SCOTCH STORIES

OR

The Chronicles of Reckleton

BY

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UNCLE PETER'S LEGACY.

The Artist's Story.

MY mother had a half-brother about thirty years her senior, who was called, by those who honoured him with his baptismal name and inherited surname, Peter Penicuick; by most of his fellow-townsfolk, and others who estimated him by his penurious disposition and the limited nature of his commercial transactions, Peter Pennyworths; and by a somewhat numerous and needy brood of nephews and nieces, who looked expectantly forward to the time when their relative would "shuffle off this mortal coil" and leave his wealth behind, Uncle Peter.

It is needless to say that I belong to this latter class. Uncle Peter had been cast early on his own resources, and had somehow drifted into commerce—first as an itinerant vendor of small wares, and subsequently as a general merchant in his native borough of Keckleton. From the day on which he first sold for a penny the packet of needles which originally cost himself a halfpenny, Uncle Peter had never been content with less than a cent. per cent. profit; but being as keen in buying as he was in selling, he generally realised his prices, previous to the introduction of railroads into our part of Scotland—an innovation which he never ceased to lament till the day of his death.

When a customer grudged the price of any article, and asserted that it could be purchased at a lower figure

elsewhere, Uncle Peter, who possessed a certain rugged independence, would say—

"Weel, weel, just gang whaur ye think ye'll be cheaper ser'd, but tak' my word for't, ye'll pay dearer i' th' end;" and as the general excellence of his goods rendered this a frequent experience, he sold more at large profits than could have been expected, seeing he was very chary of giving credit. If, however, his profits were large, his overturns were comparatively small, so that his business never extended beyond his own personal management, and he was accustomed to say—

"Folk think that I'm rich; hoo cud I be rich? It tak's a lang time for ae man selling pennyworths to lay past a poun' note."

There was no doubt truth in the observation; but as Uncle Peter had remained a bachelor, and had been noted all his life for economy merging on miserliness, it was generally believed, and not without good grounds, that he was a "warm man." And the final disposal of his wealth was necessarily a matter of no small speculation in Keckleton, but more particularly among us who fondly hoped to become legatees.

In our family this hope was naturally strong by reason of my mother having been the most favoured by Uncle Peter of any of his relatives.

She had been his housekeeper previous to her marriage, and although he had looked upon that event with much disaffection, in course of time he relented so far as to pay and receive occasional visits from her, and these more frequently after the death of my father. Towards myself Uncle Peter displayed a partiality which led my mother to indulge in the brightest anticipations, for he would extend his great, gaunt, bony fingers, and pat me on the head, as often as he came to our house; and if I happened to go with my mother, or be sent on an errand to his shop, in

addition to the already-mentioned indication of affection, he would wipe the said bony fingers on his coarse sacking apron, insert them into a wide-mouthed bottle of sweets, and extract as many as half-a-dozen lozenges or sugar drops for my delectation.

When I was about twelve years of age, Uncle Peter let fall some hints which led my mother to think that he would not be unwilling to receive me into his own shop as an apprentice; but as she well knew that my tastes and inclinations drew me in a different direction, she wished, as far as lay in her power, to give me a chance to follow their bent, and so she contrived to put uncle off with some sort of temporising answer.

In consequence of all those indications of favour, I began to be regarded as Uncle Peter's heir, both at home, and also among my cousins in Keckleton and elsewhere. I am bound, however, to say, in all fairness to the old man himself, that, beyond what has been mentioned, he neither said nor did anything to encourage this assumption.

Moreover, as time wore on, and my mother reported the favourable progress I was making in my studies, especially in drawing, she observed, with no little uneasiness, that Uncle Peter received her intelligence with a grunt, which did not seem indicative of much satisfaction. But when I had the good fortune to gain the first prizes at our local School of Art in both the drawing and colouring departments, and my work, on being sent up to Edinburgh, had procured for me the privilege of free tuition at the Royal Scottish Academy, my mother thought it impossible but that her brother would catch some part of her own enthusiasm in respect to my talents. However, the old man received the information with the usual grunt, and the repetition of a well-worn proverb, "He that will to Cupar maun to Cupar."

"But if you only saw some of Hugh's drawings and paintings," urged my poor mother, "you would not doubt for a moment, Peter, but that he is a real born artist."

"Nae doot, nae doot," replied Uncle Peter, "but it wud hae been better for you an' himsel' to, that he hed been born a real tailor, souter, or baker, or even with the genius to become a sma' merchan' like mysel'," was the discouraging reply.

"But you will let him bring his portfolio and show what he can do?" my mother further pleaded.

"He needna be at the fash," said uncle; but with a sort of relenting smile he added, "I'll drap in some nicht and tak' a luik o' his bits o' pictur's to please you, Mary, an' we'll see what can be dune for the laddie. We maunna harden oor hairts against him athegither."

With this poor sympathy my mother was fain to take her departure.

True to his promise Uncle Peter did "drap in to see my bits o' pictur's," was pleased to express something not very far from approbation of my "handiwork," and by way of giving a practical direction to my energies and acquirements, he announced that he would make interest with the landlord of the Dog and Gun for a job to me, namely, the furbishing up of his old "signboard."

Luckily, I happened to be out at the time, otherwise there is no saying but I might have been imprudent enough to reject Uncle Peter's intended patronage with more disdain than gratitude. At anyrate his good intentions were never put into execution, for the very next day saw him laid down on his deathbed. The dying man had been all his life so unsympathetic and selfish, that his last illness excited but little commiseration in others.

Even my mother appeared to be more concerned about the disposal of his goods and chattels than about the *patient* himself. It is but fair, however, to say that her

solicitude was for her family and not for herself, and most of all on my account.

My chances had alternated in her mind from confident hope, in the days of the lozenges and sugar drops, to the borders of despair, when my art proclivities became the subject of Uncle Peter's disapproval. Again, a rebound had taken place when the merits of my "bits o' pictur's" received a sort of surly recognition from him, but when he sent from his deathbed a message for me to visit him—me alone of all his numerous nephews and nieces—hope rose to its zenith.

My brothers and sisters congratulated me in anticipation, and my mother herself, while warning me against false hopes and the pride that goeth before a fall, could hardly conceal her own elation of spirits. With trembling eagerness I made my way to Uncle Peter's dwelling, into which I was admitted by Betty Dean, an old maid who had succeeded my mother as uncle's housekeeper, and had retained the post ever since. Without delay Betty ushered me into a chamber so unique that it deserves a few words of description. It was a long, low-ceiled apartment on the ground floor, at right angles to the shop, and having an entrance both from it and also from the dwelling-house. Against the wall boxes and barrels were crowded without any other attempt at arrangement than the keeping clear of a passage of about two feet in width near the centre of the apartment, at the far end of which a space of about nine feet was partitioned off by unplaned deal boards.

Within this enclosure was Uncle Peter's bed, and here were also his strong box, an antique chest of drawers, and sundry other articles on which he appeared to set a special value. It was not mere whim which had caused Uncle Peter to make his bedroom in that rather unlikely place. An attempt had once been made to break into

the shop, and immediately thereafter he had fitted up this citadel, and furnished it with a sufficient armoury in shape of a superannuated military rifle and several stout cudgels, and there he had kept nightly watch and ward ever since, in order to be ready to stand by his stuff, in the event of any further predatory attacks being made upon it; and there is little doubt but that he would have given a good account of any plunderer, had ever one dared to appear, for he stood fully six feet in his shoes, with bone, muscle, and courage proportionate. Now, however, that he was down in his last illness, it might have been more seemly that he should have been laid in the ben end, as he himself had remarked to my mother, but he was, he said, "owre ill to be fashed wi' a change, an' wud e'en dee as he had lived by the stuff."

At the moment of my entrance into his little *sanctum* he was in bed with his face towards the wall, but when Betty said, "It's Hugh Paiterson, maister," he turned round with a groan and said, "Ye can leave us, Betty;" then addressing me, he said—

"Oh, Hugh, man, but ye're lang in comin'!"

I replied that it was not an hour since my mother had reached home to inform me that I was wanted.

"Weel, weel," he answered, "it may be only the impatience o' a man whase sands are numbered and quickly rinnin' oot that gars me think sae."

I ventured to say that recovery might not be so hopeless as he seemed to think it.

"Recovery!" he answered sharply, "there's nae hope o' recovery—nane, an' I canna say I greatly desire it. I canna say I'm sorry that the weary warsle o' life is sae nearly owre. Na, na, Hugh, I maunna complain; an' I dinna complain. I've had my day. I've seen my threescore an' ten years, an' anither half-score to haud them hale wi'; sae I am content to tak' staff in han' an' try

the crossin' o' the Jordan by sic fords or coble as may be granted me. My task in life is finished, Hugh, an' yours is beginning, sae I just sent for you to gie you a bit legacy to start wi'."

Here he made a pause, as if exhausted, at the same time scanning my features with his still keen grey eyes; then he resumed, as if in answer to the thoughts which my face had expressed to him—

"Nae a legacy o' siller, Hugh, but o' soun' common sense. A legacy o' guid advice, which, if followed, may prove o' far greater vailue than a' the siller I cud lea' ye. Luik at me, Hugh, I'm an auld man, a man o' nae little worldly experience, a man wha has aye got credit for soun' common sense, an' I'm a deein' man, Hugh."

Here followed another pause, and I did look at him as he lay there—grimmer, gaunter, ghastlier, with his eyes more sunk, his eyebrows more shaggy, his forehead more wrinkled, his nose and chin more threatful than I had ever before seen them,—and I could not but feel that his last statement at least, namely, that he was a dying man, was true, and that, so far as any voucher for the sincerity of the advice about to be tendered me was required, this was certain, that it would be given on the faith of a man who believed in its value and importance.

"Ye're a laddie, Hugh," he resumed, "that I lang thocht weel o', maybe owre weel o', for instead o' settlin' doon to a sober, industrious callin' at which ye wad be likely to mak' a decent livin', ye hae taen in yer heid to turn a pictur'-maker! Noo, what is a pictur'-maker, Hugh? I've kent twa i' this town i' my time, and the ane was starv't oot o' it, an' the ither lives in a hand-to-moo' dependent mainner that's really pitiable to see. Hugh, tak' the last advice o' an auld man, an experienced man, o' a deein' man, an' a sincere frien', an' dinna turn a pictur'-maker."

I might have offered some sort of remonstrance, but Uncle Peter left me no opening, for, drawing from below his pillow his well-worn verge watch, he continued—

"An' noo, Hugh, tak' this as a sma' remembrance o' yer Uncle Peter. She's keepit time for me for the best pairt o' sixty years, and tho' nae just what she was when I got her, I think ye'll find her weel worth pouch-room for some years yet. Fareweel, Hugh, fareweel, Hugh; Gude bless you, an' grant that you an' I may meet again in a couthier worl'. Meanwhile, tak' my advice, turn to some profitable callin', and gie up the idea o' becomin' a pictur'-maker."

These were the last words I ever heard from Uncle Peter, and the last time I saw him in life. The old verge watch I have in my possession still, not that it ever proved of much service to me as a "going concern," for its demise took place soon after that of its former owner; and when I took it to a watchmaker, he told me that the works were fairly and faithfully worn out, and the cases, he considered, would be dear at seven shillings and sixpence as old silver. As for the "legacy of guid advice," I entirely disregarded it, and although Art has often proved a niggardly enough pay-mistress, I have never seriously desired to change her service for any other.

I may add that when Uncle Peter's will was read it proved nearly as disappointing to other expectants as his "bit legacy" had proved to me. My mother got five pounds to buy mournings; Betty Dean got twenty pounds as a reward for upwards of as many years of faithful services at about half wages; and the residue of cash and property, amounting to the value of five or six thousand pounds, went to augment the funds of a charity for decayed merchants in Keckleton.

WIDOW WILL'S WOOER.

"They follow us whare'er we gang,
An' gin' we try to set them packin',
They swear their lives will no' be lang,
Because their very hairts are brakin'.
Against oor liberty they plot
Whenever they behold us single,
An' even in the widow's cot
They want a chair beside the ingle."

CHAPTER I.

IT'S a mistak', sirs, a complete misun'erstandin' o' the haill maitter, to suppose that mairriageable widows mair frequently remain single than mairriageable widowers, simply because the men hae the spierin' word an' the women hinna. I'm a widow mysel', an' I ken' at least anither half-dizzen maybe—though I say it, wha perhaps sudna say it—less likely to the e'e than I am, an ilka ane o' us hae had offers, an' micht be wearin' oor second men at this very meenit, gin sic had been oor pleasure. Na, na, sirs, the women are few wha hae had the fash o' ae man for half-a-score, or even half-a-dizzen years, wha will care to encounter the fash o' a second.

In nine cases oot o' ten, sirs, when we dae mairry a second or a third time, it's nae oor ain inclination, it's nae oor ain interest, it's nae oor ain convenience, an' surely it's nae oor ain comfort that we consult. Na indeed, it's either oot o' sheer pity for the men themsel's; oot o' consideration for their laneliness, their fecklessness; or it's

because they wear oot oor wills by their very persistence, as the constant drap wears oot the stane, that we consent to relinquish oor freedom for their sakes.

My man, John Will, wis just a fair average o' what men are generally. Gie him his head, an' let him gang his ain gait, an' he wis a' richt; but thraw wi' him, an' he was just as stubborn an' rampageous as a wild ox. He wis a guid score o' years my senior, an' folks warna slack to say that I took him for the sake o' a couthie doonsit, but that wisna the case.

I took him jist because he had set his hairt on gettin' me; an' bein' o' that headstrong an' positive character which I hae mentioned, I saw weel he wud either gang fairly wud gin I continued to refuse him, or actually tak' the bed an' gie up the ghost for my sake; an' as I cudna thole the thocht o' haen either o' the twa sair catastrophes at my door, I e'en consented to avert them by becomin' Mrs Will.

Wi' carefu' study o' Mr Will's likes an' dislikes, an' wi' canny guidin' o' the reins, so that he thocht he was gaen his ain gait when he was gaen just as I wanted him, I contrived to mak' oor half-score years o' wedded life nae mair unpleasant than I had expected, an' when John Will wis taen awa', he left his a' to me, for he had nae near relations.

Weel, bein' a bien an' comely widow, short o' twa-score, ye may judge that I wisna lang i' my weeds afore I saw that a bit wag o' my little finger, a blythe twinkle o' my e'e, or a couthie smirk o' my lips, cud at ony time bring wooers ding-dang to my door; but I wanted nane o' them, an' gae them nae encouragement; an' I keepit the maist forward o' them a' at the staff end, though nane had ony cause to complain o' my incivility.

Hoo sud I, Mrs Janet Will, risk the comforts o' a cosy four-roomed cottage, an' a bonnie bit gairden, wi' a canty

income sufficient, an' mair than sufficient, for my wants, including a douce deamie o' a servan' lassie to wait upon my will an' pleesure; hoo, I say, sud I risk a' this, an' trust my ain freedom o' word, action, an' life to the rule an' pooer o' ane o' the maisterfu' sex, wha ca' themsel's "lords o' the creation," an' dae their very best to deserve the name? I'll no deny, hooever, that I had some hair-breadth escapes, an' I dinna min' gien you a sample.

I had been about twa years a widow, an' wis beginnin' to feel a moderate confidence in my ain pooers o' defence, when I wis takin' a turn ae evenin' i' my bit front gairden, an' up comes a sonsie, weel-dressed, genteel-like man, apparently aboot my ain time o' life, accompanied by a wise, winsome bit slip o' a lassie. The pair made a sort o' a halt at my yett, nae doot attracted by the beauty o' my roses, for I had then, as I hae still, some o' the bonniest simmer roses to be seen in the borough o' Keckleton.

"Oh, do look, Major Benson; what pretty roses!" cried the bairn, lood aneuch for me to hear her.

"They are indeed lovely, my dear," replied her companion, in a deep musical voice, wi' an accent that I kent weel didna belang to Keckleton.

The gentleman's voice had an effect upon me that I couldna weel account for at the time, an' canna weel account for yet.

At onyrate, afore I hardly kent what I wis daen, I had snippit aff the bushes twa o' the bonniest roses i' the gairden, an', step¡in' up tae the yett, I said wi' a smile, at the same time ¡resentin' the ane to the gentleman an' the ither to the bairn—"Sin' ye admire my roses sae much ye'll maybe honour me by acceptin' a samplc o' them."

The gentleman not only thankit me very kindly, but also made me a fine military salute into the bargain.

He had a certain gentleman-like ease in his mainner that put us at once on the footing o' auld acquaintances,

an' I sae far threw aff a' reserve that I invited them to step into the gairden an' tak' a look o' a' my bit flooers, an invitation which was accepted without hesitation.

Ae advance led till anither, an' afore ten minutes had passed, I had learnt wha my new acquaintances were. Sergeant-Major Benson, a Devonshire man, had been sent doon by the War Office to drill the newly raised Keckleton Volunteers. He was lodged wi' the coachman o' Mickle Ha's wife, an' the bit slip o' a lassie wis the coachman's youngest dochter, wha, the Major said, wis daen him the honour to show him the beauties o' Keckleton; an' he wis sae flatterin' as to add, "But she has shown me nothing so pretty as your garden, Mrs Will. Indeed, my little friend has frequently wished me to come this way before to-night, and my walk has been amply rewarded. Her descriptions have been far excelled by the reality."

Of coorse I cudna help bein' pleased an' flattered by a' this, an' bein' far frae weel versed in military matters, I gae a much higher rank in my ain mind to the Sergeant-Major than really belonged to him, placin' him somewhere atween a Colonel an' a General, an' considered it nae sma' honour that he sud enter into my bit gairden, an' address mysel' in sic an elegant an' complimentary mainner.

When he an' the bit lassie took their departure, however, I couldna but reflect on mysel' for enterin' into sic a sudden intimacy wi' a stranger o' the opposite sex, wha, I cud easily see, wis mair than pleased wi' me an' my bit placie, an' wha had managed, in less than half an 'oor's time, to let me ken that he wis a wanter, wha wadna be adverse to matrimony wi' a suitable person, an' to worm oot o' mysel' that I wis a widow wi' a decent income entirely under my ain control.

I therefore resolved to be mair o' my guard in future, sud Major Benson favour me wi' a second visit, which I had a strong presentiment that he would dae.

Weel, this presentiment didna turn oot wrang, he nae only cam' again, but the simmer roses faded, the fruit ripened an' fell, or wis gathered frae the tree; the leaves waned, fell, an' were whirled awa by the blasts o' autumn; the winter snaws began to whiten the distant hills, an' still Major Benson found some attraction or anither that led him to my yett at least ance a week.

In fact his visits had been frequent eneuch to set the tongues o' the gossips o' Keckleton waggin'; but that I minded little. I wis never ane to let the clash o' the neighbourheid interfere wi' my peace or pleesure.

I said an' did naething to unnecessarily encourage him to come, an' at the same time I cudna fin' i' my hairt to deprive him o' ony sma' bit enjoyment that either a sicht o' my plants an' flo'ers, or maybe a nod or a smile frae mysel' at the window or the door, or a five minutes' crack at the yett, cud afford him.

Further than this, hooever, I took guid care that oor intimacy didna gang, though I maun admit that on several occasions it wis a piece o' rael self-denial on my pairt to refrain frae askin' him in to a wee drap o' a dram when I kent he wis on the return frae a lang, toilsome shootin' match.

CHAPTER II.

WEEL, the shootin' matches gaed past an' the drill itsel' wis owre for a season, an' it cam' to my ears that the Major had got the route for Carlisle. Of coorse I expected him to come my gait afore he left Keckleton. In a' likelihood he wud ca' to say gude-bye; an' altho' he had never been within the four wa's o' Rosebank Cottage, I thocht I cudna'

let him leave the toon without inveetin' him in to partake o' a dram an' a bite o' cheese an' bread at the least.

I wis nae langer in ony mist aboot his rael rank. I had informed mysel' correctly on that point, as weel as in relation to his general character an' conduct, sae far as these were kent at Keckleton, for it behoves a woman, an' mair especially a woman possessin' considerable warldly gear in her ain richt, to be very circumspect in the wale o' the sort o' men she admits to her society.

Weel, the voice o' Keckleton wis unanimous in declarin' that Major Benson wis a perfect model o' propriety, and he wis jist as exact as the town's clock in the performance o' a' his duties; sober, good-tempered, an' quite adored by the men in his capacity o' drill instructor, an' mair than that, I had observed that he wis a regular attender at the same kirk as mysel'.

There seemed nae reason to question the perfect respectability o' the Major, but I cudna but own to mysel' that it wud be a daft-like thing for me to forsake a comfortable hame at my time o' life, an' scamper aboot the warld wi' a sodger hooever respectable he micht be.

The thing wisna to be thocht o' seriously, but there seems to be a natural desire o' conquest i' the human briest, an' I maun confess that I didna like to hae been sae groundlessly made the subject o' the gossips' claick. Withoot wishin' to subject the worthy Major to ony serious disappointment or needless pain, I wis a wee thing anxious to ken to a certainty whether or no I had the richt to add him to the number o' my captives, sae to speak.

I raelly didna wish the Major to mak' me ony formal offer, but I confess I did desire to ken a little mair exactly hoo the lan' lay; I wisna ill-pleased, therefore, when the Major ca'd ae evenin' an' requested to see me.

Although I felt a wee thing flurried, I ordered Nelly to bid him enter an' step ben, believin' that I had the hank

o' circumstances fairly in my ain han', an' cud win' the thread just as I wished.

Weel, when the usual salutations had passed, and the near departure o' the Major had been duly commented upon, I rang my bit han' bell, an' ordered Nelly to set oot the whisky bottle an' the bread an' cheese.

To my surprise the Major, while thankin' me very politely for my intended hospitality, informed me that he didna drink speerits o' ony kind; "for," said he, "I have seen so much unhappiness, misery, and crime arise from drink that I have resolved never to let ardent spirits cross my lips again, except under medical orders; but," he added, "if I may so far trespass on your kindness, Mrs Will, I will with much pleasure accept a cup of coffee from you."

Of coorse I was willin' and happy to grant his request, an' I observed wi' nae little satisfaction that while I wis busyin' mysel' aboot the makin' o' the coffee, an' the settin' oot o' the proper accompaniments, he kept followin' a' my movements wi' an approvin' an' admirin' e'e.

I need hardly add that he declared the coffee itsel' perfection, sayin' that he had drunk the beverage in baith hemispheres, prepared upon the maist approved principles, but had tasted naething to equal the delicious cup presented him by me.

In the coorse o' his duties as a sodger, Major Benson had served in a' the four quarters o' the globe, an', bein' a man o' nae sma' readin' and observation, his conversation wis sae interestin' that the 'oors flew past like meenites in his company, an' although it wis only half-past seven when he cam' in, the knock chappit ten afore we weel kent.

Noo, I'm a person o' regular habits mysel', an' seldom sit later than ten o'clock ony nicht, an' I generally lat my servan' lass mak' what she likes o' her time after nine; but on that evenin' Nelly had waitit on an additional 'oor

afore she pat her head in at the door in her usual mainner to spier gin I wad want onything mair for the nicht.

When she withdrew, my visitor startit to his feet, at the same time makin' an apology for trespassin' sae lang on my time.

"It's been nae trespassin' ava," quo' I, "but a rael pleesure to me, Major Benson, to hae been sae lang favoured wi' your company. Your conversation has been sae interestin' to me that I had nae idea o' the flicht o' time—nane. It wis a complete surprise to me when the knock chappit ten."

I had nae intention to express mysel' sae strongly; but these were my real feelin's, an' they shapit themsel's into words afore I weel kent what I wis sayin'. An I saw I had gane owre far only when I observed the pleased—I may weel say delighted—expression which cam' owre the Major's countenance, an' the nae-to-be-misunderstood looks o' love wi' which he regairded me.

He drappit into his chair again, hirsled it up to the side o' mine, an'——

Weel, I needna mention eetem by eetem a' that took place, I'll only tak' upon me to say that naething passed an' naething wis omitted suitable to the occasion o' a rael couthie coortship.

As for the Major's "declaration o' love," as the story-buiks ca' it, it cam' aboot as naturally as ony piece o' ordinary conversation, an' bore nae resemblance whatever to the eloquent an' impassioned speeches uttered by lovers in the fashionable novels. The only respect in which it differed frae his ordinary tone an' mainner wis in the impressive earnestness o' the ane an' the truly bewitchin' attraction o' the ither.

He said, amang ither things, that frae the very moment when I steppit up to my ain yett, an' put the rose in his han', he had never ceased to think o' me as a woman

wha, wad I only consent to become his wife, wad nae only blot oot a' unpleasant memories o' a somewhat stormy an' troublous past, but wad enable him to spend the remainin' years o' life in a state o' greater happiness than usually fell to the lot o' a mortal man. In a year an' a half he cud retire frae the service wi' a pension, which wud be mair than sufficient for his ain moderate wants, an' he had nae doot but some suitable employment wad enable him to double the amount o' it if required.

In this way he made it plain that I wad sacrifice naething frae a business point o' view, an' that there cud be nae reasonable objection to oor mairriage on the score o' warldly circumstances.

But he didna dwall lang upon that head. He branched aff into the maist temptin' description o' the domestic felicity that we were bound to enjoy if spared in health and strength; an' mair especially did he insist upon the great blessin' I wud be to him, what a deep debt o' gratitude he wad ever feel that he owed to me, sud I accept him, an' the dreary "Slough o' Despond" into which I wad plunge him by a refusal.

In short, he made it as plain as a pike-staff we were just made for ane anither, an' life to him withoot me wad be unbearable.

Need I say that a' my resolutions vanished like the mornin' dew aff a May flooer, or a flake o' snaw on a rinnin' stream? I never wis a hard hairtit woman; I never wis an unsociable woman; I've even pitied the puir, lanely heron stalkin' by himsel' in the Loch o' Mireside, an' hoo cud I help feelin' for a fellow-creatur, an' for sic a comely, couthie fellow-creatur as wis pleadin wi' me to put an end to his aesomeness? I hadna the hairt to say him nae, an' when Sergeant-Major Benson left Rosebank Cottage that nicht it wis wi' the promise that I, Mrs Will, wad become Mrs Benson.

CHAPTER III.

THE Major didna leave Keckleton for some days aifter that fatefu' nicht, an' it wis arranged atween us, at several meetings previous to his departure, what line o' action we sud pursue.

In the first place, we agreed that oor engagement sud be kept a profound secret at Keckleton; that by-and-by I sud follow the Major on to Carlisle, as on a visit to a weel-to-dae second cousin o' my ain residin' there, a widow like mysel'; an' that in due coorse we sud be quietly mairret there. Aifter which we sud be guided as inclination an' circumstances micht direct.

When the Major gaed south, I had ample opportunity for calm reflection; but contemplatin' the step I wis aboot to tak frae a' the possible points o' view, an' apairt frae my ain inclination an' personal likin' athegither, I cud see my duty in nae ither licht than just to follow oot the coorse agreed upon.

The happiness o' this worthy man was evidently in my han's, an' I felt that I had nae richt to trifle wi' it, and nane to pursue the selfish policy o' remainin' single, when I micht be sae muckle mair usefu' in the sphere o' a mairret woman.

Mony days hadna passed either ere a letter arrived frae my intended, the contents o' which were scarcely less delightfu' than his ain presence an' conversation.

Mair letters followed, an' what wi' these, an' the attention demanded by the preparations necessary for my journey south, an' the care to be exercised lest oor secret sud in ony way leak oot at Keckleton, my head wis for some weeks kept in a complete whirl o' confusion an' excitement. The pryin' curiosity that followed a' my movements at Keckleton; the constant questionin's an

surmisin's o' my neighbours Mrs Peck an' Mrs Botherston, as they were reported to me by my ain servant lass, Nelly Watt, were doonricht annoyin'; an' glaid wis I when a' my arrangements, packin's, an' parcellin's were at an end, an' I mysel' wis in a railway carriage speedin' soothwards wi' my back to Keckleton. I had received a letter o' love, cautions, an' directions frae Major Benson, an' anither frae my cousin, Mrs Armstrong, assurin' me o' a welcome reception; an' it wis nae only wi' nae mainner o' misgivin's, but in very high spirits, that I left hame; an' the readin' an' re-readin' o' the Major's letters frae first to last, together wi' my ain pleasant thochts, an' the novelties seen on the road, made the lang journey lichtsom', so that I arrived at Carlisle far less fatigued than micht hae been expected.

It is nae mere figure o' speech to say that I wis received at the station by the Major wi' open airms, and conducted by him to my cousin's hoose, wha cudna hae gien me a heartier welcome altho' I had been the "Chief o' the Armstrongs' leddy," whaever she may be.

It wasna lang a secret to Mrs Armstrong on what errand I had come to Carlisle, and it was a real relief to me to get the approval, the sympathy, and the advice an' helpin' han' o' a true frien', an' ane o' my ain sex, on sic a tryin' occasion.

When the Major cam' to tea next afternoon, by special invitation, an' confirmed the guid impression made when he had handed me in, I dinna think there was a happier woman than mysel' in a' the four quarters o' the globe.

Weel, a' wis arranged for the mairriage, which, accordin' to previous agreement, wis to be a very quiet affair.

The Major, alang wi' a frien', a Sergeant-Major Potter frae the Castle, were to tak' breakfast thegither wi' Mrs Armstrong an' mysel', and then we were to drive in twa cabs to ane o' the churches, I forget which, an' be mairret by special license, after which ceremony we were to lunch

athegither at a hotel, an' then the Major an' mysel' were to start on an aucht days' tour to London an' elsewhere.

When the fatefu' mornin' arrived I wis far less flurried than micht hae been expected, for everything had gaen sae smoothly. I could hae nae fear nor suspicion o' a hitch o' ony kind arisin' to mar the harmony o' the final proceedin's.

Indeed, I had been jokin' Mrs Armstrong about followin' my example an' gaen into the military line wi' the Major's frien', wha, we understood, wis a wanter like himsel', an' didna' appear athegither indifferent to her charms, which were considerable. Mrs Armstrong, being a very merry bodie, didna tak' my proposal anywise amiss; an' while we were dressin', an' sittin' dressed waitin' in state for the arrival of the gentlemen to breakfast, which wis to be at shairp ten o'clock, we were baith as gay, as frolicksome, an' as licht hairted as if we had been twa lassies in oor teens, instead of twa douce widows, wha had neither o' us lang to live till we sud hae seen oor forty simmers.

We were, in fact, gigglin' for a' the warl' like twa giddy young things when a cab at full gallop drove up to the door, oot o' which sprang Major Benson, still in his regimental undress. He rang the bell as if he would hae pulled down the hoose, and, when the door was opened, rushed into the breakfast-room, where we were sittin'.

His looks were wild, his face white as that o' a corpse. He seized me in his airms, an' pressed me to his breist as wi' the iron grip o' a' droonin' man, at the same time exclaimin'—

"O, Janet! O, my own darling love! All is over between us! That woman, that virago who by legal right calls herself my wife, is not dead as I believed. She and her accursed accomplices practiced a cunningly devised deception upon me, it appears, in order to extort money, and more money.

"No! no! she is not dead! She is here in Carlisle to claim me, to make me the most miserable wretch in creation; and the most miserable of all, because I have deceived — but I swear before High Heaven, most unintentionally, most unwittingly—deceived the best, the noblest, the dearest woman alive!"

Here the great, strong man utterly broke doon, relaxed his ticht hold o' me, and clasped his han's owre his forehead, while the big tears rolled doon his cheeks, an' his breist heaved as if his very hairt was burstin'.

As for me, a sort o' spasm seemed to pass owre my hairt, ascend an' paraleeze my brain, an' though I didna faint deid awa, which dootless wad hae been the correct an' ledy-like thing to hae daen, yet ye micht hae knockit me doon wi' a feather, and I drappit into a chair fairly dazed an' dumfounded.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS ARMSTRONG wis little better at first than mysel', but she cam' sooner roon' than I did; an' she demanded in a tone o' serious displeasure what explanation or excuse the Major could offer for the sair deception an' wrang which he had practised upon me.

Puir man, my very hairt is sair even yet when I mind on the terrible distress wi' which he eeked oot an accoont o' a hasty and unfortunate mairriage wi' a woman possessed indeed o' nae little beauty, but very defective in a' maitters o' proper an' weel regulated conduct.

Headstrong and perverse frae the very first, she very soon set a' control at defiance, an' gaed on frae bad to worse till she ended by becomin' a drunken virago o' the very worst description.

I daurna trust mysel' to gang into a' the miserable details o' that unhappy connection as they were set forth by the sufferer.

Suffice to say that aboot a year afore Major Benson cam' to Keckleton the woman's conduct became utterly unbearable, an' the disgrace o' a divorce wis avoided only by her consentin' to leave the Major upon receivin' a sum o' money sufficient to enable her to gang to an elder sister, mairret an' settled in America, under whose care she promised to begin a reformed life.

Weel, the money wis raised, the woman was seen on board a New York liner, an' in coorse o' time there cam' to the Major a lang, weel-connected letter, purportin' to be frae a lady wha had been a fellow-passenger in the same ship wi' the woman.

The letter set forth, wi' a detail o' circumstances which disairmed a' suspicion, that the woman had been ill mair or less durin' the coorse o' the haill voyage to New York; that on landin' at that city she cud gang nae further; that, on the recommendation o' the writer o' the letter, she had been received into a respectable lodgin'-hoose; that here she became worse an' worse, an' her money becomin' exhausted the writer had frae time to time advanced such sums as were required for her necessities, an' on her death had also paid the expenses o' her funeral.

Mairowre an' aboon that, the writer had promised the woman in her last 'oors to inform Sergeant-Major Benson o' a' the circumstances o' the case, including the fact o' the woman's true repentance, o' her sair grief at nae bein' able tae pillow her deein' head on his breist, an' obtain frae his ain lips an assurance o' forgiveness for a' the grief an' sorrow she had caused him.

