, let us have his gold belt," said Ralph, unbuckling Eric's belt. "Ha! what a pretty thing it is!" "My father gave it to me, and I don't wish to part with it. The swineherd Wolf tried to take it from me, but I fought him, and kept it," said Eric. "Wolf is a brave young robber," replied Ralph, "and he shall have it for his trouble. In the meantime, my lad, it is mine. But what, my men, shall we do with the prince?" "Kill him," said one. "Starve him to death," said another. "Put his eyes out, and send him back to his father," said a third. Eric prayed to God, but said nothing. "I propose," said Ralph, "to make him a captain if he will stay with us." "Never!" said Eric; "I would rather die!" "Let him die, then," said a fierce robber; "for his father hung my brother for killing one of his nobles." "I tell you what we will do with the lion's whelp," said Ralph; "let us keep him in prison, and send a message to his father, that we have him snug in a den

among the mountains, and that, unless he sends us an immense ransom, we shall kill him." "That will do famously," said the robbers; "so off with him!" Then Ralph led the boy down stairs,—down, down, until he thought they never would stop, and at last they came to an iron door, with great bars on it, and a large lock, and he turned to Eric, and said, "I know your father, and I hate him! for he sends his soldiers after me, and tries to save travellers from me, and now I have got his son. I will keep you here till you die, or till he pays!" Then he opened the dungeon door, and thrust Eric in. When it closed, it echoed like thunder through the passages. Eric cast himself down on the dungeon floor.

All appeared to be a strange dream. Oh, how he repented having disobeyed his father! and how he seemed to be as bad as the dreadful robbers in having done what he pleased, and followed his own will, instead of doing what was right! About an hour after, he heard some rustling, as if high up on the wall, and a voice whispered

“Eric!” “Who is there?” asked Eric, and his little heart trembled. “Silence! quiet! it is Wolf. Here is a small window in your prison, and I have opened it outside; climb up, get out, and run for your life.” Eric heard no more, but scrambled in the dark up the rough stones in the wall until he reached the window, where he looked out, and saw the stars and the woods. He soon forced his way through, and dropped down on the opposite side. Some one caught him in his arms. It was Wolf. “Here is your gold band, Eric. I got it from Ralph; for He who was speaking in the thunder has been saying things in my heart. You were kind to poor Wolf. Now escape! Fly! I shall close the window again. Ralph will never know how you got out, and he will not open the prison-door till after breakfast. So you have a long time. Run as long as you can along that road till you reach a hill, then cross it, until you reach a stream, which you must follow downwards. The worst of the storm is over, and the night will soon be calm. Off!” “Bless you, Wolf!” said

Eric ; "I shall never forget you." Poor Eric! how he ran, and ran, beneath the stars! He felt no fatigue for a time. He thought he heard the robbers after him ; every time the wind blew loud, he imagined it was their wild cry. On he ran till he reached the hill, and crossed it, and came to a green spot beneath a rock, on the banks of the stream, when he could run no more, but fell down, and whether he fainted or fell asleep he could not tell.

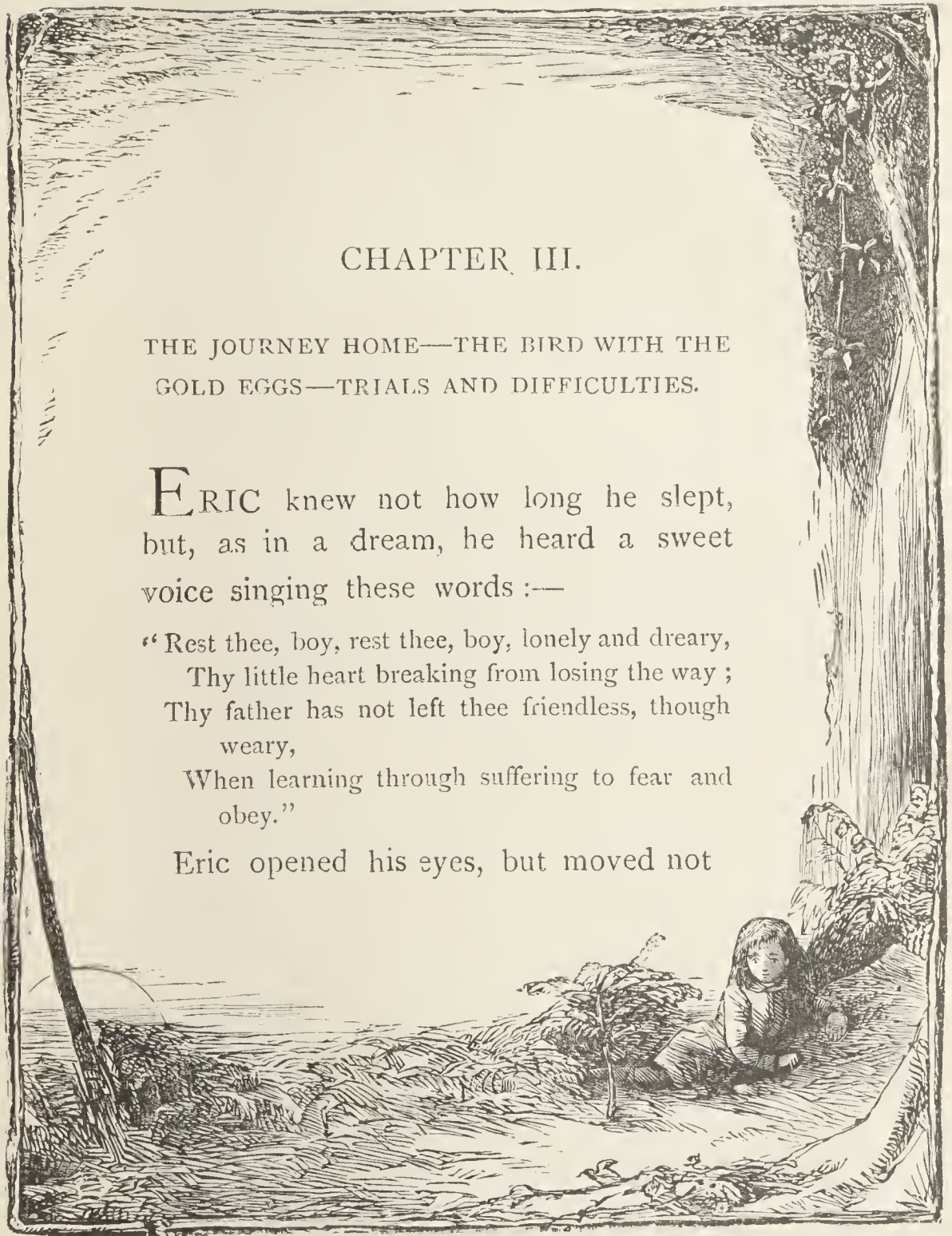
CHAPTER III.

THE JOURNEY HOME—THE BIRD WITH THE
GOLD EGGS—TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES.

ERIC knew not how long he slept, but, as in a dream, he heard a sweet voice singing these words :—

“Rest thee, boy, rest thee, boy, lonely and dreary,
Thy little heart breaking from losing the way ;
Thy father has not left thee friendless, though
weary,
When learning through suffering to fear and
obey.”

Eric opened his eyes, but moved not



a limb, as if under some strange fascination. It was early morning. High over head a lark was "singing like an angel in the clouds." The mysterious voice went on in the same beautiful and soothing strain—

"Oh, sweet is the lark as she sings o'er her nest,
And warbles unseen in the clear morning light;
But sweeter by far is the song in the breast
When in life's early morning we do what is right!"

Eric could neither move nor speak; but in his heart he confessed with sorrow that he had done what was wrong. And again the voice sang—

"Now, darling, awaken, thou art not forsaken!
The old night is past and a new day begun;
Let thy journey with love to thy father be taken,
And at evening thy father will welcome thee home."

"I will arise and go to my father!" said Eric, springing to his feet. He saw beside him a beautiful lady, who looked like a picture he once saw of his mother, or like one of those angels from heaven about whom he had often read. And the lady said, "Fear not! I know you,

Eric, and how it came to pass that you are here. Your father sent you for a wise and good purpose through the forest, and gave you hold of a gold thread to guide you, and told you never to let it go. It was your duty to him to have held it fast ; but instead of doing your duty, trusting and obeying your father, and keeping hold of the thread, you let it go to chase butterflies, and gather wild-berries, and to amuse yourself. This you did more than once. You neglected your father's counsels and warnings, and because of your self-confidence and self-pleasing, you lost your thread, and then you lost your way. What dangers and troubles have you thus got into through disobedience to your father's commands, and want of trust in his love and wisdom ! For had you only followed your father's directions, the gold thread would have brought you to his beautiful castle, where there is to be a happy meeting of your friends, with all your brothers and sisters." Poor little Eric began to weep ! " Listen to me, child," said the lady, kindly, " for you cannot have peace but by doing what is

right. Know, then, that all your brothers and sisters made this very journey by help of the gold thread, and they are at home with great joy." "Oh, save me! save me!" cried Eric, and caught the lady's hand. "Yes, I will save you," said she, "if you will learn obedience. I know and love you, dear boy. I know and love your father, and have been sent by him to deliver you. I heard what you said, and know all you did, last night, and I was very glad that you proved, in trial, your love to your father, your love of truth, and your love of others, and this makes me hope all good of you for the future. Come now with me!" And so the beautiful woman took him by the hand. The storm had passed away, and the sun was shining on the green leaves of the trees, and every drop of dew sparkled like a diamond. The birds were all warbling their morning hymns, and feeding their young ones in their nests. The streams were dancing down the rocks and through the glens. "The mountains broke forth into singing, and all the trees clapped their



hands with joy." Everything thus seemed beautiful and happy to Eric, for he himself was happy at the thought of doing what was right, and of going home. The lady led him to a sunny glade in the wood, covered with wild flowers, from which the bees were busy gathering their honey, and she said, "Now, child, are you willing to do your father's will?" "Oh, yes!" "Will you do it, whatever dangers may await you?" "Yes!" "Well, then, I must tell you that your father has given me the gold thread which you lost; and he bids me again tell you, with his warm love, that if you keep hold of it, and follow it wherever it leads, you are sure to come to him at sunset; but if you let it go, you may wander on in this dark forest till you die, or are again taken prisoner by robbers. Know, also, that there is no other possible way of saving you, but by your following the gold thread." "I am resolved to do my duty, come what may," said Eric. "May you be helped to do it!" said the lady. She then gave him a cake, to support him in his journey. "And now, child," she

added, "one advice more I will give you, and it was given you by your father, though you forgot it ; it is this—if ever you feel the thread slipping from your hands, or are yourself tempted to let it go, pray immediately, and you will get wisdom and strength to find it, to lay hold of it, and to follow it. Before we part, kneel down and ask assistance to be good and obedient, brave and patient, until you meet your father." The little boy knelt down and repeated the Lord's Prayer ; and as he said, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven," he felt calm and happy as he used to do when he knelt at his mother's knee, and he thought her hand was waving over him, as if to bless him. When he lifted up his head there was no one there but himself ; but he saw an old gray cross, and a GOLD THREAD was tied to it, and passed away, away, shining through the woods.

With a firm hold of his gold thread, the boy began his journey home. He passed along pathways on which the brown leaves of last year's growth were thickly strewn, and from among

which flowers of every colour were springing. He crossed little brooks that ran like silver threads, and tinkled like silver bells. He passed under trees with great trunks, and huge branches that swept down to the ground, and waved far up in the blue sky. The birds hopped about him, and looked down upon him from among the green leaves, and they sang him songs, and some of them seemed to speak to him. He thought one large bird like a crow cried, "Good boy! good boy!" and another whistled, "Cheer up! cheer up!" and so he went merrily on, and very often he gave the robins and blackbirds that came near him bits of his cake. After awhile, he came to a green spot in the middle of the wood, without trees, and a footpath went direct across it, to the place where the gold thread was leading him, and there he saw a sight that made him wonder and pause. It was a bird about the size of a pigeon, with feathers like gold and a crown like silver, and it was slowly walking near him, and he saw gold eggs glittering in a nest among the grass a few yards

off. Now, he thought, it would be such a nice thing to bring home a nest with gold eggs! The bird did not seem afraid of him, but stopped and looked at him with a calm blue eye, as if she said, "Surely you would not rob me?" He could not, however, reach the nest with his hand, and though he pulled and pulled the thread, it would not yield one inch, but seemed as stiff as a wire. "I see the thread quite plain," said the boy to himself, "and the very place where it enters the dark wood on the other side. I will just leap to the nest, and in a moment I shall have the eggs in my pocket, and then spring back and catch the thread again. I cannot lose it here, with the sun shining; and, besides, I see it a long way before me." So he took one step to seize the eggs; but he was in such haste that he fell and crushed the nest, breaking the eggs to pieces, and the little bird screamed and flew away, and then suddenly the birds in the trees began to fly about, and a large owl swept out of a dark glade, and cried, "Whoo—whoo—whoo-oo-oo;" and a cloud came over the sun!