Finally, the writer didna neglect to enclose a carefully made oot account o' moneys said to hae been advanced, an' o' expenses incurred aboot the funeral, leaving it, as

wis cunnin'ly set forth, to the Major's honour either to repay the same or no, just as his conscience sud dictate. Gin there had been a shadow o' suspicion left in the puir man's mind, this last stroke o' policy wad hae completely dispelled it. He wis far owre honourable a man to let anither bear the burden which in law, if nae in justice, fell to him. The siller wis sent. But wae's me! The whole story wis a fabrication.

The woman an' anither limmer nae better than hersel' had, it appeared, contrived the base scheme to extort mair siller frae their deluded victim, an' were, as I said, only owre successfu'.

When the woman was tired o' America, she somehoo faund her way back to England, an' easily tracked the Major to Carlisle, "comin'," as he observed, "in the very nick o' time to prevent him frae committin' a crime in the eyes o' the law, but at the same time to dash the cup o' happiness frae his lips when it appeared to be fullest an' sweetest."

This is a dry an' bare ootline o' the pitifu' story, for I haena the hairt to dwall upon the particulars, an' mair than that, it wud tak' the pen o' a ready writer to gie onything like a correct idea o' the whole sum an' substance o' the maitter, an' the sair, sair distress that accompanied the revelation.

As for my ain feelin's on the dowie occasion, an' o' oor final separation, I winna speak; there's nae speech at my comman' to describe them.

The grief o' a woman's aften sair eneuch to witness, but that o' a strong man in the agonies o' a despairin' love is truly hairt-rendin'.

For me, what I felt waur than onything wis to witness the distress o' a man wha had been sae very nearly my ain, an' yet had nae richt to offer him ither consolation than an ill-expressed assurance o' full an' complete forgiveness.

You may be sure I turned my face hamewards wi' far different feelin's frae those wi' which I had left it; an' when I arrived at Keckleton an' Rosebank Cottage, a' the brichtness seemed to hae gaen oot o' life. I noo un'erstood for the first time hoo Robbie Burns an' ither true poets ca' upon natur' to mourn and lament alang wi' them in their deep distresses an' sair bereavements—for the woods roon' Keckleton appeared to me to hae put on sackcloth; the distant hills werna covered wi' the stainless snaw, but muffled in ghastly windin' sheets; an' the wee birds that ance chirped sae confidingly an' cheerily on my ain window sill in the frosty mornin's, cam' timidly an' waefully to licht on the gray stane, an' utter a few dowie notes which said to me as plainly as words:—

"Janet Will, Janet Will,
Greet your fill, greet your fill;
Sad for you life is noo,
Janet Will, Janet Will."

Oh! that wis a dreary winter an' spring, an' I wis amaist thankfu' when my servan' lass, Nelly, informed me ae day o' some ill-natured remarks made about me by Mrs Peck an' Mrs Botherston, as bein' somethin' different for me to think o', and somethin', sae to speak, tangible to warsle wi'.

A woman's guid name is a thing for her to defend wi' her last breath, an' ye may be sure I gaed the twa kitties, wha were tryin' to damage mine, "their kail thro' the reek" the first time I foregathered wi' them.

As I remarked afore, I'm nae ane wha generally aloos the clack o' gossips' tongues to brak' my peace, but on this occasion I wis angry, an' rale angry, at what wis said baith aboot mysel' an' also aboot that sair-sufferin' man, Sergeant-Major Benson. Hoosomever, I gae my leddies sic a settin' doon as will keep them for the future, I think, frae makin' impertinent remarks, to my ain servan' lass

at onyrate, either aboot me or ony ane in whom I happen to hae a special interest.

An' noo, sirs, that I hae gien you the whole story frae first to last, ye will be able to judge for yoursel's whether either I or Major Benson wis to blame for the unfortunate issue o' oor engagement; an' also whether, under the circumstances I cud weel hae refused him, believing him free to mak' me his wife.

But though I'm nae what I wis afore this dowie affair, an' may never be the same again either in strength or speerits, I think I'm strong eneuch to keep the resolution which I hae noo made for a finality, namely, to hae nae mair to dae wi' matrimony on my ain account a' the days o' my life, be they lang or short. Na, na, sirs, although the speerin' word were mine instead o' theirs, there wud be twa suns i' the lift afore ony ane o' the male sex fand me speerin' their price.

Such was Widow Will's account of her wooer and the result of his wooing; but the Editor of these veracious histories believes that he would scarcely be justified in closing the narrative without making the following addenda:—

Not many weeks after Mrs Will put her friends in possession of the foregoing facts, the following appeared among the Death Notices in the columns of the *Keckleton Chronicle:*—

"At Carlisle, on the 18th of June, Sarah, the wife of Sergeant-Major Benson. Friends at a distance will please accept of this intimation."

Among the local paragraphs allusion was thus made to the above notice:—

"We sincerely regret to announce, in another column, the death of the wife of Sergeant-Major Benson, who was drill-instructor of the Keckleton Volunteers last summer,

and in that capacity gained the goodwill of the entire corps. It may also be added that Sergeant Benson is besides well remembered by a large circle of friends in Keckleton, who, we feel assured, will as sincerely as ourselves sympathise with him in his afflicting bereavement."

Nearly a year after this notice, there appeared another in the marriage column of the same Journal, in which Sergeant-Major Benson and Mrs Will were named as the contracting parties.

The Editor has also heard that Mrs Benson, formerly Mrs Will, informed her friends at the wedding party that, although she had most solemnly resolved to "hae naething mair to dae wi' the male sex, yet when Major Benson cam' a' the way frae England to Keckleton to renew his wooin', an' lookit sae wae-begone and hairt-broken like, an' made it sae clear to me that the re-establishment o' his happiness wis entirely in my han', I wad hae had the hairt o' a' nether millstane nae to act as I hae dune, an' become Mrs Benson."

THE RESURRECTIONISTS.

The Sexton's Story.

I.

I DINNA profess to be gifted wi' the qualifications o' a successfu' story-teller, but for certain reasons, which may become apparent in due coorse, I hae taen pen in han' in order to write oot a bit memorandum o' certain transactions which took place at Keckleton in the year 1830, includin' some account o' the death o' my esteemed frien', Matthew Davidson, o' Strypeside.

In the year 1830, when the events which I am about to relate took place, the kirkyaird in which the maist o' the gude folks o' Keckleton were laid doon to sleep wi' their forefaithers, didna lie as noo within the toon, but a guid furlong ootside the thick o' the hooses.

A bit burnie, ca'd the Siller Strype, ran alang the lower end o' the kirkyaird an' separated it frae the toon. This Strype nae langer exists; twenty years ago it becam' a feeder for Keckleton Water Company's upper dam; but till this very day it's sometimes said o' a deein' person that he or she will soon hae to cross the Siller Strype.

This sayin' is Greek to young folk wha hae seen the first licht o' day sin' Howe Street ran alang the fit o' the auld kirkyaird; but the signification o' the expression is weel understood by us o' the last generation, wha hae seen mony a corp borne across the Strype to its lang hame. Ah, me! mony is the corp that my ain twa een hae seen

carried alang the auld timmer briggie, lang sin-syne rotten or burnt for fuel; an' mony is the corp for whom these twa hands hae fashioned the "hoose o' clay" in the Keckleton Kirkyaird. Ay, an' a couthie doon-lie it maun hae been for ony corp amang sae mony hamely, kent folks, as compared wi' the new Seemetry, wi' a' its new-fangled "Rules and Regulations," an' its plots laid oot in a' mainner o' fancifu' shapes, like flooer-beds, and where ony comer may get a graif wha has the siller to pay for it.

Ay, ay, mony is the corp, big an' little, that I've laid doon, but the biggest single graif that I ever made wis in 1830, for the corp o' a weel-respectit man, Matthew Davidson, sometime tenant in the farm o' Strypeside. Matthew Davidson—"Muckle Matthew" he wis aften ca'd baith to distinguish him frae a neighboor o' the same name, an' also on account o' his size—stood sax feet seven inches in his stockings, and wis stout in proportion, —but bein' a weel made man, he didna strike the e'e as by ordinar' big. Ah, me! there's nae men makin' like honest Matthew Davidson noo-a-days.

It wis said that Matthew never kent what fear was except the fear o' employin' his ain heavy han' against ony o' his fellow-creatures in ony rash or unguarded mainner; an' that wis the reason that his name was never heard o' in a brawl or fecht, although I am mair inclined to set his quietness doon to a naturally kind hairt an' an even temper.

Mony were the feats o' strength exhibited by Matthew in a usefu' and peaceable direction, hooever, as is remembered to this very day in Keckleton. An' yet this worthy an' pooerfu' man was felled doon at an age little past the prime o' life, as I am weel convinced, by the han' o' a stripling.

That is the story that I've taen upon me to tell, an' I maun gang through wi' my task in my ain fashion.

In the year 1830 Matthew Davidson was livin' at Strypeside wi' his only bairn, a wise-like lassie o' some auchteen or nineteen simmers, as his hoosekeeper, for I had laid doon his wife in the year o' the short crap, namely, 1826. The dwellin'-hoose o' Strypeside, a canty, stob-thack but-an'-ben, wi' a kitchen standin' aff at richt angles, wis situate exactly at the point where Brae Street noo joins Howe Street, or, referrin' to the period o' my story, on the side o' the Siller Strype nearest to the toon.

Richt opposite to Matthew's hoose was the lower yett o' the kirkyaird. Near the yett was my bit tool-hoose; a set o' stane steps stood oot o' the yaird wa' near the west gable o' the hoosie, an' a fitpath led through the yaird to the upper yett, alangside o' which anither set o' steps led owre the upper wa'.

The fitpath was used a' my time as grave-digger as a thoroughfare to the landward pairts o' the pairish, an' there wisna sma' discontent occasioned by the shuttin' o' it up. Weel, my bit tool-hoose bein' situate sae near to Matthew Davidson's dwallin'-hoose, it becam' a frequent practice o' mine to gang in to Matthew's to licht my pipe, or maybe, when business wisna very thrang, I wud gang in withoot the excuse o' requirin' to burn tobacco, for I kent the Davidsons lang, an' was fond o' a crack wi' them.

As I observed afore, Mary Davidson was a wise-like lassie, as sensible as she wis weel-faurt, an' had become naewise averse to hae a joke wi' me aboot the lads.

Matthew himsel' wis a man weel informed upon a' the traffic o' Keckleton an' the surroundin' districts; for, being skeely amo' beasts, and his ain placie bein' owre sma' to employ a' his time, he made a gey guid eke to his income by actin' as a sort o' doctor an' general adviser anent a' sort o' complaints amo' the bestial for miles an' miles aroun', an' wis, therefore, weel posted up as to whatever was gaen on.

Noo, the conversation o' sic a man to ane like mysel', in a public way as I then wis, cudna fail to be interestin'; an' at this time even mair sae than usual, by reason o' an epidemic that had broken oot in the pairish, an' wis occasionin' some deaths an' nae sma' apprehension, for it wis said to be spreadin', which, I may say, didna turn oot to be the case, hooever.

"It's like ye'll be keepit busy, Tammas," said Matthew to me ae evenin', aboot the later end o' Januar', that I had steppit in frae soddin' a graif.

"Wissin' nae ill to kent folk," quo' I, "a job or twa wudna be unacceptable at the present time, for I had a gey bare year last, an' this epidemic's nae like to mak' me muckle richer sin' twa o' the deaths that's happened in't hae been buried at Sankland."

"Yer a terrible bodie, Tammas," says Mary Davidson. "I believe ye wud be glaid to bury's a' for greed o' siller."

"Hoot, hoot, lassie," quo' Matthew, "Tammas is nae sae bad as that, an' ye ken we maun a' live by oor trade."

"Tammas doesna see the necessity o' ithers livin' owre lang," quo' Mary, for she an' I were nae i' the waye o' sparin' ane anither when we began banterin'.

"I'll pay you oot for yon saucy tongue, my lass, when I get the chance," quo' I; "at onyrate there's *some* o' your frien's that I wud lay doon cheap."

Noo I sud nae hae said that, but a bodie canna aye wyle his words, for Mary guessed wha my remark referred till, an' her face littit scarlet.

It was Jamie Lott that I sklentit at, for I had reason to believe he wis comin' aifter Mary Davidson, an' I likit neither him nor his faither, Dr Lott; but o' the Lotts mair by-an'-by. An' in order tae turn the conversation I addressed mysel' to Matthew, for I understood by his first remark that he had something fresh to communicate anent the epidemic.

"Ah weel, Matthew, by your waye o' speakin' ye hae been hearin' o' mair cases o' illness?" quo' I, inquiringly.

"Ou ay," quo' Matthew; "Janet Tamson at the Wardhead is doon in the epidemic, an' ye'll hae heard o' the death o' Eppie Robb under very peculiar circumstances."

"I did hear o' the death o' Eppie," quo' I, "but kennin' that she wis to be buried oot o' the pairish, I didna tak' muckle notice o't. What were the peculiar circumstances, man?"

"Weel," quo' Matthew, "the whole talk at present is o' this epidemic, an' o' forewarnin's an' dead-can'les, an' the like in connection wi't, an' it appears there wis a forewarnin' in this case.

"Auld Meggie Mathieson dreamt the nicht afore Eppie's death that she heard a voice cryin' doon her ain lum—'Come awa, Meggie, come awa; ye're owre lang there!' Meggie waukened in a sair fricht, believin' that her last hoor wis at han'. She cud sleep nae mair that nicht, an' in the mornin' she felt far frae weel, an' wud hae sent for the minister, or ane o' the elders at onyrate, but, livin' by hersel', she had naebody to send. So she crap oot to her nearest nieper, Eppie, whom she found in the dead-thraw. Meggie kent then that the warnin' didna refer to hersel', but to Eppie; an', puir bodie, she declares that till her deein' day she'll aye regret that she micht hae been instrumental in savin' puir Eppie's life.

"The stories o' dead-can'les are rife enough, but there's only ane in which ye wud tak' interest, Tammas."

"An' what is it, man?" quo' I.

"Weel," quo' Matthew, "Geordie Massie had occasion to be comin' hame in the late only three nichts ago, an' he saw a can'le movin' atween your tool-hoose an' ane o' the new graves. I had this frae Geordie's ain mou', an' he says he wud tak' his Bible oath that his een didna deceive him."

"Matthew," quo' I, "it's my real opinion that the deed-lichts seen by Geordie Massie were in livin' han's."

"What dae ye mean, Tammas?" quo' Matthew, raither excitedly.

"I mean that the corp-lifters hae been payin' a visit to Keckleton Kirkyaird," quo' I.

"Matthew, lettin' flee a bit oath, a thing far frae common wi' him, said, "Gin I come across ony o' the scoondrels I'll visit them wi' a vengeance."

"Ye'd better be cautious, Matthew, man," quo' I, "for the villains micht hae fire-airms."

"Fire-airms or no' fire-airms," quo' he, "I sanna mince maitters wi' ony ane o' them gin I catch him."

I chanced to look at Mary as Matthew wis speakin', an' I observed that she first turned as white as a windin'-sheet and then flushed crimson, an' I had nae doot in my ain mind that she was thinkin' o' the consequences that micht ensue were a collision to tak' place atween her lover an her faither. "Hooever," I said, "we'll better say nae-thing aboot oor suspicions in the meantime, till I see gin there's ony grounds for them." An' wi' that I cam' my waas hame.

II.

WHEN I got hame an' sat doon to my drap kail brose, the wife as usual says to me, "Onything new the day, Tammas?"

Weel, I gae her a' that had passed at Strypeside. An' when I cam' till an end o' my budget, quo' I, "It's my opinion, Marget, that some provision will hae to be made some waye or anither for the doctors gettin' bodies, for ye see they will hae them by fair means or foul."

You see it wis only about twa years afore this, in 1828 I think, that the notorious on-gaun's o' Burke an' Hare had been made public, an' the greater rascal o' the twa had escaped his deserts by turnin' King's evidence, an' the ither, wha wis hanged, had gien a new verb—*to burke*—to the language; but in the year 1830 doctors had still to provide for themsel's an' their pupils subjects for dissection, an' some o' them were by nae mainner o' means scrupulous aboot the mode o' obtainin' them.

"You're nae doot richt, Tammas," quo' Marget. It seems to me a terrible thing that a bodie's nae sure o' rest even i' the graif. But whase graif dae ye think has been meddled wi, man?"

"Gin there has been ony meddlin'," quo' I, "it's been wi' the corp o' Francie Kelly, wha wis the last laid doon," quo' I.

"An' what gars ye think that Francie sud hae been lifted?" quo' she.

Quo' I, "Mair reasons than ane. An' first an' foremost Francie had nae relations, that we ken o', to mak' ony stir aboot him; in the neist place, he wis laid doon at the expense of the pairish, wha winna care to be fashed aboot him a second time; an' lastly, he deet o' the epidemic, the nature o' which is nae weel un'erstood, an' the doctors will nae doot be very curious aboot it."

"An' what doctor, wad ye suppose, micht hae lifted Francie?" quo' Marget.

"Ye need hardly spier that, wife," quo' I; "wha but just Dr Lott and his gang. An' what cud be mair natural than that my suspicions sud fa' upon the Lotts. Ye ken what grounds there are. Ye ken that Dr Lott an' his son cam' to Keckleton some three or four years ago as gin they hed drappit frae the cloods. Nane here kens onything aboot their forebears, except that they maun hae been foreigners. Dr Lott has nae practice to speak o' to be a livin' to him,

except in the very slums o' the toon; an' hoo does he live, an' keep up nae inconsiderable establishment, but by keepin' aboot him a wheen young rascals o' doctor students, whase on-gaun's are aften, alang wi' those o' his ain son Jamie Lott, a scandal to a' Keckleton? There's nae a cat nor a dog can gang in the direction o' the Back Lodge, let alane enterin' the grounds roon' the Lodge, that ever finds its way hame again; but it's weel kent where the puir brutes gang, even to Dr Lott's 'Burkin' House,' as what used to be the laundry at Back Lodge is very properly noo ca'd. Tak' ye my word for't, Marget, Dr Lott an' his students dinna content themsel's wi' the mere dissection o' brute beasts, but mony a graif has had to render up its dead to their scalpels as weel."

"Dear me! Tammas," quo' Marget, "there's surely nae necessity for workin' yoursel' into a fury on the maitter; but I never kent you speak a pleasant word aboot the Lotts sin' ever ye blamed Jamie Lott for making awa wi' your favourite cat, Black Tam."

"An' wha ither wis to blame?" quo' I. "Didna I tax young Lott wi' the deed; an' daur'd he deny it? He had the impudence to lauch in my vera face, an' say that Tam was a'maist blin' wi' age, an' had dootless fa'en owre the brig an' been droonit durin' the spate in the Siller Stripe, as gin ever onybody heard o' sic a misfortune happenin' till a cat! That Jamie Lott can come to nae guid, the ill-faurt, ill-daen young rascal!"

"Wheest! wheest! Tammas," quo' Marget; "ye ken weel that Jamie Lott's neither ill-faurt nor ill-daen; he's ane o' the bonniest young lads in Keckleton; an' although he may be a wee thing wild, he's a clever fellow, an' they say cairryin' a' afore him in his classes at college."

I didna speak anither word, but, haen finished my supper, sat doon at the lamp an' read aboot the Reform Bill in the newspaper that a cousin had sent me frae Aberdeen.

The neist day I made a carefu' examination o' Francie Kelly's graif, an' I had nae mainner o' doot left but it had been tampered wi'; but I cudna say to a certainty whether or no the corp had been lifted, unless I had opened the graif, an' that I wudna tak' upon me to dae without some authority.

Naturally I gaed up to the manse to consult the minister—Mr Drubber he wis then; the Rev. Dr Drubber he becam' soon aifter—for he was a gran' scholar, they said, and powerfu' in argument in the Church Coorts, although but only a gey dry stick in the poopit. I laid the maitter entirely afore the minister, but for some reason or anither he didna tak' it up wi' the interest an' vigour that I had expected. He commended me very warmly for keepin' my suspicions to mysel', for I said naething to him as to what had passed at Matthew Davidson's.

"But, Thomas," he said, "it is not likely, supposing the body of Kelly to have been removed, that any investigation we might now be able to make would lead to a practical result. The body-snatchers, whoever they may have been, are certain to have gone about their business too knowingly to leave behind them such traces as would lead to their discovery, or to the recovery of the body. And, after all, between you and me, Thomas, what will it now matter to Kelly whether his body shall return to its original elements by the ordinary process of slow decay, or shall in the first place give its members to the scalpel of the anatomist. Is it not evident that in the latter case the living may be benefited, while the dead can suffer no injury?

> "For when this living soul shall flee,
> This body is no longer *me;*
> 'Tis but a lump of senseless clay
> That cannot long resist decay,
> And little can it matter where
> Its atoms mix with earth or air."

I ventured to observe that "the feelin's o' the relatives o' the dead were generally, so far as I had observed, strongly in favour o' Christian burial, an' furthermair, that the dead sud be permitted to rest in their graves till the resurrection."

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless, Thomas," interrupted the minister, wha wis far ower strong in argument to be put doon by the like o' me—"Doubtless, and I do not condemn the feeling; but you know there are no near relatives in this case; and if nothing be said by you as to the removal of the body, the public will know nothing about it, and cannot therefore be scandalised, while medical science may possibly be a gainer. Who knows but the dissection of Kelly's body may lead to a better understanding of the epidemic which is at present raging in our midst with so much fatality? Take my advice and keep quiet as to this case, but that is not at all to say that a proper vigilance is not to be exercised in future."

I canna say that I was athegither satisfied wi' Mr Drubber's view o' maitters, but as he was to a certain extent my superior, I had to sink my ain judgment in favour o' his.

The neist time that I gaed into Strypeside, Matthew Davidson wis oot, an' Mary was a little dry I thocht; hooever, I lichtit my pipe as usual, an' leant my back for a moment against the kitchen dresser.

Mary whiskit backward an' forward frae this thing to that, as gin she were unco busy.

"Ye hae a hantle adae, here, Mary," quo' I; "but ye'll hae mair to look aifter, if no to put your han' to, at Greenslack, when ye gang up to tak' chairge there."

"That is like to be twa weet days an' ae dry till, ony waye," quo' she gae snappishly.

"O, may be," quo' I, "but frae the way the young man o' Greenslack looks owre at you in the kirk ilka Sunday,

an' follows you wi' his e'e through the folk ootside, I canna think it will be lang afore ye get the place o' gudewife aifter his mither in your offer."

"O, weel, I'll ken a' the better what answer to gie to the offer when it's made me, noo that I'm forewarned," quo' she.

"Ye're unca sherp the nicht, lassie; what's put ye on edge?" quo' I, gettin' a wee thing nettled in my turn.

"Tammas," quo' she—an' noo she stood still an' confronted me wi' a serious look,—"what gars ye keep up spite against Jamie Lott aboot that auld black cat o' yours?"

"I cud never bear to think that ony brute beast that ever belanged to me sud be tortured to death, as I hae nae doot my puir Tam was tortured in that Burkin' Hoose o' Lott's," quo I.

"Ye're mista'en aboot your cat, Tammas. I hae reason to believe that the stories aboot Dr Lott's students torturin' animals are pure fabrications, an' at onyrate it wisna Jamie Lott that made awa' wi' your cat, for he wis at the college at the time when it disappeared, an' it's rael illnatur'd o' you, Tammas, to keep up spite against Jamie, an' try to embitter my faither mair against him."

"Your faither doesna think muckle o' Jamie Lott mair than mysel', an' maybe we baith hae oor ain reasons," quo' I.

"I ken as muckle aboot him as ony o' you," quo' she, "an' I am weel assured that there's nae hairm in him; on the contrary I ken that he's weel-natured an' richt kindhairted. There's nae a sufferin' creature, the poorest in the slums, that he wudna rise oot o' his bed at the mirkest 'oor o' a stormy winter nicht to attend. Just look hoo he an' his faither hae kept alive, an' nearly free frae pain, that puir object Robbie Ettles. I'm sure Jamie Lott's a feelin'hairted lad, an' will mak' a kind doctor."

"I see he has a warm frien' an' a staunch defender in you, Mary," quo' I, "an' I'm sure I dinna wiss to wrang him; an' I am very far frae wissin' to quarrel wi' you on his account."

"There's needin' to be nae quarrel, Tammas. Jamie Lott can never be naething to me but a common acquaintance, an' soon maybe nae even that, for he'll be lookin' for a higher acquaintanceship than wi' ane o' my condition"—an' here it seemed to me that Mary's voice an' her nether lip shook a little;—"but I hae my ain reasons for thinkin' weel o' him, an' I canna bide to hear him misca'd; and I'm vexed that my faither sud be sae bitter against him."

"Weel, weel, Mary," quo' I, "there's my han', an' ye ken Tammas Ogg's a man o' his word—I'll never vex you again by speakin' ill o' Jamie Lott, nor in ony way sklentin' on him in your presence."

Mary took my han' and shook it warmly, an' sae we pairtit; but I canna just say that my opinion o' the Lotts wis much changed for the better. Hooever, we'll see fat we'll see.

III.

In spite o' a' Dr Lott's skill an' care, it wisna mony days aifter my conversation wi' Mary Davidson that Robbie Ettles depairtit this life, and I in due coorse wis ca'd upon to lay him doon. An' here I maun say this for Dr Lott, that gin there wis ony puir object that had been gien owre by the ither doctors, or ill-aff creatur' that they wudna attend, he never refused them his services, an' wis even mair attentive to them than to wealthier patients. Still

he wasna weel likit even amo' the puir, for he aye brought some o' his young doctors wi' him, an' improved the occasion for their benefit in a waye that wisna agreeable to the patient; an' mairowre and aboon, gin a' his orders werena carried oot to the letter, he wud rage like a very dragoon. He had keepit the puir bodie Robbie Ettles alive lang aifter the frien's thocht that he wud hae been better in's grave, and possibly his bawbees in their pooch; for the bodie, object as he wis, had got thegither a gey trifle siller. I say Dr Lott had keepit him alive far langer than he wis expected to live, an' when he did dee the doctor swore it wis in consequence o' disregairdin' certain o' his orders, an' he wanted sair to open the creatur's body to prove to his students the correctness o' his opeenion, but the frien's wudna permit.

Weel, when the creatur's corp wis laid doon, it did occur to me that there micht be an attempt made to lift it again, an' I even gaed as far as to suggest to the frien's the propriety o' keepin' watch for a few nichts, but they poo-poo'd the idea, an' sae I gae mysel' nae mair concern.

Hooever, gin my advice had been followed, a sair catastrophe micht hae been prevented, but by offerin' it I cleared my conscience at onyrate.

Aifter the funeral wis past an' the graif snodded up, I took my tools doon to the tool-house, an' gaed in to Matthew Davidson's to licht my pipe, an' maybe crack a meenit.

It had been a braw day for the season o' the year, but appeared to be settin' to frost as nicht fell, an' so Mary Davidson wis makin' up a big peat fire in the roomy kitchen fireplace.

"You're nae gaen to spare the laird's moss this evenin, Mary," quo' I.

"There's nae reason," said Matthew, makin' answer for her, "for they say the laird's gaen to stop the cuttin' o'

peats athegither neist season, an' even turn a' the sheep aff the hills in order that the grouse may nae be disturbed. So at least Gamie had been saying' in the smiddy the ither nicht."

The ongaens o' the lairds wi' their grouse, an' their deer forests, an' their sheep runs is really shamefu'," quo' I; "but I'm thinking they'll hae to draw in their horns a bit gin this Reform Bill pass, for it will throw mair pooer into the han's o' the people."

"Gamie wis sayin'," quo' he, "that it wudna pass—the Lords wud never allow it to become law, for they weel kent it wud ruin the country, an' anarchy an' confusion wud follow."

"Gamie only repeats what he hears his betters sayin'," quo' I; "he has nae twa original ideas in his ain head, although he sets himsel' up for an authority, an' picks up a wheen big words to spice his talk wi', an' impose upon ignorant folks."

"I'm muckle o' your opeenion aboot Gamie," said Matthew, "but think ye, Tammas, that the bill will pass?"

"As sure as ye're sittin' there, Matthew," quo' I, "the Lords will hae to gie in, an' the Tory lairds as weel, for the country's determined on haen 'the bill, the haill bill, an' naething but the bill,' an' gin it canna get that by fair means, it will hae it by force, an' that will be seen afore lang."

"I hope ye'll prove a true prophet, Tammas, an' I sud like to return to this subject wi' you again, as Mr Drubber aften says in the poopit; but in the meantime, I maun get ready to gae oot," quo' Matthew.

"Where may ye be gaen the nicht?" quo' I.

"O," said he, "I'm gaen up to Greenslack to see ane o' the young horse that's nae thrivin', an' possibly I may bide the forenicht; so ye wud oblige me gin ye wud

sit still an' crack an hoor wi' Mary, to keep her frae thinkin' lang."

"I doot Mary wud soon tire o' my company," quo' I, "but I'll tell you what I'll dae. Oor Lizzie has come hame frae her place wi' a strained shackle-bane. She was speakin' o' comin' to see Mary onywye, an' so I'll gang hame an' sen' her doon to spen' the forenicht."

"That'll be gran'!" said Mary.

"It will be so," added Matthew; "an' there will be nae necessity for me hurryin' hame till I get the moon to licht me owre the muir an' through the kirkyaird."

Wi' that Matthew got up an' stept out to the hallan to put on his big coat; an' the fire haein' noo broken oot, I lichtit my pipe, an' stood up wi' my back against the cheek o' the chimney, while Mary put a new rush wick into the black iron lamp—for there wis nae gas yet in Keckleton—an' hung it up in the cleek owre the chimney.

"Lizzie will be wi' ye in a jiffie, Mary, for I'll gang straight hame an' sen' her doon," quo' I, "an' she need be in nae hurry hame, for she canna dae a jot o' wark in the meantime."

"She'll better bide a' nicht an' sleep wi' me then; I'll be richt glaid o' her company," said Mary.

"As to that you can mak' your ain arrangements," quo' I.

Matthew noo stept ben buskit for his journey.

"Ye'll want your staff, faither," said Mary.

"Ay, my *rung*, lassie," quo' Mathew, wi' a peculiar stress on the word *rung*.

"Dinna ca' it by that ugly name, faither," said Mary. "Cudna ye sae your stick, or staff, or cudgel even, onything would be less vulgar than 'rung.'"

"Onything to please you, lassie," said Matthew, wi' a good-natured laugh, an' then, turnin' to me—"Ye maun

un'erstan', Tammas," said he, "that I hae twa sticks, ane for common use an' anither for dress occasions, an' I ca' the latter my 'cane,' an' the former my 'rung;' but we're grown sae fine in talk, it seems that 'rung' would spoil the set o' oor mou's."

By this time Mary had put the "rung" into her faither's han', an' I thocht it weel deserved its name, being a knotty blackthorn an inch an' a half in diameter, wi' a nat'ral turn at the tap; an' as I surveyed Matthew frae heid to fit as he stood that nicht in his ain kitchen floor, there cam' into my mind the Anakims whom Joshua cut off, and Og, King o' Bashan, which was o' the remnant o' the giants that dwell at Astaroth and at Edrei.

"Matthew," quo' I, "I wudna like to get the win' o' that rung frae your han'."

"An' I," quo' he, "wudna like to be the man to wield it, either against you or ony ither decent man; but gin I come across ony corp-lifter in the kirkyaird as I return, his feet will be his best frien's, I'm thinkin'."

"But I hope ye'll meet wi' naething waur than yoursel' the nicht, father," quo' Mary, as she laid her han' on his coat sleeve an' lookit fondly and admirin'ly up in his face.

"I hope the same, lassie," quo' Matthew, an' he laid his great loof on her shapely heid o' bonnie broon hair, an' bendin' doon as it seemed to me wi' mair than an ordinary degree o' affection, gae her the partin' kiss.

"They mak' auld men o' baith you an' me thae young hizzies, Tammas," quo' Matthew, as we steppit oot into the open air thegither; "an' they may soon leave a lanely fireside to some o' us, gin it sudna be the will o' Providence to ca' us to oor accounts in the first place. But guid nicht, Tammas;" an' Matthew gae my han' a pairtin' squeeze, a thing that wisna very usual, for we were seein' ane anither ilka day amaist, an' so cud dispense wi' the ceremonies o' a formal leave-takin'.

On my way hame, I turned ower in my ain mind Matthew's words aboot the lanely fireside, an' connectin' his remarks wi' certain rumours aboot Mary Davidson an' her suitors, I concluded that she had been haen an offer, an' maist likely frae the young man o' Greenslack, wha wis said tae be owre the lugs in love wi' her. At the same time I believed that, wi' a perversity nae uncommon amo' womenkind, Mary's ain inclinations drew her in a different direction.

It never occurred to me to tak' Matthew's words in the licht o' a presentiment, as nae doot I micht hae daen, gin I cud hae foreseen the dowie catastrophe aboot to happen; but it's dootless a' for the best, an' for oor ain comfort, that we are left blin' as to the future.

An' sae, as I hae afore said, a' the road hame my thochts ran on the affairs o' Matthew's dochter, never ance turnin' in the direction o' hairm till himsel'.

"Gin there be onything very immediate in the win'," thocht I to mysel', "Mary is sure to tell oor Lizzie something aboot it this very nicht when they are by themsel's; Lizzie winna keep what she kens lang frae her mither, an' her mither'll mak' a clean breist o' the secret to me within twenty-four 'oors aifter it comes into her possession, as sure as her name is noo Betty Ogg. Sae ye needna puzzle your brains aboot what will likely soon be made plain to you withoot ony effort o' your ain, Tammas, man."

As soon as I entered my ain hoose at the fit o' the Schule Wynd, I gae Lizzie to understand that she wis expected at Strypeside, an' it wisna mony minutes aifter when she wis dancin' doon the wynd as merrily as gin there hidna been a sair lith in a' her body.

"There's nae word o' a sair shackle-bane noo," said I to the wife; "although Lizzie's been hurklin' an' grainin' owre the fire a' day wi' it, she wisna lang o' buskin' an' gallopin' aff her ain gait."