Eric's heart beat quick, and he made a grasp at his gold thread, but it was not there! Another, and another grasp, but it was not there! and soon he saw it waving far above his head, like a gossamer thread in the breeze. You would have pitied him, while you could not have helped being angry with him for having been so silly and disobedient when thus tried, had you only seen his pale face, as he looked above him for his thread, and about him for the road, but could see neither! And he became so confused with his fall, that he did not know which side of the open glade he had entered, nor to which point he was travelling. But at last he thought he heard a bird chirping, "Seek—seek—seek!" and another repeating, "Try again—try again—try—try!" and then he remembered what the lady had said to him, and he fell on his knees and told all his grief, and cried, "Oh, give me back my thread! and help me never, never, to let it go again!" As he lifted up his eyes, he saw the thread come slowly, slowly down; and when it came near, he sprang to it and caught

it, and he did not know whether to laugh, or cry, or sing, he was so thankful and happy! "Ah!" said he, "I hope I shall never forget this fall!" That part of the Lord's Prayer came into his mind which says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "Who would have thought," said he to himself, "that I was in any danger in such a beautiful, green, sunny place as this, and so very early, too, in my journey! Oh! shame upon me!" As he proceeded with much more thought and caution, a large crow up a tree was hoarsely croaking, and seemed to say, "Beware, beware!" "Thank you, Mr Crow," said the boy, "I shall;" and he threw him a bit of bread for his good advice. But now the thread led him through the strangest places. One was a very dark, deep ravine, with a stream that roared and rushed far down, and overhead the rocks seemed to meet, and thick bushes concealed the light, and nothing could Eric see but the gold thread, that looked like a thread of fire, though even that grew dim sometimes, until he

could only feel it in his hand. And whither he was going he knew not. At one time he seemed to be on the edge of a precipice, until it seemed as if the next step *must* lead him over, and plunge him down; but when he came to the very edge, the thread led him quite safely along it. At another, a rock which looked like a wall rose before him, and he said to himself, "Well, I must be stopped here! I shall never be able to climb up!" But just as he touched it, he found steps cut in it, and up, up, the thread guided him to the top! Then it would bring him down, down, until he once stood beside a raging stream, and the water foamed and dashed. "Now," he thought, "I must be drowned; but come what may, I will not let my thread go." And so it was, that when he came so near the stream as to feel the spray upon his cheek, and was sure that he must leap in if he followed his thread, what did he see but a little bridge that passed from bank to bank, and by which he crossed in perfect safety; until at last he began to lose fear,

and to believe more and more that he would always be in the right road, so long as he did not trust mere appearances, but kept hold of his thread!



CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT LION—THE LITTLE SQUIRREL—
AN OLD FRIEND—THE BLOODHOUND—
THE LAST TEMPTATION.

BUT Eric had now to endure a great trial of his faith in the thread. As he journeyed on, it led him up a winding path towards the summit of a hill. The large trees of the forest were soon left behind, and small stunted bushes grew among masses of gray rocks. The path was like the bed of a dry brook, and was often very steep. There were no birds except little stone-chats, that hopped and chirped among the large round

stones. Far below, he could see the tops of the trees, and here and there a stream glittering under the sunbeams. Nothing disturbed the silence but the hoarse croak of the raven, or the wild cry of a kite or eagle, that, like a speck, wheeled far up in the sky. But suddenly, Eric heard a roar like thunder coming from the direction towards which the thread was leading him. He stopped for a moment, but the thread was firm in his hand, and led right up the hill. On he went, and no wonder he started, when, as he turned the corner of a rock, he heard another roar, and saw the head of a huge lion looking out of what seemed to be a cave, a few yards back from the edge of a dizzy precipice! He saw, too, that the path he must follow was between the lion's den and the precipice. What now was to be done? Should he give up his thread and fly? No! A voice in his heart encouraged him to be brave and not fear, and he knew from his experience that he had always been led in safety and peace when he followed the road, holding fast to his thread. He was

certain that his father never would deceive him, or bid him do anything but what was right; and he was sure, too, that the lady, from her love to him, and her teaching him to trust God and to pray, would not have bid him do anything that was wrong. And then an old verse his father taught him came into his mind—

“ In the darkest night, my child,
Canst thou see the Right, my child ?
Forward then ! God is near !
The Right will be light to thee,
Armour and might to thee ;
Forward ! and never fear ! ”

So Eric resolved to go on in faith. There was just one thing he saw which cheered him, and that was a white hare, sitting with her ears cocked, quite close to the lion's den, and he wondered how she had no fear, but he could not explain it at the time. On he walked, but he could hardly breathe, as the thread led still nearer and nearer to the den. These big eyes were glaring on him, and seemed to draw him closer and closer ! There the lion stood, on

one side of the path, while the great precipice descended on the other. One step more, and he was between these two dangers. He moved on until he was so near that he seemed to feel the lion's breath, and then the brute sprang out on him, and tried to strike him with his huge paw that would have crushed him to the dust! Eric shut his eyes, and gave himself up for lost. But the lion suddenly fell back, for he was held fast by a great iron chain, and so Eric passed in safety!

Oh, how thankful he was! and how gladly he ran down hill, the lion in his den roaring behind him! Down he ran until all was quiet again. As he pursued his journey in the beautiful green woods, something told him his greatest trial was past. He felt very peaceful and strong. And now, as he reached some noble old beech-trees, the thread fell on the grass, and he took this as a sign that he should lie down too, and so he did, grateful for the rest. He ate some of his cake, and drank from a clear spring beside him, and feasted on wild strawberries which grew in

abundance all round him. He then stretched himself on his back among soft moss, and looked up through the branches of the gigantic tree, and saw with delight the sunlight speckling the emerald green leaves and brown bark with touches of silver, and, far up, the deep blue sky with white clouds reposing on it, like snowy islands on a blue ocean; and he watched the squirrels, with their bushy tails, as they ran up the tree, and jumped from branch to branch, and sported among the leaves, until he fell into a sort of pleasant day-dream, and felt so happy, he hardly knew why. As he lay here, he thought he heard, in his half-waking dream, a little squirrel sing a song. Was it not his own heart, now so glad because doing what was right, which was singing? This was the song which he thought he heard:—

“I’m a merry, merry squirrel,
All day I leap and whirl,
Through my home in the old beech-tree;
If you chase me, I will run
In the shade and in the sun,
But you never, never can catch me!

For round a bough I'll creep,
 Playing hide-and-peek so sly,
 Or through the leaves bo-peep,
 With my little shining eye.
 Ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha.

“Up and down I run and frisk,
 With my bushy tail to whisk
 All who mope in the old beech-trees ;
 How droll to see the owl,
 As I make him wink and scowl,
 When his sleepy, sleepy head I tease !
 And I waken up the bat,
 Who flies off with a scream,
 For he thinks that I'm the cat
 Pouncing on him in his dream.
 Ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha.

“Through all the summer long
 I never want a song,
 From my birds in the old beech-trees
 I have singers all the night,
 And, with the morning bright,
 Come my busy humming fat brown bees ;
 When I've nothing else to do,
 With the nursing birds I sit,
 And we laugh at the cuckoo
 A-cuckooing to her tit !
 Ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha

When winter comes with snow
 And its cruel tempests blow

All the leaves from my old beech-trees ;
Then beside the wren and mouse
I furnish up a house,
Where like a prince I live at my ease !
What care I for hail or sleet,
With my hairy cap and coat ;
And my tail across my feet,
Or wrapp'd about my throat !
Ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha ! ha, ha, ha !”

As Eric opened his eyes, and looked up, he saw a little squirrel with its tail curling up its back, sitting on a branch looking down upon him ; and then it playfully ran away with the tail down and waving after it. “Farewell, happy little fellow !” said Eric ; “I must do my work now, and play like you afterwards ;” for at that moment the thread again became tight, and Eric, refreshed with his rest, and hearty for his journey, stepped out bravely. He saw, at some distance, and beyond an open glade in the forest, a rapid river towards which he was descending. When near the river, he perceived something struggling in the water, and then heard a loud cry or scream for help, as if from one drowning. He was almost tempted to run off to his assist-

ance without his thread, but he felt thankful that the thread itself led in the very direction from whence he heard the cries coming. So off he ran as fast as he could, and as he came to the brink of a deep, dark pool in the river, he saw the head of a boy rising above the water, as the poor little fellow tried to keep himself afloat. Now he sank—again he rose—until he suddenly disappeared. Eric laid hold of his thread with a firm hand, and leaped in over head and ears, and then rose to the surface, and with his other hand swam to where the boy had sank. He soon caught him, and brought him with great difficulty to the surface, which he never could have done unless the thread had supported them both above the water.

“Eric!” cried the gasping boy, opening his eyes, almost covered by his long, wet hair. “Wolf!” cried Eric, “is it you?” It was indeed poor Wolf, who lay panting on the dry land, with his rough garments dripping with water, and himself hardly able to move. “Oh, tell me,

Wolf, what brought you here! I am so glad to have helped you!" After a little time, when Wolf could speak, he told him in his own way, bit by bit, how Ralph had suspected him; and how the old woman had heard him speaking as she was looking out of an upper window; and how when Ralph asked the gold belt he could not give it; and how he was obliged himself to fly; and how he had been running for his life for hours. "Now let us fly," said Wolf; "I am quite strong again. I fear that they are in pursuit of us."

They both went on at a quick pace, Eric having shewn Wolf the wonderful thread, and explained to him how he must never part with it, come what may, and having also given him a bit of his cake to comfort him. "O rub-a-dub, dub!" said Wolf, squeezing the water out of his hair, as he trotted along; "I am glad to be away. Ralph would have killed me like a pig. The voice told me to run after you." So on they went together, happy again to meet. Suddenly Wolf stopped, and listening with anxious

face, he said, "Hark! did you hear anything?" "No," said Eric, "what was it?" "Hush!—listen!—there again—I hear it!" "I think I do hear something far off like a dog's bark," replied Eric. "Hark!" So they both stopped and listened, and far away they heard a deep "Bow-wow-wow-wow-o-o-o-o-o" echoing through the forest. "Let us run as fast as we can," said the boy, in evident fear; "hear him!—hear him!" "Bow-wow-wow-o-o-o-o-o," and the sound came nearer and nearer. "What is it? why are you so afraid?" inquired Eric. "Oh! that is Ralph's bloodhound, Tuscar," cried Wolf, "and he is following us. He won't perhaps touch me, but you he may." So Eric ran as fast as he could, but never let go the gold thread, which this time led towards a steep hill, which they were obliged to scramble up. "Run, Eric!—quick—hide—up a tree—anywhere!" "I cannot, I dare not," said Eric; "whatever happens, I must hold fast my thread." But they heard the "Bow-wow-o-o-o" coming nearer and nearer, and as they looked back they

saw the large hound rush out of the wood, and as he came to the water, catching sight of the boys on the opposite hill, he leaped in, and in a few minutes would be near them. And now he came bellowing like a fierce bull up the hill, his tongue hanging out, and his nose tracking along the ground, as he followed their footsteps. "I shall run and meet him," said Wolf, "and stop him if I can;" and down ran the swineherd, calling, "Tuscar! Tuscar! good dog, Tuscar!" Tuscar knew Wolf, and passed him, but ran up to Eric. As he reached Eric, who stood calm and firm, the bloodhound stopped, panting, smelling his clothes all round, but, strange to say, wagging his huge tail! He then ran back the way he had come, as if he had made a mistake, and all his race was for nothing! How was this? Ah, poor Tuscar remembered the supper Eric had given him, and was grateful for his kindness!

Wolf was astonished at Eric's escape, until he heard how he and Tuscar had become acquainted; and then Wolf heard the voice in his heart

say that there was nothing better than kindness and love shewn to man or beast. They both after this pursued their journey with light and hopeful hearts, for they had got out of what was called the wild robber country, and Eric knew that he was drawing near home. The thread was stronger than ever, and every hour it helped more and more to support him. Wolf trotted along with his short stick, and sometimes snorting and blowing with the fatigue like one of his own pigs. They talked as best they could about all they had seen. "Did you see big Thorold the lion?" asked Wolf. "I did," said Eric; "he is very awful, but he was chained." "Lucky for you!" said Wolf, "for Ralph hunts with him and kills travellers. He will obey none but Ralph. I heard him roaring. He is hungry. He once ate one of my pigs, and would have ate me if he had not first caught the poor black porker. I escaped up a tree." And thus they chatted, as they journeyed on through woods, and across green plains, and over low hills, until Wolf complained of hunger. Eric at once gave

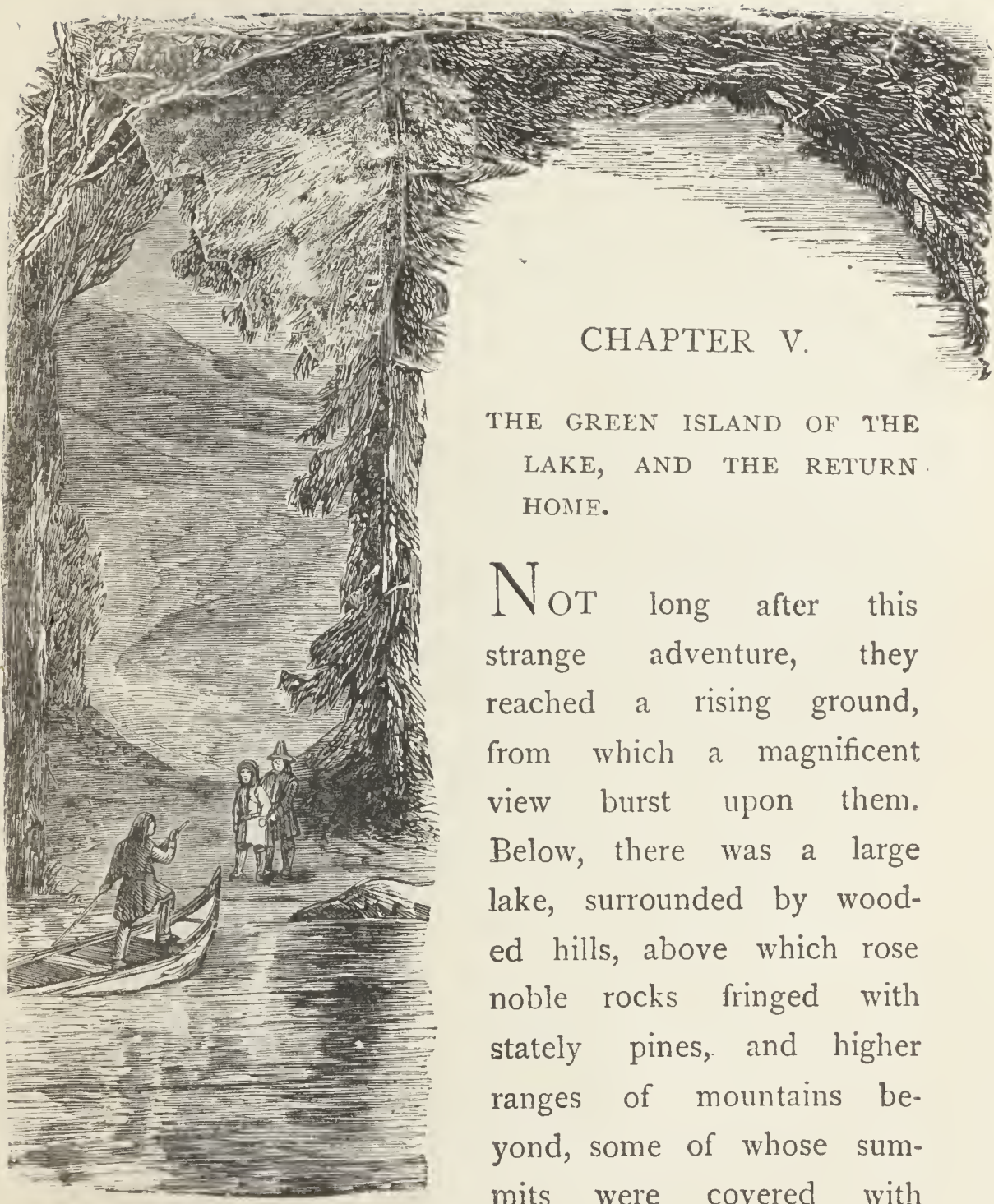


him what remained of his large cake ; but it did not suffice to appease the hunger of the herd, who was, however, very thankful for what he got. To their delight they now saw a beautiful cottage not far from their path, and, as they approached it, an old woman, with a pretty girl who seemed to be her daughter, came out to meet them. "Good day, young gentlemen!" said the old woman with a kind smile and a courtesy ; "you seem to be on your travels, and look wearied? Pray come into my cottage, and I shall refresh you." "What fortunate fellows we are!" said Wolf. "We are much obliged to you for your hospitality," replied Eric. But, alas! the thread drew him in an opposite direction ; so turning to Wolf, he said, "I cannot go in." "Come, my handsome young gentleman," said the young woman, "and we shall make you so happy. You shall have such a dinner as will delight you, I am sure ; and you may remain as long as you please, and I will dance and sing to you ; nor need you pay anything." And she came forward smiling and dancing, offering her arm

to Eric. "Surely you won't be so rude as refuse me! you are so beautiful, and have such lovely hair and eyes, and I never saw such a belt as you wear: do come!" "Come, my son," said the old woman to Wolf, as she put her hand round his neck. "With all my heart!" replied Wolf; "for, to tell the truth, I am wearied and hungry; one does not get such offers as yours every day." "I cannot go," again said Eric. *They* could not see the thread, for to some it was invisible; but *he* saw it, and felt it like a wire passing away from the cottage. "Who are you, kind friends?" inquired Eric. "Friends of the king and of his family. Honest subjects, good people," said the old woman. "Do you know Prince Eric?" asked Wolf. "Right well!" replied the young woman. "He is a great friend of mine; a fine, tall, comely youth. He calls me his own little sweetheart." "It is false!" said Eric; "you do not know him. You should not lie." But he did not tell her who he was, neither did Wolf, for Eric had made a sign to him to be silent. "I won't enter your dwelling,"

said Eric, "for my duty calls me away." They both gave a loud laugh, and said, "Hear him! Only hear a fine young fellow talking about duty! Pleasure, ease, and liberty are for the young. We only want to make you happy: come!" "I shall go with you," said Wolf; "do come, Eric." "Wolf, speak to me," whispered Eric to the swineherd. "You know *I* cannot go, for my duty tells me to follow the thread. But now I see that this is the house of the wicked, for you heard how they lied; they neither know the king nor his children; and they laugh too at duty. Be advised, Wolf, and follow me." Wolf hesitated, and looked displeased. "Only for an hour, Eric!" "Not a minute, Wolf. If you trust them more than me, go; but I am sure you and I shall never meet again." "Then I will trust you, Eric," said Wolf; "the voice in my heart tells me to do so." And so they both passed on. But the old woman and the girl began to abuse them, and call them all manner of evil names, and to laugh at them as silly fellows. The girl threw

stones at them, which made Wolf turn round and flourish his stick over his head. At last they entered the cottage, the old woman shaking her fist, and calling out from the door, "I'll soon send my friend Ralph after you!" "Oh, ho! is that the way the wind blows!" exclaimed Wolf, with a whistle; and, grasping Eric's arm, said, "You were right, prince! I never suspected them. I see now they are bad." "I saw that before," replied Eric, "and knew that no good would come to us from making their acquaintance." "Were they not cunning?" "Yes; but, probably, with all their smiles, flattery, and fair promises, they would have proved more cruel in the end than either Ralph or old Thorold." "What would they have done to us? Why did they meet us? Who are they, think you?" "I don't know, Wolf; it was enough for me that they lied, and did not wish us to do what was right. The gold thread given me by my father never could have led me into the society and house of the wicked. I am glad we held it fast."



CHAPTER V.

THE GREEN ISLAND OF THE
LAKE, AND THE RETURN
HOME.

NOT long after this strange adventure, they reached a rising ground, from which a magnificent view burst upon them. Below, there was a large lake, surrounded by wooded hills, above which rose noble rocks fringed with stately pines, and higher ranges of mountains beyond, some of whose summits were covered with

snow that glittered like purest alabaster in the azure blue of the sky. Eric gave a cry of joy; for he saw the house of one of his father's foresters, which he had once visited with his father. "Wolf! Wolf!" he exclaimed, "look yonder, that is the house of Darkeye, the forester. We are safe!" and the thread was leading straight down in the very direction which they wished. Darkeye's house was built on a small green island in the lake. The island was like a little fort, for on every side the rocks descended like a wall. It could only be approached by a boat, which Darkeye kept on the island, and then by a narrow stair cut out of the rock at the landing-place. No robbers could thus get near it, and Darkeye was there to give shelter to travellers, and to help any of the poor who had to pass that way. The thread led down to the shore. They forgot their fatigue, and ran down till they reached the ferry. "Boat, ahoy!" shouted Eric. By and by two boys were seen running out of the cottage, and after looking cautiously at those who were call-



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ing for the boat, they rowed off, and soon were at the shore, where stood Eric with his gold belt, and Wolf in his rough skins. "Olaf! Torquil! don't you remember me?" asked Eric, looking at his old friends. The boys looked astonished as they recognised the young prince, and received him joyfully into their boat, he holding by the thread, which seemed to cross the ferry towards the cottage. How many questions were mutually put and answered in a few minutes! They told him their father was at home; and how he had lately seen the king; and how the king was anxiously looking for Eric's return; and how glad all on the island would be to see him; and the younger boy, Torquil, told him how they had now a tame otter, that fished in the lake, and a fine golden eagle which they had got young in her nest, that also lived on the island with them; and how their mother had got another baby since he had been there, and how happy they all were, and so on, until they arrived at the island, and there was old Darkeye himself waiting to receive them; and when he

saw who was in the boat, he ran down the stone steps and grasped the young prince's hand, and drew him to his heart. "Welcome! welcome!" said he; "I knew you had been in the forest, but your father would not tell me anything more about you. He only said that he longed for your coming home. But who is this?" asked Darkeye, pointing to Wolf. "A friend of mine," said Eric, with a smile. "My name is Wolf," grunted the swineherd. "I think I have seen him before. But no! What? Yes!" said Darkeye, examining him; then added, as if he had discovered some old acquaintance, "Surely I *have* seen him. Tell me, my fine fellow, did you"—— It was evident Darkeye had seen Wolf killing his game, or in some affray with the robbers. Wolf looked sternly at Darkeye, then at Eric, but said nothing. "Oh, Darkeye, do not trouble poor Wolf," said Eric, "but let him go into the cottage; and come you with me, as I wish to tell you all that has happened to me during these few days." So, while the boys took Wolf to the cottage, and food was being

prepared, Eric told Darkeye all his adventures; and you would have been sure that the forester was hearing something which surprised and interested him wonderfully, had you seen his face, and how he sometimes laughed, or knit his brows and looked angry, or sad and solemn, or sprung to his feet from the rock on which he was sitting beside Eric. When Eric came to speak about the old woman and her daughter, "Ah!" said Darkeye, "there are not worse people in that wicked country! They say that the old woman is a witch of some kind. But whether she poisons travellers or drowns them, I know not. No doubt she is in league with Ralph the robber, and would have robbed you or kept you fast in some way or other till you were handed over to him. You were right, my prince, in all you did. The only way of being delivered from temptation is to be brave, and do what is right, come what may." Then, grasping Eric by the hand, he led him back to the cottage. There Darkeye's wife received him like a mother, and all the children gathered round him in

surprise and admiration, he looked so brave and lovely.

One of the walls of the cottage was reared on the edge of the rock, so that it seemed a continuation of it, and to rise up from the deep waters of the lake. The boys were thus able often to fish with a long line out of the window. A winding-stair led to a look-out on the roof, from which the whole island, called "The Green Island of the Lake," could be seen. It was about a mile or more in circumference, and was dotted all over with the cottages of the other foresters and king's huntsmen, each surrounded with clumps of trees, through which the curling smoke from the chimneys might be seen ascending. There were everywhere beautifully-kept gardens, with fruits, and flowers, and bee-hives; and fields, too, with their crops. On the green knolls and in the little valleys might be seen cows and sheep; while flocks of goats browsed among ivy-covered rocks. In the middle of the island was a little shallow lake, beside which the otter had his house among the rocks; and there

the eagle also lived. All the children in the island were the best of friends, and they played together, and sailed their boats on the little lake, and every day met in the house of one of the foresters to learn their lessons ; and on Sunday, as they were very far away from any church, old Darkeye used to read the Good Book to them, and worship with them, and did all he could to make them love God and one another. There was also in the island a house, where, by the king's orders, all poor travellers could find refuge and refreshment. And it was a great pleasure to the boys and girls to visit them ; and if they were sick and confined to bed, to attend to their wants. If the stranger had any children, the young islanders always shared their sports with them. And nothing pleased these stranger children more than to get leave to sail a boat, or to have the loan of a fishing-rod, or to hear the boys call Oscar, for that was the name of the otter, out of his den, and to play with Tor the eagle ; or to see them feed Oscar with some of the fish they had caught, and Tor with a bit of

meat. The dogs were so friendly, too, that they never touched Oscar, but would swim about in the same pool with him. And so all were happy in the Green Island; because Darkeye had taught them what a wicked thing selfishness was, and that the only way to be happy was by thinking about others as well as themselves, and by becoming like Him, the Elder Brother of us all, who "pleased not Himself." He also used to say: "Now, when you work, work like men, and when you play, play like boys: be hearty at both." And so, while there was no idleness, there was abundance of recreation. Another evil was never permitted on the island, and that was, disobedience to parents, or want of respect to the old. But, indeed, punishment for these offences was seldom needed. The young learned to *like* to do what was right, and were too brave and manly to give pain and trouble to others, by forcing them to find fault or to punish. I should have mentioned, also, that they had a little band of musicians. One beat the drum, a few played the fife, and others

some simple instrument ; while almost all could sing tolerably well in parts. Thus, many a traveller would pause and listen with delight, as he heard, on a summer's evening, the chorus sung from many voices, or the music from the band coming from the island. "Young people," Dark-eye used to say, "have much wealth and happiness given them, for themselves and others, if they only used their gifts."