"An' what for no', man?" quo' Marget, "ye mak' nae allowance for the speerits o' young folk, Tammas. Lizzie has a sair eneuch han' an' airm tae, I'm weel sure, but, like ither speeritit young folk, she forgets her ills in the prospect o' diversion. I hae my ain reasons for believin' that the twa lassies will be weel divertit wi' their ain crack this evenin'."

As I perfectly weel un'erstood frae Marget's mainner that she had something that she considered o' importance to communicate, I didna say onything to ruffle her temper, but raither eggit her on wi' a' compliment or twa; an' so I got it a' oot in the coorse o' the evenin' that Mary Davidson had actually had an offer o' mairriage frae the young man o' Greenslack—that the parents on baith sides were to be weel pleased wi' the match, though they wantit it put aff for a year or twa on account o' the youth o' the pairties—but that Mary, although seemingly naewise averse to the young man, yet wud gie nae decided answer on account o' some sort o' calf-love that had existed atween Jamie Lott an' hersel', an' that she cudna get oot o' her hairt, although neither her faither nor her ain judgment approved o't.

This much, it appeared, Mary had communicated to oor Lizzie when they had forgethered comin' frae the kirk the Sabbath afore, promisin' to gie her a' the oots an' ins o' the maitter when they sud meet wi' mair time on their han's.

"An' so," Marget observed, on concludin' a lang story, o' a' which I hae here set doon the barest ootline, "Lizzie's eagerness to gang to Strypeside to spen' the forenicht wi' her frien' may be easily understood, Tammas."

IV.

THE wife an' I sat up till past eleven o'clock, an' then gaed to bed, weel kennin' that Lizzie wud be bidin' a' nicht at Strypeside.

Weel, I was just clearin' my een in the gray o' the mornin', when the door wis shacken as gin it wud hae been shacken aff the hinges, an' the voice o' oor ain Lizzie screamed, "Lat me in! lat me in! will ye?"

Afore I cud stir a fit, her mither was oot-owre, an' at the door.

"Preserve's a'!" cried she, "what's the maitter wi' ye, Lizzie?"

"Maitter wi' me? Mither, naething's the maitter wi' me; but, oh! Matthew Davidson's killed!" sobbed Lizzie.

"Killed!" cried I, "where, when, what waye?" an' by this time I was oot-owre an' dressin' wi' a' my micht.

It took Lizzie some time to answer my questions, for the puir thing had noo drappit into a chair, an' wis greetin' an' sobbin' as gin her very hairt wud brak.

When she cud get the pooer o' speech again, the sum an' substance o' her story wis as follows:—

Mary Davidson an' she had sat up, weel divertit wi' their ain crack, till midnicht. Mary then began to get very uneasy about her faither, wha wis on the whole a very regular sort o' a man, never stoppin' oot at nicht langer than the natur' o' his business necessitated.

"I'm sure," said she to Lizzie when twal chappit, "some ill has happened to my faither, or else he wud hae been hame afore this time. There cud hae been nae reason for his stoppin' so late at Greenslack, an' even gin he had gaen in aboot the smiddy, the smith wud hae gien owre wark twa hoors syne."

Lizzie did her best to soothe her frien's uneasiness, by sayin' that maybe the horse beast at Greenslack had

grown waur, an' required to be sittin' up wi'; or that possibly, bein' nae far aff the yule-time, Matthew might hae sat doon till a han' at catch-the-ten, which the lads at Greenslack often played for a penny the game in the winter forenichts, aifter the bestial wis settled up. Hoosomever, as the nicht wore on, the puir lassie becam' mair an' mair uneasy an' gloomy in her forebodin's—mentionin', amo' ither things, that her faither hadna been like himsel' a' the previous day.

He had spoken mair, she said, aboot her mither than at ony time sin' the funeral, an' had gathered oot several bits o' finery an' trinkets that he had keepit up till then entirely in his ain possession, an' handin' them to her had said, "Mary, I wud like you to tak' chairge o' thae things, as they will of richt belang to you some time soon, an' wud be better in your keepin' gin onything sud happen to me."

She said—"What gars you speak o' onything happenin' to you? Are ye nae weel, faither?"

"Ou, ay, weel eneuch, lassie, except that I feel a queer kin' o' heaviness hangin' aboot me that I canna athegither accoont for; an' mair than that, I had a strange dream, a very strange dream last nicht. I thocht—for it wis hardly like a dream either—that your mither, dressed just as she was on the day o' oor mairriage, an' lookin' if possible rosier an' bonnier, cam' saftly into the room, an' said in a voice, O so sweet an' musical, an' yet sae like her ain voice! 'Ye maun get ready, Matthew, for the minister's come, an' the folks are a' waitin'.' I startit up immediately, for I didna seem to hae been sleepin', that was the queer thing; but the saft, clear licht that I had thought wis shinin' roon' me wis gane, there wis na trace o' your mither, the room wis just as usual sae far as I kent, for it wis pitch dark. I daresay, lassie," he added, "there's naething in a' this, but yet I canna get it oot o' my head,

an' I canna shak' aff the feelin' that something serious is gaen to happen to me."

"I tried to cheer him up," quo' Mary, "but he seemed dull an' depressed like a' day, an' sat langer in the hoose than usual, an' spake mair to me aboot a' his affairs than ever he had dune in his life afore. An' a' this," she added, "mak's me the mair concerned aboot him."

Wi' this an' ither sic like crack the nicht wore on till the cocks began to craw, an' Mary declared she "cud thole nae langer."

There lived nae far doon the Strype an' uncle o' Mary's, a Samuel Brodie, for her mither had been a Brodie; an' Mary's proposal wis to gang to his hoose an' raise either him or some o' his sons—for Brodie wis a mason an' took on jobs on his ain account, an' had three or four stoot chiels o' sons that used to bide at hame an' help their faither.

"I'm sure," said she, "my uncle wud either come himsel' or sen' ane or twa o' my cousins wi's to Greenslack to see aboot my faither, for I can wait nae langer, an' I darena gang through the kirkyard withoot some man-bodie wi's."

Of coorse Lizzie gaed alang wi' her frien', wha cud by that time hardly speak withoot greetin', an' in a jiffy twa o' the Brodie lads an' the twa lassies were ready to tak' the gait. The mornin' wis fair an' frosty, butthere wis nae snaw except on the hill taps, an' as the moon had gaed doon, ane o' the lads took a lantern in his han'.

They took the thoroughfare through the kirkyard athegither.

Robbie Ettles' graif wisna far aff the path, an' the licht frae the lantern happenin' to fa' in that direction, a sicht met their een that suddenly drew their attention an' arrestit their steps.

A considerable quantity o' yird wis thrown up oot o the graif, an' the body o' a man wis lyin' alangside o' it.

This wis the body o' Matthew Davidson, nae just quite cauld, but to a' appearance stane deid.

He micht hae been felled doon for some considerable time, for the yird heap wis frozen hard, an' there wis little doot but that he had been felled by the scoondrels wha had been openin' the graif, an' wha had made aff as soon as they had committed the foul deed.

I may weel say "foul deed," for it wis evident that it wis in nae fair fecht that Matthew had fa'en.

He wis lyin' on his face, an' there wis a dint in the back o' his heid frae which the blood wis still oozin', an' which made it plain that he had been felled frae behind wi' the stroke o' some lethal weapon. The graif wis aboot half open, an' ane o' my spades an' a shouther-pick were lyin' upon the unthrown yird, but nae ither tool nor weapon, nae even Matthew's "rung" wis to be seen.

Mary Davidson fainted deid awa' when she saw her faither, or raither his corp, an' had to be carried hame; an' Matthew bein' sic a heavy man, four o' the Brodies were soon on the spot to carry him in aifter her.

Such were the particulars that I gathered frae Lizzie, an' I need hardly add that her story wis a dowie ane to me, an' that Matthew's death—"murder," I may weel ca' it—wis a sair regret to mony ane, for he wis a man weel respectit by a' that kent him. The wife an' mysel' made a' haste to Strypeside to render ony sma' aid in oor pooer.

The Brodies, as the sibbest relatives an' the nearest at han', had taen chairge, an' were daen a' that cud be dune in the melancholy circumstances.

Mary Davidson had come roon again, but, as micht hae been expected, wis in a sair, sair state aboot her faither, an' Mrs Brodie wis very judiciously keepin' her in bed.

The body o' Matthew wis laid oot on a plaid afore the fire, which had been kindled in the ben end.

"He wis nae athegither cauld," said James Brodie to me, an' we've laid him afore the fire till the doctor come; but I've unco little hope."

"An' I hae nane," quo' I, withdrawin' my han' frae my auld frien's breist; "the hairt that wis ance the warmest in Keckleton is grown cauld, an' will beat nae mair for ever."

"Weel, the doctor will soon be here onyway," quo' James.

"It may be a satisfaction," quo' I, "but he can dae nae guid. He canna gie life to the deid;" an' here I wis obliged to step oot to the open air, bein' clean owre-maistered by my ain feelin's.

In a few minutes I observed Dr Watson comin' gallopin', what legs cud lift, towards the hoose. He gae his beast to ane o' the Brodies, an' steppit in, an' I followed him. He declared in a moment that the case wis beyond a' help frae him; but he made a very carefu' examination o' the body a' the same, observin' that death must have been instantaneous from a blow dealt by some blunt but lethal weapon on the back part o' the skull. He added, also, that he would communicate particulars to the Procurator-Fiscal for the county, and that there would likely be an investigation made on the spot immediately.

An investigation did tak' place, but naething ever cam' oot o' it.

The graif o' Ettles an' a' the ground roon wis minutely examined, an' a lot o's were "precognosst,"—I think they ca'd oor examination.

It wis found that the corp o' Ettles hadna been liftit, Matthew havin' maist likely come upon the resurrectionists in the act o' openin' the graif.

Several traces o' blood were observed aboot the graif, an' here an' there a' the waye oot at the upper yett, indicatin' that some ane besides Matthew had been

wounded mair or less in the tulzie which, it wis judged, had taken place.

Aifter the investigation, a reward of £50 wis offered for such information as wud lead to the discovery an' apprehension o' the perpetrator or perpetrators o' the crime, but nae licht wis ever thrown on the subject. It has been said that justice is blind, an' I think that the same thing micht weel be said o' law, for gin ever there wis a case in which circumstantial evidence clearly pointed to the perpetrators o' a murder, it wis in this very instance.

I hae mentioned afore that I suspected Dr Lott an' his gang in the case o' the liftin' o' Kelly, but their han' in the murder o' Matthew Davidson wis as visible as onything but actual e'esicht. An' yet when I mentioned my opinion to the Procurator-Fiscal,—

"On what evidence do you ground your suspicions, Ogg?" asked he sharply.

"On the followin' facts, sir," answered I firmly:—

"First, Dr Lott keeps a gang o' young medical students aboot him wha are constantly pickin' up dogs an' cats for dissection, as is weel kent to a' Keckleton—my very ain cat, 'Black Tam,' haen to a certainty fa'en into their han's. Second, the gang is believed by toon an' country to hae lifted mair than ae corp already, ay, some wad tell you mair than a dizzen. An' lastly, an' mair connectit wi' this particular case, the very nicht o' my dear frien's murder, Dr Lott is reported to hae been thrown frae his horse, an' to hae sustained several severe injuries aboot the heid, in consequence o' which he is said to be lyin' at this very moment a'maist in the dead-thraw.

"Noo, sir," quo' I, an' my concludin' words were pronounced wi' very great distinctness, "it's my opinion, an' naething will put me aff o' it, that Dr Lott got his injuries frae Matthew Davidson's 'rung,' an' that, while the twa

were in the tulzie, ane o' Dr Lott's young scoondrels cam' ahint Matthew an' gave him his death-blow wi' some lethal weapon."

The Fiscal keepit jottin' doon some notes on a paper afore him while I wis speakin'. These he took a few minutes to read owre, an' then lookin' up grimly at me, an' he wisna a bonnie man at the best, he says,—

"Ogg, there is nothing in all this save a tissue of suspicions and idle hearsays, and I caution you against making in public the statements you have made to me, otherwise you may get yourself into trouble."

I fared little better wi' puir Matthew's dochter; for some days aifter I had had the melancholy pleesure o' soddin' my auld frien's graif, I ca'd at Brodie's, where Mary Davidson wis stoppin' for a time, to spier hoo the puir thing wis, an' tak' ony further directions she micht hae to gie.

Mary cam' to the door an' up the Howe a bit wi' me, an' says she, "Hae ye ony suspicions as to wha did it?"

I didna need to spier what she meant. I kent owre weel, an' I made answer at ance—"Deed hae I, Mary; it wis nane ither than Dr Lott an' his gang!"

"Oh, dinna say that, Tammas! Oh, dinna say that! Dinna say that Jamie Lott had ony han' in my puir faither's death! Oh, dinna say that, gin ye dinna want to drive me clean oot o' my senses athegither, Tammas!' sobbed the puir lassie.

"Far be it frae me, Mary," quo' I, "to say that Jamie Lott had ony han' in your faither's death, for I hae reason to believe the contrary. I believe he wisna in Keckleton on the nicht when it happened, being awa' at some o' his college classes; but——"

I got nae pooer to say mair, for the lassie seized thae twa hard, horny han's o' mine, coverin' them wi' kisses an' weetin' them wi' her tears afore I cud withdraw them.

"Oh, bless you, Tammas! bless you for that assurance! I may never see Jamie Lott again, an' certainly there can never be onything mair atween him an' me, for I promised my puir faither that there sudna be; but, oh, bless you, Tammas Ogg, for the assurance that he had nae han' in bringing aboot my dear, dear faither's death!"

So seein' that I wis to get nae thanks, an' micht only create needless fash to mysel' by meddlin' mair i' the maitter, I resolved to keep my ain coonsel, merely jottin' doon this bit memorandum for the easin' o' my ain conscience, an' leavin' it to ithers to decide whether or no the narrative sall see the licht aifter the han' that has written it sall, alang wi' this body, hae that dune for them that they hae dune for mony ane.

Hoosomever that may be, afore laying aside my pen, I wud just like to add that Dr Lott didna cross his ain door-step for mony a day, an' when he did it wis to leave Keckleton never to return. It wis said that he gaed abroad to some German Spa, an' deet there nae that lang aifter.

As to Jamie Lott, I believe he becam' a doctor in the airmy, an' did weel in his profession; but whether he ever socht or got anither meetin' wi' Mary Davidson I never learnt.

It's but richt an' reasonable, I suppose, that the dead sud be forgotten, or at onyrate that the livin' sud cease openly to grieve for them; an' sae even Mary Davidson in coorse o' time got owre her heavy grief, an' becam' gudewife o' Greenslack. Ay, an' as I pen these lines there isna a comelier, nor a mair thocht o' wife, nor a mither o' a wiser-like or mair thrivin' family in Keckleton parish, than Mrs Robbie, o' Greenslack.

"DEATH TO THE HEAD THAT WEARS NO HAIR."

The Inspector's Story.

TOWARDS the end of the summer of 18—, the Rev. Dr Woodcross, Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools for the Highlands and Isles of Scotland, received instructions to proceed to the Shetland Islands and make a careful report of the state of elementary education in those remote parts of Her Majesty's dominions.

The mission was one which the Inspector would have been glad to remit to his assistant, a much younger man, for he was by no means fond of the rough seas of the far North at so advanced a period of the year.

Moreover, a former experience in the same region had taught him that the Shetlanders were not very partial to Governmental officials generally, and that the lower orders of them looked, at that time, with special disfavour on the threatened interference with their educational affairs.

The Doctor could not forget how, on the occasion of his first visit in an official capacity, the islanders seemed to have considerable difficulty in distinguishing between him and the officers of Excise—gentlemen who appeared to be very obnoxious to them.

As he was being ferried from one island to another, he had been at some pains to make the nature of his business

clear to the crew of the boat, and to point out the benefits likely to arise from a liberal education; but he failed completely to carry conviction to the minds of his auditors whose opinions were summed up and clenched, so to speak by the skipper in the following words:—

"I've heard say that education is a good thing, and it may be so in some respects; but this I'm well sure of, it's not a necessary—for there's a hand that can neither read nor write" (at the same time extending one of his sledge-hammer fists) "but it can pull an oar or kill a cod with any hand in Shetland."

The Lairds of Shetland were not more favourable to an extended education than the owner of the "hand that could neither read nor write," for they were aware that it would lead, in the long run, to a demand for better schools and school-houses, and a consequent tax upon their pockets.

It was further in the Doctor's recollection that the ministers of the Established Church were also in favour of letting matters educational in Shetland slide, because they saw in the introduction of the "grants-in-aid" the beginning of an interference which would seriously diminish their control over the schools in their parishes, if not ultimately abolish it altogether.

These considerations would have had slight influence with the Doctor at almost any other time, but during the previous spring and summer he had added on to his official duties the preparation of some school-books, which had cost him no small labour and thought. He was consequently in a condition, mental and physical, which would have made a less arduous and unpopular mission much more acceptable.

However, the orders of my Lords of the Committee of Council on Education were peremptory. Dr Woodcross was personally to make a careful inspection of the state of education in the Shetlands, and lay before my Lords a

report based upon his own observations. Obedience was imperative.

Accordingly the Rev. Doctor went on board the steamer "Prince Consort" at Aberdeen, and in due course found himself safely landed at Lerwick, the chief town of the Shetland Islands.

During his tour of inspection the Doctor received various unmistakable indications of the unpopularity of his mission, and he was therefore well pleased when he had finished collecting the information which he considered necessary to enable him to draw up the required report.

Not that he had had any real reason to dread personal violence, or had experienced serious personal discourtesy, far from it; but still he had felt that he was among those who had but little goodwill towards the object of his visit; and in addition to this he was, in consequence of the extra strain of work during the spring and summer, out of sorts, nervous, and subject at the time to those vague, groundless apprehensions which so frequently supervene on mental exhaustion.

It was thus with a feeling of relief that he returned to Lerwick to await the arrival of the steamer which would convey him back to Aberdeen.

The Doctor had not taken time during his tour to see anything of Shetland society, although he had been urgently requested to partake of the hospitality of several ministers and proprietors. But when his inspection was completed, and he found that he would have to wait for the steamer several days at Lerwick, he recollected that, on his way north, he had formed the acquaintance of a Mr Swanson, a passenger like himself on board of the "Prince Consort," and that this gentleman had given him a very pressing invitation to pay him a visit.

Mr Swanson resided in the mainland, at a distance of only a mile and a half from the town, and as he had proved

himself an intelligent and agreeable travelling companion, the Doctor thought he could not more pleasantly pass a spare evening than in enjoying his society and hospitality.

Having despatched a note on the previous day to apprise Mr Swanson of his intended visit, the Doctor set out from the chief hotel in Lerwick early on a November afternoon, and, after a leisurely walk of three-quarters of an hour's duration, arrived at his destination, the residence of the proprietor of Westercliffe.

Westercliffe House, called more frequently Westercliffe Castle by courtesy, was a large, grey, gloomy-looking mansion, of a nondescript style of architecture, overlooking the melancholy waters of the Northern Ocean, whose long, rolling billows were to be seen that evening breaking in sheets of foam upon the rugged edges of the rock-bound coast.

The mansion stood about 200 yards back from the shore, facing inland, and the cliffs behind it ran sheer down three or four hundred feet to meet the incessant shock of the wildly-moaning surge.

In front of the house, and towards the right and left, the land rose so high as to limit the view to a semicircle of less than a quarter of a mile in radius, within which no other human habitation was visible.

In the frame of mind in which the Doctor then was, the melancholy, solitary grandeur of the place impressed him with an awe and superstitious dread which had well-nigh compelled him to return to Lerwick without paying his intended visit.

He had, however, as was before mentioned, sent word to Mr Swanson to expect him, and therefore he shook off, as far as possible, his nervous feeling, and marched boldly up to the door.

He was warmly welcomed by his host and hostess, and introduced to five or six other gentlemen who had been

invited to meet him, and he soon began to feel more at ease.

The early part of the evening was passed in general conversation, and, although a few allusions were made to the Doctor's mission in its professional sense, yet those were sufficient to show him that it was not very warmly approved by any member of the company, the laws of hospitality alone preventing them from giving expression in terms more pithy to their real sentiments on the subject.

The Doctor would therefore gladly have limited his visit to a protracted call, but that his host and hostess would not hear of. They said that the evening was particularly fine, that the moon would be up between nine and ten o'clock, and, in conjunction with the northern lights, would make the night as clear as day; and, besides, good care should be taken to see Dr Woodcross within sure reach of Lerwick.

There was no resisting such hospitality, and the Doctor could think of no good excuse for refusing it.

As the evening wore on the company were served with a plentiful repast, which, for want of a more fitting name, may be termed a "tea supper."

Previously there had been no lack of "drams," but as soon as supper was fairly over, whisky-punch was introduced in all its glory.

Toast-drinking then began, and numerous northern stories of perilous adventures by sea and land were related.

The Doctor was himself a capital story-teller, and he was not slow to exercise his gifts that night, but his stock consisted for the most part of probable, lively, and ludicrous incidents, while the narratives related by his host and the other guests were chiefly of a supernatural, horrible, and blood-curdling character.

When the night was pretty far advanced, a thick-set, harsh-featured man on the Doctor's left hand told a thrilling tale concerning the tragic death of an unpopular exciseman, who was related to have been first brutally tortured and finally precipitated over a cliff into the sea by a band of daring smugglers, who could not, however, be convicted of the crime.

The Doctor had from the first felt an instinctive dislike of the thick-set man, and shuddered with horror at the tale which he had related with such a thrilling minuteness of detail.

According to the laws of Shetland convivality, the last story-teller could either call on another for a story or toast, or he might propose a toast himself, and in the exercise of his right the thick-set man demanded full bumpers for a toast.

The Doctor was a moderate drinker at all times, and on that occasion he had contrived to drink several toasts with one glass of punch, a proceeding which did not seem to meet the approval of either his host or of his fellow-guests.

The thick-set man, in particular, had rallied him somewhat boisterously on his abstemiousness.

To avoid importunities, therefore, the Doctor was careful to replenish his glass to this particular toast as requested.

The thick-set man, having filled himself a brimmer, sprang to his feet, and said that he had a toast to propose which, he believed, every man in that company would honour with a glass filled to the brim and drained to the bottom.

Here he paused, appeared to Dr Woodcross to fix his eyes on him, and gave forth in a stentorian voice as a toast—

"Death to the Head that Wears no Hair!"

The Doctor threw a rapid glance round the company, and observed that the head of every individual in it save his own was supplied with an abundant natural covering of hair. His, the mirror over the mantelpiece showed him as bare as the back of his own hand.

The observation startled him, and a sudden thrill of dread ran through his entire frame. He could hear his own heart beat, and feel that chill, crawling sensation of the flesh which dread horror inspires.

He believed himself a doomed man. His was "the head that wore no hair;" the only bald head in the company, and doubtless he was the person whose death was so tragically denounced by the thick-set ruffian on his left.

As the events of a lifetime are said to be condensed into the struggling moments of a drowning person, so did every suspicious circumstance connected with his unpopular mission flash across the doctor's mind, magnified ten, twenty, a hundred-fold by terror.

There was not a single doubt left in his mind but that his destruction had been determined, pre-arranged, and would speedily be executed.

At that lone house, in that remote region, he could easily be murdered, and his body made away with, without any suspicion of foul play being awakened in the minds of his dearest friends.

He might be beaten to death with the bludgeon-like walking-sticks, which he had observed in the entrance hall; starved to death in one of the dungeons which doubtless existed under the *quasi* castle; or he might be precipitated over the cliffs, like the unpopular exciseman, and justice might never overtake the perpetrators of the horrible crime.

It could easily be given out that he had fallen over the rocks into the sea on his way back to Lerwick, and

none out of that company would doubt the truth of the statement.

In that company the scowl of a fixed hostile determination appeared on every countenance. All in it were his enemies. None would intercede for him, none would compassionate him.

Under plea of household duties the hostess had retired, and there were thus only men of stern, relentless purpose to be dealt with.

Resistance was hopeless, mercy scarce to be dreamt of.

But while these thoughts were flashing with electric swiftness through the mind of the doomed man, the glasses were slowly, steadily rising.

Should he drink or dash his glass to the floor?

What! Drink to his own destruction. No; but he would drink to sharpen his wits, to deaden his terror, to nerve him to meet his fate like a man.

Like the rest around the board, he raised the glass to his lips, and this time he drained the contents to the last drop.

Deafening cheers followed the act, but the Doctor sank back into his chair pale as a "sheeted ghost."

Happily his agitation was quite unobserved.

On the contrary, the thick-set man actually slapped him on the back, and complimented him vociferously for having emptied his glass to the last toast "like a jolly good fellow."

"But what does it all mean?" gasped the bewildered Inspector.

"Why," said his neighbour, "the toast is well known to every Shetlander, but you as a stranger are quite excusable for not having understood it, and I owe you an apology for introducing it without a suitable explanation. You must know that here in Shetland we are all more or less interested in the fishing trade, and as the head of the fish

has no hair on it, and the more fish that are caught and die so much the better for our interests. 'Death to the head that wears no hair' is a toast which always commands full bumpers in our convival meetings."

Dr Woodcross thanked the thick-set man for his explanation, which he considered perfectly satisfactory. Having, however, had quite enough conviviality for that evening, he soon started for Lerwick under a suitable guide, and arrived at the hotel at which he was putting up, with "the head that wore no hair" perfectly safe on its owner's shoulders.

Of course, nobody would have known of the mistake into which the Doctor had fallen, but he was fond of a good story, and used to tell this one with much dramatic effect as long as he lived, in order, as he would say, to illustrate the fact that, under certain mental conditions, a person may convert the most innocuous circumstances into causes of the most serious apprehension.

TOWN COUNCILLOR ETTERSHANK'S RISE TO CIVIC HONOURS.

CHAPTER I.

WAR PRICES.

THE Crimean War had happily come to an end, an' it had done very weel for me, as a general merchant, on the Market Square i' the toon o' Keckleton.

An' here I wud tak' the leeberty to remark that, in a general waye, war does weel for tradesmen like mysel', inasmuch as it enables us to lay on an extra bawbee, or penny, on articles o' sale, arisin' to twenty-five, fifty, or sometimes even a hunner per cent.

For example, a customer wud come in to me, an' something like the followin' conversation wud tak' place in the coorse o' transac':—

Customer.—"Gie's a bawbee's worth o' tackets, Mr Ettershank" (Ettershank bein' my name).

Mr E.—"Wi' pleesure" (serving customer).

C. (coontin' tackets).—"Hoo's this, Mr Ettershank? Ye used to gie a dizzen for the bawbee, but's there's only nine here!"

Mr E.—"That's quite true; but dae ye no' ken that tackets are up in consequence o' the war."

C.—"Dear me! is that really the case?"

Mr E.—"Deed is't. There's sic mairchin' an' coonter-mairchin' upon roch roads, an' aften upon nae roads ava, that the airmy cobblers can hardly keep the sodgers' soles frae the grun', an' the tackit mackers, workin' nicht an' day, can barely supply the deman' for tackits."

C.—"Dear me! Weel, I wud never hae thocht o' that" (an' gangs awa' weel pleased).

Second Customer.—"A penny can'le, Mr Ettershank."

Mr E.—"Dae ye no ken that the penny can'les are noo three bawbees, in consequence o' the war?"

C.—"Nonsense! The sodgers are nae fechtin' wi' can'le licht!"

Mr E.—"But they hae to keep watch an' ward through mony a dark an' dismal nicht, an' that canna be dune withoot can'le licht, I'm thinkin'. A fine look oot a camp wud keep for an enemy in the lang nichts o' Crimean darkness, which is sae great that it's aften taen by Milton in 'Paradise Lost' to represent the darkness o' the bottomless pit."

C.—"I had nae idea o' that, Mr Ettershank; but ye're just a wonnerfu' man for learnin'" (an' gangs awa' as weel pleased as Customer No. 1).

Third Customer.—"A pun' o' yer fourpence saip, Mr Ettershank."

Mr E.—"Wi' a' the pleesure in life, mem, I'll gie ye a pun' o' saip; but I hinna an ounce i' the shop at fourpence. The fourpenny saip is up to saxpence in consequence o' the war, mem."

C.—"Hoo's that, noo, Mr Ettershank? I wadna hae thocht that the sodgers wud hae had muckle time for mackin' use o' saip, wi' a' the sair fechtin' that's gaen on at Sawbastapool."

Mr E.—"Saip, mem! There's tons upon tons o' saip used ilka day. The very dragoons, ay, an' their Generals, are at wark like washer-women, keepin' the neebourhood

o' Sawbastapool clean, it seems. But here's the paper· read for yersel', mem."

C.—"I hinna my glasses upon me, Mr Ettershank. What does it say?"

Mr E. (takin' up the newspaper an' glancin' at it).—"Lord Cardigan and his dragoons are daily engaged scouring the suburbs and country for miles around Sebastopol to keep them clear"—stoppin' at—"of the enemy."

C.—"Weel, that beats a'! Mr Ettershank; whatever gars them set the puir lads o' dragoons to sic unusual wark as scoorin' the neebourhood o' a toon?"

Mr E.—"O, dootless, to keep doon disease, colera, an' sic like, mem."

C.—"Nae doot, Mr Ettershank, nae doot. I've heerd that colera was something fearfu' in the Eastern countries."

Mr E.—"It is that, mem, an' sae they hae to exercise great care in the maitter o' cleanliness, for there is nae greater breeder o' disease than dirt; an' oor Government, kennin' that colera in the British or French camp wud be waur than the Czar an' a' his Rooshians, are sendin' oot ship-loads o' saip ilka ither day, an' the very dragoons are kept eident at the scoorin'."

C.—"Weel, it just dings a'" (an' gangs awa' in a maze o' astonishment).

An' similar wud be the case gin a customer ca'd for a penny pirn. It wud be up to three bawbees in consequence o' the vast quantities o' thread required for stitchin' up sodgers' sarks, torn in the battles, tyin' up their woon's, an' sic like ither necessities connected wi' the war. Or lat the demand be a red herrin'—the fishers were a' oot wi' the fleets, keepin' the Rooshians in their ain seas, an' herrin' were hardly to be got at ony price; or a box o' spunks—lucifer matches were bein' sent to the Crimea to licht the sodgers' pipes, an' so the twa boxes had to be raised frae three bawbees to tippence:

or even a horn spoon—the story wud be that the French, Sardinians, an' Turks engaged wi' oorsel's in the war had taen to suppin' their parridge, brose, an' kail wi' Scotch horn spoons, an' wud use naething ither.

For my ain pairt, weel kennin' the vailue o' the adage aboot makin' hay while the sun shines, I didna aye confine my transactions to the sale or purchase o' the articles within the legitimate limits o' my ain trade, but sometimes made a bit hit ootside them. An' ae example, an' only ane, I'll tak' time to gie afore proceeding wi' the story which I hae undertaen to relate.

Ae mornin' Birdie Briggs, frae the Gutter Wynd, comes hulking into my shop wi' a very pretty canary in a sma' wicker cage o' his ain makin', an' wanted me to buy the bird, offerin' to tak' half the price in tobacco.

Noo, I was nae bird fancier at the time, at least o' cage birds, though I wasna averse to a transaction in eggs an' pootry, when the same was likely to prove profitable; an' so I was very short an' dry wi' Birdie, an' gae him a pretty broad hint that my time was my money, for I didna want him hangin' aboot the coonter, lest onything sud stick till his fingers, kennin', as I did, the character o' the man.

But as he was gaen oot at the door mutterin' till himsel' something aboot the "vailue o' a tippenny merchan's time," for he's an impudent blackguard, a thocht struck me, an' I cried aifter him, "I say, Birdie!"

Birdie halted, an' slewed roon', and luikit at me wi' ane o' his impudent glowers, dootless thinkin' that I was to ca' him to account for his muttered remarks.

But sic was far frae my purpose, seein' I had the makin' o' a bargain wi' him in view. An' so I said, wi' a gude-natured smile upon my face,—"What micht ye be seekin' for the bit creatur', gin a bodie were inclined to trade wi' ye, man?"

Birdie made answer, assumin' my ain tone an' mainner when servin' a customer, as nearly as he cud,—"O, birds like that *were* seven-an-sax, but they're up to fifteen 'bob' in consequence o' the war."

"I canna afoord tae buy canaries at war prices," quo' I; "an' even seven-an-sax is twice the worth o' the creatur' an' mair; but I'll tell ye what I'll dae wi' ye, I'll gie ye twa shillin's an' twa ounces o' rael Irish twist, first quality."

"Twa shillin's and twa ounces o' rael Irish twist, your grandmither!" sneered the vulgar scum, an' he made as gin he had been to mak' aff, but as I made nae motion o' recal, he slewed roon' an' hulkin' up tae the coonter, ahint which I was stanin', set doon the bit cage afore me, an' began praisin' the canary to the nines, concloodin' wi' these words—

"An' noo, merchan', this is my last an' lowest offer: tak' the bird or want it. The bird an' cage is yours for half-a-croon in cash, an' half-a-croon's worth o' tobacco o' my ain selection."

I haggled lang wi' him owre this price, but a' that I cud mak oot o' him was a wee bit better a cage, an' the canary becam' my property, and was hung up at the back o' the shop, for I daurna tak' it in to the hoose, else the wife wud soon hae become sae fond o' it that she wudna hae alloo'd me to pairt wi't for love or siller.

Everybodie that cam' into the shop admired the canary, an' haen risen in the scale o' ownership, as I may surely weel venture to say, it rose in vailue accordingly, so that afore nicht I cud hae sold it three times owre for twice my ain siller.

But there is aye this feelin' in an up-gaen market. Ye're inclined to hang on an' on till ye're sometimes taen in the turn o' the tide an' carried back till your buying price, or even lower.

In this case, however, I made up my min' either to get a guinea for the bird or to mak' a present o' it to the wife; an' the langer I keepit the creatur' the firmer I becam' in this resolution, because it was a gran' singer, an' I was becomin' quite charm'd wi' it mysel'.