But I am forgetting Eric and Wolf. They were both, you may be sure, ready for their dinner, and there was laid for them on a table, cream, cakes, and fresh trout, and such other good things as the kind woman could get ready.

But now the thread began to move, as if it wished Eric to move also. Before rising to depart, he told Wolf how Darkeye, for his sake, would be so glad to take care of him, until he got his father's permission to bring him into the castle ; that he would learn to be a huntsman, and be taught what was good, and to know about the Voice that spoke in his heart ; and that all the boys in the island would make him

their friend if he did what was right. "Ralph will come here!" said Wolf, hanging his head. "I wish the rascal did," said Darkeye, "for he would never go back. But he cannot enter my fort, and knows me and my huntsmen too well ever to try it. I have had more than one brush with the villain, and we hope soon to drive him and his brood from their bloody nest. Wolf, you are welcome and safe, for Eric's sake!" Then turning to Eric, he said, "I shall teach him, and make a man of him, my young prince, depend upon it. And now, before we part, I have to ask a favour," continued Darkeye. "You know our custom near evening? If the thread permits, remain, and be one of us." "I remember it," said Eric, "and will remain and be one of you, and let poor Wolf also be one." And so they entered the cottage, and all sat down round an open window which looked out upon the beautiful lake with its wooded islands, and surrounded by the noble forest, above which rose the giant peaks and precipices. The water was calm as glass, and reflected every brilliant colour

from rock and tree, and, most of all, from the golden clouds, which already began to gather in the west. Darkeye read from the Good Book of one who had left his father's house, and went to a far country, where he would fain have satisfied his hunger from the husks which the swine did eat, and could not, but who at last returned home after having suffered from his disobedience. When he closed the book, all stood up and sung these words with sweet and happy voices :—

“Father ! from Thy throne above,
Bless our lowly home below !
Jesus, Shepherd ! in Thy love,
Guard Thy flock from every foe.

“Thine we are ! for Thou hast made us ;
Thine, for we 're redeem'd by Thee ;
Thine, for Thou hast ever led us,
Thine, we evermore shall be !

“May we love Thee, may we fear Thee,
May Thy will, not ours, be done,
Never leave us till we 're near Thee
In the Home where all are one !”

Then they knelt down, and Darkeye spoke to

God in name of them all, thanking Him for His goodness, and telling Him their wants. When they rose from their knees, the gold thread shone brilliantly, and, like a beam of light, passed out at the door in the direction of the ferry. During the singing of the verses, Wolf seemed for the first time quite overcome. He bent his head, and covered his face with his hands. He then said, in a low voice, when the short service was over, and as if speaking to himself, while all were silent listening to him, "I had a dream. Long, long ago. A carriage—a lady. She was on her knees, with her hands clasped, and speaking to the sky. She had hold of me. Ralph was there and the robbers. I forget the rest." He rose and looked out of the window, gazing vacantly. "What can he mean?" asked Eric aside to Darkeye, who was looking tenderly on Wolf. "Ah! who knows, poor boy! Singing always touches the heart of these wanderers, Perhaps—yes—it may be," he said, so that Eric alone could hear him, "that he has been taken when a child by Ralph from some rich traveller,

and perhaps his mother was killed! He may have been the child of good people. Was that person his mother who, he says, prayed for him? If so, her prayers are now answered, for her boy will be delivered,—poor Wolf! Wolf, my boy,” said Darkeye, “come and bid farewell to your friend.” Wolf started as from a dream, and came to Eric. “Farewell, my kind Wolf, and I hope to see you some day in my father’s house.” The herd spoke not a word, but wiped his eyes with the back of his rough hand. “Cheer up, Wolf, for you will be good and happy here.” “Wolf is happy already, and he will take care of the pigs, or do anything for you all.” He then held out his stick to Eric, and said, “Take it; keep it for my sake; it is all Wolf has to give; Ralph has the gold coin.” “Thank you, good Wolf; but you will require it, and I need nothing to remember you.” “Don’t be angry, Eric, for what I did to you in the forest when we first met. My heart is sorry.” “We did not know one another then, Wolf, and I shall never forget that it is to you

I owe my escape." "Wolf loves you, and every one here." "I am sure you do, Wolf, and I love you. God bless you, Wolf, I must go; farewell!" And thus they parted. But all gathered round Eric, and accompanied him to the boat, blessing the little prince, and wishing him a peaceful and happy journey. Eric thanked them with many smiles and tender words. Darkeye alone went with him into the boat, wondering greatly at the thread, and most of all at the prince, who shone with a beauty that seemed not of this world. The prince landed, but Darkeye knew, for many reasons, that he could not accompany him in his journey, which he must take alone. Eric embraced Darkeye, and waving his hand to all on the island, he was soon lost to their sight in the great forest.

A winding pathway, over the ridge of hills, led down to a broad and rapid but smooth river, and on its banks was a royal boat, splendid and rich to look upon. She was white as snow, with a purple seat at the end covered by a canopy, that gleamed with golden tassels and many

gems. The thread led into the boat, and though no one was there, Eric entered, and sat on a purple cushion, on which the Gold Thread also laid itself down. No sooner had he gone on board of the boat, than—as if his little foot, when it touched her, had sent her from the shore—she slowly moved into the centre of the channel, and was carried downwards by the current. On she swept on the bosom of that clear stream, between shores adorned with all that could delight the eye—rocks and trees and flowers, with here and there foaming waterfalls, from mountain rivulets which poured themselves into the great river. The woods were full of song, and birds with splendid plumage flashed amidst the foliage like rainbow hues amidst the clouds. Eric knew not whither he was being carried, but his heart was sunshine and peace. On and on he swept with the winding stream, until at last, darting under a dark archway of rock, and then emerging into light, the boat grounded on a shore of pure white sand, while the thread rose and led him to the land. No

sooner had he stepped on shore and ascended the green bank, than he found himself at the end of a long broad avenue of splendid old trees, whose tops met overhead. The far-off end of the avenue was closed by a great marble staircase, which ascended to a magnificent castle. Wall rose above wall, and tower over tower. He saw grand flights of stairs, leading from one stately terrace to another, with marble statues, clear gushing fountains, and flower-gardens, and every kind of lovely tree. It was his father's castle at last! He ran on with breathless anxiety and joy. He soon reached a large gate, that seemed to be covered with glittering gold. As he looked at it, he saw the thread tied to a golden knocker upon it, shaped like the old cross in the forest. Inscribed over the gate were the words, "He that persevereth to the end shall be saved." He seized the knocker, and the moment it fell, the thread broke and vanished like a flash of light. A crash of music was then heard. The door opened, and there, in the midst of a court paved with marble of



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purest white, and on a golden throne, sat Eric's father, surrounded by his brothers and sisters. The beautiful lady was there too, and many, many more to welcome Eric. His father clasped him to his heart, and said, "My son was lost, but is found!" While all crowded round Eric to bid him welcome, with his weary feet and torn dress, kept together by the golden band, a chorus was heard singing,—

“Home where the weary rest,
Home where the good are blest,
Home of the soul ;
Glorious the race when run,
Glorious the prize when won,
Glorious the goal !”

Then there rose a swell of many young voices singing,—

“Oh, be joyful, be joyful, let every voice sing !
Welcome, brothers, our brother, the son of the king ;
His wanderings are past, to his father he 's come ,
Little Eric, our darling, we welcome thee home !

“Oh, bless'd is the true one who follows the road,
Holding fast to his GOLD THREAD OF DUTY TO GOD,
Who, when tempted, is firm, who in danger is brave,
Who, forgetting himself, will a lost brother save.

Then be joyful, be joyful, for Eric is come ;
Little Eric, our darling, we welcome thee home !”

And then the sun set, and the earth was dark,
but the palace of the king shone like an aurora
in the wintry sky.

W E E D A V I E .

WEE DAVIE.

BY THE LATE
NORMAN MACLEOD, D.D



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WEE DAVIE.

CHAPTER I.

“WEE DAVIE” was the only child of William Thorburn, blacksmith. He had reached the age at which he could venture, with prudence and reflection, on a journey from one chair to another; his wits kept alive by maternal warnings of “Tak care, Davie; mind the fire, Davie.” When the journey was ended in safety, and he looked over his shoulders with a crow of joy to his mother, he was rewarded, in addition to the rewards of his own brave and adventurous spirit, by such a smile as equalled only his own, and by the well-merited approval of “Weel done, Davie!”

Davie was the most powerful and influential member of the household. Neither the British fleet, nor the French army, nor the Armstrong gun, had the power of doing what Davie did. They might as well have tried to make a primrose grow or a lark sing!

He was, for example, a wonderful stimulus to labour. The smith had been rather disposed to idleness before his son's arrival. He did not take to his work on cold mornings as he might have done, and was apt to neglect many opportunities, which offered themselves, of better-

ing his condition ; and Jeanie was easily put off by some plausible objection when she urged her husband to make an additional honest penny to keep the house. But “the bairn” became a new motive to exertion ; and the thought of leaving him and Jeanie more comfortable, in case sickness laid the smith aside, or death took him away, became like a new sinew to his powerful arm, as he wielded the hammer, and made it ring the music of hearty work on the sounding anvil. The meaning of benefit-clubs, sick-societies, and penny-banks, was fully explained by “wee Davie.”

Davie also exercised a remarkable influence on his father’s political views and social habits. The smith had been fond of debates on political questions ; and no more sonorous growl of discontent than his could be heard against “the powers that be,” the injustice done to the masses, or the misery which was occasioned by class legislation. He had also made up his mind not to be happy or contented, but only to endure life as a necessity laid upon him, until the required reforms in church and state, at home and abroad, had been attained. But his wife, without uttering a syllable on matters which she did not even pretend to understand ; by a series of acts *out* of Parliament ; by reforms in household arrangements ; by introducing good *bills* into her own House of Commons ; and by a charter, whose points were chiefly very commonplace ones,—such as a comfortable meal, a tidy home, a clean fireside, a polished grate, above all, a cheerful countenance and womanly love,—by these *radical* changes she had made her husband wonderfully fond of his home. He was, under this teaching, getting every day too contented for a patriot, and too happy for a man in an ill-governed

world. His old companions at last could not coax him out at night. He was lost as a member of one of the most philosophical clubs in the neighbourhood. "His old pluck," they said, "was gone." The wife, it was alleged by the patriotic bachelors, had "cowed" him, and driven all the spirit out of him. But "wee Davie" completed this revolution. I shall tell you how.

One failing of William's had hitherto resisted Jeanie's silent influence. The smith had formed the habit, before he was married, of meeting a few companions, "just in a friendly way," on pay-nights at a public-house. It was true that he was never "what might be called a drunkard"—"never lost a day's work"—"never was the worse for liquor," &c. But, nevertheless, when he entered the snuggerly in Peter Wilson's whisky-shop, with the blazing fire and comfortable atmosphere; and when, with half-a-dozen talkative, and, to him, pleasant fellows and old companions, he sat round the fire, and the glass circulated; and the gossip of the week was discussed; and racy stories were told; and one or two songs sung, linked together by memories of old merry-meetings; and current jokes were repeated, with humour, of the tyrannical influence which some would presume to exercise on "innocent social enjoyment"—then would the smith's brawny chest expand, and his face beam, and his feelings become malleable, and his sixpences begin to melt, and flow out in generous sympathy into Peter Wilson's fozy hand, to be counted greedily beneath his sodden eyes. And so it was that the smith's wages were always lessened by Peter's gains. His wife had her fears—her horrid anticipations—but did not like to "even to" her husband anything so dreadful as what she in her heart dreaded. She took her own way, however, to win him to the house

and to good, and gently insinuated wishes rather than expressed them. The smith, no doubt, she comforted herself by thinking, was only "merry," and never ill-tempered or unkind,—“yet at times—” “and then, what if—!” Yes, Jeanie, you are right! The demon sneaks into the house by degrees, and at first may be kept out, and the door shut upon him; but let him only once take possession, then he will keep it, and shut the door against everything pure, lovely, and of good report,—barring it against thee and “wee Davie,” ay, and against One who is best of all,—and will fill the house with sin and shame, with misery and despair! But “wee Davie,” with his arm of might, drove the demon out. It happened thus:—

One evening when the smith returned home so that “you could *know it* on him,” Davie toddled forward; and his father, lifting him up, made him stand on his knee. The child began to play with the locks of the Samson, to pat him on the cheek, and to repeat with glee the name of “dad-a.” The smith gazed on him intently, and with a peculiar look of love, mingled with sadness. “Isn’t he a bonnie bairn?” asked Jeanie, as she looked over her husband’s shoulder at the child, nodding and smiling to him. The smith spoke not a word, but gazed intently upon his boy, while some sudden emotion was strongly working in his countenance.

“It’s done!” he at last said, as he put his child down.

“What’s wrang! what’s wrang!” exclaimed his wife as she stood before him, and put her hands round his shoulders, bending down until her face was close to his.

“Everything is wrang, Jeanie.”

“Willy, what is’t? are ye no weel?—tell me what’s wrang wi’ you?—oh, tell me!” she exclaimed, in evident alarm.

“It’s a’ richt noo,” he said, rising up and seizing the child. He lifted him to his breast, and kissed him. Then looking up in silence, he said, “Davie has done it, along wi’ you, Jeanie. Thank God, I am a free man!”

His wife felt awed, she knew not how.

“Sit doon,” he said, as he took out his handkerchief, and wiped away a tear from his eye, “and I’ll tell you a’ about it.”

Jeanie sat on a stool at his feet, with Davie on her knee. The smith seized the child’s little hand in one of his own, and with the other took his wife’s.

“I hav’na been what ye may ca’ a drunkard,” he said, slowly, and like a man abashed, “but I hae been often as I shouldna hae been, and as, wi’ God’s help, I never, never will be again!”

“Oh!” exclaimed Jeanie.

“Let me speak,” said William; “to think, Jeanie,”—here he struggled as if something was choking him,—“to think that for whisky I might beggar you and wee Davie; tak the claes aff your back; drive you to the workhouse; break your heart; and ruin my bonnie bairn, that loves me sae weel; ay, ruin him in saul and body, for time and for eternity! God forgie me! I canna stand the thocht o’t, let alane the reality!” The strong man rose, and little accustomed as he was to shew his feelings, he kissed his wife and child.

“It’s done, it’s done!” he said; “as I’m a leevan man, it’s done! But dinna greet, Jeanie. Thank God for you and Davie, my best blessings.”

“Except Himsel’!” said Jeanie, as she hung on her husband’s neck.

“And noo, woman,” replied the smith, “nae mair

about it ; it's done. Gie wee Davie a piece, and get the supper ready."

"Wee Davie" was also a great promoter of social intercourse ; an unconscious link between man and man ; and a great practical "unionist." He healed breaches, reconciled differences, and was a peacemaker between kinsfolk and neighbours. For example : Jeanie's parents were rather opposed to her marriage with the smith. Some said it was because they belonged to the rural aristocracy of country farmers. They regretted, therefore, it was alleged—though their regret was expressed only to old friends—the day when the lame condition of one of their horses had brought Thorburn to visit their stable, and ultimately their house. Thorburn, no doubt, was admitted to be a sensible, well-to-do man ; but then he was, at best, but a common smith ; and Jeanie was good-looking, and "by ordinary," with expectations, too, of some "tocher." Her mother, with the introduction, "Tho' I say it, that shouldna say it," was fond of enlarging on Jeanie's excellences, and commenting on the poor smith, with pauses of silence, and expressions of hope "that she might be mistaken," and "that it was ill to ken a body's ways," all of which remarks, from their very mystery, were more depreciatory than any direct charges. But when "wee Davie" was born, the old couple deemed it proper and due to themselves—not to speak of the respect due to their daughter, whom they sincerely loved—to come and visit her. Her mother had been with Jeanie at an earlier period ; and the house was so clean, and Thorburn so intelligent, and the child pronounced to be so like old David Armstrong, Jeanie's father, especially about the forehead, that the two families, as the smith remarked, were evidently being welded.

so that a few more gentle hammerings would make them one.

“Wee Davie,” as he grew up, became the fire of love which heated the hearts of good metal so as to enable favourable circumstances to give the necessary finishing stroke which would permanently unite them. These circumstances were constantly occurring; until, at last, Armstrong called every market-day to see his daughter and little grandson. The old man played with the boy, (who was his only grandson,) and took him on his knee, and put a “sweetie” into his mouth, and evidently felt as if he himself was reproduced and lived again in the child. This led to closer intercourse, until David Armstrong admitted that William Thorburn was one of the most sensible men he knew; and that he would not only back him against any of his acquaintances for a knowledge of a good horse, but for wonderful information as to the state of the country generally, especially of the landed interest; and for sound views on the high rent of land. Mrs Armstrong finally admitted that Jeanie was not so far mistaken in her choice of a husband. The good woman always assumed that the sagacity of the family was derived from her own side of the house.

But whatever doubts still lingered in their minds as to the wisdom of their daughter’s marriage, were all dispelled by one look of “wee Davie.”

“I’m just real proud about that braw bairn o’ Jeanie’s,” she used to say to her husband; remarking one day, with a chuckling laugh and smile, “D’ye no think yersel, gudeman, that wee Davie has a look o’ auld Davie?”

“Maybe, maybe,” replied old David; “but I aye think he’s our ain bairn we lost thirty years syne.”

“That has been in my ain mind,” said his wife, with a sigh; “but I never liked to say it.” Then, after a moment’s silence, she added, with a smile, “But he’s no the waur o’ being like baith.”

Again:—there lived in the same common passage, and opposite to William Thorburn’s door, an old soldier, a pensioner. He was a bachelor, and by no means disposed to hold intercourse with his neighbours. He greatly disliked the noise of children, and maintained that “an hour’s drill every day would alone make them tolerable.” “Obedience to authority, that’s the rule; right about, march! That’s the only exercise for them,” the Corporal would say to some father of a numerous family in the “close,” as he flourished his stick with a smile rather than a growl. Jeanie pronounced him to be “a selfish body.” Thorburn had more than once tried to cultivate acquaintance with him, as they were constantly brought into outward contact; but the Corporal was a Tory, and more than suspected the smith of holding “Radical” sentiments. To defend things as they were was a point of honour with the pensioner—a religion. Besides, any opposition to the Government seemed a slight upon the army, and therefore upon himself. Thorburn at last avoided him, and pronounced him to be proud and ignorant. But one day “wee Davie” found his way into the Corporal’s house, and putting his hands on his knees as he was reading the newspaper near the window, looked up to his face. The old soldier was arrested by the beauty of the child, and took him on his knee. To his surprise, Davie did not scream; and when his mother soon followed in search of her boy, and made many apologies for his “impudence,” as she called it, the Corporal maintained that he was a jewel, a perfect gentle-

man, and dubbed him "the Captain." Next day, tapping at Thorburn's door, the Corporal gracefully presented toys in the shape of a small sword and drum for his young hero. That same night he smoked his pipe at the smith's fireside, and told such stories of his battles as fired the smith's enthusiasm, called forth his praises, and, what was more substantial, procured a most comfortable tea, which clinched their friendly intercourse. He and "the Captain" became constant associates, and many a loud laugh might be heard from the Corporal's room as he played with the boy, and educated his genius. "He makes me young again, does the Captain!" the Corporal often remarked to the mother.

Mrs Fergusson, another neighbour, was also drawn into the same friendly net by wee Davie. She was a fussy, gossiping woman, noisy and disagreeable. Jeanie avoided her, and boasted indeed that it was her rule to "keep hersel to hersel," instead of giving away some of her good self to her neighbour, and thus taking some of her neighbour's bad self out of her. But her youngest child became seriously ill, and Jeanie thought, "If Davie were ill I would like a neighbour to speir for him." So she went up stairs to visit Mrs Fergusson, "begged pardon," but "wished to know how Mary was." Mrs Fergusson, bowed down with sorrow, thanked her, and bid her "come ben." Jeanie did so, and spoke kindly to the child—told her mother, moreover, what pleasure it would give her to nurse her baby occasionally, and invited the younger children to come down to her house and play with wee Davie, so as to keep the sick one quiet. She helped also to cook some nourishing drinks, and got nice milk from her father for Mary, often excusing herself for apparent "meddling" by saying, "When

ane has a bairn o' their ain, they canna but feel for other folk's bairns." Mrs Fergusson's heart became subdued, softened, and friendly. "We took it as extraordinar' kind," she more than once remarked, "in Mrs Thorburn to do as she has done. It is a blessing to have sic a neighbour." But it was wee Davie who was the peace-maker !

The street in which the smith lived was as uninteresting as any could be. A description of its outs and ins would have made a "social science" meeting shudder. Beauty or even neatness it had not. Every "close" or "entry" in it looked like a sepulchre. The back courts were a huddled confusion of outhouses ; strings of linens drying ; stray dogs searching for food ; hens and pigeons similarly employed with more apparent success and satisfaction ; lean cats creeping about ; crowds of children, laughing, shouting, and muddy to the eyes, acting with intense glee the great dramas of life, marriages, batties, deaths, and burials, with castle-building, extensive farming, and various commercial operations : out everywhere smoke, mud, moisture, and an utterly uncomfortable look. And so long as we, in Scotland, have a western ocean to afford an unlimited supply of water ; and western mountains to condense it as it passes in the blue air over their summits ; and western winds to waft it to our cities ; and so long as it will pour down, and be welcomed by smoke above, and earth below, we shall find it difficult to be "neat and tidy about the doors," or to transport the cleanliness of England into our streets and lanes. But, in spite of all this, how many cheerful homes, with bright fires and nice furniture, inhabited by intelligent, sober, happy men and women, with healthy, lively children, are everywhere to be found in those very

streets, which seem to the eye of those who have never penetrated further than their outside, to be "dreadful places."

A happier home could hardly be found than that of William Thorburn, as he sat at the fireside, after returning from his work, reading his newspaper, or some book of weightier literature, selected by Jeanie from the well-filled shelves in the little back parlour, while Jeanie herself was sewing opposite to him. As it often happened, both were absorbed in the rays of that bright light, "wee Davie," which filled their dwelling, and the whole world, to their eyes ; or both listened to the grand concert of his nappy voice, which mingled with their busy work and silent thoughts, giving harmony to all. How much was done for his sake ! He was the most sensible, efficient, and thoroughly philosophical teacher of household economy and of social science in all its departments who could enter a working man's dwelling !

CHAPTER II.

My heart is sore as I write it ; but wee Davie got ill.

He began to refuse his food, and nothing would please him. He became peevish and cross, so that he would hardly go to his father, except to kiss him with tearful cheeks, and then to stretch out his hands with a cry for his mother. His mother nursed him on her knee, rocked him, walked with him, sang to him her own household lullabies ; put him to bed, lifted him up, laid him down, and “fought” with him day and night, caring for neither food nor sleep, but only for her child’s ease and comfort.

What lessons of self-sacrificing love was she thus unconsciously taught by her little sufferer ! Such lessons, indeed, as earth alone can afford—and so far it is a glorious school ; for there are no sickbeds to watch, no sufferers to soothe, nor mourners to comfort, among the many mansions of our Father’s house.

The physician, who was at last called in, pronounced it “a bad case—a *very* serious case.” I forget the specific nature of the illness. The idea of danger to Davie had never entered the minds of his parents. The day on which William realised it, he was, as his fellow-workmen expressed it, “clean stupid.” They saw him make mistakes he had never made before, and knew it could not be from “drink,” yet could not guess the cause. “I maun gang hame !” was his only explana-

tion, when, at three o'clock, he put on his coat and stalked out of the smithy, like one utterly indifferent as to what the consequences might be to ploughs or harrows, wheels or horse-shoes. Taking an old fellow-workman aside, he whispered to him, "For auld friendship sake, Tam, tak charge this day o' my wark." He said no more. "What ails Willy?" asked his fellow-workmen in vain, as they all paused for a moment at their work and looked perplexed.

It was on the afternoon of the next day that "the minister" called. It must here be confessed that William was a rare attender of any church. The fact was, he had been hitherto rather sceptical in his tendencies: not that his doubts had ever assumed a systematic form, or were ever expressed in any determined or dogmatic manner; but he had read Tom Paine, associated the political rights of man with rebellion against old authorities, all of whom he thought had tyrannically denied them; and he had imbibed the idea at the old "philosophical" club, that ministers, especially those of the Established Church, were the enemies of all progress, had no sympathy with the working classes, were slaves to the aristocracy, preached as a mere profession and only for their pay, and had, moreover, a large share of hypocrisy and humbug in them. The visit of Dr M'Gavin was, therefore, very unexpected.

When the Dr entered the house, after a courteous request to be allowed to do so,—as it was always his principle that the poorest man was entitled to the same respect as the man of rank or riches,—he said, "I have just heard from some of your neighbours, whom I have been visiting, that your child is seriously unwell, and I

thought you would excuse my calling upon you to inquire for him."