But as I kent that the fairmers were gettin' guid sale for a' their commodities as weel as mysel', I believed gin I keepit the bird oot o' the wife's sicht till the Friday's market, I was sure to get my price for't, an' sae it cam' to pass. On the Friday I had offers o' twal shillin's, fifteen shillin's, an' auchteen shillin's for the bird an' cage, but I never budged frae the guinea.

In the coorse o' the aifternoon, Mrs Robbie o' Greenslack cam' in for some things, an ane o' her servan' lasses alang wi' her, to carry the goods hame.

"Ye've come doon wi' ae load, and ye'll hae to gang hame wi' anither, lassie," quo' the gudewife to the servan'; then turnin' to me, she says, "We cam' doon wi' oor butter to the market, ye ken, and noo we've come to leave the muckle half o' the price o' it wi' you."

"I'm muckle obliged to you, but ye micht hae come to me wi' the butter at ance," quo' I, "an' that wud hae saved you the fash o' stan'in' in the market."

"But I thocht ye werna buyin' just noo, Mr Ettershank," quo' she.

"Weel," quo' I, "I dinna generally buy for curin' purposes till the weather's a bit caulder, but I hae bits o' orders for fresh butter, and I widna hae been ill pleased to execute some o' them wi' Greenslack butter," for I kent the gudewife was prood o' her butter, and nae athegither without reason.

A' this time the gudewife had been e'ein' the canary, an quo' she, "Weel, I wud gie ye a guid mony punds for that bonnie birdie o' yours, for oor ane deet in the winter, an' the cage's stanin' empty, for I wis sae fond o'

my canary that I never cud thing o' buyin' anither aifter't; but I think that ane o' yours beats it for beauty."

Weel, I took doon the cage aff the hook, and brocht the bird for her to examine at leisure, while I was servin' anither customer. She was in perfect raptures wi' the creatur'; but she sent awa' her servan' lass afore sayin' a word to me aboot the purchase o' it. Then she spiert what I was seekin' for the bird without the cage, but I never altered frae the guinea.

"It's a hantle o' siller for't, bonnie as it is," quo' she; "oor last ane only cost ten shillin', an' it was said to be a pure canary?"

"That micht weel be," quo' I, "but then canaries are a ransom at present on account o' the war."

"Gae awa' wi' ye!" quo' she, laughin'. "What can the war hae to dae wi' the price o' a canary?"

"Just this, Mrs Robbie, that nae British tradin' ship daur venture to the Canary Islands, in the teeth o' the Rooshian fleet, to fetch ony mair birds in the meantime, an' the stock in the market at hame here is sold oot," quo' I, wi' the air o' a man o' superior knowledge.

"I dinna see hoo Rooshia cud keep oor ships frae the Canary Islands," quo' she. "Isna Britain Queen o' the Seas?"

"In a mainner she is, an' in a mainner she's nae," quo' I, rather evasively, for I saw that I was gettin' upon ticklish grun'.

Mrs Robbie's neist question increast the difficulty o' my position, for she asked me point blank—"Whaur are the Canary Islands, Mr Ettershank?"

This was really a poser, for I had nae mair notion o' the whereabouts o' those islands than gin I had been a Hottentot. Hooever, it was necessary either to confess ignorance or gie the islands a site somewhere, so I made a plunge for't, and answered,—

"Whaur sud the Canary Islands be but i' the Caspian Sea, Mrs Robbie?" an' I added wi' the view o' puttin' an extinguisher upon her zeal for geographical knowledge—"But it's a' very weel for bairns at schule to thresh their brains aboot the situations o' foreign places; your bairn-time an' mine are baith past, I fear, Mrs Robbie."

"But ye surely dinna think that it's a faut to seek usefu'—or at least hairmless—knowledge at ony age, Mr Ettershank?" quo' she, wi' feminine persistency.

I felt it necessary to assert my superiority, for I somehoo considered my dignity at stake in the contest, an' so, wi' a severely credulous air, I replied, "I dinna say it's a faut to seek usefu' knowledge, Mrs Robbie, but ye've got the information ye asked for; that is to say, we've agreed to locate the Canary Islands in the Caspian Sea; an' I think ye'll no pretend that even Sir Charles Napier, wi' a' the Horse Marines at his back, wud undertak' to sail the British fleet into the Caspian, as maitters stand at this critical juncture o' international an' Continental affairs?"

Mrs Robbie was for a moment, but only for a moment, flabergasted by the terrible facer I had just dealt her, but she rallied immediately an' cam' up to the scratch wi'—"I see nae reason hoo oor ships sudna sail into ony waters that ither ships sail into sae lang as Britain remains Queen o' the Seas. But to return to the bird, Mr Ettershank."

"Was ye wantin' to buy't?" quo' I, weel pleased to withdraw frae the Canary Islands, which I was beginnin' to doot that I had raither misplaced.

"A guinea's a big price for't," said she musingly, "an' yet I'm delighted wi' the creatur'. Wud ye tak' nae less, merchan'?"

"Nae ae single bawbee less," quo' I firmly; "an' mair than that, I really dinna want to pairt wi't at a' in the meantime, Mrs Robbie," for I saw the gudewife had set

her min' upon the creatur', an' I kent weel that, the mair I seemed disinclined to sell, the mair she wud wiss to buy.

"But I maun hae the birdie at ony rate," quo' she, wi' a sudden spurt o' resolution.

"Mrs Robbie," quo' I, "ye're a woman o' will, an' what ye say ye *maun* hae, ye *will* hae."

"I canna weel spare the siller jist noo, Mr Ettershank, for I paid a big bill to the dressmaker this very day," quo' she.

"Dinna lat that stan' in your waye, Mrs Robbie," quo' I. "The bird's yours at a guinea gin ye like to tak' it hame wi' ye, an' sen' me back the cage. I cud trust the gudewife o' Greenslack wi' a bigger debt than ane-an'-twenty shillin's ony day."

"Ye're very kind," quo' she, no ill-pleased wi' the flattery; "but I'm no willin' to be in your buiks for a birdie, which is nae athegither a necessary, ye ken."

"I'll tak' barter—butter, eggs, or pootry," said I, fearin' that the sale micht miscairry aifter a', an' at the same time seein' my waye to a fair addition even to the guinea in a case o' barter.

"Sae be't," quo' the gudewife, eagerly; "I'll gie twenty-ane punds o' butter—for butter's a shillin' the day in the market—but ye maun tak' the butter at the rate o' seven punds a week, commencin' neist week, because I canna spare mair, aifter servin' the hoose an' supplyin' several customers wi' fresh butter."

"Say aucht pund per week for the neist three weeks, an' the bird's yours; for ye ken I wud require some sma' allooance for the chance o' a fa' in the merket, Mrs Robbie," quo' I.

"Ye're a hard, hard man, Mr Ettershank, but we'll say it's a bargain," quo' the gudewife, wi' ane o' her winsomest smiles, an' she was at that time a rael bonnie woman.

An' so the canary gaed to Greenslack, an' I served a few customers, wha were regardless o' price, wi' fresh Greenslack butter at fourteen an' saxteenpence the pund for the remainder o' the season.

I wisna athegither hard-hairted wi' my winnin's either, for Birdie Brigg's wife—a puir, trauchlt bodie—ca'd, an' wantit aboot a croon's worth o' things on credit.

"I daurna begin giein' credit except whaun I'm sure o' my siller, else I wud soon be ruined oot at the door," quo' I; "but I'll tell you what I'll dae wi' you, Mrs Briggs" (puir bodie, she had seen better days afore she mairrit her scum o' a man, an' was aye ca'd "Mrs" through a' Keckleton), "I'll gie the bits o' things ye want free, gratis, for naething—for I've been daen gey weel in trade sin' this war began,—but ye maun say naething aboot it, an' ye maunna come back seekin' goods withoot siller."

Weel, the puir bodie was that gratefu' for the bits o' things that, haen observed the empty cage hangin' at the back o' the shop, she gaed hame an' brocht me a young canary in a present, which I gae to my ain wife on her birthday, which luckily happened to fa' that week. The bird grew up to be a fine singer, an' nae muckle ahint the gudewife o' Greenslack's bird in point o' guid looks; an' sae proved to me, gin I had been needin' ony proof, that a kindly act till a fellow creatur' may be rewarded even in this warld. By similar modes o' dealin' as those I hae set forth, I managed to net a braw penny during the coorse o' the Crimean War, on the ootlay o' which mair in the neist chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONTESTED ELECTION.

On takin' stock baith o' my goods an' bankit siller at the end o' the Crimean War, I found mysel' in a position to mak' further investments, either in the waye o' extendin' my business, or in a new direction.

Which was it to be?

That was a question that cost me nae little serious reflection an' prospection; but I warsled it oot in my ain min', and pairtly carried the solution into effect afore I said a word aboot it to Nancy, my wife.

Up till this time we had lived in the rooms an' garrets aboon the shop; but that waye o' livin' I noo resolved to discontinue.

I wud re-open communication between thae rooms an' garrets an' the shop, an' extend the wholesale pairt o' my business, so as to occupy the entire buildin' wi' my stores. Neist I wud buy a bit property on the Sunny Side o' Keckleton, an' big a hoose on't sootable to my position an' prospects.

Noo, there happened to be on the south side o' the toon a property for sale at the time, that met my ideas very weel wi' the single exception that the upset price wis raither aboon my commission, bein' nae less a sum than sax thoosan' poun's.

Gin I laid oot a' that siller on the purchase o' "Mugwort Hill," as the property in question was ca'd, I saw owre clearly that my ither projects wad hae to stan' owre for a bit; hooever, Mugwort Hill wis a bargain that I didna think weel to lat slip, an' so I made bold to secure it, which I had nae tribble in daen, as I wis the only ane that offered the upset price—ae half cash doon.

This property paid me even beyond expectation, for I laid oot the northern half in buildin' feus that brocht me in ten per cent. yearly upon the cost price.

A very inferior class o' cottage dwallin's stan'in' on the southern slope of the hill I had thocht at first to pu' doon, but changed my min' for a reason that will be seen by-an'-by; an' as the rental was aboot three per cent., I cud weel afford to lat the auld rickles stan' till my ain time cam'. On the farther west pairt o' the same slope, I biggit my present dwallin', enclosin' it within nearly aucht acres o' lan', which in coorse o' time cam' to be laid oot in a mainner befittin' the dignity o' the mansion itsel'.

It appears to be utterly unpossible to get things entirely to your min' in this world, an' so I had a bit disappointment wi' the name o' the new hoose, which I had intended to be pronounced in the English mainner "Mugwort Hall;" but frae the first day when the titled stane was placed in the corner, the Keckleton loons kept persistently chalkin' upon every available object near the buildin' "Muggart Ha',"—and so "Muggart Ha'" it was, is, an' I suppose will remain wi' the populace till Scotch becomes ane o' the deid languages.

When I bocht the Mugwort Hill property, Nancy imagined it wis wi' borrowed siller, as a speculation, an' wis gay sair frichtened at the bigness o' the risk, and I never let the cat oot o' the pock till the Ha' wis bigget an' ready for the interior fittin's.

By that time I saw my waye clearly eneuch to the occupyin' o' the entire hoose on the Square wi' my business, an' so I invited the gudewife to tak' a walk oot wi' me ae bonnie aifternoon—I think it wud be in the month o' April, 1860—to see the Ha'.

The grun's waurna yet laid oot, an' there wis a hantle to dae aboot the hoose itsel', but still the place athegither made a pooerfu' impression upon Nancy's min'.

"But wha," quo' she at length, "but wha can afford to live in sic a braw hoose, William? I doot ye'll no easily find a tenant in Keckleton."

"An' wha sud live in the braw hoose," quo' I, "but the owner o' it an' his wife? or, to adopt a mair befittin' style o' language—who but William Ettershank, Esq. of Mugwort Hall, and his good lady?"

"Dear me! dear me! William," quo' Nancy, "ye maist tak' awa' a bodie's breath. Hooever cud I manage sic a hoose?"

"Frae this moment I double your hoosekeepin' siller, an' a' furnishin's an' outside expenses sall regaird me, for the neist year at ony rate," quo' I.

Nancy required to step into anither room, whaur she remained sae lang that I had to luik aifter her.

She wis stan'in' at ane o' the windows wi' her pocket naipkin in her han', an' didna luik unlike as gin she had been greetin'.

"Mr Ettershank," quo' she wi' a lauch, "ye're jist a woonerfu' man; a perfect genius for makin' siller."

"Mrs Ettershank," quo' I, wi' a mock boo, "an' ye're joost a wonnerfu' woman, a perfect genius for makin' a happy hame to your man, an' that strengthens his han's an' clears his head to note a' the turns o' trade, so as to follow them to advantage."

I winna describe what immediately followed, but somehoo frae that time forward Nancy and I cam' to assume a little mair dignity o' mainner wi' strangers an' ootsiders, an' ca'd ane anither "Mr" and "Mrs" when we had occasion to refer to ane anither as third pairties in ony transaction.

In due coorse o' time we moved into the new hoose, an' to the gudewife's great delight my letters were henceforth addressed to "William Ettershank, Esq. of Mugwort Hall."

My neist important move followed very soon aifter, an' raised me till an honour nae athegither o' my ain seekin', although there wud hae been naething presumptuous in my aspirin' til't as a landit proprietor an' also a lairge ratepayer in the toon.

It was at first suggestit to me to seek a seat at the Toon Cooncil Boord by nane ither than the Provost himsel', at that time a rael decent carlie in the leather trade: his name was Hydes.

At the date 1862, I think, the Hillside Ward, in which my property wis situate, wis represented by a sooter o' the name o' Finlayson, a chiel wi' a rael lang tongue, an' nae an ill head-piece; but the Provost an' he had first a difference in their business transactions, an' by-an'-by they cairret their quarrels to the Cooncil Boord, an' Finlayson, bein' raither best shod i' the gab, had become a sair thorn in the Provost's flesh.

This wis the man that the Provost wantit me to oppose, an' if possible oost frae his seat.

The job was a gey stiff ane, but wi' the Provost at my back I resolved to try't.

I wisna a week deep in the contest, hooever, afore I wud gladly hae withdrawn, gin it hadna been for pride an' shame.

Had I ever been guilty o' ony glarin' faut, I wud surely hae been driven to hide my diminished head in the obscurest corner o' the earth, for the abuse that wis heapt upon me wis perfectly scunnerfu'.

I hae often said sin-syne, that gin there be a black spot in a man's life, a weak joinin' in ony pairt o' a man's moral harness, sen' him oot to dae battle on his ain accoont in a contestit election, an' the black spot will be shown braid an' wide, magnified a hunnerfald, an' the wee chink will be penetrated by cloods o' arrows frae quarters he least expected.

The only weakness I wis conscious o' when I began the contest wis in the maitter o' speech-makin'. I cud palaver a customer wi' ony ane i' the coonty ahint the coonter like mysel', or I cud haud my ain, in chaff or common conversation, wi' the smairtest "bagman" on the road; but, when it cam' to gettin' upon my legs an' attemptin' to translate my thochts into English afore a sea o' upturned faces, an' maistly the faces o' enemies, I cudna get utterance, or I made the weakest remarks, or the maist ridiculous mistak's.

On the ither han', my opponent cud reel ye aff a speech an 'oor lang, in English as glib as gin English had been his mither tongue; an' as for my bits o' arg'ments an' statements, he jist made mince-meat o' them.

The consequence o' a' this wis that I, wha commenced the contest feelin' only a little weakness, as has been said, in the maitter o' speech, respectin' mysel' an' believin' that I wis weel respectit throughoot the length an' breadth o' Keckleton, gaed hame at the end o' the first week wonderin' hoo I—a man covered frae the sole o' the fit to the croon o' the head wi' woun's an' bruises an pootrefyin' moral sairs, I—an idiot in intellect an' a villain in principle, cud daur to sit doon at the same fireside or tak' my place at the table wi' sic an honest, weel-daen woman as I kent my wife to be!

Wi' sic depressin' feelin's weighin' upon me, it needna be wondert at although I sat doon wi' a gey glum luik on enterin' my ain hoose.

"I doot ye hinna been sae successfu' the nicht as cud hae been wisht, William," quo' Nancy, in her couthiest mainner.

"Successfu'!" quo' I. "Successfu's nae the word to use wi' regaird to my candidature, which sud never hae been entered upon. I hae made a perfect ass o' mysel'!"

"Hoot! hoot, man!" quo' she, "ye tak' owre serious a view o' the maitter. It has never been my custom to tak' or meddle in your business mair or less; but this time I think I'll venture to advise ye, man. When ye stan' up to speak in reply to your opponent an' attempt to use the English tongue, to which ye're nae accustomed, it appears to me that ye're jist like David gaen forth against Goliath o' Gath in Saul's armour. Assay nae langer, man, this unproved gear; put it aff ye, an' attack your enemy wi' the sling an' the stane o' yer mither tongue an' yer mither wit, an' gin ye dinna open his een till him, then I'll admit that ye're jist the ass that ye hae ca'd yoursel' an' naethin' mair."

At the very neist meetin' I followed my wife's advice, makin' use in the beginnin' o' my speech o' her simile aboot David an' Saul's armour.

"But, sirs," cried I, "I'll put aff this gear which I hinna proved, for it hasna been my high privilege to learn Oxford English in the slums o' Leicester. (This shot tauld immensely, for Finlayson had worked several years at's trade an' learnt the airt o' spootin' among the Radical sooters o' Leicester.) I'm like maist o' yoursel's, gentlemen, a Keckletonian born an' bred, an' I stan' afore ye in my ain true colours. (Cheers.) I'm nae jackdaw in peacock's feathers; I'm a Keckleton chicken, a Scotch bird, gentlemen, but ane o' as honest a nest as ever was biggit south o' the Tweed. (Cheers.) I mean to fecht this battle fairly, gentlemen, but I mean to show my rival afore I'm dune wi' him that I'm a rael Scotch game-cock withoot a single white feather in a' my plumage. I hinna been Anglicised by crossin' the neuk o' an English midden; but it cheats me, gentlemen, gin the candidate for your suffrages wha has sae often twitted me wi' my oratorical deficiencies dinna fin' oot afore this tulzie comes to an end that the electors o' Hillside Ward prefer plain common

sense in braid Scotch to empty rant in nairrow English. (Immense cheering.) Mr Finlayson tells the electors that I am an interested candidate, wha seeks a seat at the Cooncil Boord merely to serve my ain selfish ends. Weel, grantin' that he has divined my true motives, am I less likely to serve your interests because my ain are mixt up wi' them? Is the man wha has his share in the same parritch pat wi' yoursels nae the mair likely on that account to endeavour to keep the contents sweet an' wholesome? Or, again, whether is he wha has a ten thoosan' poun' stake in the prosperity o' the toon, or he wha has barely a Cooncillor's qualifyin' property, maist likely to strive for the toon's weelfare? Gentlemen, I leave the answers to your ain common sense. (Immense cheering.) O, but Mr Finlayson says I am for pooin' doon auld buildin's an' rearin' new anes; for widenin' nairrow thoroughfares an' makin' fresh streets an' roads upon expensive an' improved plans. I plead guilty to a' these chairges, gentlemen. (Cries of Oh! oh!) Yes, gentlemen, I desire to see a' these improvements cairried oot, an', as a lairge ratepayer in the toon, I dinna grudge my fair share o' the expense, an', gin it sae please ye to state my case, because I am weel assured that ony extra burden I may hae to bear, in the shape o' heavier ratin', will be mair than met by my share in the increased commercial prosperity o' the toon, an' in the increased value acquired by a' my belangings as a merchan' an' a property owner. Gentlemen, toons are like human bein's; gin ye wish them to thrive ye maun provide for the renewal o' their claes, the expansion o' their lungs, an' the growth o' a' their joints an' members; for, gin ye dinna, they'll as surely crine, dwindle, an' perish as the scrimpit, starvt, hampert human body will. Therefore, I wud improve oor toon an' keep it abreast o' the times in a' the requirements o' a healthy progress. But, gentlemen, ye're tauld that I'm

ane o' those lovers o' expense wha wud like to see the formation o' a Water Company to bring a purer an' mair abundant supply o' that element to the toon. To this chairge also I plead guilty. Whether in the Cooncil or oot o' the Cooncil I will dae my very best to promote the formation o' sic an undertakin', an' believe that in sae daen I sall win the hearty thanks o' every enlichtened Keckletonian wha prefers cleanliness to filth, convenience to discomfort, an' health to sickness. I wud save oor women an' bairns frae the necessity o' gaen lang distances for water in dry times, an' us a' frae bein' compelled to drink the drumly dreepin's o' the gutters in wet. I wud mak' a pure an' plentifu' supply frae the mountain spring enter into the hooses o' the very puirest an' meanest o' oor inhabitants, so that what little extra they micht hae to pay in water rates wud be mair than saved them in drugs an' doctor's bills. Oh, but I'm 'a Tory in disguise,' it seems! Gentlemen, I'm nae Tory, but neither am I a Leebral o' the penny-wise-an'-pound-foolish schule. I wud preserve a' that's worth preservin' either in oor local or national institutions, but I'm a root an' branch Radical to cut aff or pluck up an' destroy a' that is useless an' obstructive to that healthy progress which is, in my opeenion, absolutely necessary to oor social an' political weel-bein'."

A lood an' lang continued burst o' cheerin' followed the close o' this address, an' nae less a person than Ralph Rough, generally kent as "Rough the Radical," proposed—"That the strenuous support of the electors of the Hillside Ward should be given to Mr William Ettershank as the most suitable candidate to represent them in the Town Council." The motion was "carried by acclamation," as the chairman declared.

I may jist mention that "Rough the Radical" hadna been convertit to my cause athegither by my eloquence,

as I had at first believed. The process o' conversion had been greatly hastened by certain presents o' warm underclaes made to his bairns by Mrs Ettershank—a transaction o' which I kent naething till lang aifter the election.

When I reached Mugwort Hall that nicht my first words to Mrs Ettershank were—

"Nancy, my dear, I followed your advice, an' I've welted the sooter."

The fact is that frae that very nicht I followed Finlayson through thick an' thin, an' didna leave him a' leg to stan' upon. On the day o' the election I polled double his number, an' thus I'm noo TOON COUNCILLOR ETTERSHANK, at your service.

WEE JOHNNY MARTIN.

The Schoolmaster's Story.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN I first came to be parochial schoolmaster of Keckleton there was not—there has never been since—a more remarkable boy attending the school than Johnny Martin.

Johnny was twelve years of age, but in stature and weight there was scarcely a single boy of six who did not surpass him. Yet Johnny was not in the least dwarfish in appearance. He was perfectly proportioned, straight-limbed, with the daintiest possible little hands and feet, fair complexioned, with a pleasing, nay, beautiful, oval face, bright blue eyes, and flaxen hair, so soft and woolly that, draw it out however you might, it instantly re-coiled itself into silken ringlets on his finely moulded head. I do not believe that Britain ever produced a finer model for Oberon, King of the Fairies, than "Wee Johnny Martin," as the child was generally called in Keckleton.

There was something positively fascinating, weird, unearthly in the child's singular beauty of person when you came to remark it, which I had not done at first; for the child was meanly clad, sunburnt, and generally unattractive in attire as compared with many of the other boys and girls in the school, which was open alike to both sexes.

In fact, my own attention was first drawn to Wee Johnny by his mental qualities, which were not less extraordinary than his bodily attributes.

The little fellow appeared to "know" his lessons as if by intuition, and to be, in his class, so easily master of those several years his seniors and three times his size, that I could not help taking notice of him.

On certain days I allowed the pupils in the more advanced classes to put each a question to the "dux," in order if possible to pull him down. If the dux could not give a satisfactory answer to the question it was passed on to the next, and further down if necessary till the right answer was given, the one who gave it taking the dux's place. The children took great delight in those questioning exercises, and by-and-by each question came to be called a "shot." Many were the "shots," carefully prepared beforehand, and aimed at Wee Johnny, when he happened to be dux, which was very frequently the case. Generally he would sustain a full round of "shots" without tripping; but if he did fall, the heavy ammunition which he would immediately bring to bear upon the foe was sufficient to reconquer the lost position.

If I were to go back to my note-books of the period when Wee Johnny was my pupil, and extract some of his questions and answers, taken down *verbatim et literatim* out of sheer astonishment, few would believe but that they had been "doctored" by myself, for they are marked by a breadth of learning, a depth of thought, and an acuteness of perception which would appear to belong rather to a ripe scholar than to a mere child.

It will not be necessary for the development of my simple story, however, that I should put either my own credibility or my readers' powers of belief to so severe a test. I merely ask it to be granted that Wee Johnny was a boy of extraordinary mental precocity.

My first spring and summer as schoolmaster at Keckleton had passed, and the school was re-opened after the harvest vacation, before I came to know anything about Wee Johnny, further than that he was a regular attender at school, and remarkably successful in all his studies; but when he returned to school in the early days of a chill, wet October, not only more ragged than he had been previously, but paler, thinner, and subject to a deep-seated, hacking cough, common humanity led me to inquire into the worldly circumstances of the poor wee mite.

At that time the schoolmaster's house consisted of four goodly-sized rooms above the school, the entry to these being by a stone stair outside. Two of those rooms I occupied as bachelor lodgings, and the other two were let off to a jobbing gardener and his wife, the latter serving me in the capacity of cook and general servant. This was not a very aristocratic arrangement; but it had been made by my predecessor, and it suited my circumstances to continue it for a time.

It was one night soon after the re-assembling of the school, when the children had been dismissed for the day, that, on my invitation, Wee Johnny followed me shiveringly up the outer stone stairs, upon which the cold rime of an early frost was falling, and entered my cozy rooms above.

"Come here, and sit down by the fire, Johnny," said I; "you have looked more starved like than usual to-day, and I think your cough has also been more than usually troublesome."

"I thank you, sir," answered Johnny, with an accent which I had previously noticed as not Keckletonian. Then he added, a little sadly, "I am afraid my cough has been more than usually troublesome to-day, to others as well as to myself. I do my best to stifle it, but it masters me, and appears to be getting worse."

"I will get you some bread and butter, and a cup of warm tea, Johnny," said I, "after which I wish to have a little conversation with you."

Again Johnny thanked me with the well-bred ease of a child who had been used to good society, and when he had drunk some tea, and got well warmed, I entered as delicately as I could upon the reason of my having asked him to come upstairs with me.

I said it was no mere idle curiosity which led me to pry into Johnny's affairs, but a sincere desire to be of use to him, if I could only find out in what way I could further his interests; for I was truly sorry to observe a boy so orderly, so intelligent, and so apt in every matter of scholarship, at the same time so scantily clad, that there seemed to be serious danger lest his health might be permanently injured if some warmer clothing could not be got for him, now that the cold weather was setting in.

"I find your name thus entered upon the school register by my predecessor—'John Martin, aged ten years, residing with Mrs Martin, No. 9 School Wynd.' I presume this Mrs Martin is your mother?" said I, inquiringly.

"Mrs Martin is not my mother, nor is she related to me at all. Indeed, I have no relatives in Keckleton, nor for that matter anywhere else, so far as I know," replied Johnny, mournfully.

"Dear me!" cried I in amazement; "who then brought you to Keckleton? Your English pronunciation informs me that you were not brought up here; nor can you have resided here very many years, otherwise, at your age and amidst your surroundings, you must have lost something of your English accent."

"I came here two years ago, and quite alone," was Johnny's answer.

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed I, getting more and more astonished. Wherever did you come from?"

Wee Johnny paused a moment, looked up in my face with his bright shining eyes, and said quietly—"You are so good to me, sir, that I think I would do well to tell you all my story. And yet I am half afraid, lest you too should cast me off; I am such a poor little waif, and seem to belong to nobody."

"Johnny," said I, warmly, "tell me your story. I will not cast you off, I promise you, but befriend you in every way within my power."

The child laid his tiny palm confidently in my outstretched hand, and a silent tear rolled down his cheek, but he replied cheerily, "I thank you sincerely, sir, and I will trust you."

He then withdrew his little hand, the palm of which I had felt to be as hard as horns, and related his story in something like the following words:—

"I know, sir, from the number of times my birthday was kept before I came to Keckleton, that I am twelve years old, or rather will be that age on the twentieth of the current month of October, but in what part of the world I was born I cannot tell.

"I first remember myself at a place called Wellwood Chapel, which I believe must be in Yorkshire. I have no recollection of any earlier home, but I have reason to believe that I was not born at Wellwood. My guardians at Wellwood were the old minister of the chapel and two not very young daughters, both unmarried. The name of the old minister was Mr Taylor. I think he must have been very old, for everybody called him 'Old Mr Taylor,' except his daughters, and his face was more wrinkled than that of any man I ever saw.

"All the Taylors were very kind to me, but I think I liked the old minister best. He told me many pretty stories, and as his poor old eyes were bad, he made me

read a great deal to him, especially out of the Bible; and whenever I came to any word or passage which I did not quite comprehend, I used to lay down the book and say, 'What does this mean, Mr Taylor?' and he would explain away my difficulty—oh, so clearly and patiently!

"I think I shall never forget how he used to take me between his knees, throw up his spectacles on his high, wrinkled forehead, and tell me all about the Patriarchs, and the Kings, and the Prophets of Israel. Joseph, and David, and Daniel were my favourite Bible heroes, and Mr Taylor had always some new lesson to teach me from one or other of their lives.

"I thought my heart would break when I was told one morning that my old friend was dead, and I should hear his voice no more on earth.

"It appeared he had passed away in the night time; for when Miss Taylor went into his bedroom to inquire if anything was the matter, because it was past his usual time of getting up, she found him quite dead.

"I was outside playing in front of the house when I heard Miss Taylor and Miss Mary, her sister, both crying aloud, and I instantly ran in to see what could have caused a circumstance so extraordinary. By that time some of the neighbours had come in, and I was sent into the kitchen, where I was told what had happened. Afterwards, at my own urgent request, I was permitted to see the corpse and sit beside the old man's coffin, and I think the Misses Taylor were kinder to me than ever, because of my sore grief for their father.

"I was in my eighth year when Mr Taylor died, and for some time the only change his death made to me was that I sadly felt the want of his company, for he was more like a dear, wise companion than my guardian or instructor.

"The Misses Taylor had kept a day school for children from a period long before I had come to be their single

boarder, and it went on just the same after their father's death as before.

"At first they talked together about having to give up the house to the new minister, when one was appointed; but the chapel had fallen into such a state of disrepair, that whatever body it had belonged to did not appear to think it worthy of restoration, and so it fell into complete decay—the roof at last falling in, and the woodwork being gradually carried away by the poor people round about for fuel.

"I was not sorry that the chapel had not been kept up; first, because when it went to ruin there was the less likelihood of our being disturbed in our quiet, comfortable home; and next, because I had never liked going to chapel. It was the only place in which Mr Taylor was disagreeable. On Sundays and preaching days he made me go to chapel, and listen to a tedious service, and a long, dreary discourse, which I never understood, and if I fell asleep, as was frequently the case in summer weather, he was angry with me, and it always vexed me to offend him.

"I could never understand why he was so wearisome in the chapel, and so lively and interesting out of it; but it was so, and perhaps that was the reason why nobody came to the chapel besides ourselves and about half-a-dozen old, old men and women, who seemed to sit all the time of the sermon in a sort of dazed state, so that I don't think they were much more edified than myself.

"It may have been wrong, but I had far more pleasure in playing among the ruins of the chapel than ever I had in listening to good old Mr Taylor droning away over my head from its pulpit.

"I was sincerely grieved when Mr Taylor died, and yet I think the year which followed his death was really the happiest of my life at Wellwood.

"Being easily at the top of the Misses Taylor's school, they never troubled me about preparation of lessons, and very seldom did they ask where I had been, provided I came regularly to meals, and was within doors at a reasonable hour at night. It thus happened that I enjoyed more freedom than ever I had done, and in the fine weather I employed it in rambling all up and down the Wellwood valley, which stands out in my recollection as the loveliest place I have ever seen.

"A lofty brown hill bounded it towards the east, and high ridges, cultivated to their tops or covered with plantations of thriving oak, formed its southern and northern confines, while away far to the west the stalks and smoke of a manufacturing town were distinguishable. Along the bottom of the valley ran a small stream of pure, bright water for more than two miles, traced upwards, from the chapel to the brown hill. Below the chapel it received several small tributaries, and became a feeder for numerous dams which supplied the power to turn grinding wheels, but I did not care for the lower end of the valley. It was the upper part which afforded me inexhaustible delight, and the bright rivulet chattering over its stony ways in little sharps and trebles was one of the most powerful attractions.

"There came into my mind an idea that there was a special gladness in the murmur of the brook, when I was sitting on its banks, or in the bend of one of the older oaks whose branches overhung it; and the very birds in the trees seemed to sing a blithe welcome when I came, and piped a saddened lay as I went away.

Mr Taylor had told me the names of the wild flowers too; and I knew when and where to look for them in their seasons, and make them up into bouquets so pretty that the farmers' wives would often beg them of me as I was carrying them home.

"After Mr Taylor's death I had free access to all the books in the little glass-fronted bookcase in the parlour, where he used to sit and study. Many of them were in languages which I could not read, or on subjects that I did not care for; but some of them were such as I could understand, and they delighted me greatly.

"None of them charmed me more than 'Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.' I read and re-read that story till I could picture to myself all the characters, and I localised them in Wellwood, which I baptised 'The Happy Valley.' I required no other companions save my books, birds, and flowers, my whispering oaks and my murmuring brook, to make me happy; indeed, the presence of other children in my favoured haunts appeared to mar the perfection of my enjoyment. Thus one summer flew past, and a winter which, although not quite so delightful, was not without its pleasing duties and recreations. But in the spring-time poor Miss Mary fell ill, and was unable to take her class in school. I could easily take all the lessons, and was proud and happy to do so; but I was smaller in size than most of my pupils, and they would not obey me.

"This was my first great grief, but greater were speedily coming upon me. Miss Mary grew worse and worse as the summer advanced, and required Miss Taylor to be constantly with her. The school was given up a month earlier than the usual vacation time, and not many days after Miss Mary died.

"Miss Taylor was very sad and depressed, and so was I also, for we had both loved the gentle Miss Mary; but we had not long to grieve together, for Miss Taylor made up her mind not to re-open the school, but to go away from Wellwood, and live in a distant part of the country with a richer relative.

"And I?—I overheard Miss Taylor telling a deaf old lady, who called sometimes to condole with her, that 'the

Society' had resolved to put me into a 'Boys' Industrial Home' in the manufacturing town at the western end of our valley.

"I was dreadfully frightened, and as soon as the old lady went away, I ran to Miss Taylor to tell her that wherever she went I would follow her. 'What right had any Society,' I demanded passionately, 'to thrust me into an Industrial Home, which would be worse for me than any prison?'

"Miss Taylor said all she could to reconcile me to the necessity of my lot, declaring, I believe truly, that she would not be less sorry to part from me than I from her; but such was the will of Providence, and both of us must try to submit without repining. She herself, she said, had so little to live upon that she would be partly a pensioner upon the cousin to whose house she was going.

"As for me: my mother died when I was a baby, and my father, leaving me at Wellwood, went away to the East as a missionary, where he fell a victim to jungle fever. Since that time the Society had paid them (the Taylors) a small sum annually for taking care of me, and it was now intended, by placing me in an Industrial Home, to enable me to gain my own living, which I would have to do ultimately; because I had no wealthy relatives to support me, nor indeed any relatives, except some brothers or sisters of my father's, who were said to live at a place called Keckleton, far, far away towards the north of Scotland; but these had never, to her knowledge, once asked after me. To the Society, therefore, I must look, and the Society I must needs obey.

"Circumstances were too strong for us both, and so we parted—Miss Taylor for her cousin's, and I for the Industrial Home. It was about two months afterwards that I had a letter given me at 'The Home,' informing me that Miss Taylor was dead and buried. She died, the letter

said, as her father had done, in the night, when no one was near her, and the doctor stated that the cause of her death was heart disease.

"Miss Taylor was my last friend of the 'Happy Valley' —I thought at that time my last friend on earth—and I cannot describe to you my feelings of utter loneliness when I got word of her death. Nor will I weary you with an account of my troubles at 'The Home;' troubles not with the masters, but with the other boys, who were nearly all idle and untruthful, and nearly all hated and persecuted me because I would not join them in their wickedness.

"I have no words to tell you what I suffered during the dismal nine months I spent in 'The Home.' To a boy differently brought up, it might have proved an acceptable home; but to me, who had known only the good Taylors and the 'Happy Valley,' it was a place of confinement, torture, and degradation; and I made up my mind to escape from it when the fine weather came, and endeavour to find out my relatives at Keckleton.

"The way I was enabled to carry out my resolution was this. I was often sent out on messages, and one day I observed a gentleman jump out of a cab, and, in doing so, drop a book out of his pocket. Neither he nor the cabman noticed the book, for each hurried off in different directions. I shouted after the gentleman, but he was a good way off and did not hear me.

"Then I ran and picked up the pocket-book, as it proved to be, and followed him as fast as I could. He was stepping into the Station Hotel when I overtook him, and put the book into his hand without saying anything at first, for I was breathless with running so fast.

"He turned quickly round and cast a look of suspicious scrutiny upon me. Happily, I had been ordered to put on my own clothes that day, because my uniform was to

undergo some repairs, and the gentleman seemed to be satisfied with my general appearance, for he smiled in a reassuring manner and asked, 'Where did you get this, my good little man?'

"I explained how I had seen him drop something as he alighted from the cab, and when I could not make him hear me, that I had picked up the pocket-book and followed him to restore it.

"He examined the contents of the book while I was making my statement, and finding that all was right, he put it carefully into the breast pocket of his coat, which he slowly buttoned as if he was thinking about something. Then he said—'And you did well to follow me, my little man. Do you know the pocket-book, which I was careless enough to lose, contains bank notes and papers of great value, and you have done me a great service indeed in restoring it.'

"I said I had done only what I ought to have done, and was very glad to have been useful to him; and was turning to go away, when he laid his hand on my shoulder and drew me into the hotel after him, saying—'Stop, stop my little man! You have rendered me a signal service, and now I must see what I can do for you.'

"So speaking he opened the door of a room, and, leading me in, desired me to sit down on a couch. 'And now,' he said, in a kindly tone, 'tell me something about yourself, that I may know how I may best repay the obligation under which you have laid me.'

"As briefly as I could I told the gentleman all my story, and how eagerly I wished to get away from 'The Home,' and get to my friends in Scotland. I believe I spoke of those friends as certainly existing, and as most anxious to receive me; not, I assure you, with any wish to deceive, but because I had actually persuaded myself that it was so.

"The gentleman heard me patiently, and, when I had finished, said compassionately—'Poor little fellow! I believe every word of what you have told me, and I think I shall take upon myself the responsibility of sending you to your friends in Scotland. I have no time to make inquiries; but I believe I cannot be far wrong in enabling you to escape from this detested "Home." Your friends may rectify the mistake by sending you back if I err in gratifying your wishes.' I cannot tell you in what terms I thanked the gentleman, for I was beside myself with joy. Fain, fain would I have gone back to 'the Home' to try to fetch away a few keepsakes and memorials of my home and friends at Wellwood, but I dared not lest I should be detained, and the chance of getting to my friends in Scotland should escape me.

"The kind gentleman not only paid my railway fare, but also made the people at the hotel furnish me with a great paperful of biscuits, cheese, and sandwiches. He also bought a purse for me at the station, and put a sovereign and ten shillings into it for any chance expenses which might occur by the way. A few shillings of this sum I was forced to spend in coach hire, for the railway does not extend to Keckleton, as you know. Otherwise I arrived with myself and my cash all right.

"But, alas! I could not find any relatives at Keckleton. Several Martins I found, but they each and all denied all knowledge of me and mine.

"At last I stumbled footsore and depressed into the good woman's house with whom I still live, and she agreed to let me stay with her for a few weeks, while my money lasted; but, bless her kindly heart! she has never taken any money from me. The money I got from the gentleman, together with some few shillings I have earned for making wicker baskets, has all been spent on my own schooling and clothes, until lately, when Mrs Martin has

been too ill with rheumatism to do much work, and every penny we can make is required to keep us in food. My clothes have got to be very bad, so has my cough, and Mrs Martin sometimes says that neither of us will get through the winter, and she seems to think that it will be best for us both that it should be so."

This was Wee Johnny's little history, and I felt truly sorry for the poor lonely mite, and resolved to take immediate steps towards the improvement of his condition, the results of which I must defer to another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

My first step was to call in the aid of a jobbing tailor, and get Wee Johnny rigged out in a complete and comfortable outfit of warm clothing made from some old things of my own. He was so much improved, so much smarter and more genteel in his general appearance when he put on these, that on looking at him there came into my mind the words of Robin Hood when he changed clothes with the beggar as recorded in the old ballad:—

> "And by my sooth, and quoth bold Robin,
> 'Tis the mounting that makes the man."

From that time I used to regard Wee Johnny as he stood at the top of his class as a credit to my school in point of scholarship, and also an ornament to it in point of personal appearance; and the little fellow appeared to have acquired a new pride in himself and a desire always to come to school clean and tidy. My next care was to call upon Mrs Martin, in order to satisfy myself as to her character, and see what sort of board and lodgings she provided for my interesting protégé.

I found Mrs Martin to be a stout old woman, apparently between sixty and seventy years of age, "a terrible martyr," as she informed me, "to the rheumatis."

The habitation consisted of three apartments, the front room of which she used as a shop—the commodities sold in it being of a very miscellaneous character, from needles, buttons, thread, and shoe laces, up to many of the smaller articles of household requisites, such as brushes, basses, tin pans, and wooden buckets. I observed also several wicker baskets amongst the goods, and learnt that they were the handiwork of Wee Johnny, who had been instructed in wicker work at the Industrial Home, it appeared.

Greengroceries were also added to Mrs Martin's traffic, and she had a large, old-fashioned mangle with which she gained a little when the "rheumatis" permitted.

The mangle, as well as her own bed, stood in a kitchen behind the shop, and a small "chamber in the wall" off the kitchen was "Wee Johnny's room."

It was not easy to obtain information of an unmixed character from Mrs Martin, and after several ineffectual attempts to restrain her observations to the subject in hand, I found it best to exercise a little patience and let her proceed in her own way, which was as follows:—

"Ye wiss me to tell ye something aboot Wee Johnny, Mr Edom." (My name is Adams.) "Eh! I wyte I wull dae that wi' a' my heart, for ye hae been kin' to the littlen yersel'—oh, wonnerfu' kin' Mr Edom; an' I'm sure ye hae lifted a mountain aff my min', for I cud neither get nicht's rest nor day's ease for thinkin' o' hoo the littlen wis to warsle through the winter wi' sic claes, an' he's had a sair cauld an' a hoast as weel; but I dinna think sae muckle o' that, for littlens wull tak' caulds, herd an' hap them hoo ye like. I ken that weel, for I hae been a mither mysel', ye ken; 'deed hae I. I bare ten, buried sax an' their faither, an' brocht up four, an' they're a' awa' frae me;

'deed are they—a' awa' to foreign countries, an' nae jist owre mindfu' o' their auld mither; but that wull happen when creatur's get up to hae faimilies o' their ain, Mr Edom. I hae twa dochters mairriet, the ane in Liverpool an' the ither in Glaisgo', an' I hae twa sons baith in America, mairriet and daen weel, I believe; but they a' hae big faimilies, an' I get naething frae ane nor ither o' them; an' dear me! it's a sair fecht to mak' a livin' in sic times, wi' rents like mine hangin' owre yer head. I'm sure I hardly get oot o' the warsle o' ae rent afore anither's due. Sax poun' a year I pay for this bit place, Mr Edom, my bit shop, the kitchen, an' Wee Johnny's closet. Puir stock, he's welcome to the use o' it, I'm sure, and the sma' bit bed my ain youngest Wee Johnnie, that's noo a big, stoot man and the father o' a big sma' faimily in America, used to sleep in when he wis a laddie at schule; but he never took till his lear' like this Wee Johnny, wha is the maist extraordinar' littlen for buiks that ever I kent; but Mr Wilson, that wis schulemaister, afore ye Mr Edom, wis a gay surly bool, an' I think he set my Johnny clean against learnin', an' I cud never get him past the New Testament class; an' to this very day I dinna believe that he could say 'Effectual Callin',' for a' the time I spent tryin' to drive it intil him.

"But as I wis sayin' aboot the present Wee Johnny, he drappit into my bit shop jist as gin he had drappit frae the cloods, aboot this time twa years back. He was weel drest an' bonnie, an' spak' jist like a buik. 'Mrs Martin,' said the littlen—he's learnt to ca' me 'Granny' sin' that time, puir wee stock! I thocht it wud be couthier like for him to ca' me Granny, couthier like for baith o's indeed, for I thocht wi' mysel' aifter I cam' to be sae fond o' the littlen, 'Wha kens but my ain Johnny's wee Johnny in America may be sic anither, an' gin he wer' here he wud be ca'in' me Granny.'

"'Mrs Martin,' said the littlen, when he drappit into my shop,—'I have come to Keckleton from a part of England a long, long way off, in order to seek out my relatives, who are said to reside in this town or neighbourhood, and I have been sent to you as being perhaps one of them, for your name is Martin and so is mine. Had you or your husband ever any relatives in England of your own name and mine?'

"Weel, Mr Edom, my hairt warm't to the puir bit mite at the very meenit; an' I took him into the kitchen an' gae him a flour scone an' a bowl o' sweet milk, for which the infant wantit to pay me, but I wad hae nane o' his siller. An' aifter he had tell't me aboot his ain forbears, as far's he kent, I opened upon mine; first upon the Cruickshanks—my ain maiden name wis Cruickshank, Isobel, or Tibby, as they ca'd me when I wis a lass; an' neist upon my man's, George Martin, noo dead an' gane a dizzen o' years sin' syne come Marti'mas; an', lastly, I tell't him aboot our ain family, deid an' livin'.

"It may be, sir, that the littlen had some difficulty in followin' me, for he didna weel unnerstan' hantles o' oor words when he came here at first, or it may be that he wis worn oot wi' fertigue. At onyrate, when I finished my accoont, which I tried to mak' as plain as possible, I observed that he had fa'en deid asleep in my auld airm chair, in which I had garrt him sit doon.

"I took him up an' cairrit him into the closet beddie, an' it wis braid daylicht at aucht o'clock neist mornin' afore he budged again. An' he's never left me sin' syne, Mr Edom. An' I'm sure I'm jist as fond o' him as ever I wis o' my ain Johnny, him that's the faither o' the big sma' faimily in America, ye ken. Oh, dear me! I'm sure it's jist oot o' sicht oot o' min' wi' young folks! It's sax months sin' I had a wag o' a pen frae either Glaisgo' or Liverpool, and mair than twa years sin' I

heard frae America. An' Sandy had seven littlens at that time, an' Johnny had aucht an' wis jist gaen to hae a ninth; an' Mary an' Nelly hae five an' eleven the piece in Glaisgo' an' Liverpool; sae I think I'm weel entitled to the name o' 'granny.' But as I wis remarkin' aboot Wee Johnny, he's been wi' me twa years, an' I've hardly ever misst his bit meat, for he's a sma', sma' eater, an' yet he's wonnerfu' strong an' healthy though he has a sair cauld an' a hoast in the meantime; but wi' the braw warm claes that ye hae provided for him—an' mony, mony thanks to ye for the same, Mr Edom—wi' thae warm things on his back, he'll soon be himsel' again. An' I'm sure a better littlen never breathed the breath o' life; an' he's that gratefu' to you for your kin'ness till him, sir, an' to mysel' tae for that maitter; though, 'deed, to tell the truth, he's been worth mair than's keep to me sin' ever he cam' to me: he turns the mangle, he runs errands, he serves in the shop—but oh, sir, there's richt little daen, an' sic strong competition that, even wi' Johnny's help, I find it sair wark to mak' oor livin' an' the rent, let alane claes an' firin'; an' I wud tak' it as a great kin'ness, sir, gin ye cud lat it be kent amo' the schule bairns, that I—'Granny Martin,' as the littlens are a' comin' to ca' me—gie a bool mair for the bawbee than ony ither dealer in Keckleton. But as I wis sayin' aboot Wee Johnny, he rises in the mornin' an' opens the shop, an' puts on the fire, an' even masks my drap tea when I'm ill wi' the rheumatis—which is nearly constantly the case at present—an' he mak's wicker baskets, an' I get aboot auchteenpence for them, which is jist a shilling o' profit, for the wands cost saxpence; an' he's helpfu' to me in a hunner ways. Of coorse I try to mak it up to him by lettin' him gang to schule, an' glaid I am, sir, that ye hae introduced the custom o' no takin' the bairns in on Saturday, for it's ane o' my busiest days, an' Wee Johnny

helps me wonnerfully—for he's a littlen that disna care for play, like littlens o' his ain age—gin he's nae at his buiks, sir; but, oh, he's fond o' his buiks, an' says he wud like to be a missionar' minister like his faither, an' I dinna discourage him; on the contrary, I say, 'An' wha kens, my bonnie wee man? As broken a ship has come to lan'.' But as I wis sayin', I jist dinna ken hoo I cud keep a hoose noo withoot my wee laddie, for when he's nae at's buiks he's sure to be helpin' me some gait or anither.

"Na, na, he's nae related to me, Mr Edom, an' I canna think what Martins he can be o', gin he binna an oye o' a John Martin wha left Keckleton when I wis a lass and gaed sooth wi' his faimily; for gin my memory disna fail me—but deed it's far frae what it wis ance, Mr Edom,—this John Martin's youngest son learnt to be a minister o' some sort, an' he may hae gaen abroad an' deet in the jungle, wherever that may be. Noo, gin Wee Johnny be an oye o' this John Martin's, as is likely, he has nae relations in Keckleton, nor ony ither where that I ken o', Mr Edom."

As Mrs Martin, upon further questioning, only returned upon her former statements, without throwing any new light on the history of Wee Johnny or his "forbears," I left her with injunctions to be as good to the little man as her circumstances would admit, and I, on my part, would do my best to aid her efforts.

On consulting the parochial registers, which were in my keeping, I convinced myself that my protégé was really the "oye," or grandchild, of that John Martin of whom mention had been made by "Granny Martin," and that he was therefore connected with the parish of Keckleton.

My object in endeavouring to establish this connection was to enable me to prove Wee Johnny's claim to a "mortification" of eight bolls of meal, or the value of the

same in money, made by a certain Robert Scott, for the maintenance at Keckleton Parish School of "ane poor scholar belonging to the parish," whose studies should include Latin, and whose expressed intention should be to fit himself for acting as "ane missionary of the Christian religion, as the same is laid down in the Confession of Faith and the other standards of the Kirk of Scotland, to the heathen in foreign pairts."

A preference was to be given, in the first place, to applicants of the name of Scott, and second, of Martin; or, failing applicants bearing either of those names, the "mortification" was to be given to any other applicant or applicants, as the kirk-session of Keckleton might direct.

I was aware that the mortification was in abeyance at the time, and, arming myself with copies of the entry relating to it, and also with copies of such other entries as appeared to me to establish my pupil's connection with Keckleton, I called upon Dr Drubber to get his opinion and advice as to the claim which I intended to make.

The Doctor received me with his usual urbanity, but he entered into my views with less readiness than I had expected.

"The boy's connection with the parish was rather misty," he said, "but, granting it to be established by present and future residence, in what way did I propose to satisfy the kirk-session that the boy would qualify for a missionary according to the Confession of Faith and the other standards of the Kirk of Scotland?"

"By my own showing," he went on, "the boy had been brought up by dissenters; his parents were most probably members of the same dissenting body as the Taylors; and the old woman Martin with whom the boy lodged, if she went to church anywhere, did not, certainly, come to the Parish Church. He believed she was what was called an 'old light seceder.' The boy thus appeared to belong

to nobody, to have no one who would be surety for his intentions, and he was too much a child himself to be of much account as to the shaping of his future. These were the *primâ facie* objections which presented themselves to him, and the kirk-session would not unlikely entertain similar views. Still, if the boy continued to manifest such extraordinary signs of ability as I had described, something might ultimately be done for him."

I was very much disappointed at my failure to enlist Dr Drubber's sympathies, for I well knew that whatever opinion he held on the subject, that of the kirk-session was certain to be identical; and so it proved. I was not without hope, however, for the strong point against the claim was the fact that the boy had no proper guardian, and, in my enthusiasm in his behalf, I entertained serious thoughts of constituting myself his guardian.

Pending my taking that step, I set about strengthening my pupil's claim as I best could. I got him to attend the Parish Church and "Sabbath School," which he did with exemplary regularity; I saw to the maintenance of his wardrobe in a state of propriety; and, lastly, I commenced to instruct him in Latin, with a result which more than realised my expectations, high as they were.

The study of the ancient classics had fallen to a minimum of one pupil under my predecessor, but I had succeeded in getting up a class of some half-a-dozen students by the commencement of my second winter. Still, the work was done in a half-hearted, lifeless sort of way until Wee Johnny joined the class. He had to traverse the "Rudiments," from the commencement up to the end of the regular verbs, in order to overtake his class-fellows; but by my taking him by himself a few hours a-week, he not only made up his leeway, but also became so notedly *princeps* at the examination conducted by the Presbyterial Deputation in the spring, as to attract the attention of all

the examiners. By that time I had got him so far on that he could read with ease about one-half "The Lives of Eminent Commanders, by Cornelius Nepos." In this work he took very great delight, and when once he had mastered one of the biographies there was little fear of his forgetting it; for he went over it so often by himself afterwards, that he not only knew the story accurately, but also the meanings and modifications of the individual words, together with the grammatical construction of every sentence.

Dr Drubber was so delighted with the boy that he took me aside and informed me, that he believed some arrangement might be made which would enable him to advise the kirk-session to appoint the little man to the Scott Mortification. And I was well aware that what Dr Drubber "advised" the kirk-session would carry out.

However, the harvest vacation arrived, and nothing definite as to the mortification had yet been determined, but I went away leaving Wee Johnny in the best of spirits, and being myself in the highest hopes as to his future.

The latter half of the vacation was cold and wet, and consequently I returned to Keckleton a week previous to the day fixed for re-opening the school.

One of my first calls was made at Granny Martin's, for I had received a letter from Dr Drubber while I was away informing me that my little friend was appointed to the Scott Mortification, subject to my consenting to exercise a general care over him while he held the bequest, and I was desirous of communicating the good news, which I believed would be equally as welcome to Granny as to himself. I entered as usual by the shop, and found Granny sitting behind the counter with her hands folded in her lap.

"There you are," said I jocularly, "just as I left you five weeks ago, Mrs Martin, sitting at the receipt *of custom.*"

"Dinna speak to me o' custom, Mr Edom," exclaimed Granny; "there hasna a customer entered this shop the day, an' it maun be near sax o'clock at nicht, except ae gangeral littlen, an' it cam' in only to spier gin I cud gie its mither twa bawbees for a penny. But oh, Mr Edom, I'm glaid that ye've come, for Wee Johnny's lyin' in's bed het an' sick, an' rael ill."

I had no patience for Granny's account of the commencement and progress of the illness. She began it in the shop, continued it through the kitchen, and would likely have gone on with it long enough after I was at the bedside of the little sufferer had I not cut it short with little ceremony.

The substance of her story was—that Johnny had caught a severe cold about eight days previously; that she herself, being "bad with rheumatis," had been unable to give him much attention—had, indeed, required all his care to relieve her own sufferings, which "amaist drove her demented;" that he had frequently got up during the night to get her bottles of hot water to lay against the affected parts, until, finally, the day before he had been unable to rise in the morning, and had been getting worse ever since.

"This is no case to be trifled with," said I; "and if you have not had Dr Watson already, I must fetch him at once."

"The doctor!" screamed the old woman in great alarm. "Oh, dear me! dear me! my ain wee Johnny, him that's noo a stoot man in America——"

I did not stay to hear any more, but made what haste I could to Dr Watson's. Happily, Dr Watson was at home, and did not delay many minutes before he was ready to accompany me.

There is no need for me to sound the praises of Dr Watson, the goodness of whose heart is known to all

Keckleton, and throughout the country for many miles around it; but I wish to take this opportunity of bearing my humble testimony to the noble profession of which he is an honoured member, and I feel constrained to say that I never knew a medical man hesitate from any trivial, selfish, or sordid consideration to employ the utmost efforts of his skill to relieve suffering, or, if possible, save life where it was in danger.

On the contrary, I have known doctors go out in all weathers, and at all hours of the four-and-twenty, to attend patients from whom there was no hope of their ever receiving a penny. I know of no greater risks encountered by man for men, of no nobler displays of benevolence among men in the cause of humanity, than have been exhibited by members of the medical profession during my own time. Of some of the nobler actions of the profession I myself have been the subject, of some I have been an eye-witness, and of many more I have learnt from well authenticated authority.

It was, therefore, with the utmost confidence that all that Dr Watson could do for my little friend would be done, that I hurried along with him to the School Wynd, explaining to him by the way my ideas as to the origin and gravity of the case.

On our arrival the doctor confirmed my worst fears. It was, he said, a very bad case of congestion of the lungs, and he was afraid he had been called too late, for the fever appeared to have run its course, and the child was now in that comatose state which might be the beginning of the end.

Still, however, while there was life there was hope; and if the child's bed were lifted into the kitchen, where a high, even temperature could be kept up, warm poultices applied to his chest, and the medicines, which would be *sent* immediately, administered according to directions,

the child might survive; but his life was trembling in the balance, and upon the strictest compliance with the prescribed directions the human probabilities of recovery or death would depend.

Immediately we lifted the child in his little bed to the most suitable nook of the kitchen, and the doctor left us to prepare and send on the medicines.

I knew that the old woman was too muddle-headed, and selfish to be trusted with the care of the child; and as no other arrangement could well be made, I resolved to stay beside him and see to the exact carrying out of the doctor's orders.

In order to promote the goodwill and activity of the old woman, I confided to her the fact of Wee Johnny's appointment to the Scott Mortification. I will not swear that I did not magnify the money value of the bequest, and I could see her eyes sparkle with pleasure when I added that her rent for the entire year would certainly be paid, and something toward the child's board besides.

It was simply marvellous how completely Granny forgot her "rheumatis," checked her loquacity, and seconded my efforts in behalf of our poor little patient throughout the night. We persevered with our remedies till nearly four o'clock in the morning with growing hopes, and then I allowed Granny, who had sat down in her easy chair, to go to sleep.

It seemed to me that Johnny's breathing was now less difficult and more regular; there had also stolen over his features a look of pleased tranquillity, such as I believed indicated the absence of pain; and I was hopeful that an amendment had commenced.

It would not do to relax the treatment, however, and I laid my hand on the child's chest, to feel if the poultice had still the requisite warmth, when he opened his eyes and recognised me for the first time since my return.

"Oh, it is you, Mr Adams," said he in a very feeble voice, but with a sweet smile irradiating his whole countenance; "I am so glad you have come back before I went away again, because I wished so much to thank you for all your goodness to me, and to ask you to be sure to come and join us when you tire of keeping school at Keckleton."

"Yes, yes; I shall be sure to join you, Johnny," said I, humouring the child's sick fancy; "but in the meantime it is the doctor's orders that you keep quiet and do not fatigue yourself, for you are very ill."

"The doctor mistakes—I am not ill at all," persisted the child. "On the contrary, I am very well; but I must go away now, and you will be sure to come as soon as your work here is done, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I will." And I so far forgot my own order to the child to keep quiet, as to ask—"But where am I to come to, Johnny?"

"Oh, to the Happy Valley, of course," said he, with a species of delighted emotion. "I have just been there, and our garden is trimmer than ever, and all the Valley is aglow with flowers. Old Mr Taylor, and Miss Taylor, and Miss Mary have returned, and the ruined chapel has been restored. I went into it and heard service and singing, not at all wearisome, but perfectly delightful. The dazed old men and women were not there, but Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, and his sister, and Imlac the Philosopher, and Joseph and David and Daniel were all there. And Themistocles, too, came in arm-in-arm with Aristides the Just. But I must go now, and so good-bye!"

He laid his tiny hand in mine, and lay perfectly still for a few moments; then a slight tremor shook his body, the hand waxed colder in mine, the pulse had ceased to *beat, and the* action of the heart had stopped for ever.

I permitted the old woman to slumber on till daylight, and when I awoke her, she broke out into an incoherent lamentation, alternating from sorrow for the death of the child to mournings at the hardness of her own fate in losing him and the money to which he would have been entitled.

I bought a little plot of ground in the new cemetery, and there the child was buried, with an upright stone at the top of his grave bearing the inscription—

"WEE JOHNNY."

I never cared to see Granny Martin after, for I could not but consider that her stupidity and selfishness had contributed greatly towards the fatal result of my little favourite's illness. However, I got the kirk-session to allow her six pounds out of the Scott Mortification in consideration of the fact that she had afforded the child a home for nearly three years.

The six pounds paid her rent for the next year, and she died before its termination. Then my heart softened a little towards her, for I thought that she had really been "bad with the rheumatis;" but it hardened again when I heard that the old wretch had left money and goods to the value of two hundred pounds.

VOTING AGAINST THE LAIRD.

The Factor's Story.

RICHARD, or as he was generally called, "Ritchie" Cameron, tacksman of the farm of Muirhead, situated in the southern division of Morvenshire, reckoned among his remote ancestors the celebrated Covenanting preacher of the same name. Ritchie had been rocked and swaddled and dandled in Liberalism, and, if the times had demanded, he believed himself capable of having defended his opinions on the battle-field, or of having suffered for them on the scaffold or at the stake. Nor did he escape persecution for conscience sake, even although his lot happened to be cast in a quiet rural district, and in the nineteenth century. His tribulations sprang from causes partly natural and partly accidental.

Naturally, he was short and insignificant in person, but endued with a very stubborn will; accidentally, he had chosen as the partner of his lot a woman of masculine proportions and character, and of a will as stubborn as his own, who appeared to be possessed by the perpetual desire of exercising her administrative faculties in the domains which properly belonged to her husband. It thus happened that there were many moot points between the pair, and that Mrs Cameron generally carried off the victory by her immense physical force, which enabled her to persist till her feebler husband was compelled to yield from sheer *physical* exhaustion.

There were, however, two points on which Ritchie Cameron stood persistently firm. His wife, Bell, chose to attend the ministrations of the Rev. Dr Drumlie, of the Established Kirk. Ritchie was a determined adherent of the Free Kirk. The Parish Kirk was to him the House of Rimmon, and the connection of Church and State a most unholy alliance. The other point with which we have more especially to deal was political.

Ritchie's landlord, Sir Thomas MacGrippie, was, according to his own definition of himself, a Liberal-Conservative; but, according to his tenant, a rank Tory.

Now, Bell Cameron entertained towards Sir Thomas feelings similar to those of the Scotch matron who desired her husband to put his head quietly into the noose and be hanged, to please the gweed Laird o' Grant. On the other hand, Ritchie persistently and openly avowed himself a Liberal, and voted for the Liberal candidate as often as there happened to be a Parliamentary election for South Morvenshire.

The ground officer, and even Sir Thomas himself, who both had reason to believe that at Muirhead the grey mare was the better horse, had spoken disapprovingly to Bell Cameron of her husband's politics, but her answer had been—"I can gar Ritchie gang my way in maist things, but in this I ken owre weel I needna thraw wi' 'im, I hinna tried 'im sae seldom."

It was during the summer preceding the termination of the late Lord Beaconsfield's Government, that Ritchie Cameron underwent the severest of his political trials. At that time the Member of Parliament for South Morven died, and Sir Thomas MacGrippie announced his intention of contesting his division of the county against an eminent barrister sent down with the full approbation of his party, and the high recommendation of its chiefs to solicit the seat of the late Liberal M.P. in the same

interest. From the moment that Sir Thomas issued his electoral address Ritchie Cameron had to "bide the wallop o' Bell's tongue mornin', noon, an' nicht," as well as the indirect onsets of Saunders Cammel, the ground officer, and the direct solicitations of the Laird himself.

The following may serve as a specimen of the attacks which Ritchie had to sustain :—

Bell Cameron (loquitor).—"Man, ye surely canna think o' votin' against the Laird, an' you sae near the end o' yer tack, unless ye hae taen leave o' yer seevin senses athegither."

Ritchie (respondent).—"Wife, I canna gang against my conscience neither to please the Laird nor nae ither ane."

Bell.—"Fat sorra has conscience to dae wi' the maitter? Dinna ye ca' yersel' a Leebral, an' disna the Laird's address tell ye 'at he's a Leebral-Conservative. Didna Sir Tammas 'imsel' say t'ye, in this verra hoose, 'at he wud preserve a' 'at's gude i' the Constitootion, an' rejec' or repair a' 'at's bad. An' fat better cud yer best Leebral dee for the countra than that?"

Ritchie.—"I needna try to argifee the pint wi' you, Bell; but though the Laird has been advised to try to catch votes by stickin' 'Leebral' afore 'Conservative' in's address, I tell ye, 'oman, 'at he's a rank Tory in principle, an' I micht as weel vote for Lord Bawkonsfield 'imsel' as for Sir Tammas MacGrippie."

Bell.—"An' fat for no, Ritchie. The grun' officer, Saunders Cammel, a man weel skeeled in polleetics, says 'at Lord Bawkonsfield is the greatest Prime Meenister that ever we hed, an' that the countra 'll be clean ruin't gin he be turn't oot o' pooer. But settin' a' that aside, as things 'at little concern the like o' hus, fa' oucht never to lat principle hurt interest, as my worthy faither mony a time observed, jist consider fat 'ill be the *upshot o' your* votin' against the Laird. Ye ken there's

only twa year o' your tack to rin. A' yer penny siller's either in the grun' or in yer fairm stockin' an' implements. Yer nae that stoot yersel', an' the bairns are only half up yet; an' jist as sure as ye vote against the Laird, as surely will we hae to quit Muirhead in twa year, or else yer rent will be raised, so 'at there'll be nae livin' i' the place."

Ritchie.—"I canna help it, Bell; I canna help it, 'oman. I canna vote against my conscience fatever be the upshot."

Bell.—"An' div ye think 'at naebodie hes a conscience but yersel', Ritchie man? I cud name half-a-dizzen o' Sir Tammas's tenan's, jist as gude Leebrals as ye are, fa wud never dream o' votin' directly i' the Laird's teeth. Jist lat yer conscience stan' aside for ae day; an' for yer ain sake an' yer faimily's, gang doon-by to Netherton on Friday niest an' vote for Sir Tammas, like a man."

Ritchie.—"It's needless for me to say a word mair nor I hae said, Bell."

Bell.—"It is that, perfectly needless, Ritchie; an mair nor that, yonner's Saunders Cammel comin' up atween the dykes. Awa' to the neeps wi' ye, an' I'll tell 'im 'at yer min's made up to vote for the Laird."

Ritchie.—"Aye, aye, my min's made up—"

Bell.—"That's richt, awa' wi' ye!"

And here Bell fairly hustles Ritchie outside of the kitchen door, while Saunders Cammel is admitted at the front entrance.

After the customary salutations, Saunders is refreshed with a dram, and informed that Ritchie is "waverin," and Bell thinks "will be brocht roon' by Friday."

"That's richt, Mrs Cameron, that's richt," said the ground officer, "I'm weel sure it'll be till his interest nae to anger the Laird. Mair than that, I've in a mainner implicated mysel' for 'im wi' Sir Tammas; for this wis fat I said, nae farer gaen nor yesterday—'Muirhead's gey positive, Sir Tammas,' said I, 'but them that's aboot

'im,' says I, 'hae mair sense than lat him vote against his Laird. He'll be brocht roon to vote for ye, or he'll bide at hame on Friday,' says I, 'Sir Tammas.'"