William made him welcome, and begged him to be seated. The call was specially acceptable to Jeanie. Old David, I should have mentioned, was "an elder" in a most worthy dissenting congregation, and his strong religious convictions and church views formed in his mind a chief objection to the marriage of his daughter with a man "who was not," as he said, "even a member of any kirk." Jeanie had often wished her husband to be more decided in what she herself cordially acknowledged to be a duty, and felt to be a comfort and a privilege. The visit of the Dr, whose character was well known and much esteemed, was therefore peculiarly welcome to her.

In a little while the Dr was standing beside the cot of wee Davie, who was asleep, and gently touching the little sufferer's hand, he said, in a quiet voice, to the smith, "My friend, I sincerely feel for you! I am myself a father, and have suffered losses in my family." At the word *losses*, William winced, and moved from his place as if he felt uneasy. The Dr quickly perceived it, and said, "I do not, of course, mean to express so rash and unkind an opinion as that you are to lose this very beautiful and interesting boy, but only to assure you how I am enabled from experience to understand your anxiety, and to sympathise with you and your wife." And noiselessly walking to the arm-chair near the fire, he there sat down, while William and Jeanie sat near him.

After hearing with patience and attention the account from Jeanie of the beginning and progress of the child's disease, he said, "Whatever happens, it is a comfort to

know that our Father is acquainted with all you suffer, all you fear, and all you wish ; and that Jesus Christ, our Brother, has a fellow-feeling with us in all our infirmities and trials."

"The Deity must know all," said William, with a softened voice ; "He is infinitely great and incomprehensible."

"Yes," replied the minister ; "God is so great, that He can attend to our smallest concerns ; yet not so incomprehensible but that a father's heart can truly feel after Him, so as at least to find Him through His Son. Oh ! what a comfort and strength the thought is to all men," continued the Dr, "and ought to be to working men, and to you parents, especially with your dear child in sickness, that He who marks a sparrow fall, smitten by winter's cold, and who feeds the wild beasts, is acquainted with us, with our most secret affairs, so that even the hairs of our heads are numbered ; that He who is the Father, almighty Maker of the heavens and the earth, knows the things which we need ; that He has in us, individually, an interest which is incomprehensible, only because His love to us is so in its depth ; for He so loved us that He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up to death for us all ! It is this God who considers each of us, and weighs all His dealings towards us with a carefulness as great as if we alone existed in His universe, so that, as a father pitieth his children, He pitieth us, knowing our frames, and *remembering* that we are dust."

William bent his head, and was silent, while Jeanie listened with her whole soul. "It is not easy, minister," he at last said, "for hard-wrought and tired men to believe that."

“Nor for any man,” replied the Dr. “I find it very difficult to believe it myself as a real thing, yet I know it to be true; and,” he continued, in a low and affectionate voice, “perhaps we never could have known it or believed it at all, unless God had taught it to us by the life of His own Son, who came to reveal a Father. But as I see *Him* taking up little children into His loving arms, when others would keep them away who did not understand what perfect love is, and as I see in such doings how love cannot but come down and meet the wants of its smallest and weakest object—when I see all this love at last expressed in the giving up of His life for *sinners*, oh! it is then I learn in what consists the real greatness of God, ‘whose name is Love.’”

“I believe wi’ my heart,” remarked the smith, “that no man ever loved as Jesus Christ did.”

“But,” said the Dr, “I see in this love of Christ more than the love of a good man merely; I see revealed in it the loving tenderness towards us and ours of that God whom no eye hath seen or can see, but whom the eye of the spirit, when taught of God, can perceive; for, as Jesus said, ‘He who seeth *me*, seeth the Father!’”

“I believe a’ ye say, Dr,” said Jeanie, meekly. “I wadna like to keep my bairn frae Him, nor to rebel against His will, for it’s aye richt; but, O sir, I hope, I hope, He will lift him up, and help us now as He did many distressed ones while on earth, by sparing ane that’s just like a pairt o’ our ain hearts!”

“I hope,” said the minister, “God will spare your boy. But you must trust Him, sincerely ask Him so to do, and commit your child into His hands without fear, and acquiesce in His doing towards you and your boy as He pleases.”

“That is hard!” remarked William.

“Hard!” mildly replied the Dr. “What would you choose else, had you the power of doing so, rather than acquiesce in the will of God? Would you trust your own heart, for instance, more than the heart of God? or, tell me, would you rather have your child’s fate decided by any other on earth than by yourself?”

“No, for I know how I love the boy,” was Jeanie’s reply.

“But God loves him much more than you do; for he belongs to God, and was made by Him and for Him.”

“I ken I am a waik woman, Dr, but I frankly say that I canna, no, I canna thole the thocht o’ parting wi’ him!” said Jeanie, clasping her hands tightly.

“May God spare him to you, my friends!” replied the minister, “if it be for your good and his. But,” he added, “there are worse things than death.”

This remark, made in almost an under-voice, was followed by silence for a few moments. The minister’s eyes were cast down as if in meditation or prayer.

“Death is hard enough,” said the smith.

“But hard chiefly as a sign of something worse,” continued the Dr. “Pardon me for asking you such questions as these:—What if your child grew up an enemy to you? What if he never returned your love? What if he never would trust you? What if he never would speak to you? What if he always disobeyed you? Would this not bring down your gray hairs with sorrow to the grave?”

“Eh! sir,” said Jeanie, “that *would* be waur than death!”

“But excuse me, Dr, for just remarking,” interrupted

William, "that I never knew any child with a good parent, who would so act. I really don't think it possible that our ain wee Davie, even with our poor bringing up, would ever come to *that*. It would be so unnatural."

"God alone knows how that might be, Thorburn," said the Dr. "But there are many things more unnatural and dreadful even than that in this world. Listen to me kindly; for I sincerely thank you for having allowed one who is a stranger to speak so frankly to you, and for having heard me with such considerate patience."

"Oh, gang on, gang on, sir, I like to hear you," said Jeanie.

"Certainly," added the smith.

"Well, then," said the minister, "I have no wish even to appear to find any fault with you at such a time. I am more disposed, believe me, to weep with you in your sorrow than to search your heart or life for sin. But I feel at such solemn times as these, most solemn to you and to your wife, that the voice of a Father is speaking to you in the rod, and it ought to be heard; that His hand is ministering discipline to you, and that you ought to give Him reverence, and be in subjection to the Father of our spirits that you may live. In order, therefore, that you may receive more strength and comfort in the end, let me beseech of you to consider candidly, after I leave you, whether you have perhaps not been acting towards *your* Father in heaven in that very way which, did your child grow up and act towards *you*, would be reckoned by you both as a sorrow worse than death?"

"How could that be?" asked Jeanie, with a timid and inquiring look.

“You may discover *how*, my friends, if you honestly ask yourselves, Whether you have loved God your Father who has so loved you? Has there been cordial friendship, or the reverse, towards Him? Confidence, or distrust? Disobedience, or rebellion? Communion in frank, believing, and affectionate prayer, or distant silence? I do not wish any reply to such questions now; but I desire you and myself, as loving fathers of our children, to ask whether we have felt and acted towards the best and most loving of Fathers, as we wish our children to feel and act towards ourselves?”

The Dr paused for a moment. Jeanie shook her head slowly, and the smith stared with her at the fire.

“By the grace of God,” said Jeanie, in a whisper, “I hope I have.”

“I hope so too,” replied the minister, “but it does not come naturally to us.”

“It’s a fact,” ejaculated the smith, thrusting his hands vehemently into his pockets; “it does *not* come naturally, in whatever way it comes, and yet it’s desperate unnatural the want o’t.”

“Yes, Thorburn,” replied the Dr, “it is very dreadful, but yet we have all sinned, and this is our sin of sins, that we have *not known nor loved our Father*, but have been forgetful of Him, strange, shy to Him; we have every one of us been cold, heartless, prodigal, disobedient children!”

Another short pause, and he then spoke on in the same quiet and loving voice: “But whatever we are or have been, let us hope in God through Jesus Christ, or we perish! Every sinner is righteously doomed, but no man is doomed to be a sinner. God is our Father still, for He is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not

imputing unto men their trespasses ; and just as you both have nourished and cherished your dear boy, and have been loving him when he knew it not, nor could understand that great love in your hearts, which, sure am I, will never grow cold but in the grave, so has it been with God toward us. Open your hearts to His love, as you would open your eyes to the light which has been ever shining. Believe it as the grand reality, as you would have your boy open his heart to and believe in your own love, when he wakens from his sleep. Your love, as I have said, is deep, real to your boy, irrespective of his knowledge or return of it. But what is this to the love of God ! ‘ *Here-in* is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.’ Let us, my friends, never rest till we are enabled in some degree to see and to appreciate such marvellous goodness, and to say, ‘ We have known and believed the love which God has to us.’ ”

“ Dr M‘Gavin,” said William, “ you have spoken to me as no man ever did before, and you will believe me, I am sure, when I say, that I respect you and myself too much to flatter you. But there is surely a meaning in my love to that boy which I never saw before ! It begins to glimmer on me.”

“ Thank God if it does ! But I do not speak to you, and this you must give me credit for, as if it were my profession only ; I speak to you as a man, a father, and a brother, wishing you to share the good which God has given to me, and wishes you and all men to share. So I repeat it, that if we would only cherish towards God that simple confidence and hearty love—and seek to enjoy with Him that frank, cheerful communion which we wish our children to possess in relation to ourselves.

we would experience a true regeneration, the important change from an estranged heart to a child's love."

"That would, indeed, be a Christianity worth having," said William.

"It would be," continued the Dr, "to share Christ's life; for what was the whole life of Jesus Christ, but a life of this blessed, confiding, obedient, childlike sonship? Oh that we would learn of Him, and grow up in likeness to Him! But this ignorance of God is itself death. For if knowledge be life, spiritual ignorance is death. My good friends, I have been led to give you a regular sermon!" said the Dr, smiling; "but I really cannot help it. To use common, everyday language, I think our treatment of God has been shameful, unjust, and disgraceful on the part of men with reason, conscience, and heart! I do not express myself half so strongly as I feel. I am ashamed and disgusted with myself, and all the members of the human family, for what we feel, and feel *not*, to such a Father. If it were not for what the one elder Brother was and did, the whole family would have been disgraced and ruined most righteously. But His is the name, and there is no other whereby we can be saved!"

"Dr," said William, with a trembling voice, "the mind is dark, and the heart is hard!"

"The Spirit of God who is given with Christ can enlighten and soften both, my brother."

"Thank ye, thank ye, from my heart," replied the smith; "I confess I have been very careless in going to the church, but——"

"We may talk of that again, if you allow me to return to-morrow. Yet," said the Dr, pointing to the child, "God in His mercy never leaves Himself without a

witness. Look at your child, and listen to your own heart, and remember all I have said, and you will perhaps discover that though you tried it you could not fly from the word of the Lord, should you even have fled from the Bible. A Father's voice by a child has been preaching to you. Yes, Thorburn! when in love God gave you that child, He sent an eloquent missionary to your house to preach the gospel of what our Father is to us, and what we as children ought to be to Him. Only listen to that sermon, and you will soon be prepared to listen to others."

The Dr rose to depart. Before doing so, he asked permission to pray, which was cheerfully granted. Wishing to strengthen the faith, in prayer, of those sufferers, he first said, "If God *cannot* hear and answer prayer, He is not all perfect and supreme; if He *will* not, He is not our Father. But, blessed be His name, His own Son, who knew Him perfectly, prayed Himself, and was heard in that He prayed. He heard, too, every true prayer addressed to Himself; while He has in His kindness furnished us with an argument for prayer, the truth and beauty of which we parents can of all men most appreciate: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, now much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!'"

The Dr then poured forth a simple, loving, and most

sympathising prayer, in which he made himself one with his fellow-worshippers, and expressed to a common Father the anguish and the hopes of the hearts around him. When it ended, he went to the cot, and looked at the sleeping child, touched his white hand, and said, "God bless your little one! May this sleep be for health."

"It's the first sleep," said Jeanie, "he has had for a lang time. It may be a turn in his complaint."

The minister then shook them both warmly by the hand, and gazed on them with a world of interest in his eyes, asking them only to consider kindly what he had said.

The silence which ensued for a few minutes after his absence, as William and Jeanie returned from the door and stood beside the bed, was broken by the smith observing, "I am glad that man came to our house, Jeanie. Yon was indeed preaching that a man can understand and canna forget. It was wee Davie did it."

"That's true," said Jeanie; "thank God for't!" And after gazing on the sleeping child, she added, "Is he no bonnie? I dinna wunnar that sic a bairn should bring guid to the house."

That night William had thoughts in his heart which burned with a redder glow than the coals upon the smithy fire!

CHAPTER III.

IT was a beautiful morning in spring, with blue sky, living air, springing grass, and singing birds ; but William Thorburn had not left his house, and the door was shut.