"An' sae it sall be, Saunders, ye may depend on me sae far," said Bell; "but losh, man, jist lat me full that thummle o' a gless to you agen; ye'll be scoorin' aboot amo' them a' day, an' anither thummlefu' 'll help ye to battle the cause wi' them."

"I sanna say na, Mrs Cameron," replied Saunders handing the glass, and receiving it refilled. "An' noo here's wissin' Sir Tammas a successfu' election, an yer gweed man a rezzinable renewal o' his tack."

"Sae be't, Saunders," replied Bell Cameron.

And so the conspirators parted.

Hotter than ever was now the wordy battle against poor Ritchie Cameron, so that he was ultimately reduced to silence, though not yet to submission, as Bell still feared. No; she could not flatter herself with the hope of victory. If Ritchie went to vote, it would be against the Laird, a catastrophe which must be avoided by force or fraud.

According to this view, Bell Cameron commenced operations the night before the election. On one pretence or another she kept Ritchie up till a late hour, and contrived to awaken him earlier than usual in the morning. Learning from the orra-man that his master had ordered the shawlt to be ready, fed, and saddled to take him to the polling station at Netherton between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, and knowing that voting was to cease at four, Bell's schemes were laid to prevent her husband reaching Netherton in time. First, Ritchie was regaled with a more tempting dinner than usual, and egged on to drink a "gweed drap o' toddy" after it, so as to superinduce somnolence.

The result corresponded to Bell's expectation. After the restless night, the heavy dinner, and the whisky toddy,

Ritchie began to show signs of drowsiness, and withdrew to indulge, as had been his wont for some time back, in a siesta in the corn-loft. Bell watched him as a spider watches a fly buzzing about the meshes of his web, and as soon as she observed him ascend the outside stone stair leading to the corn-loft, followed after, and noiselessly locked him in. Her next step was to countermand the orders given to the orra-man, and send that functionary to a distant part of the hills with the shawlt to fetch a load of divots.

By this time it was getting towards two o'clock, and Bell Cameron thought she had accomplished her object. Ritchie was certain to sleep a good hour at the least. It might take him most of another hour to contrive his way out, and, having no shawlt, it would be impossible for him to make his way to Netherton before four o'clock. So Bell, well pleased with her management, went and threw herself down on the sofa in the ben-en', to enjoy her own siesta with a good conscience.

Now, it happened about the same time that Sir Thomas MacGrippie, who had been anxiously making the rounds of the polling stations, arrived at Netherton, and was advised by his agents there to bring to the poll every available voter. All the conveyances in the village were despatched, and still there were "waverers" who had not been seen at the station during the day; amongst others, Ritchie Cameron. "A happy thought" occurred to Sir Thomas—he would send his own carriage and pair for Ritchie. If anything would fetch him, it would be the honour of riding forth and home in Sir Thomas MacGrippie's elegant carriage. So thought the Tory candidate.

Ritchie slept till nearly three o'clock. When he looked his watch and saw what time it was, he sprang to his feet and made for the door, of course to find himself a prisoner. There was, however, a small gable-end door

which opened from the inside. It was fully twenty feet from the bottom of this door to the ground; but Ritchie was a man of expedients, and found himself equal to the situation. He half filled several bags with grain, dropped them above each other, and then let himself down without hurt on the top of them. Of course it was a great disappointment when he rushed to the stable and found "Dobbin" gone; but there was still a good hour, and Netherton was not more than four miles distant, and so off he started.

Sir Thomas MacGrippie had directed his coachman to drive at full speed to Muirhead, give his and Sir Thomas's compliments to Mrs Cameron, and ask her to send on her husband to vote, and the carriage would afterwards convey him back to Muirhead. There is little doubt that if the coachman had exactly obeyed orders Mrs Cameron would have been equal to the occasion; but before the man reached Muirhead he met Ritchie tearing along to Netherton.

Knowing the farmer by sight, the coachman drew up and delivered Sir Thomas's message. Ritchie scratched his head and hesitated a moment, till the man urged him to jump in at once, else he would be too late to vote—adding that he understood the contest was to be a very close one. In an instant Ritchie jumped into the carriage and was whirled at the full speed of Sir Thomas's fine bays to Netherton, and arrived in time to record his vote. As he issued from the polling station, Sir Thomas observed him from the front window of the "MacGrippie Arms," and rewarded him with a gracious smile and a bow. Ritchie would have declined the honour of returning home in the carriage, but the coachman told him that Sir Thomas's orders were peremptory, and must be obeyed. So Ritchie was driven grandly up to his own door.

Bell came running to witness the arrival, and her looks of complete bewilderment may be more easily imagined

than described when her husband stept from the carriage and authoritatively ordered her to "fetch the coachman a dram."

For once in her married life she obeyed her gweedman's order with alacrity, believing that, after all, matters had turned out as she desired. She was quickly undeceived, however, for Ritchie, on dismissing the coachman, gave him the following message to his master:—

"Tell Sir Tammas, coachie, 'at I'm obleeged an' mair nor obleeged till 'im, for owin' to a vera pecooliar set o' circumstances, which my wife cud explain better nor mysel', gin Sir Tammas hadna sent his carriage for me, I wud hae been prevented frae votin' as I hae dune for the Leebral candidate."

Happily at that moment, the horses having become restive required the whole of the coachman's attention, so that he did not catch the latter part of Ritchie's message; and Mrs Cameron took good care that it should not be repeated. She jocularly pushed her husband into the house to get his tea, and dismissed the coachman herself with acknowledgements such as she considered suitable for his master's ear.

There is little doubt but that Ritchie was duly schooled to keep a "calm sough" about the voting; but, nevertheless, the story leaked out just as has been narrated.

Sir Thomas MacGrippie polled only a respectable minority, and to his credit be it said he took his defeat good-humouredly enough, and never evinced any grudge against his tenants for having voted against him, Ritchie Cameron being still tenant of Muirhead on a new lease at the old rent.

THE CAPTURE OF THE ENEMY'S COLOURS:

OR,

A STRUGGLE WITH A MADMAN.

The Student's Story.

I THINK that the event which I am about to relate took place about the latter end of the year 1849. At that time I was a student at Marischal College in the new town of Aberdeen, along with several cousins and other acquaintances from the same part of the country. It is not in the Scotch Universities, as in the English, the custom for the students to live in rooms within the University buildings: they are scattered about in lodging-houses all over the town, and, except in class-hours, are out of the control of the University authorities.

It is true, they are liable to be brought to book by the Professors for any acts of public misconduct, but this so rarely happens among the students at Aberdeen that professorial interference beyond the College bounds is almost unknown. Consequently, there is to my thinking a good deal more freedom in the life of a Scotch than of an English University student.

Some may consider this rather a loss than a gain to the Scotch students, because liberty, with hot-blooded youth, has so strong a tendency to degenerate into licentiousness; but there are controlling and modifying influences,

which prevent all save a very insignificant number of Scotch students from abusing their privileges of liberty. And I am inclined to think that the early initiation to responsibillty promotes self-reliance.

Be this as it may, I know that we enjoyed a great deal of liberty, and I am not prepared to admit that we were the worse for it. We all acknowledged the paramount claims of our college task-work; but three or four hours were always sufficient to get up the exercises for the ensuing day, save in the case of those who were reading for the higher distinctions of merit, and I must confess that this ambition was not cherished by any member of my set. We were all content to keep a medium place in the class, and let the honours slide. I don't say, however, that this was commendable in us; I merely state it as the fact. Looking back on my student life, I am of opinion that I and the whole of my set were inclined to make the best of our time in rather an Epicurean sense, giving to pleasure as much of every fleeting day as we could with any conscience spare from our studies.

When the weather was good, nothing pleased us better than to take long rambles into the country, enter the farm-houses and purchase milk to be drunk on the spot, and eggs, butter, or even fowls to be carried back in the hand-bags with which we had provided ourselves, or in our handkerchiefs or pockets, according to the size, quantity, or nature of the purchase.

Whenever one of those marketing expeditions was to be undertaken, we almost invariably started from a shop near the lower end of Skene Street; and the reason why this particular shop became our common rendezvous was that it was kept by a Mr Thomson who belonged to our part of the country. Thomson had a large parlour at the back of his miscellaneous grocery store, which was always at the service of any or all of our set. He was a man of

about forty years of age, a bachelor, exceedingly obliging and good humoured, and consequently a favourite with us all. There was no end to the large paper bags and pieces of pack-sheet we begged from him for our expeditions, and though our business patronage was small indeed, he never refused our importunate demands. I mention this, because otherwise I might not so readily have become the temporary keeper of a lunatic at his request.

The way I happened to put myself in that position was this. My cousins and I had arranged one of our excursions, the place of meeting being at Thomson's. I was the first to arrive, and passing through the shop in which Thomson was serving a customer, I made my way as usual to the back parlour, and without ceremony made myself comfortable by the fire with the host's copy of the *Aberdeen Herald* for perusal.

By-and-by that gentleman looked in with some piece of good-humoured banter about the ease with which I had taken possession, wishing at the same time that he were at leisure to join me, but his young man had just gone home to dinner, he said, and would not be back for an hour at least.

While he was speaking, with the opened door in his hand, I observed two gentlemen walk into the shop. Thomson closed the door, and went into the shop to attend to them, but in a few minutes he re-opened the door and showed the two gentlemen into the room where I was sitting, mentioning their names and inviting me to remain, because the gentlemen had merely called for him to wait on a third party about some goods, and had agreed to delay a little till he was free to go with them. Having placed on the table refreshments, always kept in a handy cupboard in the wall, and desiring us to help ourselves without ceremony, Thomson begged to be excused *while he served a* customer.

After having exchanged with me a few commonplaces about the weather, the new comers began to talk about their own affairs, and I resumed my newspaper. As an involuntary listener, however, I soon understood that one of the gentlemen was a commercial traveller on a visit to Aberdeen, and that the other was engaged in business in the town.

By-and-by I noticed that the Aberdonian, whose name was Massie, had an odd, excited sort of manner. The excitement increased very much after he had drunk a glass of whisky, and when he stretched out his hand to help himself to a second glass his companion hastily drew the bottle away, saying with a smile—

"You forget, Mr Massie, that you are not so strong as you used to be; and besides we shall likely have to drink a drop of something where we are going."

Massie made no answer, but bent his head downward and held it for a minute or two between his hands as if he were in pain; then he looked up, and said—

"I think, Burnett, you had better go on, and say that Thomson and I will come over in a little time, in case our man should suppose we are not coming, and go out."

Burnett cast an uneasy glance at the whisky, and replied—

"I dare say Thomson will be ready to go soon."

"Hang the whisky!" cried Massie, excitedly. "Young man, lock it up in the cupboard and take the key to Thomson, for this gentleman is afraid to leave you and me alone with it. I don't know which of us he suspects would be likely to drink it all up."

"A capital arrangement, Mr Massie," said Burnett, rising and putting the drink into the cupboard, locking the door and drawing out the key.

"'Remove the temptation and you lessen the chance of sin.' Is it not so, sir?"

The question was addressed to me, and I signified assent.

"Well, don't preach us a sermon about it, but be off at once," cried Massie, authoritatively.

"Good-bye, then, for the present," said Burnett, stepping out into the shop and shutting the door after him.

Massie rose, took two or three turns round the room, threw himself down on his chair again, and commenced pressing his head between his hands as formerly.

Desirous of saying something, I remarked, "You are not very well, I fear, Mr Massie?" If I had sent a pistol shot through him he could not have started more suddenly, or glared at me more fiercely.

"And what right have you to suppose that I am not very well, or to meddle in my affairs at all?" he shouted. "Are you in league with the rest of them?"

I attempted to apologise, but Massie waved his hand, and went on with great volubility—

"Do you know what my sufferings have been? Do you know even who I am? Are you aware that you are in the presence of one of the greatest men of the age? Why, boy, I could crush you as easily as I crush that fly." Here he came down with a sledge hammer knock on the table where, for ought I know, a fly may have rested at the time. "Yes, boy, I could crush you or dash you to pieces as you shall see me dash this watch!" and he pulled out of his vest pocket a fine gold watch and dashed it on the table with a force that sent the cases one way and the works another to distant parts of the room.

The noise brought Mr Thomson from the shop. He and I collected the scattered parts of the watch, and soothed the excited owner, till we got him to sit down and wipe the foam from his mouth and the large drops of perspiration from his brow. When he had calmed down

a little he complained that his head ached badly, and expressed a wish to return home; "but," said he, "I must have a cab, because of this unfortunate foot."

I then perceived that he had a club foot, which I had not noticed before, as I had been so intent on observing his eyes and threatening gestures. I volunteered to fetch a cab, and in a few minutes had one waiting at the shop door. Massie came out instantly, shook hands with me, and thanked me very kindly for my services; then he gave Thomson a pressing invitation to visit him, said good-day, and stepped into the cab. I shut the cab door, and was just entering the shop again, when Thomson exclaimed:

"Plague upon him! He's out at the other side!"

I looked across the street and saw Massie stamping on the pavement with his club foot, shaking his clenched fist at the cabman, and working himself into a second paroxysm of rage. We ran to him and prevailed on him to re-enter the cab; and, at the urgent request of Thomson, I consented to take a seat beside him, and keep him quiet till we reached his own house at Causeyend. I never undertook a task that I had more difficulty to perform. No sooner had we started than Massie turned round on me, seized me by the breast, and shook me till my very teeth rattled; then quitting his hold of a sudden, he was just on the point of taking a header through the window, when I locked my arms through his behind and pulled him down with a jerk, partially above myself, on the seat. By good fortune he had kicked his club foot through the cab window, and somehow so entangled it that he was unable to draw it back again. He had thus put himself into a posture which prevented him from exerting all his force on me, otherwise I do believe he might have done me serious injury before the cabman or anyone else could have come to the rescue. As it was

he tried with all his might to bite and throttle me. He swore the most horrid oaths, and foamed and shouted and roared all the way along John Street, George Street, and Hutcheon Street to Causeyend.

Of course, I might easily have stopped the cab and got assistance; but I knew that Thomson was very desirous that I should get the poor man home with as little scandal as possible; and besides I was just at that very age at which, if ever, one prides himself on his physical prowess, and was unwilling to let it be said that I was overcome in a mere hand-to-hand struggle with a man considerably under my own weight, and lame in addition. I therefore held on to my man, but the job taxed all my resources. Once he got his hand twisted into my neck-tie, and had not the fastening luckily given way, he would have mastered me, for undo his hold I could not; but when the fastening broke he tore away neck-tie and shirt front, which happened to be a false one, and waved them round and round his head, shouting that he had captured the enemy's colours.

Serious as the situation was at this point, I believe my laughter almost drowned the ravings of the maniac. He never lost hold of his vaunted capture to the last, and seemed mightily pleased with the victory which he had achieved; but he continued the struggle none the less, and as we were bowling along Hutcheon Street, had nearly torn the bit out of my arm with his teeth. He did indeed bite me very severely before I could relieve myself by almost choking him, and forcing his body down between the seats of the cab. When we got to our journey's end, the cabman dared no more touch his fare than if he had been a savage animal, and it was then that I felt most the awkwardness of my position.

A crowd quickly gathered round the cab, and I could *hear the peo*ple saying to each other "Oh, Massie's mad

again; he's been twice in the lunatic asylum already, and is ready for it a third time;" but no one seemed inclined to interfere on my behalf, and it was all I could do to defend myself. At last a great brawny blacksmith with a leather apron on came forward and said, "Let me tackle him." And having disentangled Massie's club foot, he lifted him out of the cab and bore him as if he had been a child through the crowd, waving my unfortunate neck-tie and shirt front, and shouting, "Victory! victory! I have captured the enemy's colours."

I did not wait to receive the sympathies of the mob, which were being liberally enough extended to me, but ordered the cabman to drive me to my lodgings in order to repair damages. I was still in time for our excursion, and you may be sure my exploit formed no small part of our conversation that afternoon.

If Thomson is still alive, I have no doubt he is often relating it, and dwelling, as usual, with peculiar unction on "the capture of the enemy's colours."

MRS COOPER OF MUCKLE CAIRNS ON HER DAUGHTER'S WOOERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANKER.

EH, sirs! but it behoves women folks to keep their een open, an' mair particularly gin they be mithers o' mairriageable dochters, wha hae gude luiks to recommend them, alang wi' the still higher attraction o' a muckle tocher.

For mysel', I'm sure I hae aften wisst that I had been born wi' an e'e in the howe o' my neck, or raither like Argus, or Fergus, or whatever auld-warld carl it was, wha was gifted wi' a head dotted a' owre wi' een.

An' yet, I've only ae dochter on my han', and she's a lassie nae withoot a fair share o' prudence either; what then must be the anxieties o' mithers wha hae to keep watch an' ward owre half-a-dizzen? It amaist turns me dizzy to think upon their responsibilities.

Jist lat me tell ye, in my ain gait, aboot some o' the fash an' vexation which I hae already had on oor Bella's account, an' ye'll see the responsibilities o' a mither's position.

It's five years sin' Bella cam' hame frae the Misses Leith's boordin' schule, a weel-educat', clever, strappin',

fair-complexioned, blue-e'ed, lauchin'-faced lass, wha—though I say't, wha maybe sudna say't—hidna mony equals for guid luiks in a' Keckleton; an' her faither an' mysel' wer' maybe prooder o' her than we oucht to hae been.

Nae that I mean to insinuat' that the lassie has lost her guid luiks, or daen onything to gar's think less o' her than ever we did—far frae it; but it maun be confessed that there's an artless winsomeness aboot sweet auchteen that's nae athegither to be met wi' in the mair self-conscious an' womanly three-an-twenty.

I maun mak' a little bit o' a digression here, in order to render perfectly clear the position in society held by oor Bella, whom, aifter the mainner o' ither story tellers, I sall ca' my heroine.

An' first it will be necessar' to say a word or twa aboot the parentage o' the heroine; that is aboot her faither, John Cooper, an' mysel, Janet Ross, his wife.

John Cooper, when I mairret him, was a bonnie young lad, just entered upon the sma' farm o' Windy Wa's, on the ootskirts o' the parish o' Keckleton.

I mysel' was considered a weel-faurt lass, an' was the dochter o' anither sma' fairmer in the same neighbourhood—namely, Peter Ross, o' Seggie Howe, as decent a man as ever set a croon to the lift, but nae jist very fortunate in his warldly transac'.

Hoosomever, I mairret John Cooper, the man o' my hairt's choice, wi' a fair providin', my faither's an' mither's blessin', a soon' constitution, a pair o' willin' han's, an' a richt guid intention to dae my ootmost to mak', wi' the help o' Providence, a thrifty an' helpfu' gudewife to my weel-daen, industrious gudeman.

We werna fasht wi' ony bairns for half-a-dizzen years aifter oor mairriage, an' afore Bella, oor first an' only livin' ane, was born, we had succeeded sae weel in a warldly point o' view that we had entered upon a nineteen years'

lease o' the hunner-an'-seventy-pounds-a-year fairm o' the Muckle Cairns.

It wisna athegither wi' grubbin an' grindin' in the yird that the siller to tak' an' stock Muckle Cairns had been raised. John was a judge o' a' kin's o' bestial, an' had an e'e till a bargain seldom to be met wi'. An', mair than that, I'll tak' it upon me to say that he wis uncommonly lucky. I never kent him lose a beast wi' disease o' ony kin', an' gin ony o' the sma' fairmers or crafters roon aboot had back-gaen stock they jist gae John Cooper a bargain o' them, an' frae the day they becam' his property a change for the better took place in their condition.

To be sure John maintained that the change wis brocht aboot by mair judicious feedin' an' onwytin'; but ye wud never put me aff o' the belief that ae bodie's luckier than anither amo' bestial. I seek nae ither proofs than the sair losses encoontered by my ain faither, an' the constant success that followed my ain man.

Weel, John, bein' sae successfu' amo' beasts, natur'lly extended his dealin's amo' them, till there wisna a lettin' o' grass parks far nor near, nor a cattle market, that he was absent frae, an' the amount o' siller which he made was perfectly astonishin'.

But I suppose there never was, an' never will be a life perfectly smooth frae the cradle to the grave, an' we had nae richt to expect John's to prove an exception.

His tribble raise, nae frae ony failure in his business transac', but frae a sair change in his ain health. Ae wet autumn he gat cauld at some o' the markets, an' took sic a sair rheumatic fever that we thocht we wud lose him, an', indeed, he's never been the same man sin' syne.

Bella wis jist ten years auld at the time, an' I never saw a bairn in sic a state aboot a faither as she wis when he was lyin' at the warst, for she ay wis and is extraordinar' fond o' her faither.

When he got on his feet again, he tried the markets as usual, but it wudna dae; he found that he cudna stand muckle fatigue, an' very little cauld brocht a return o' the rheumatism.

So ae day he comes hame to me, an' says he, "Dae ye ken, wife, that I've bocht three braw villas on the Sunny Side o' Keckleton."

"Ye dinna say't!" quo' I, a guid deal surprised, for I had never ance heard him speak o' buyin' onything save beasts an' aye mair beasts.

"It's quite true," says he, "an' what's mair, I think o' leaving the fairm oonder the care o' Sandy Hogg as grieve—for he's a carefu' chiel—an' gaen to live in ane o' the villas oorsels. Ye see, I canna stan' the markets as I used to, an' I hae nae need sae far as siller is concerned. An' I think it wud be an amusement to drive oot an' in occasionally to the fairm; an' maybe I micht buy or sell a hoose or a bit lan' at a time, for I aye like to be trockin'. Anither advantage o' livin' at Keckleton wud be that oor Bella's schulin' wud be better attendit till than at present. Ye ken yersel' that neither her faither nor her mither are Samsons at learnin', and I wud like the lassie to be able to tak' her place wi' the best in her sphere o' life."

"I dinna ken that Samson wis onything extraordinar' for's learnin' mair than oorsel's, gudeman," quo' I; "but as for your new plans, I think they're made oot wi' your usual guid sense, an' ye'll find me jist as ready an' willin' to second them as ever I wis."

An' so in due coorse we took possession o' ane o' the braw, ten-roomed villas at Keckleton, an' aifter the lassie had got aboot the best that the toon cud afford her in the waye o' education, naething wud dae but that she maun be sent to a fashionable boordin' schule, even the Misses Leith's, o' Drummond Place, Edinboro', to receive the final polish.

I will say this much for her, that she didna disappoint's, for in addition to bringin' guid luiks, an' an easy, gentle mainner wi' her, the Misses Leith had managed to convert her handwriting into something like copper-plate; an' her playin', which we were prood o' afore she gaed to Edinboro', is noo the admiration o' a' that hae the pleasure o' hearin' her. Indeed, her faither, nae satisfeed wi' a braw cottage piano o' which he made her a present on her fourteenth birthday, must needs gang an' buy her what's ca'd a "semi-gran'," at a price that he's jist ashamed to name, nae mony days aifter she came hame finished.

"Dear me!" quo' I, "gudeman, but ye're fond o' warin' siller upon that dochter o' yours; I'm sure the piano that she got first hadna mony superiors in Keckleton."

"An' the player wha has nae equal in Keckleton deserves an instrument that has nae equals," quo' he, gay snappish like.

"Weel, man," quo' I, wi' a smile, "it's nae my custom to fin' faut wi' ony your bargains, an' the new piano will be a braw piece o' furniture, as weel as a gran' musical instrument; my only fear is that ye will mak' Bella extravagant wi' giein' her sae mony costly presents."

"Tut, tut," quo' John, restored to his usual good humour, "Bella's like her mither; she has owre muckle gude sense to become extravagant. An' as for the pianos, Bella can tak' the muckle ane wi' her when she gets a hoose o' her ain, an' leave the little ane here to play the auld folks a spring when she comes to see them."

"Weel contrived," quo' I; "but I hope she'll no' think o' a hoose o' her ain for the neist half-score o' years. At onyrate I'm expectin' her to tak' the chairge aff my han' for a bit, a' lat me trail a lichter harrow in my auld age."

"Nae doot, nae doot," quo' the gudeman; "but it cheats me gin sic a comely, clever lass, an' ane sae muckle thocht

o' baith at hame an' forth, as oor Bella, dinna get plenty o' chances o' mairriage afore half-a-score o' years gang owre her heid; but the lassie's ain happiness is to be thocht o' afore onything, an' I'm sure I'll no' be the first to wiss her oot o' the hoose, for ye agree wi' me that she's been the very daylicht o't sin' ever she cam' hame."

An' noo that I've shown Bella's place at her ain fireside, an' afforded the means o' estimatin' her position in Keckleton society, I may confine my further observations to my heroine as the object o' her wooers' attentions.

It wisna mony days aifter Bella's new piano cam' hame, when oor tenant an' neist-door neighbour in Western Villa, Mrs Wishart, took in a lodger—a tall, handsome, dashin' young man.

Bella had taen a great interest in the roses an' ither plants an' flooers in oor front gairden, ever sin' her return frae Edinboro', and by a singular coincidence Mrs Wishart's lodger likewise displayed similar tastes. He wis amo' the flooer-beds o' Western Villa nicht an' mornin', and never had Mrs Wishart's plots an' borders been seen sae trim.

The gudeman wud be oot takin' a turn an' a smoke in the front afore brakfast, or in the evenin's, an' nae bein' ane wha stan's upon ceremonies, he wisna lang o' introducin' himsel' to the lodger; so that Bella an' the twa men wud hae their plans for layin' oot this plot an' that plot, an' sawin' this sort o' annuals an' that sort o' annuals, discussed a'thegither.

Of coorse the intimacy didna confine itsel' to the gairden an' the language o' flooers, for the lodger turned oot to be a weel-connectit young man, wha had come to Keckleton, wi' a great reputation for business ability, to take chairge o' a new branch o' the North o' Scotlan' Bank that had just been opened in the toon, an' the gudeman an' he had lots o' questions in common to discuss.

So it cam' to pass that aifter a' the plants wer' got in, a simmer hoose wis erected in a corner o' the back gairden, an' the twa men wud meet twice or three times a week to hae a crack on maitters o' trade an' commerce, an' very frequently Bella, and sometimes mysel', wud be o' the pairty. Then supper, or a glaiss o' something, an' music on the semi-gran' wud follow.

I will say this for Bella, that she wis very circumspect in a' her conduct towards Mr Gillon, the lodger, but it soon becam' evident to me that she thocht as muckle o' him as he as plainly did o' her.

Observin' the partiality o' the youngsters for ane anither, I thocht weel to speak to John on the subject afore the maitters sud gang further alength.

"Bless me!" quo' the gudeman, "an intimacy o' that natur' never cam' into my head. I had thocht o' naething except a pleasant acquaintanceship."

"Jist like the thochtlessness o' you men," quo' I; "but you micht as weel think o' bringin' the fire an' the tow thegither withoot causin' a flame, as to throw the like o' them sae muckle into ane anither's company withoot lichtin' the low o' love in ane or baith o' their hairts. Hoosomever, gin a guid lang engagement were entered into between them, as they're baith sae young, I can see nae reasonable objection to their bein' as fond o' ane anither as they like; for Mr Gillon seems to me to be in a' respects an excellent young man."

The gudeman scratched his head, an' considered several minutes afore he made answer; then he said,—

"Weel, wife, I wudna like Bella to enter into ony engagement lang or short wi' Mr Gillon, for it's my deliberate opinion that as a business man he's puttin' oot his airm further than his sleeve will lat him; or, to be plainer wi' ye, that in his eagerness to extend the business o' the bank he's rinnin' into extravagant

expense—dinin' an' treatin' on his ain account, an' enterin' into unsafe risks on the pairt o' the bank. I hae several times taen the opportunity o' a turn o' the conversation, when we were by oorsels, to point this oot; but Mr Gillon evidently thinks he kens his ain business best, an' I sud be weel pleased that sic sud turn oot to be the case, for itherwise I think weel o' the young man, but I sair fear he'll involve himsel' in difficulties, an' that winna be long till neither."

Weel, the result o' this conversation wis that John an' I agreed to endeavour to bring aboot a gradual lessenin' o' oor intercoorse wi' Mr Gillon, at ony rate till we sud see his fittin' as a banker a bit firmer; an' it wis left to me to put Bella on her guard in the best mainner I cud.

We had been speakin' o' gaen a week or twa to the seaside afore hairst, an' sae I made a' haste to get ready to set oot, leavin' maitters as they were till oor holiday sud gie me mair leisure on my han's to impairt oor views on this subject to Bella.

We wer' a' busy, an' had seen naething o' Mr Gillon for some days, when ae forenoon Mrs Wishart cam' in wi' a rin, an' scarce had time to say guid-mornin', afore she brak' oot wi'—

"Oh, Mrs Cooper, I'm sure ye'll sympathise wi' me in respect to the sair disappointment that I've met wi' in my lodger!"

"Dear me, Mrs Wishart! what's happened till him?" quo' I, unco concerned.

"He's aff! gaen an' left ever sae muckle debt ahint him! an' the affairs o' his bank are in the blackest confusion, it's said! It wis only this mornin' I kent onything aboot it, for he said to me he wis only gaen oot o' toon some days on business; but a bank agent has been here nae an hour ago, wi' an officer an' a warrant, an' they hae taen chairge o' a' Mr Gillon's buiks, boxes,

papers, an' effects, an' they say there's beagles oot aifter the unfortunate lad himsel'."

Weel, sirs, when I heard this ye micht hae ca'd me owre wi' a windle-strae, an', as if to mak' maitters waur, Bella comin' into the room at the minute, Mrs Wishart blurtit oot the hale story to her afore I cud prevent her.

The puir lassie tottered raither than stept oot, wi' a face like a corpse; but by guid luck Mrs Wishart wis owre fu' o' her ain subject to mak' ony remark, or indeed to observe the effect o' her ill news.

It wud be unmitherly o' me to drag my puir lassie's feelin's an' sufferin's into public licht; but I'm safe to say that I passed mair sleepless nichts on account o' that young man than ever I did for a' my ain wooers put thegither.

I'm glaid to say that Gillon's affairs didna turn oot so ill as report at first made them appear. There had been naething waur than a blamable extravagance an' rashness in the management o' his transactions, an' the relations wha had got him pushed on owre fast for his years an' experience, satisfeed a' claims against him.

The puir lad had made his case appear ten times waur than it really wis wi' loupin' the countra an' sailin' for Australia, where we heard o' him nae lang sin' syne as a mounted policeman.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAPTAIN.

THE neist episode in the life o' my heroine—for, be it weel understood, I'm nae relatin' Bella's haill life, but *mere episodes* in the last few years o't—didna happen

till nearly a year aifter we had "banker on the brain," as the gudeman sometimes jocularly says, when referrin' to oor first episode.

Accordin' to oor custom sin' we gaithered gear, John, an' the lassie, an' mysel' had gaen to the seaside for a month or sax weeks during the warm simmer weather; but for reasons o' my ain I sall say nae mair aboot the place o' oor temporary residence than that it wis farther south, mair expensive, mair fashionable, mair frequentit, an' on the whole less to my taste than ony waterin' place that we had ever been at afore.

Hooever, baith the gudeman an' Bella appeared to enjoy themsel's famously, an' in a mainner sae did I.

To let you in to a bit secret, I've taen to novel-readin' in my auld age, an' sae naething pleases me better than a quiet 'oor wi' Sir Walter Scott, or some ither guid story-teller; an' gin I dinna wiss to gang oot, Bella will say to her faither—

"I'll get mother a nice book, and she will manage to amuse herself till our return."

Or gin I gang oot she'll say—

"I will get you a nice book, mother, so that you may sit down and read in some quiet nook, if you don't want to go so far as father and I."

An' here you may observe that Bella speaks English, although wi' a slichtly Keckletonian accent. When she cam' back frae Edinboro' she wud be to ca' her faither an' me "Papa" and "Mamma," but I put down my fit at ance on sic newfangledness.

"Na, na, lassie," quo' I; "'Mother,' I may answer till, but to 'Mamma,' never; for there's nae sic a name atween the twa brods o' the Bible."

It sae happens that sin' I took to the buiks, whether I like the place or no', I get on very weel at the seaside, wi' Bella an' the gudeman, as I did on the occasion

o' which I'm noo speakin'. In fact, I was sae deeply immersed in the tribbles o' Jeanie Deans, puir creatur', that we had pickit up a fine new acquaintance an' enjoyed several days o' his oot-o'-doors society afore I wist.

I was jist finishin' "The Hairt o' Midlothian," an' had been sae deeply interested in the fate o' Effie Deans, that I heard only the bum-bummin' o' the gudeman's voice an' Bella's as they sat an airm's-length aff mysel' upon a bench at the southern-end o' the braid walk facin' the san's; but several times the name, "Captain O'Meara," caught my ear.

At length, when I had sattled up the Deans, I sat wi' my e'e on the buik, as gin I had been still readin', though that wisna the case.

I wis an attentive listener to the crack atween faither an' dochter, which needna be detailed, but frae which I gathered sic information as I wanted withoot ony fash o' spierin'.

It cam' oot that Bella had drappit her pocket-naipkin ae day on the san's, an' Captain O'Meara had followed her a guid half mile to restore it. The gudeman, wha, as I hae already mentioned, disna stan' upon ceremonies, entered into conversation wi' the Captain, wha politely handed him his caird an' said he wud be prood to mak' the acquaintance o'—here the gudeman supplied the *hiatus* (hech, sirs, what a lot o' lang-nebbit words I'm pickin' up wi' my buik-readin'!)—"Mr an' Miss Cooper."

"Yes; he would be prood to make the acquaintance of Mr and Miss Cooper, and in the meantime he could not help feeling himself highly honoured and favoured by fortune for enabling him to perform the very trifling service which had procured the charming introduction." An' a hantle mair to the same effect.

Then the three had strolled back an' fore on the san's *an 'oor* or mair, had met ilka day sin' syne, an' were as

weel versed in ane anither's histories as gin they had been acqua'nt a' their lives.

The Captain, it seemed, wis, by the faither's side, o' an auld Irish faimily o' great consideration lang afore the English obtained a fittin' in the "Emerald Isle;" an' by his mither he cud claim relationship wi' half the nobility o' England, she having been a Howard, nearly related to the House o' Norfolk.

The Captain had served in the Ashantee War, an' sae far as I cud learn he had, single-han'it, contributed mair to the overthrow o' King Coffee than Sir Garnet Wolseley, Baker Russell, Sir Evelyn Wood, Sir Archibald Alison, an' Sir John Macleod wi' the Black Watch at his heels.

In consequence o' his eminent services in Africa, the Captain had been permitted to retire frae the army, in order that, aifter a sootable period o' repose, he micht start, as the gudeman phrased it, "in the 'spear' o' diplomacy," a sphere in which his noble relatives did him the honour to believe that he wis pre-eminently fitted to shine.

In the meantime the noble Captain was endeavouring to enjoy the repose which his physicians had recommended to him and, it micht be also awaiting the death of an old, infirm, and immensely rich uncle, from whom he had great expectations; but, to a man who had been so much in active life, it was very irksome to hang about idle, and he had met no attractive society at our seaside resort, until a lucky chance had thrown him into "the company of Mr Cooper and his charming daughter;" an' a hantle mair blarney to the same effect.

Noo, I canna say gin it wis the tribble occasioned to Effie Deans by consortin' wi' ane aboon her ain station, or gin it wis a natural instinct against the vicious, that turned me against oor new acquaintance; but frae the moment I heard o' the high pretensions put forth by Captain O'Meara, I conceived a dislike till him, alang

wi' a suspicion that there wis a screw loose somewhere aboot the Captain.

In the maitter o' an ordinary bargain, there's nae a sharper man in a' braid Scotlan' than the gudeman; but lat ony ane o' superior station display an admiration for the lassie, an' he seems to tyne's head a'thegither: that's ane o' the main reasons hoo I hae been kept sae muckle on the watch on Bella's account.

I cudna conceal frae mysel' that although we had come to hae a guid grip o' gear, yet, gin the Captain wis what he representit himsel' to be, the best tocher that Bella cud bring wud be a mere naething to a gentleman o' his position an' expectations; that wi' his high descent he cud luik upon us only as weel-to-dae clodhoppers an' naething mair.

Turn the maitter as I liked, I cud see't in nae ither licht than that John wis daen a very foolish an' dangerous thing to throw Bella sae muckle into the company o' a man o' sic attractions as the Captain appeared to possess, o' whom we kent naething save frae his ain report; an' wha appeared to me to be raither owre muckle the hero o' his ain story, an' by his ain showin' to be far owre far up the tree to be requirin' to coort the company o' a Keckleton fairmer an' his dochter.

Hooever, I resolved to say or dae naething rashly. I wud first see an' hear the Captain, an' form my judgment an' plans accordingly. That resolution wisna ill to cairry into effect; for the gudeman an' Bella were jist gaen oot, an' I understood they were certain to meet the Captain, he haen promised to mak' inquiries at a horse-hirer's aboot a sootable beast which Bella wis to ride alang the san's under his (the Captain's) special care, while the gudeman watched her performance an' enjoyed his smoke in the distance. Weel, I informed the gudeman an' Bella that I had changed my min' aboot beginnin' to

"St. Ronan's Well." I wud be the better o' a turn oot, an' sae wud gang alang wi' them, which I did.

We werena lang on the san's till we forgaithered wi' the Captain.

He wisna an ill-luikin' nor yet an unsodger-like man, though there was a certain indescribable rakishness aboot him that I didna like; an' though there wis nae trace o' the brogue in his speech, there was nae doot o' his bein' o' Irish descent, for he had the knack o' payin' compliments beyond ony man I ever met.

I wisna twa meenits in Captain O'Meara's company afore I wis made aware that I wis a lady o' remarkable pooers o' judgment, an' o' great literary taste an' culture, an' so on.

I endeavoured to deserve the praises he sae leebrally bestowed on me, by showin' as fine an appreciation o' the merits o' my eulogist.

I said it made me a prood 'oman that day to have been introduced to so distinguished a soldier an' officer, an' that I had had it from good authority that, but for the wise head an' the strong airm o' Captain O'Meara, Sir Garnet Wolseley wudna hae won his honours in Ashantee sae easily.

The Captain actually blushed like a lassie in her teens at my compliment, an' stammered oot something aboot my exaggeratin' the value o' his sma' services.

"There's nae exaggeration at a', Captain O'Meara," quo' I, "though it comports weel wi' the modesty o' rael merit to say as much; but it's my opinion, sir, that gin your achievements in Africa were rewarded wi' their proper deserts, it's by the title o' Colonel or General, instead o' Captain, that I wud noo be addressin' you, gin I micht aspire to sae high an honour."

In short, I met the Captain's blarney wi' blarney sae strong that he very soon stoppit frae applyin' ony mair to

me, for he cudna but hae a suspicion that I wis tarrin' him wi his ain brush.

Na, na, there wis very little blarney an' less braggin' wi' him in my presence, but I wis weel assured that he didna restrict himsel' in the same waye when only the gudeman an Bella wer' in his company, for they seemed never to tire o' soundin' the praises o' his cleverness an' politeness, an' they were far frae weel pleased when I, as my sole comment on their accoonts o' his gran' qualities, wad utter the single word "Blarney!"

The gudeman said gin I werna hopelessly prejudiced against the Captain, the trouble he had ta'en to mak' Bella a perfect horsewoman wad deserve my gratitude.

My answer wis—

"Weel, gudeman, I dinna ken o' muckle benefit that Bella will derive frae her perfect horsewomanship unless she intends to join the mounted police in Australia."

"That's a rael ill-natured speech that oucht never to hae crossed your lips, wife," quo' John.

"Weel," quo' I, "ye ken what wis the upshot o' ae rash intimacy, an' I think it's nae very considerate o' you to encourage anither in a hantle o' respects mair likely to come to an unfortunate endin'. Hooever, ye ken my opinion o' your Captain, and gin ye winna follow my advice wi' regaird to him, ye maun just follow your ain lead; but I wash my han's o' the consequences."

It vex't me mair than I cud tell to hae words wi' John, a thing that happened sae seldom, but I wis really seriously concerned aboot the lassie, an' as baith her faither an' she seemed to be clean infatuated wi' the Captain, I saw naething for't but to act for mysel'.

My plan wis to sen' a pressin' invitation to a Captain Reid, a second cousin o' my ain, to come an' spen' a week wi' us afore we left the seaside, which I hoped he wud accept at his very earliest convenience, as I had special

reasons for wissin' to see him. Captain Reid wis at the time livin' on half-pay in Edinboro', an' cud weel afford the time to come. He had been in the Ashantee War, an' cud, I believed, set my min' at rest aboot Captain O'Meara. He wis mairowre-an'-aboon a douce, elderly, sensible man, frae whom I micht expect guid advice an' assistance in case o' my suspicion that there wis a screw loose aboot O'Meara provin' correct.

My frien' didna keep me lang in suspense. I got a note amaist by return o' post, tellin' me to expect him within twenty-four 'oors. I got lodgin's for him in the same hoose wi' oorsel's, an' keepit my ain coonsel.

Captain O'Meara had got a standin' invitation to ca' in the evenin's, an' either smoke a cigar an' drink a glaiss wi' the gudeman, or tak' a stroll oot as the weather an' inclination directed; an' I kent my Captain an' him wud soon meet, but I didna expect sic a sudden an' serious collision as actually took place.

Captain O'Meara had jist drappit in, an' at the gudeman's request I had set oot the speerits, an' we were a' crackin' thegither in the parlour, when the servan' lass opens the door an' announces "Captain Reid."

Noo, Captain Reid wis nae stranger to the gudeman, for he had been to see's at Keckleton mony a time, an' so, aifter shakin' han's an' sayin' hoo glaid he wis o' the unexpected pleasure o' his visit, he gaed through the ceremony o' introducin' the twa captains till ane anither.

Instead o' gaen through ony o' the forms o' friendly recognition usual on sic occasions, the twa men stood for some meenits luikin' for a' the earth as gin they wud throttle ane anither. Captain Reid, hooever, wis the first to speak, an' sternly addressin' O'Meara, the followin' were his words—"Murphy, I did not expect to see you here, and it will be wise in you to withdraw from this company with as little delay as possible."

John had sat doon at the table, but he noo sprang up till his feet, wi' a face as red as a lowin' coal, an' turnin' fiercely upon Captain Reid,—"Ye hae a deal o' cool assurance," cries he, "to order my particular frien' oot o' my hoose!"

"A moment or two of patience," said Captain Reid, calmly, "till we rid the room of the contamination of this scoundrel's presence, and then, Mr Cooper, I shall have no difficulty in showing you that he ought never to have intruded himself here, and could only have won your friendship by passing himself off for what he is not —an 'honourable man.'"

John drappit into his chair as gin some ane had gien him a blow on the heid, an' as for O'Meara or Murphy, as his rael name was, he turned first white an' then a kin' o' green, an', wi' a luik o' the maist fiendish hate at Captain Reid, as he passed him, he stalkit oot o' the room withoot utterin' ae single word.

"Ugh!" said Captain Reid, wi' an air o' supreme disgust, when he heard the ooter door slammed. "You ought to get every part of the house where that villain has set his accursed feet fumigated with the strongest disinfectants!"

Then the Captain sat doon an' gae's the history o' the departed imposter at his leisure.

It will be necessary for me only to state that Murphy, though really a weel-educatit, weel-connectit, an' maist pleasin' an' plausible man when it sooted his purpose sae to be, had been obliged to fling up his captain's commission an' quit his regiment in disgrace, for cheatin' in play, an' ither ungentlemanly practices. But the blackest chairge wis that o' first leadin' astray the sister o' a brither officer an' drivin' her to suicide, an', when her puir brither socht what sober satisfaction the sae-ca'd laws o' honour wud alloo, had got him oot o' the warld by a plot which was

jist ootricht murder, although it had been sae airtfully contrived as to keep the villain's skin safe wha wis at the boddom o't.

"In short," said Captain Reid, on concloodin' his black story, "Murphy is a rake of the most heartless description, a cheat, a blackleg, a scoundrel who would break every commandment in the Decalogue to gain his selfish purposes."

"A villain," quo' the gudeman, risin' up an' shakin' Captain Reid's han' effusively, "frae whase clutches we thank you maist sincerely for deliverin' us, an' whase name sall henceforth be a blank in oor conversation."

"Amen!" added I, an' sae this ugly affair ended, for I needna say that Murphy fashed us nae mair, an' wis never allooded till again amang us.

CHAPTER III.

THE MINISTER

PUIR BELLA had sat like a person clean dumfoonert during the scene described in the last chapter, an' she hardly opened her mou' throughoot the rest o' the evenin'. Neist day, hooever, she wis jist like hersel' again, an' I wis glaid to think that the impostor had made but little impression on her hairt, hooever muckle he micht hae wounded her self-esteem.

Ae thing I observed, nevertheless, which vexed me nae a little, an' that wis that Bella, frae that time forward, began to speak o' the men wi' a bitterness that I didna consider proper nor healthy in sae young an' weel-faurt a lass. I saw the gudeman wis vexed as weel as mysel', an' I thocht it necessary to speak to Bella aboot it. She heard what I had to say in silence, an' sae far changed

her conduct that she ceased to mak' ony remark, guid, bad, or indifferent, about the opposite sex, further than this, that she wud very frequently keep liltin' till hersel' the followin' bit strowd:—

"Oh, man is a deceiver;
To me that fact is plain;
In one thing a believer,
And that is selfish gain.

He thinks us women ninnies;
And ninnies sure we are,
If we give him our guineas,
Our peace and joy to mar.

In this I'm a believer,
Because the fact is plain,
That man is a deceiver,
And ever will remain."

Whether she made up this strowd hersel', or met wi't in some book, I canna tell, but it wis aften in her mou' a' the neist winter, an' I didna like to hear't, nor did I think it a'thegither respectfu' frae the lips o' a bairn wha had a faither sae worthy an' kin-hearted as honest John Cooper. My desire wis to see the lassie wi' the feelin's sootable to her years, an' although I thocht it best nae to interfere wi' her mair directly, yet her state o' min' continued to cause me nae sma' uneasiness a' that winter.

To my great joy I thocht I saw a cure early in the simmer for Bella's unnat'ralness.

It so happened that Dr Drubber was appointed ane o' a deputation frae the Kirk o' Scotland to visit the Presbyterian Churches in British America; an', instead o' acceptin' the supply that wud hae been provided by his brethren, he thocht weel to invite a frien' o' his ane', a newly-fledged preacher, Gordon by name, to tak' his place at Keckleton till his return.

Mrs Drubber wis to accompany her husband, but the young minister wis to put up at the manse.

The Doctor took Mr Gordon roon' amo' the parishioners, an' bespak' the coontenance o' the pick o' them on his behalf afore he gaed awa'. You may be sure he didna neglect to bring him to oor hoose, an' says he to me in his maist affable mainner—

"I will take it as a personal kindness, Mrs Cooper, if you and your goodman and your accomplished daughter here will try to make my young friend Gordon forget that he is a stranger in Keckleton. I am sure you will find my friend a capital preacher, and, moreover, an excellent and agreeable young gentleman. It is not necessary, Mrs Cooper, to repeat what I have said to Mr Gordon regarding you and your household; I shall merely add that I expect to find you warm friends on our return across the Atlantic. You are aware that Mrs Drubber is to accompany me, and I am, therefore, the more desirous that he should have at least one pleasant home to drop into without ceremony when the loneliness of the manse weighs upon him."

Of coorse, in reply to a' thae civil speeches, I promised to dae my best for Mr Gordon, addin' that I wis very sorry Mr Cooper wisna at hame to speak for himsel', but I micht tak' it upon me to say that ony frien' o' Dr Drubber's wud aye be sure o' a hairty welcome frae John, were his ain merits even fewer than I had the best reasons for believin' that Mr Gordon's were, by the token o' the important post that he had been selected to fill.

Bella said very little, but I wis pleased to observe that she wis mair gracious in her mainner towards Mr Gordon than she had been to ony o's sex sin' oor seaside adventure.

Mr Gordon, on his pairt, seemed michtily pleased wi' her, and promised to drap in again some evenin' soon—a promise which he faithfully fulfilled.

We were a' greatly pleased wi' his poopit performances; a fact o' which I wisna slow to notify him; an' the main

we saw o' him as an acquaintance the better we liked him. His appearance, voice, an' mainner were a' in his favour.

In person he wis tall an' weel-proportioned. His complexion wis dark, his face weel-faurt, an' rendered mair interestin' by a pair o' large black een, an' an intellectual forehead. His voice wis sweet, an' withoot ony effort wis heard to the remotest neuk o' Keckleton Pairish Kirk, an' its nae a sma' ane. He wis a wee thing shy at first, but that only increased the charm o' his gentleman-like mainners, an' lively, intelligent conversation.

It wis nae wonner, therefore, although Mr Gordon wis aye a welcome guest at oor fireside, an' wis shortly sae popular in Keckleton, that "Auld Betty," wha wis ane o' Dr Drubber's greatest admirers, observed to mysel' that she sair dooted that "the minister had brocht an Absalom intil his kingdom to steal awa' the hairts o' his people."

Amang his ither accomplishments, Mr Gordon wis a gran' singer, and you may be weel assured that Bella's talents as a pianist werena permitted to lie fallow while he wis at Keckleton.

Eh, sirs, it gars the very water come into my een to min' hoo sweetly the twa bonnie, happy, young creatur's (for Mr Gordon wisna mair than five-an'-twenty) used to sing the followin' duet thegither:—

THE TRYSTING TREE.

DUET.

HE—"See the summer sun is setting,
His radiance lights the flow'ry lea;
Heart of my heart, art thou forgetting
Our meeting 'neath the trysting tree?
The songs are silent in the forest,
Save one of heavenly melody;
The nightingale which thou adorest
Is singing near our trysting tree."

SHE—"I come, I come, I do not linger;
I fly, but not, fond youth, to thee;
I fly to hear that heav'nly singer,
The nightingale beside our tree.
O, gloaming hour, thou art the fleetest
Of all the wingëd hours that flee!
O, nightingale, thy song is sweetest
When heard beneath the trysting tree!"

DUET—"O, gloaming hour, thou art the fleetest
Of all the wingëd hours that flee!
O, nightingale, thy song is sweetest
When heard beneath the trysting tree!

To hear the voices o' thae twa blendin' in the duet pairt o' this sang, an' to see them luik at ane anither, in sic perfect an' sweet content, drove awa' frae my min' a' doot as to their bein' made for ane anither, an' bein' certain to become man an' wife gin Providence spared them till circumstances arranged themselves for their union.

I can never comprehend what waye it cam' aboot that Mr Gordon an' Bella had pairted, when he left Keckleton, withoot haen entered into onything like a formal engagement, but sic wis actually the case. I hae learnt as much frae Bella hersel'; an' it seemed to me that the puir lassie had been expectin' that her admirer—as it wis easy to be seen that Gordon wis—wad declare himself afore he left; but he didna, an' I saw that she wis gey doon-hairtit aboot the mainner o' their pairtin'.

O' this I am weel sure, that we left nae opportunity o' showin' oor gudewill to the young minister unimproved. We wove him socks, an' comforters, an' watch guards; an' we were the biggest subscribers, an' the maist active pairties in gettin' up the weel-filled purse o' sovereigns that wis presented him by the pairish when his engagement cam' till an end; while oor hoose wis just like a hame till him a' the time he wis at Keckleton.

When I spak' to John aboot my disappointment, he cheered me up by saying—

"I think a' the better o' the lad for his prudence in nae bespeakin' the bird till he get the cage; but ye'll see that it will come a' richt. I dinna ken whaur he cud mak' a better barg'in than oor Bella; an' a blin' man micht see that he's owre the lugs in love wi' her. Gie yoursel' nae tribble, gudewife; ye'll get the offer o' the minister for a son-in-law as soon as he gets a settlement o' his ain. Never fear; but, whether the post o' minister's wife is the sphere that Bella's best suited to fill, may require serious consideration when the offer comes."

John's view o' the case, therefore, wis a great relief to my min', an' I wis fashed wi' nae earthly doot as to Bella's acceptin' an' adornin' the sphere o' minister's wife when she sud be ca'd upon to fill it.

It wisna mony weeks aifter the young minister left, when Bella got a lang, lang letter frae him, informin' her o' his appointment to be helper till a minister in ane o' the bonniest pairts o' Lanarkshire, an' there wis a guid prospect as weel that the post micht become that o' successor, as the auld minister had had a gey sair paralytic stroke.

Letters followed that ane gey frequently for a time, and then they began to drap aff.

At last there cam' anither lang, lang letter, informin' Bella that Gordon had got the appointment that he was luikin' for, an' wis gaen to mairry the auld minister's dochter. Aifter this announcement there followed a rigmarole, made up pairtly o' blarney, an' pairtly o' apology, an' concludin' wi' an expression o' confident hope that Bella and the writer's kind friends at Keckleton would perfectly understand his position, and give him their good wishes and earnest prayers at such a critical and trying period.

When I read the letter—which Bella had handed to me without a word o' remark—I said, "The man oucht to

be ashamed o' himsel'; the scoondrel Murphy cud hardly hae behaved waur."

When the gudeman wis tel't, he wis naither to haud nor bin' wi' anger. He said that he wud hae Gordon prosecuted for breach o' promise; but on re-perusin' a' the letters, it becam' clear eneuch that my lad had taen guid care to mak' nae distinct promise, nor to commit himsel' to onything upon which a prosecution cud hae been grounded.

The neist time that Dr Drubber ca'd I had jist as muckle adae as I wis weel able, to keep oor sense o' ill usage oot o' sicht.

"And so our young friend Gordon is likely to make a double settlement in Lanarkshire, Mrs Cooper," quo' he.

"So it seems," quo' I, gey dryly.

"I was in hopes that he would have come back to Keckleton for a wife," quo' the Doctor, wi' a glance at Bella, wha wis blushin' like a June rose.

"It appears he thinks his bread will be better buttered elsewhere," quo' I.

"That is hardly the light in which to view the matter, Mrs Cooper," quo' the Doctor, wi' a very provokin' smile. "The exigencies of our young friend's position certainly make this marriage a desirable one for him; but, apart from prudential considerations, I understand that Gordon's betrothed is highly esteemed in her father's parish, in which a considerable fortune left her by a rich uncle has enabled her to accomplish an immense amount of good. She will, therefore, prove much more acceptable to the parishioners than any stranger, however handsome and accomplished she might happen to be."

"Nae doot! nae doot!" said I, dryly; "but there's ae thing I've remarked in regaird to you ministers, an' that is, that while ye're aye ready to show us the worthlessness o' warldly gear, yet gin there be a weel-tochered

lass in a congregation, under a bachelor amang ye, he's certain sure to be aifter her."

The Doctor, wha I believe cud easily prove that black is white, or white is black, did it suit his purpose to do so, replied that "ministers' stipends were small, the demands upon their resources were great, and a young minister had often to sacrifice mere carnal inclination to a high sense of spiritual duty, inasmuch as he knew that the command of wealth would, as society was constituted, greatly extend his power of doing good."

I kent I wis nae match for the Doctor in argument, an' so I changed the subject; but although I wis silenced, my opinion regardin' Gordon wis unchanged, an' I still think he used oor lassie rael ill.

When the gudeman cam' in he said it wis as weel that he didna meet the Doctor, else he wad hae gien him a line o' his min' aboot Gordon that wadna hae been owre acceptable.

"But it's maybe jist as weel," quo' he, "for Bella's sake, to keep a calm sough, an' be mair circumspect neist."

But I ask ony sensible man or woman hoo I cud be mair circumspect than I hae been, or hoo a mither cud hae watched owre the interest o' a dochter wi' a glegger e'e than I hae watched owre Bella's. An' yet, what has a' my care come till?

Great honours an' high titles are gien to Generals an' Admirals aften for sma' eneuch achievements, but in my opinion ony mither wha conducts half-a-dizzen weel-faurt, weel-tochered dochters through the dangers o' coortship into safe an' satisfactory mairriages is far mair deservin' o' honour an' praise than ony General or Admiral up to Wellington or Nelson.

THE ROSE OF KECKLETON.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT the beginning of the second half of the present century there was not a prettier girl than Rosa Lee to be met with in Keckleton. She had a rich wealth of flossy flaxen hair, which floated in wavy beauty about her graceful neck and shoulders, or which hung around her dainty little head in the most fascinating ringlets imaginable, just as whim or convenience ordered. Her face was nearly oval, its regularity being charmingly broken by a tiny dimple in the chin, and its pure complexion was lighted into brilliancy by the roseate hue of a healthy youth. The cloudless azure of the clearest summer skies was not more lovely to behold than were Rosa's eyes; and her perfectly formed Grecian nose, and white regularly set small teeth peeping out between soft vermilion lips, together with the expression of cherub-like sweetness which pervaded the whole, made one dream of that far-off time when the angels used to visit the abodes of men.

Add to all this that Rosa Lee had as well-proportioned a figure as ever bodice encircled, and as neat a foot and ankle as ever donned leather; that she was always dressed, if not expensively, at least with faultless taste; and that she moved with the litheness and grace of the fawn, and you must then admit her right to the title of "The Rose of Keckleton," an appellation which, by common consent, had come to be bestowed upon her.

It is not at all to be wondered at that Rosa Lee was so beautiful. Her father was an Englishman in the service of the Revenue Excise department, who had come down to Keckleton as a gauger at the distillery, and was a remarkably handsome man. As like often draws to like, he was speedily attracted to Jessie Miller, the daughter of "Mercer Miller," as he was frequently called, who was proprietor of one of the largest mercery businesses in the High Street of Keckleton.

Jessie Miller and Samuel Lee seemed to have been expressly formed for each other, and to have been happily brought together by a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances, to show that there might be exceptions to the truth of the widely-received adage, "The course of true love never did run smooth," for after a brief courtship, in which there was never known to have been a single unpropitious ripple, they became man and wife.

After a year of happy wedded life, spent chiefly in the neat little cottage of Silver Dell, in the suburbs of Keckleton, to Mr and Mrs Lee was born an extremely pretty, blue-eyed baby daughter, whom by mutual consent they agreed to call by the mellifluous name of Rosa.

Sprung from parents so favoured in point of personal attractions; born in a home so charming as Silver Dell Cottage, and, so to speak, rocked and swaddled and dandled amongst amiable and delightful surroundings, how could Rosa Lee have helped growing up a beauty?

She might, however, have become a spoiled beauty if misfortune had not come upon her early. When she was only three years old her father fell suddenly ill. No one knew how his illness had originated, for immediately before it came upon him he had appeared good for at least half a century of active life.

He soon, however, became rapidly worse and worse, and *the doctor* who was called in gave the malady a learned

name, and said it had been going on for a considerable period, till it had completely invaded and poisoned all the springs of vitality. Had he been called earlier, he asserted, he might have prolonged, or perhaps saved, the patient's life, but, as it was, death was inevitable.

And the result justified the doctor's prediction. Within two days from its commencement the disease proved fatal; and so Mrs Lee was left a widow, rather slenderly provided for, and Rosa an orphan.

For a time the widow was inconsolable, and wished for nothing so much as to lie down and die, that she might "ascend," as she said, "to her beloved husband;" but by-and-by her pretty child nestling near her and calling her "mamma," re-awoke in her the instincts of life, and she prayed to be spared for her infant's sake.

Pretty Mrs Lee (and she did look very pretty in her early days of pale-faced, black-robed widowhood) might have returned to her father's house; but misfortunes seldom come singly. By the failure of a brother who had carried on business in a large way, and lived in a grand style in Glasgow, too confiding Mr Miller was ruined, and took his altered condition so much to heart that he lay down and died not many weeks after the death of his son-in-law. Thus Mrs Miller was thrown almost entirely upon her own resources for the up-bringing of her only child.

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," said pretty Mrs Lee, "and why then should I despair of His bounty to Rosa and me?" And she did not despair. She gave up, though with a sad heart, Silver Dell Cottage, took a less pretentious abode in a business part of the town, and put on her front door a brass-plate, on which was engraved—

MRS LEE,

DRESS AND MANTLE MAKER.

Keckleton was not slow to respond to this silent appeal to its sympathies. Mrs Lee soon had enough work for

herself and several apprentices and "improvers," and so succeeded not only in keeping the "wolf from the door," but also in bringing up and educating her daughter as well as any in her own station in life. Taught by experience and misfortune, Mrs Lee practised economy and early accustomed her daughter to habits of industry and carefulness; and thus Rosa Lee grew up, not only a beauty, but a sensible, active, helpful young woman as well.

Yes, Rosa Lee was really a charming girl, and in most things was as near to perfection as it often falls to the lot of humanity to be. But she was not quite perfect. She had at least one little weakness—she was somewhat of a coquette. Not to any serious, harmful extent, but it must be confessed that she was not indifferent to the pleasure of having her charms acknowledged by the opposite sex, though it may be doubted whether she had any just idea of the grave commotion which an arch glance or a winsome look from her bright eyes could cause in the heart of the youth who was the recipient of the one or the other.

Amongst the most seriously smitten of Rosa's earlier admirers was Walter Montgomery, or, as he was generally called, "The Keckleton Poet." Rosa was first seen by the poet in all the gay glory of her young womanhood at a Keckleton flower show, and straightway his heart was in a flame. His muse reeled off rhyme to indefinite length, but only one brief specimen need be given in order to show the nature of his verse:—

ROSA.

A flower amid the flowers she stood,
  From all the gardens none so fair;
Her smile dispelled the blackest brood,
  The most aggressive fiends of care.

I met her glance, I felt her smile,
  I stood as rooted to the spot,
And through my brain there rushed the while
  Thoughts tender, passionate, and hot.

"O Rosa! wert thou mine," I sighed—
I did not dare to speak aloud—
"How sweetly life for me would glide—
One summer day without a cloud."

Another came, she took his arm,
And quickly vanished from my sight;
Now life for me hath lost its charm,
And clouds surround me black as night.

The rival who had taken the charm out of poor Walter Montgomery's life, and surrounded him with clouds as black as night, was George Meldrum, son of "Meldrum of Mickle Mills," a substantial miller and corn factor in the neighbourhood of Keckleton.

The Meldrums of Mickle Mills were distant relatives of Mrs Lee by the mother's side, and George Meldrum, being about two years older than Rosa, had taken a sort of elder-brother interest in her, and was wont to call her "cousin" ever since they were infants.

Mr Meldrum intended his son to assist and ultimately succeed him in the milling business; but about three years previous to the commencement of our story, he had put him into the office of a "writer" in the county town, in order, as he said, "to smarten him up a bit."

George Meldrum had seen very little of his "cousin" while he was in Mr M'Kinlay's office, but having returned to Mickle Mill for good, he had come into town on the day of the flower-show in order to take Rosa to it. He found her much more womanly and a thousand times more attractive than ever. He had left her a girl of fifteen or sixteen summers; she was now a lovely young lady.

There was one thing in Rosa which displeased him. Her manner towards him, he could not help observing, had undergone a complete change. She met him with a stiffness and reserve which he had not anticipated; and she made so much difficulty about getting out with him that, had it not been for her beauty and the occasional

glances which she threw him, belonging, as it were, to the olden time, he most assuredly would have gone away without her.

George Meldrum, in his inexperience of the sex, did not know the change which passes over the thoughtless, romping girl when she steps into the dignity of womanhood. He forgot that Rosa and he no longer stood towards each other in the relation of playmates, and he was pained and puzzled by Rosa's coldness, as he judged it. He thought there must be a reason, and this he determined to find out.

Thinking over the matter after Rosa had, with an appearance of reluctance which surely was uncalled for, consented to go out with him just for one hour, and while she was in the adjoining room making ready, he arrived at the conclusion that Rosa must have got a sweetheart —might even be engaged, and this idea was not at all to his mind.

When they were among the flowers, an acquaintance had called her away from him for a little, and had introduced Walter Montgomery to her, George, who followed all Rosa's movements with eager eyes, fancied he saw in the smile and glance which set the poet's heart aflame much more than they were intended to convey, and believed he had discovered his own successful rival in Walter Montgomery. He was the further confirmed in this opinion from the warm commendations which Rosa and her acquaintance bestowed in his hearing upon some poetical pieces of Montgomery's which had recently appeared in the *Keckleton Chronicle*. No opportunity for any sort of explanation, however, took place before Rosa and George separated, and the consequence was that he went home depressed and deeply jealous, while the feelings of the Keckleton poet were nearly similar to his own.

CHAPTER II.

ROSA LEE, though not unconscious of her charms, was certainly not aware of their full power. Had she known the turbulent commotions which she had raised in the hearts of two youths, to neither of whom she could have desired to occasion painful feelings, she might have been more guarded in the exercise of her fascinations. As it was, she saw no harm that could arise either to the young men or to herself were she to extract a little amusement and pleasurable glorification out of their evident admiration.

During the evening succeeding the show and for many successive days her thoughts alternated between her twain admirers, and she weighed and balanced them against each other more than she would have liked her dearest friend to know of. It no doubt helped considerably to turn the balance in favour of her newer admirer, that he had sent her the lines which have appeared in the previous chapter, as well as several other verses even more laudatory, but all so equally impractical that she had considered it quite unnecessary to offer any written acknowledgment of their receipt, leaving it to some chance meeting to afford her an opportunity of speaking, or perhaps merely looking and smiling her pleased appreciation.

George Meldrum had also called again, and although he had made no actual declaration of love, nor even had an opportunity of speaking to her three minutes alone, he had somehow contrived to make her understand that he did not desire her to receive attentions from any young man save himself.

And now for the first time in her life Rosa Lee commenced to examine her own heart, and to commune with it regarding its emotions towards the opposite sex. She

felt that the shyness, or rather stiffness and reserve, which she had manifested towards George Meldrum, when he called to take her out to the flower-show, had not been entirely involuntary. She was not altogether satisfied with the way in which he had been acting towards her for a good long time. They had been a great deal together as children, and even as boy and girl; but after George went to Mr M'Kinlay's office, and she took more interest and responsibility as regards her mother's business, he had very seldom called at the house; and on the very few occasions when he did visit, he had gone away without seeming desirous of seeing her, when he was told that she was engaged in the workroom.

It was true, he had told her mother how thoroughly his spare time was employed with cricket, football, and other athletic exercises, but she thought these need not have caused him so utterly to forget his former playmate. It was pretty evident, she believed, that the young lawyer, and prospective successor to a big business, looked down on the humble *modiste*, at that time anyway.

And it was hardly to be endured without resentment, that immediately on his quitting his more stylish companions and returning to the paternal roof, George should suddenly remember that she might in some manner contribute to his glorification, and should come in a haughty, imperious sort of way and almost order her to accompany him to the flower-show, just as he used to order her about years ago when they were playing at housekeeping as little man and wife. What right had he to neglect her so entirely for three years, and then, when it suited his whim, to come to her like a master and command her attendance, that he might show all Keckleton how complete was his power over her?

He had not behaved well either when they were at the show. He had tyrannically subjected her will to his,

begrudged her a turn or two with an old school companion, whom she had not met for a long time, and to whom she had much more to communicate than to him; and, above all, he had resumed almost forcible possession of her, and almost dragged her away from the flower-show altogether, for no other reason than because she had exchanged a few words of common courtesy with another young man in point of education and manners evidently his superior.

How impatient George had been of the commendations bestowed upon Montgomery's verses, and how very little appreciation he had shown of high-class poetry in general. His was evidently a nature of a coarse fibre—a masterful, unsympathetic spirit, that would not bear contradiction. And then, after making himself so disagreeable, it was surely a piece of arrogant presumption that he should come to her again, and, without a word of explanation or inquiry as to her feelings or inclination, should intimate that she ought to reject any other attentions except what he might deign to bestow upon her.

George Meldrum was evidently the purse-proud son of a purse-proud father; but she would let him know that she was not to be dictated to and ruled in this high-handed way. What cared she about his great prowess in athletics, of which he appeared to be so proud, or of the big business, of which both father and son were so ready to talk? George Meldrum evidently seemed to think that she was to be purchased with his father's money, like a sack of oats or barley; but she would let him see that he was mistaken.