Mrs Fergusson trod the wooden stair that led to the floor above with slow and cautious step ; and as she met her boy running down whistling, she said, “ What d’ye mean, Jamie, wi’ that noise ? Do ye no ken wee Davie is dead ? Ye should hae mair feeling, laddie ! ”

The Corporal, whose door was half-open, crept out, and in an under-breath beckoned Mrs Fergusson to speak to him. “ Do you know how they are ? ” he asked, in a low voice.

“ No,” she replied, shaking her head. “ I sat up wi’ Mrs Thorburn half the night, and left Davie sleeping, and never thocht it would come to this. My heart is sair for them. But since it happened the door has been barred, and no one has been in. I somehow dinna like to intrude, for nae doot, they will be in an awfu’ way about that bairn.”

“ I don’t wonder,—I don’t wonder ! ” remarked the Corporal, meditatively ; “ I did not believe I could feel as I do. I don’t understand it. Here am I, who have seen men killed by my side ;—who have seen a few shots cut down almost half our company ; and——”

“ Is it possible ! ” interposed Mrs Fergusson.

“It is certain,” said the Corporal; “and I have charged at Pampeluna—it was there I was wounded—over dead and dying comrades, yet, will you believe me? I never shed a tear—never; but there was something in that Captain—I mean the boy—” and the Corporal took out his snuff-box, and snuffed vehemently. “And what a brave fellow his father is! I never thought I could love a Radical; but he is not what you call a Radical; he is—I don’t know what else, but he is a man—an out-and-out man, every inch of him, I’ll say that for him—a man is William Thorburn! Have you not seen his wife?”

“No, poor body! It was six o’clock when she ran up to me, no distracted either, but awfu’ quiet like, and wakened me up, and just said, ‘He’s awa!’ and then afore I could speak she ran doon the stair, and steekit her door; and she has such a keen spirit, I dinna like to gang to bother her. I’m unco wae for them.”

They were both silent, as if listening for some sound in William Thorburn’s house, but all was still as the grave.

The first who entered that morning were old David Armstrong and his wife. They found Jeanie busy about her house, and William sitting on a chair, dressed better than usual, staring into the fire. The curtains of the bed were up. It was covered with a pure white sheet, and something lay upon it which they recognised.

Jeanie came forward, and took the hand of father and mother, without a tear on her face, and said quietly, “Come ben,” as she gave her father a chair beside her husband, and led her mother into an inner room, closing the door. What was spoken there between them, I know not.

William rose to receive old David, and remarked, in a careless manner, that “it was a fine spring day.”

David gave a warm squeeze to his hand, and sat down. He soon rose and went to the bed. William followed him, and took the cloth off the boy's face in silence. The face was unchanged, as in sleep. The flaxen curls seemed to have been carefully arranged, for they escaped from under the white cap, and clustered like golden wreaths around the marble forehead and cheeks. William covered up the face, and both returned to their seats by the fireside.

“I never lost ane since my ain wee Davie dee'd, and yours, Willie, was dear to me as my ain,” exclaimed the old man, and then broke down, and sobbed like a child.

William never moved, though his great chest seemed to heave; but he seized the poker, and began to arrange the fire, and then was still as before.

By and by, the door of the inner room opened, and Jeanie and her mother appeared, both of them composed and calm. The same scene was repeated as they passed the bed. Mrs Armstrong then seated herself beside her husband.

Jeanie placing a large Bible on the table, pointed to it, and said, “Father.” She then drew her chair near the smith's.

David Armstrong put on his spectacles, opened the Bible, and selecting a portion of Scripture, reverently said, “Let us read the Word of God.” The house was quiet. No business on that day intruded itself upon their minds. It was difficult for any of them to speak, but they were willing to hear. The passages which old David selected for reading were 2 Samuel xii. 15-23, on the sorrow of King David when he lost his child; Matthew ix. 18-26, containing the history of the raising up

of the daughter of Jairus; and John xi. 1-44, with its memorable narrative of the darkness of mysterious sorrow, and the light of unexpected deliverance experienced by Martha and Mary of Bethany.

Having closed the Book, he said, with a trembling but solemn voice, "God, who doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will, has been pleased to send us a heavy affliction. 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away!' May He enable us to say at all times, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' For whether He gives or takes away, He is always the same in love and mercy towards us, and therefore ought to have the same confidence from us. In truth, if He takes away, it is but to give something better, for He afflicts us in order to make us *partakers* of His holiness. Our little one is not dead, but only sleepeth!"

Here David paused, but recovering himself, said, "Yes, his body sleepeth in Jesus till the resurrection morning. He himself is with Christ. He is alive, in his Father's bosom. Oh, it is strange to think o't, and hard to believe! but, blessed be God! it's true, that—that—Jesus Christ, who sees us, sees him, and sees us together, ay, at this vera moment!—" continued David, thoughtfully, like one pondering on a new truth; "this very moment we are all in His sight! Oh, it's grand and comforting; our wee Davie is in the arms of Jesus Christ!"

A solemn silence ensued. "The bonnie bairn will never return to us," continued the elder, "but we shall go to him, and some o' us ere lang, I hope. Let us pray." And they all knelt down, and a true prayer was spoken from suffering parents, to Him "of whom *the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*"

To David's surprise and great satisfaction, he heard William utter Amen to his prayer, which included honest confession of sin ; expressions of thankfulness for mercies, amongst others, for the great gift of their child, thus taken away, for all he had been, and for all he then was ; with trustful petitions for the forgiveness of sin, and grace to help in this their time of need.

That afternoon Dr M'Gavin called, and manifested quiet, unobtrusive, but most touching sympathy. His very silence was eloquent affection.

"I'm proud to meet wi' you, sir," said old Armstrong, after the Dr had been seated for a while. "Altho' I'm no o' your kirk, yet we're baith o' ae kirk for a' that."

"With one Father, one Brother, one Spirit, one life, one love, one hope!" replied the Dr.

"True, sir, true, our differences are nothing to our agreements."

"Our non-essential differences arise out of our essential union, Mr Armstrong. For if we differ honestly and conscientiously as brethren, I hope it is because we differ only in judgment as to *how* to please our Father, and our elder Brother. Our hearts are one in our wish to do their will. For none of us liveth or even dieth to himself."

"Ay, ay, sir. So it is, so it is! But as the auld saying has't, 'The best o' men are but men at the best.' We maun carry ane another's burdens ; and ignorance, or even bigotry, is the heaviest ony man can carry for his neebour. Thank God, however, that brighter and better times are coming! We here see thro' a glass darkly ; but then face to face. We know only in pairt, then shall we know even as we are known. In the

meantime, we must be faithful to our given light, and, according to the best o' our fallible judgment, serve Him, and not man."

"There are differences among living men," replied the minister, "but none among the dead. We shall agree perfectly only when we know and love as saints, without error and without sin."

"I mind," said David, warming with the conversation, and the pleasure of getting his better heart out—"I mind twa neighbours o' ours, and ye'll mind them, too, gude-wife? that was Johnnie Morton and auld Andrew Gebbie. The tane was a keen Burgher, and the t'ither an Anti-burgher. Baith lived in the same house, tho' at different ends, and it was the bargain that each should keep his ain side o' the house aye weel thatched. But they happened to dispute so keenly about the principles o' their kirks, that at last they quarrelled, and didna speak at a'! So ae day after this, as they were on the roof thatching, each on his ain side, they reached the tap, and looking ower, face met face. What could they do? They couldna flee. So at last, Andrew took aff his Kilmarnock cap, and scratching his head, said, 'Johnnie, you and me, I think, hae been very foolish to dispute as we hae done concerning Christ's will about our kirks, until we hae clean forgot His will about ourselves; and so we hae fought sae bitterly for what we ca' the truth, that it has ended in spite. Whatever's wrang, it's perfectly certain that it never can be richt to be uncivil, unneighbourly, unkind, in fac, tae hate ane anither. Na, na, that's the deevil's wark, and no God's! Noo, it strikes me that maybe it's wi' the kirk as wi' this house: ye're working on ae side and me on the t'ither, but if we only

do our wark weel, we will meet at the tap at last. Gie's your han', auld neighbour!' And so they shook han's, and were the best o' freens ever after."

"Thank you, Mr Armstrong, for the story," said Dr M'Gavin. Then looking to the bed, he remarked, "Oh, if we were only simple, true, and loving, like little children, would we not, like that dear one, enter the kingdom of heaven, and know and love all who were in it, or on their way to it?"

"I'm glad I have met you, sir," resumed the old Elder. "It does ane's heart good to meet a brother who has been a stranger. But if it hadna been for *his* death, we might never have met! Isna that queer? God's ways are no our ways!"

"God brings life to our hearts out of death," replied the Dr, "and in many ways does He ordain praise from babes and sucklings, whether living or dead."

And thus a quiet chat, full of genial Christian cheerfulness, was kept up for a time round the fireside. There was light in that dwelling on many a question, for there was love—love intensified by sorrow, as the last rays of evening become more glorious from the very clouds that gather round the setting sun.

"With your permission, good friends," said Dr M'Gavin, "I will read a short psalm and offer up a short prayer before I go." He selected the 23d. His only remark, as he closed the Bible, was, "The good Shepherd has been pleased to take this dear lamb into His fold, never more to leave it."

"And may the lamb be the means of making the auld sheep to follow!" added the Elder.

When the prayer was over, Jeanie, who had hardly

spoken a word, said, without looking at the Dr, "O sir! God didna hear our prayer for my bairn!"

"Dinna speak that way, Jeanie, woman!" said her mother, softly, yet firmly.

"I canna help it, mither; I maun get oot my thochts that are burning at my heart. The minister maun forgie me," replied Jeanie.

"Surely, Mrs Thorburn," said the Dr; "and it would be a great satisfaction to me were I able, from what God has taught myself in His Word, and from my own experience of sorrow, to solve any difficulty, or help you to acquiesce in God's dealings with you; not because you *must*, but because you *ought* to submit; and that again, not because God has *power*, and therefore does what He pleases, but because He is love, and therefore pleases always to do what is right."

"But, oh, He didna hear our prayer: that's my burthen! But we were maybe wrang in asking what was against His will."

"He did not answer you in the way, perhaps, in which you expected, Mrs Thorburn; yet, depend upon it, every true prayer is heard and answered by Him. But He is too good, too wise, too loving, to give us always literally what we ask; if so, He would often be very cruel, and *that* He can never be! You would not give your child a serpent, if in his ignorance he asked one, mistaking it for a fish? nor would you give him a stone for bread?"

Jeanie was silent.

"When Nathan, the Lord's prophet, telt King David that his child must die," said the Elder, "yet nevertheless David even then, when it seemed almost rebellion.

prayed to the Lord to spare his life, and I dinna doot that his Father in heaven was pleased wi' his freedom and faith. He couldna but tak kindly such confidence frae His distressed servant."

"I am sure," said the Dr, "we cannot trust Him too much, or open our human hearts to Him too freely. But let us always remember, that when God refuses what we ask, He gives us something else far better, yea, and does far more than we can ask or think. So it may be thus with regard to your dear child. If He has taken him away, can you, for example, tell the good He has bestowed thereby on himself or others, or the evil and misery which He has thereby prevented? Oh, how many parents would give worlds that their children had died in infancy!"

"We are ignorant creatures!" exclaimed William.

"And consider further, Mrs Thorburn," said the Dr, "how the Apostle Paul prayed the Lord thrice to have a thorn in the flesh—a very messenger from Satan—removed. But the Lord did not hear even *his* prayer in his way, but answered it, nevertheless, in another and better way, when He said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is perfected in weakness.'"

"True, minister," said the Elder, "nor did He ever say, 'Seek ye my face in vain.'"

"And as regards your dear child, Mrs Thorburn," continued the Dr, touching her arm, and speaking with great earnestness, "I believe sorrow's crown of sorrow to a Christian parent, and the heaviest he or she can endure on earth, is that of seeing a child, dearer than their own life, living and dying in wickedness! What was David's sorrow for his dead babe, when compared with that wail of bitter agony for his wicked son,

‘Would God I had died for thee, O Absolom, my son, my son!’ God has saved *you* from that agony. He has done so by taking your child to Himself. Your precious jewel is not lost, but is in God’s treasury, where no thief can break through and steal: *that* is surely something!”

“Something!” exclaimed the smith; “it is surely, after all, everything. And yet——”

“And yet,” said Jeanie, as if interpreting the feeling of her husband, “wi’ a’ these blessed thochts about our wee bairn, he’s an awfu’ blank! Ilka thing in the world seems different.”

“I’m just thinking, Jeanie,” said her mother, “that it’s a comfort ye ever pat yer een on Davie; for there’s puir Mrs Blair (John Blair’s blin’ wife, ye ken) when she lost her callant, May was a year, she cam to me in an awfu’ way about it, and said that what vexed her sae muckle was, that she never had seen his wee face, and could only touch and han’le him, and hear him greet, but never get a look o’ him.”

“Puir body,” remarked Jeanie, “it was a sair misfortun’ for ony mither that! Ilka ane has their ain burden to carry. But, minister, let me speir at you, sir: Will I never see my bairn again? and if I see him, will I no ken him?”

“You might as well ask me whether you could see and know your child if he had gone to a foreign country instead of to heaven,” replied the Dr. “Alas for Christian love, if we did not know our beloved friends in heaven! But such ignorance is not possible in that home of light and love.”

“It wadna be rational to think so,” remarked William. “And yet, Dr,” he continued, “excuse me for just say-

ing, though I would rather listen than speak, that the knowledge of the lost, if such knowledge there can be, must be terrible !”

“I know not how that will be,” replied the Dr, “though I have my own views on it. Yet surely our ignorance of any person being lost would be dearly purchased by our ignorance of any person being saved ?”

“I did not think of that,” said the smith.

“But,” continued Jeanie, with quiet earnestness, “will our bairn aye be a bairn, Dr? Oh, I hope so !”

“Dinna try, Jeanie dear,” said David, “to be wise aboon what is written.”

The Dr smiled, and asked,—“If your child had lived, think you, would you have rejoiced had he always continued to be a child, and never grown or advanced? and are you a loss or a gain to your father and mother, because you have grown in mind and knowledge since you were an infant ?”

“I never thocht o’ that either,” said Jeanie, thoughtfully.

“Be assured,” continued the minister, “there will be no such imperfect and incomplete beings there as infants in intellect and in sense for ever. All will be perfect and complete, according to the plan of God, who made us for fellowship with Himself and with all His blissful family. Your darling has gone to a noble school, and will be taught and trained there for immortality, by Him who was Himself a child, who spoke as a child, reasoned as a child, and as a child ‘grew in wisdom and in stature ;’ and who also sympathised with a mother’s love and a mother’s sorrow. You too, parents, if you believe in Christ, and hold fast your confidence in Him, and become to Him as little children. will be made fit to enter

the same society ; and thus you and **your boy**, though never, perhaps, forgetting your old relationship on earth, will be fit companions for one another, for ever and for ever. Depend upon it, you will both know and love each other there better than you ever could possibly have done here !”

“ My wee pet !” murmured Jeanie, as the tears began to flow from a softened, because happier, heart.

William hid his face in his hands. After a while, he broke silence, and said, “ These thoughts of heaven are new to me. But common sense tells me they maun be true. Heaven does not seem to me noo to be the same strange place it used to be. My loss is not so complete as I once thought it was. Neither we nor our bairn have lived in vain.”

“ Surely not,” said the Dr ;

“ ‘ Better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all !’

You have contributed one citizen to the heavenly Jerusalem ; one member to the family above ; one happy spirit to add his voice to the anthem before the throne of God !”

“ Lord, help our unbelief !” said Mr Armstrong ; “ for the mair I think o’ the things which I believe, the mair they seem to me owre gude news to be true !”

“ The disciples, when they first saw Christ after His resurrection,” said the minister, “ did not believe from very joy.”

“ We think owre muckle o’ our ain folk, Dr, and owre little o’ Him,” remarked the Elder. “ But it’s a comfort that He’s kent and loved as He ought to be by them in heaven. I thank Him, along wi’ them that’s awa’, for all He is and gies to them noo in His presence.”

“And for all He is and does, and will ever be and do to every man who trusts Him,” added the Dr; “our friends would be grieved, if grief were possible to them now, did they think our memory of them made us forget Him, or that our love to them made us love Him less. Surely, if they know what we are doing, they would rejoice if they also knew that, along with themselves, we too rejoiced in their God and our God. What child in heaven but would be glad to know that its parents joined with it every day in offering up, through the same Spirit, the same prayer of ‘*Our Father!*’”

“If wee Davie could preach to us, I daresay, sir, that might be his text,” said the Elder.

“Though dead, he yet speaketh,” replied the minister.

The Dr rose to depart. “By the by,” he said, “let me repeat a verse or two to you, Thorburn, which I am sure you will like. They express the thoughts of a parent about his dead girl, which have already in part been poorly expressed by me when your wife asked me if she would know her boy:—

‘ She is not dead—the child of our affection,
But gone into that school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
And Christ himself doth rule.

‘ Not as a child shall we again behold her ;
For when with raptures wild
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child ;

‘ But a fair maiden, in her Father’s mansion
Clothed with celestial grace,
And beautiful with all the soul’s expansion
Shall we behold her face.’”

“Thank ye, sir, thank ye,” said Thorburn; “and ye’ll no be offended if I ax ye to gie me a grip o’ yer han’.”

And the smith laid hold of the Doctor's proffered hand, so small and white, with his own hand, so large and powerful,—“God reward ye, sir, for we canna! And noo, minister,” the smith continued, “I maun oot wi't! Since ye hae been so kind as gie us that fine bit o' English poetry, I canna help gieing you a bit o' Scotch, for Scotch poetry has been a favourite reading o' mine, and there's a verse that has been dirling a' day in my heart. This is it:—

‘It's dowie at the hint o' hairst,
 At the wa'-gang o' the swallow,
 When the winds blaw cauld,
 And the burns run bauld,
 And the wuds are hanging yellow;
 But oh! it's dowier far to see
 The wa'-gang o' ane the heart gangs wi',
 The dead set o' a shining e'e,
 That closes the weary warld on thee!’

Fareweel, sir! I'll expect ye the morn at two, if convenient,” the smith whispered to the Dr, as he opened the door to him.

“I'll be sure to come,” he replied. “Thank you for those verses; and think for your good about all I have said.”

That evening, after Dr M'Gavin's visit, there was a comfortable tea prepared by Jeanie for her friends, and the Corporal was one of the party.

There is a merciful reaction to strong feeling. The highest waves, when they dash against the rock, flow furthest back, and scatter themselves in their rebound into sparkling foam and airy bubbles.

The Corporal told some of his old stories of weariness and famine, of wounds and sufferings, of marches and retreats, of battles and victories, over the fields of Spain. Old Armstrong could match these only by Covenanter

tales, of fights long ago, from "The Scots Worthies," but was astonished to find the Corporal a stanch Episcopalian, who had no sympathy with "rebels." Yet so kind and courteous was the pensioner, that the Elder confessed that he was "a real fine boddie, without a grain o' bigotry." Jeanie and her mother spoke of the farm, of the cows, and of old friends among the servants, with many bygone reminiscences. And thus the weight of their spirits was lightened, although ever and anon there came one little presence before them, causing a sinking of the heart!

No sooner had their friends left the house for the night than the smith did what he never did before. He opened the Bible, and said to Jeanie, "I will read a chapter aloud before we retire to rest." Jeanie clapped her husband fondly on the shoulder, and in silence sat down beside him while he read again some of the same passages which they had already heard. Few houses had that night more quiet and peaceful sleepers.

The little black coffin was brought to the smith's the night before the funeral. When the house was quiet, Davie was laid in it gently by his father. Jeanie assumed the duty of arranging with care the white garments in which her boy was dressed, wrapping them round him, and adjusting the head as if to sleep in her own bosom. She brushed once more the golden ringlets, and put the little hands across the breast, and opened out the frills in the cap, and removed every particle of sawdust which soiled the shroud. When all was finished, though she seemed anxious to prolong the work, the lid was put on the coffin, yet so as to leave the face uncovered. Both were as silent as their child. But ere

they retired to rest for the night, they instinctively went to take another look.

As they thus gazed in silence, side by side, the smith felt his hand gently seized by his wife. She played at first nervously with the fingers, until finding her own hand held by her husband, she looked into his face with an unutterable expression, and meeting his eyes so full of unobtrusive sorrow, leant her head on his shoulder and said, "Willie, this is my last look o' him on this side o' the grave. But Willie, dear, you and me maun see him again, and, mind ye, no to part;—na, I canna thole that! We ken whaur *he* is, and we maun gang till him. Noo, promise me! vow alang wi' me here, as we love him and ane another, that we'll attend mair to what's gude than we hae dune, that—O Willie, forgive me, for it's no my pairt to speak, but I canna help it noo, and just, my bonnie man, just agree wi' me—that we'll gie our hearts for ever to our ain Saviour, and the Saviour o' our wee Davie!"

These words, as she rested her throbbing head on her husband's shoulder, were uttered in low, broken accents, half-choked with an inward struggle, but without a tear. She was encouraged to say all this—for she had a timid awe of her husband—by the pressure ever and anon returned to her hand from his. The smith spoke not, but bent his head over his wife, who felt his tears falling on her neck, as he whispered, "Amen, Jeanie! so help me God!"

A silence ensued, during which Jeanie got, as she said, "a gude greet," for the first time, which took a weight off her heart. She then quietly kissed her child and turned away. Thorburn took the hand of his boy

and said, "Fareweel, my wee Davie, and when you and me meet again, we'll baith, I tak it, be a bit different frae what we are this nicht!" He then put the lid mechanically on the coffin, turned one or two of the screws, and sat down at the fireside to speak about the arrangements of the funeral.

After that, and for the first time in his life, William asked his wife to kneel down, and join with him in prayer before they retired to rest. Poor fellow! he was sincere as ever man was, and never after till the day of his death did he omit this "exercise," which was once almost universal in every family in Scotland, whose "head" was a member of the church; and was even continued by the widow when the "head" was taken away by death. But on this the first time when the smith tried to utter aloud the thoughts of his heart, he could only say, "Our Father—!" There he stopped. Something seemed to seize him, and to repress his utterance. Had he only more fully known how much was in these words, he possibly might have gone on. As it was, the thoughts of the father on earth so mingled, he knew not how, with those of the Father in heaven, that he could not speak. But he continued on his knees, and spoke there to God in his heart as he had never spoken before. Jeanie did the same. After a while they both rose, and Jeanie said, "Thank ye, Willie. It's a beautiful beginning, and it will, I'm sure, hae a braw ending." "It's cauld iron, Jeanie, woman," said the smith, "but it wull heat and come a' richt yet."

The day of the funeral was a day of beauty and sunshine. A few fellow-tradesmen and neighbours assembled in the house, dressed in their Sunday's best, though it was visible in the case of one or two, at least, that their best

was the worse of the wear. The last of his possessions a Scotch workman will part with, even to keep his family in food, are his Sunday clothes ; and the last duty he will fail to perform is that of following the body of a neighbour to the grave.

All those who attended the funeral, and about twenty assembled, had crape on their hats and weepers on their coats. The Corporal had, also, a war-medal on his breast. The smith, according to custom, sat near the door, and shook each man by the hand as he entered. Not a word was spoken.

When all who were expected had assembled, the Dr, who occupied a chair near the table on which the Bible lay, opened the book, and read a portion of the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, without any comment. He then prayed with a fervour and suitableness which touched every heart.

The little coffin was brought out. It was easily carried. The Corporal was the first to step forward. He saluted the smith by putting his hand to his hat, soldier fashion, and begged to have the honour of assisting.

Slowly the small procession advanced towards the churchyard, about half-a-mile off ; and angels beheld that wondrous sight, a child's funeral—wondrous as a symbol of sin, and of redemption, too. It at once speaks of the insignificance of a human being as a mere creature, and of his dignity as belonging to Christ Jesus.

As they reached the grave, the birds were singing, and building their nests in the budding trees. A flood of light steeped in glory a neighbouring range of hills. Overhead, the sky had only one small, snow-white cloud reposing in peace on its azure blue.

When the sexton had finished the grave, and smoothed it down, William quietly seized the spade, and went carefully over the green turf again with gentle beats, removing with his hand the small stones and gravel which roughened its surface. Those who stood very near, had they narrowly watched him, which they had too much feeling to do, might have observed the smith give a peculiar, tender pressure and clap on the grave with his hand, as if on a child's breast, ere he returned the spade, and with a careless air, said, "Here, John, thank ye; it's a' richt noo." Then lifting up his hat, and looking round, he added, "I'm obleeged to you, freens, for your trouble in coming."

And so they left "wee Davie," more precious and more enduring than the everlasting hills!

Several years after this, Dr M'Gavin, when an old man, as he sat at his study fire, was conversing with a young clergyman who seemed to think that nothing could be accomplished of much value for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, unless by some great "effort," or "movement," or "large committee," which would carry everything before it. The Dr quietly remarked, "My young friend, when you have lived as long in the ministry as I have done, you will learn how true it is, that 'God fulfils Himself in many ways.' He is in the still, small voice, and that often when He is neither in the earthquake nor in the hurricane. One of the most valuable elders I ever had—and whose admirable wife and daughters, and well-doing prosperous sons, are still

members of my church, an^d my much-attached friends—told me on his dying bed, that, under God, he owed his chief good to the death of his first child, the circumstance which accidentally made me acquainted with him. On the last evening of his life, when enumerating the many things which had been blessed for his good, he said to me, “But, under God, it was my wee Davie that did it a’l”