As for the other youth, Walter Montgomery, with the less burly but not unmanly form—with the high, white brow, the large dreamy eyes, and the face "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,"—he was, to say the least, very interesting; and he wrote very pretty verses, as both

she herself and her dear friend, Mary Moffat, who had introduced him to her, agreed in thinking.

She also had acquainted herself with the position of Montgomery, social and otherwise; for although she had no desire for any immediate change of condition from a matrimonial point of view, yet it was only natural she should look for a certain amount of compatibility in any probable suitor.

Few pretty girls, any more than Rosa Lee, are averse to a little flirtation; but all well-principled and prudent girls require some degree of matrimonial eligibility in the gentlemen whom they favour with their smiles.

Judged by this standard, Montgomery could fairly pass muster, as viewed from Rosa's social stand-point. His antecedents were respectable, and rather more; his father being a country parish minister, blessed with a numerous family, of which Walter was the seventh successive son.

There is said to be always something remarkable about a seventh son, and Walter Montgomery's distinguishing characteristic was the extraordinary facility with which, from a very early age, he could throw his thoughts into rhyme. The minister of Eydenton was a man of no small worldly wisdom, however, and knowing that poetry and poverty are nearly always companions, he discouraged the exercise of the rhyming faculty in his son, and set him early to the conjugation of Latin and Greek verbs, with the view of making him first a scholar, and finally an ornament of one of the learned professions. He succeeded so far in his first wish, that Walter had passed with considerable credit through the curriculum of Arts in the Marischal College, Aberdeen; but he left the University without being able to make up his mind as to the choice of a profession.

There was no place for idlers at the manse of Eydenton, and consequently Walter had come to act as tutor to the

young Laird of Hazel Howe; and his pupil's tastes leading him more to the stables and the kennels, and to the company of jockeys and gamekeepers, than to academic groves and the society of the learned, the tutor was left with plenty of spare time on hand to woo the muses and win poetic renown in the columns of the *Keckleton Chronicle.*

The haziness of the young poet's future was hardly understood by Rosa Lee, and to her simple mind the scholarly and gentleman-like son of the parish minister of Eydenton, without a profession and in a temporary and precarious situation, was preferable as a prospective husband to the burly and less polished son of the corn factor of Mickle Mills, who had the certainty of affluence before him.

There is no doubt that, had Rosa been called upon to decide between her rival admirers at any time within a fortnight after the flower-show, her decision would have been in favour of Walter Montgomery. But the poet's love seemed to be of a theoretical rather than of a practical character. He appeared to be in no hurry to follow up the favourable impression made by his amatory epistles in verse. Rosa had even met the poet by chance one evening, when she was enjoying a solitary stroll in the direction of Hazel Howe; he had joined her with the ease of an old acquaintance, and talked most delightfully on a variety of subjects; but with the single exception of having held her hand a little longer in his at parting, and having expressed rather warmer hopes of an early meeting again than appeared necessary, there was nothing in his conversation, nothing in his manner, different from that of an ordinary friend.

On the other hand, George Meldrum had called several times requesting to see her, but she excused herself by sending word that she was engaged with customers, or in some other plausible duty, and he had at last waylaid

her in one of her walks, and urged his suit with an impetuosity which nearly frightened her. She absolutely refused, however, to pledge herself to him in any way, and requested him, with all the firmness she could command, to desist from following her about and persecuting her with his attentions. Thus it happened that between the importunity of the lover whom she really wished to discard, and the dilatoriness of the one whom she desired to retain, the poor girl became a prey to an anxiety which began to tell upon her appetite and general health.

It may be mentioned that Mrs Lee, in consequence of the loss of her husband, although one of the kindest of mothers, had mixed little with society or its concerns further than her merely business transactions required, and neither invited nor possessed the confidence of her daughter in regard to what she would have esteemed the utter frivolities of her flirtations. Of course, in the case of any serious engagement, Mrs Lee made sure she would be consulted, and would then have been ready to advise to the best of her ability; but as yet she regarded Rosa as a mere child, and never having had occasion to question the propriety of her conduct, she left her very much to the freedom of her own will. When, therefore, she observed her daughter becoming pale and indifferent to food and exercise, she attributed the change to overwork, and insisted that Rosa should accept the pressing invitation which had come to her from her friend, Mary Moffat, to spend a week at Heather Brae, and Rosa was not slow to embrace the proposal.

It will not be necessary to follow Rosa Lee to Heather Brae, nor to say more about her visit to her friend than that its object was most completely achieved.

Mary Moffat was, with all her admiration of newspaper poetry, a thoroughly practical young lady. She ridiculed the idea of any sensible girl falling seriously in love with

Walter Montgomery, whom she knew very well—Heather Brae being in the next parish to Eydenton. Walter was, she said, and she feared would remain, a mere poetical dreamer, and was besides so emotional that every pretty face he met threw him into a love fever, which worked itself off in one, ten, or twenty songs, sonnets, odes, or amatory epistles according to its intensity. These fever fits resembled the effervescence of a bottle of brisk ginger beer, and subsided as quickly. He was, notwithstanding these weaknesses, a thoroughly good-hearted and amiable young man; an excellent scholar, full of all sorts of curious information, and withal clever in verse-making. Besides, he was, when he chose, a very pleasant and instructive companion, and for that reason Mary had wished Rosa to become acquainted with him, for she would always be safe in his society, and no person who really knew Walter Montgomery would ever suppose him to be her lover.

The two friends read together the several sets of verses which Rosa had received from him; and Mary laughingly predicted that if Rosa would benignly receive another half-score of epistles from the poet, he would then be ready to settle down to a Platonic friendship truly delightful.

CHAPTER III.

It came about in that way that Rosa Lee returned to Keckleton in her wonted health, and in more than her wonted spirits. When she had settled down again she resolved to continue her acquaintanceship with Walter Montgomery, if only to tease George Meldrum, and punish him for his arrogance and impetuosity. At the same

time, thinking of George with a mind less prejudiced, she began to recollect his early protection with more grateful feelings, and to recognise that he was on the whole a young fellow who had many excellent points in his character.

It was greatly in his favour, too, that although he had neglected her for a time, he had given his attentions to no other, and that he was now disposed to atone for any former slight or indifference, real or apparent, by a deeper devotion than she desired to encourage.

As was stated, she had no desire for an immediate marriage, nor even to enter upon any binding engagement. George Meldrum was not so much older than herself, and he could afford and would have to wait her pleasure. It would do him good to wait, and she was not yet so fond of him that she feared to run the risk of losing him. If he chose to go, let him go. She ventured to believe that she could, if she wished, be wooed by a suitor quite as eligible.

Acting on this programme, Rosa saw a good deal of Walter Montgomery, encouraged him in his compositions, and was for a time his special goddess and muse. When winter came the dreamy tutor and his horsey pupil went south, and the "Platonic friendship" was to a certain extent suspended, being rounded off for the time by the following lines:—

FROM WALTER TO ROSA.

I'm always thinking of thee, sweet,
When the rosy-mantled dawn
Comes from the east with dewy feet
Over the emerald lawn,
To wake the voices of earth and air,
The songs of joy, or the sighs of care.

I'm always thinking of thee, sweet,
When the queen of night appears,
Leading the train whose footsteps beat
To the music of the spheres,
And flinging her silver glances down
Over desert wastes and peopled town;

And deep in the stilly night, sweet,
In the silent land of dreams,
Where woods are waving and waters meet
To murmur the song of streams;
I sit with thee under leafy bowers,
And weave thee chaplets of deathless flowers.

I feel the light of thine eyes, sweet,
I hear thy voice in my sleep;
I would clasp thy form, but it flies, sweet,
And lo! I awaken to weep,
For I know that thou never, ah never! canst be
Aught else save a vision of Beauty to me!

George Meldrum had kept sullenly aloof until Montgomery's departure, but meeting Rosa shortly afterwards and finding her disposed to be friendly, he began to renew his attentions. He was now much less importunate than formerly, and subjected his wishes to hers in everything.

She thought that a marked improvement had taken place in him, and so far relented in her intentions that she permitted him to accompany her on several occasions during the winter and spring months to concerts and various other amusements; but although he had cautiously approached the subject of an engagement oftener than once, she had always adroitly turned the conversation, so that no fixed understanding was arrived at between them.

Still George was satisfied that he was progressing in Rosa's confidence and esteem, for she seemed generally well pleased to meet him, and actually took the trouble to explain the dreamy and entirely Platonic nature of her friendly relations with Walter Montgomery. George could not easily comprehend an intimacy of such an unusual nature, but it no longer made him madly jealous, and he did not assume, as formerly, that he had a right to order its discontinuance. In fact, so well had George established himself in Rosa's good graces by the commencement of the summer, that he was again thinking of pressing his suit and did not feel much dread of being refused; while Rosa,

on her side, anticipating the renewal of the request, had considered it to be her duty to reveal her expectations to her mother.

Mrs Lee did not appear to be quite unprepared for such an announcement, nor did she show any reluctance to permit her daughter to enter into the engagement, provided George obtained the full concurrence of his parents. But she insisted that, as a matter of prudent precaution, no very early union should be contemplated; first, because she considered that the parties were both still too young to enter upon the serious responsibities of a married life; and next, and perhaps more particularly, because she thought that George was a little wild, and she was desirous that he should be subjected to a probation of some years' duration before he should be entrusted with a treasure so precious as her darling Rosa. All this being quite in accord with her own views, Rosa readily promised to be entirely guided by her mother's wishes in whatever might take place.

Now, had all George Meldrum's conduct at this time been accurately known to Mrs Lee and her daughter, it is hardly probable that they would have been satisfied with the promise of a long probation on his part, but would at once have dismissed him altogether from their counsels as utterly ineligible. The facts were that George had got among a rather fast set of young men in connection with the Keckleton Athletic Club, and in their convivial meetings he liked to be "cock of the walk;" besides, the nature of the business which he had to transact daily led him much to fairs and public-houses, where dram-drinking, while bargaining or in giving or receiving money, was habitually indulged in.

Thanks to a strong constitution and to a hard head, he was not easily affected by drink; but not being a "seasoned cask," like his father, he did occasionally get

considerably excited under the influence of liquor, and, unfortunately, he was quarrelsome in his cups.

The drinking customs of the time were freer than they have since become among the class to which the Meldrums belonged, but it was beginning to be remarked even among neighbours and equals that George was taking rather kindly to the public-house, and it was considered a pity so young and clever a man should fall into such habits. Drinking for drinking's sake was growing upon him, and might lead to serious consequences, nay, actually did lead to serious consequences, in this wise.

George owned a couple of Dandie Dinmont terriers, believed to be of pure breed, and they were consequently of considerable value; and both were stolen from their kennel on the night of a Keckleton market.

A low character, who lived somewhere in the slums, was the suspected thief. He was known by the appellation of "Birdie Briggs," because the chief part of his occupation was dealing in birds; but, besides possessing a great variety of singing birds, Briggs had a general menagerie of domestic fowls, pigeons, dogs, rabbits, guinea-pigs, and ferrets. Even cats, rats, or mice might be got from him on very short notice.

Birdie Briggs was a wholly disreputable character, who greatly preferred stealing to buying any animal that he chanced to require; but he was so extremely cunning and wary, that in spite of his evil name, and the common impression that it was richly merited, he always managed to escape detection.

He had been seen skulking about the neighbourhood of Mickle Mills in the grey light of the morning on which George Meldrum's Dandie Dinmonts were missed; but he was often out bird-catching at an early hour, and he defied George Meldrum or anybody else to prove that he had been seen either going to or coming from the kennel.

or that the terriers had ever been in his possession. For all this, George Meldrum was perfectly convinced that no one save Briggs had taken his favourites, and was greatly enraged against him. He charged Briggs with the theft, and threatened to horsewhip him, if he found him trespassing at any time on any part of the property of Mickle Mills in the practice of his calling.

Briggs was a gigantic, hulking fellow, who might have laughed at such a threat or defied it; but he simply said that the law would protect him, seeing that he had done nothing wrong.

"Birdie" was accustomed to hawk his wares about at different fairs up and down the country, and it did not tend to mitigate George Meldrum's wrath against him that he would very often hulk up when he saw George in good company, and ask in the manner of a familiar acquaintance if he had recovered "them Dandies yet"?

This was extremely irritating to George, and no doubt was intended to be so, for the same impertinence was repeated as often as Birdie saw a fitting opportunity. It was all in vain that George had again and again ordered the fellow to mind his own business, and threatened to give him into the hands of the police for molestation; the provokingly mild answer had always been, "Now, now, George; how can you take offence at the civil inquiry of a friend?"

This annoyance had been going on for some months, when one day George Meldrum happened to be at a fair not very far from the county town. He had drank a good deal during the day, and as he was returning on foot to an inn in the town where he had put up his horse, he was joined by the manager of the Commercial Bank, and in company with that gentleman overtook Birdie Briggs, who had along with him two or three other disreputable characters similar to himself.

On observing George approaching Birdie faced about, and holding out his hand with a "hail-fellow-well-met" expression upon his countenance, he greeted him with the usual, "Well, George, any word of them Dandies yet?"

Inflamed with rage and drink, George Meldrum lost all command over himself, rushed upon the exasperating Birdie, and with clenched fists rained a terrible shower of blows upon his face and head, and finally directed a right-hander against the pit of his stomach, which sent him down like a felled ox.

It was remarkable that Birdie Briggs, a Hercules in size and strength, and well known to be no member of the peace-at-any-price party, never raised a hand to defend himself, but called on his companions first to take witness how he was being assaulted, and then to come to his assistance; and that when he was knocked down he made no attempt to rise, but bellowed and groaned, and finally lay completely silent and motionless, as if he had been either killed or rendered senseless. The attack had been so sudden, and terminated so speedily, that no time had been given for interference, for Birdie's companions were several paces off when it commenced; but immediately on his fall the women shrieked, and yelled "Murder, murder! police, police!" and the men, rushing up to George, surrounded him till the police arrived and made him a prisoner. It was an aggravation of his offence in the eyes of the law that he was excited and violent, and refused to let himself be handcuffed till he was subdued by force.

Ere this was accomplished, however, a motley rabble had assembled, and, along with Birdie's companions, followed the prisoner and his captors to the police station; while Birdie, seemingly still insensible, was lifted into a passing cart and conveyed to the Infirmary.

The case was clear against George; not even his friend the banker could say a word in his defence, and

although he would readily have pledged himself to answer for George's reappearance to meet whatever charges were raised, in the critical condition of the injured man all bail was disallowed, and the accused was committed to the lock-up for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

GREAT was the grief and consternation at Mickle Mills when the news of the untoward affair, related in the previous chapter, arrived at that place; but nothing could be done. The banker, who had come out in course of the evening to break the unwelcome tidings, declared that, in the precarious condition of Briggs, the law must just take its course. It would be perfectly useless to stir in the matter till it was seen what the night's rest would do for the chief sufferer.

On the following day witnesses of the assault were duly examined, and George Meldrum was formally committed to take his trial before the Sheriff of the county for an unprovoked, atrocious, and criminal attack upon Thomas Briggs, of No. 19 Gutter Wynd, Keckleton. However, as Birdie had rallied a little, and was pronounced by the doctors to be out of imminent danger, bail was allowed, and was speedily forthcoming, so that George returned to Mickle Mills, though sadly crestfallen and humiliated.

The assault speedily became known to all Keckleton, and the descriptions of it being for the most part unaccompanied by such extenuating details as might have arisen on account of the provocation received, the conduct of George Meldrum was considered unaccountably brutal and indefensible.

All his friends were greatly scandalised. A brother athlete rose in his place at the first full meeting of the members, and moved that the name of George Meldrum be erased from the list of vice-presidents of the Keckleton Athletic Club, and carried his proposition by a considerable majority. Even Dr Drubber, who was not easily roused by passing events, "improved the occasion" by a lengthy insertion into one of his favourite sermons to the young, setting forth in said insertion the evils of intemperance and unguarded passion.

As for Mrs Lee and her daughter, they knew not what to make of the matter; they were both deeply grieved, but they could see no reasonable excuse for George, and were very thankful that Rosa's contemplated engagement to him had not taken place. As for George himself, he was too much humiliated in his own estimation to approach them with either explanation or apology.

During the whole time that the criminal charge hung over him George Meldrum kept away from his former associates and haunts, and it was currently reported he had left Keckleton altogether. At any rate, his former friends saw him no more, and it was questioned by many whether he would surrender himself to custody and abide the event of the prosecution. The public opinion was much exercised on this question, and there was no small discontent amongst the tenants of the Gutter Wynd that an individual, who had made a criminal attack upon one of their number, should escape condign punishment because he happened to have wealthy relatives and friends.

It thus happened that the interest in the trial was considerably increased; and when the time arrived many Keckletonians made their way to the court-house of the district where it was to take place.

George Meldrum duly made his appearance at the bar, and, by the advice of his counsel, pleaded guilty to the

assault, under the extenuating plea of severe provocation, but denied the graver charges in the indictment of malice aforethought and intent to inflict grievous bodily injury. The prosecution refused to accept the plea, and accordingly a jury was empannelled, and evidence on both sides submitted at great length.

On the one side, it was shown that the panel had wrongfully charged Briggs with stealing his dogs; that he had once and again threatened to horsewhip Briggs; that he perpetually displayed great irritation whenever Briggs approached him with the friendly intention of ascertaining if he had recovered the stolen property; and that, within three days of the assault, he had threatened to lay violent hands on Briggs if he again repeated the inquiry. The assault itself was proved to have been severe, and continued until Briggs had been brought to the ground by blows, all of which had been directed against the most vital parts of his person. One of the female witnesses had deponed that Briggs "fell bleeding as if he had been an ouse;" and that she "had never expected to see him stand on his ain twa shanks again."

The friendly banker could give only corroborative testimony; and the severe cross-examination of the witnesses by Mr Sifter, one of the ablest advocates at the Scottish bar, who had been retained for the defence, could not shake the unanimity of the evidence for the prosecution. The only discrepancy which Mr Sifter could establish was that between the alleged atrocious character of the assault and the trifling results produced by it, as estimated by the medical testimony.

The house-surgeon at the Infirmary deponed that when Briggs' face was sponged, the only external marks of the violent treatment he had received was a slight abrasion on the nose and a discoloured patch above the right eye. The patient had recovered consciousness before he was

carried into the Infirmary, but was groaning piteously, and affirming that his internal sufferings were excruciating. Indeed, Briggs had maintained that "several of his ribs were smashed in," and were penetrating his intestines; but this certainly was not the case; and although the patient had continued groaning very lustily during the greater part of the night, to the great discomfort of all the other patients in the surgical wards, he made an excellent breakfast next morning; and in the more searching examination to which his person was subjected in the course of the day, the visiting doctors failed to find any evidence of injury either external or internal, other than those already described.

Dr Hewer, the chief of the surgical staff, gave similar evidence as to Briggs' injuries; but he admitted, in cross-examination by the prosecution, that Briggs might have received such a blow in the pit of the stomach as to render him temporarily insensible; although no traces of stomachic derangement had been visible, either on the following day or subsequently. Dr Hewer also admitted that a blow in the stomach, if given with sufficient force, might prove fatal; but the same, he added, might be admitted of a blow similarly administered to the head or any other part of the body.

Mr Sifter was obliged to make the most of the discrepancy thus discovered, for although he called a number of highly credible witnesses to depone to the suspicious character of Briggs and the annoying persistency with which he had followed Meldrum with the inquiry about the dogs, he could make use of all that he was able to elicit in that direction only as extenuating circumstances. The testimony which he produced to establish his client's previous good character was abundant enough, but it did not seem to strengthen his case much, which was on the whole a weak one.

Mr Stentor, the advocate-depute who prosecuted, seeing that the strength of his case lay in the facts established by the evidence, did not wish to risk a lengthy speech, which he believed to be unnecessary in order to obtain a conviction, and which his clever opponent, Mr Sifter, might have succeeded in tearing to tatters. He merely contented himself with submitting to the jury a brief summary of the evidence, and insisting that only a verdict of guilty as libelled was possible.

Mr Sifter followed his "learned brother" in an eloquent oration, and as powerful in argument as the slender stock of facts at his disposal would admit of; but the only part of his effort which seemed to have any effect with the jury was the splendid peroration in which he urged them to temper justice with mercy, and bring his young client in guilty only of the lesser offence of a breach of the peace under grave provocation.

Indeed, the effect of the able advocate's closing appeal was to make the jury retire to consider their verdict—which, it was afterwards understood, they would not have done otherwise.

The ordeal, which had been a terrible one for poor George Meldrum, reached its climax when the jury retired. His answer to the question, "Guilty or not guilty?" was inaudible beyond the official circle of the Court; but when the examination of witnesses commenced, he raised his drooped head and followed the process with a painful eagerness. He could scarcely conceal his emotions as witnesses for the defence, who were mostly his personal friends, were giving their evidence nearly directly against him; but when the jury withdrew, he seemed about to faint right away, and clung nervously to the front of the dock for support till the jury began to re-enter after a few minutes' absence. Then the panel appeared to revive, and although pale almost as the dead,

he stood up in his place and bent as far forward as possible to catch the first whisper of the jury's decision.

He had not long to wait.

On being questioned as to their finding, the foreman of the jury immediately stood up and, addressing the Sheriff on the bench, said, in a voice distinctly audible to the remotest corner of the Court, "My lord, we are agreed upon our verdict. It is that George Meldrum, the panel before the Court, is guilty as libelled."

For a moment there was dead silence in the Court, but the eyes of the whole audience were turned upon the prisoner, who, it was believed, would now have dropped down, but he did not. He merely drew back a little, and seizing with both hands the front of the dock, awaited the sentence. The prisoner's suspense, however, was not to be immediately relieved, for the Sheriff intimated that he would take the case to avizandum and give his decision next day. On the following day, then, George Meldrum was again brought up. He was very pale, but displayed greater firmness than at the trial.

The Sheriff addressed him with a gentleness not observable in his manner with old offenders, but his words were sufficiently severe. He said that the prisoner, although a young man of good education and accustomed to move in respectable society, had, nevertheless, so far permitted an evil and revengeful passion to dominate him, that under its influence he had committed a crime of a very aggravated character. He (the prisoner) could not be too thankful that his violent and inexcusable act had not had a more serious result. It might have placed him in a position in which it would have been the judge's duty to pronounce a sentence which would have sent him to the scaffold, and for ever cut him off from that sphere of usefulness which might still lie before him if he made the right use of the severe ordeal through which he had

passed, and the lesson which might be deduced from it. "He had," his worship continued, "carefully considered how the ends of justice might be met, so as to spare the young offender from being sent for any considerable period to herd with confirmed criminals, and at the same time to punish him for his past misdemeanour, and prevent him from future violent conduct. He thought that these ends might be answered by the exercise of a leniency which he hoped the prisoner would study to repay by a life conformable to a high moral standard. The sentence of the Court, therefore, was that the prisoner should pay a fine of twenty pounds, one-half of which would be handed over to aid in supporting that excellent institution in which Briggs had received the prompt medical treatment which had perhaps saved his life. Further, that the prisoner should be bound in two sureties of twenty pounds each to keep the peace towards Thomas Briggs during the next twelve months from that date."

Failing a compliance with these pecuniary exactions, a term of imprisonment was named as the alternative; but it is almost needless to state that both cash and sureties were immediately forthcoming. Nor was this all. In a civil action at the instance of Briggs for defamation of character and grievous bodily injury sustained, in which damages were laid at forty pounds, twenty pounds were actually awarded.

CHAPTER V.

HEAVILY as George Meldrum had paid for his rash act, both in money and in mental suffering, he was nevertheless extremely thankful to have got off so easily, and so also were his friends on his account.

There was only one part of the procedure with which every respectable person in Keckleton disagreed—it was considered a great shame to have permitted Birdie Briggs to profit so largely by the affair.

Why, the scoundrel's gains by thieving, cheating, and dealing would not, it was believed, amount to twenty pounds in a whole year; and to award him that sum for a thrashing, which had not been shown to have unfitted him for the prosecution of his calling for a couple of days, was certainly preposterous. Even Birdie's own neighbours and special chums in the Gutter Wynd considered him a lucky fellow; and "Foxy Smart" declared that he for one would willingly allow himself to be beaten black and blue any day of the week for a "fiver."

It is not, however, the purpose of this narrative to censure or criticise the deliverance of the Bench; its duty has been discharged in recording the results of the prosecution, with which—a very unusual circumstance—both the principals who figured in the trial were well satisfied.

But George Meldrum returned to his father's house with a heavy feeling of disgrace upon him. His own desire was to leave the country and commence a different life in one of the British colonies; but this wish was strongly combatted by his parents. They had married rather late in life, George was their only son, and they had always accustomed themselves to regard him as the comforter of their declining years.

Apart from any feeling of affection, which was necessarily strong, Mr Meldrum had built up during long years of thrift and shrewd dealing a business of which he was proud, and which he believed it would be sheer madness for his son to throw at his heels. Many were the reasons urged by George to bring his parents over to his views, but they were all ineffectual. His mother declared that

it would break her heart to part with him; and his father terminated every discussion in nearly the same words: "No, no, George, my lad; you stick by the old business, and this mistake of yours will soon be forgotten."

For several weeks, however, George would have nothing to do with the business. He would show himself neither at kirk nor market, nor even treat with a customer at the mills. The only occupation he would engage in during this period was the mechanical and monotonous one of "dryster" in the meal mill. From early morn till late at night he sought no other means of filling up his time than to feed the kiln ingle with the "sids," or husks of oats, and hold communion with his own moody thoughts.

Mr Meldrum began to be seriously alarmed at the lethargic condition into which his son had fallen, and not being ignorant of his partiality for Rosa Lee, he thought it might be well to seek her influence in the emergency. He did not desire his son to marry for several years at any rate, and he contemplated his making a match with a young lady, if not of a higher social position, at least richer in worldly means than Rosa; but as George had never shown special regard for any other girl, he resolved to endeavour to bring the young folks together, and leave the result to fortune.

With this view he called upon Mrs Lee, and introduced the subject, but found her disinclined to listen to any proposal which might involve her daughter in an engagement with George Meldrum. She even refused to let Rosa herself be consulted, affirming that she knew her daughter's mind in relation to George perfectly well, and she would not have its present serenity disturbed. She and her daughter had both liked George, she said, and they were extremely sorry for him and his parents at the present juncture; but he had brought his troubles upon himself, and must abide the consequences.

Mr Meldrum was a man proud of his wealth and the consideration it had gained him, and he felt much hurt at the manner in which Mrs Lee received his advances; his son was very near to his heart, however, and he made yet one more effort on his behalf. He said he believed that Rosa Lee was the only individual in the world who could raise George out of the Slough of Despond into which he had fallen, and that, as a father, he now invoked her influence.

Mrs Lee replied somewhat dryly that she also had a parent's feelings, and not until George's real progress in amendment was more apparent, as well as abject grief for his grave misdemeanour, could she believe that it would be prudent to countenance any intercourse between him and her daughter.

Even this rebuff did not silence the afflicted father. He pleaded that he should be permitted to take such a message to George as might encourage him to hope that by-and-by Rosa would see him again on the old footing.

But not even this much would Mrs Lee grant. If George desired to correspond at all with her daughter, it must be after he had proved by two or three years of steady, correct life that he was worthy to be trusted—should events take that turn—with a well-principled girl's happiness. George must work out his own reformation, and show that he was man enough to do so, before she would give any countenance to Rosa's having anything to say to him.

After this Mr Meldrum saw that nothing more need be said, and so he took his departure, very greatly disappointed and offended with Mrs Lee for the high-handed manner in which he thought she had treated him.

As he had nothing of a cheering nature to communicate to George, he thought it best to remain silent as to his visit to Mrs Lee. Thus, for the present, the matter ended

so far as the Lees were concerned, and depression and gloom prevailed in the family at Mickle Mills.

But moral elevation and light were destined to spring from a different and less likely source.

George Meldrum was not intellectual in his tastes. He voted literary conversation a "bore"; he did not care for books; he had read for pleasure only a few books of travel and one or two romances, in which scenes of active life and startling adventure predominated; poetry he considered incomprehensible rant, and, with the sole exception of some of the stock pieces in school collections, he had read none. He was not, indeed, dull or naturally slow of comprehension in any direction to which he chose to turn his attention, but he had not been reared in a home in which intellectual pursuits of a literary character were valued, and therefore he had never acquired a liking for them.

"Give the boy a good business education—I intend to take him into my own trade," had been Mr Meldrum's instructions to all his son's teachers, and the consequence was that George's education had been of a hard, matter-of-fact, practical sort. When he was sent "to be smartened up a bit" in Mr M'Kinlay's office, he soon obtained credit for methodic habits and great business capacity; but in leisure hours athletic exercises had been his chief amusement, and being a fine, healthy, strong-limbed, well-built fellow, full of animal life and spirits, he greatly shone among his athletic associates, and was proud of the praises his physical prowess brought him. But, in his reverse, when he abandoned for the time alike gymnastics and business, and had no mental resources to fall back upon, life appeared to him dreary indeed.

Rosa Lee, who had occupied so large a share of his thoughts since his return to reside at Mickle Mills, had become a source of bitterness and increased depression

to him, for he knew that he had almost won her, and now he believed that he had forfeited her esteem and regard for ever. The very newspapers and trade circulars had ceased to interest him, and thus he would sit by the kiln ingle in a moping, miserable way, without any other distraction than arose from feeding the fire.

It was on one of those melancholy days that one of the millers put the *Keckleton Chronicle* into his hands. He took the paper in a listless manner, and let it hang for a considerable time over his knees without looking at it. At last his eye wandered to the sheet, and rested on "Our Poets' Corner," where it was detained by a "heading" in unusual type—"Moral Didactics, by Walter Montgomery." He had always sneered at "Our Poets' Corner," and he had now no more intention of reading than ever; but he could not comprehend what "Moral Didactics" meant, for the expression conveyed no more significance to him than if it had been written in the Greek or Hebrew language.

Possibly it was to try to find out the meaning that he commenced to read the short poem. Once begun, he read on. The meaning of the verses seemed to lie pretty much on the surface at any rate. The following lines fairly arrested his attention:—

"If thou fallest into error—
Errors with our race are rife—
Ne'er be hopeless of amendment,
Gird thy loins for noble life.

From thy face to heaven unswerving
Chase despondent fears away;
Press the work that lieth nearest,
God will bring the brighter day."

George read and re-read these lines, and they struck him as being very applicable to his own case. Had they been written with a personal intention? He would

certainly have resented the liberty if he had thought that the poet was directing his admonitions at him personally; but on perusing the whole poem with close attention to its meaning, he could find nothing to confirm such an opinion.

The intention of the interpolation in Dr Drubber's "Sermon to the Young" had been quite obvious, and the self-esteem of the Meldrums had been so much wounded by it that they had talked of leaving the parish church. George had not gone to hear Dr Drubber since the date of the assault, and believed he should never enter his church door again.

Now, Dr Drubber was a very worthy man, and not wanting in genuine sensibility. What he had done was done under a strong sense of duty, and he was pained to think that his remarks had only given offence where they had been intended to improve. Indeed, as matters had turned out, the Doctor was sincerely vexed that he had gone to the depths of his repertory and fished up that particular sermon, and furnished it with a sort of direct personal application; but, at any rate, he could lay the soothing unction to his soul that his intentions had been good. Moreover, the Doctor only bided his time to make a strenuous effort to bring the errant sheep back to his fold.

But to return to George Meldrum and the lines which had arrested his attention. The oftener he perused those lines, the more completely did he think them applicable to himself, and the more he felt strengthened and encouraged by them. He endeavoured to fix them in his mind; but he was unaccustomed to such work, and this was no easy task for him. Nevertheless, it was something to occupy his mind, and he persevered till success rewarded his exertions. That very afternoon he gave up the duties of "dryster" to the ordinary hand,

and went to tea with his father and mother in the usual way. Mr Meldrum introduced some business matter at the table, and George at once entered with him upon the discussion of it as on former occasions, for he felt that his father's business was the work which lay nearest to him at the time.

Immediately after tea Dr Drubber called upon them. Mr Meldrum met him at first rather dryly, but George advanced several paces to take the Doctor's proffered hand, and shook it so cordially that a tear actually welled up into the old man's eye—whether from the pain of the pressure or the unexpected cordiality of the welcome need not be too curiously determined. In a few minutes the Doctor found himself on the old familiar footing in the family, and in his most genial manner disclosed the object of his visit. This, he remarked, was not entirely disinterested. He had called to endeavour to enlist the services of George in a little undertaking which he had been scheming in connection more especially with the young men of his parish. Outdoor amusements and games had, he said, very properly employed a great part of the young men's leisure during the summer months; but the good weather was nearly at end for the season, and he was very desirous to provide for the development and improvement of their minds during the winter and early spring months. He had got toward this end the promise of able literary assistance from various quarters; but, not being quite so active himself as he had been once, he stood sorely in need of some energetic, clear-headed young man possessing good business qualifications, and, if possible, having influence among the young men, to aid him in arranging and conducting the business part of the matter in relation to the classes, lectures, and entertainments of various kinds contemplated; and it had occurred to him that George was the very person

to discharge the duties of such a post, provided he would undertake them.

Here, George thought, was another work lying near to his hand, and therefore, very greatly to his father's amazement, he replied that he himself did not know of anything to prevent his accepting the post, of which the Doctor was good enough to think him worthy, provided his father did not object; at the same time, he would like to take a day or two to consider the proposal.

At any other time Mr Meldrum might have raised objections on the score of the demands which would be made upon George's time, but under the present circumstances he was only too glad to see his son's reviving interest in any branch of active life, and accordingly he said at once that George had his most cordial permission to be guided by his own inclination and judgment.

So it was agreed that George should call and give his final answer at the manse some evening during the course of the week. And so Dr Drubber departed, radiant with pleasure at the success of his visit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE night after the events related in our last chapter, George Meldrum went to bed a happier man than he had been at any time since he struck the first blow at Birdie Briggs, nay, since anger against Birdie on account of the terriers began to dominate his mind. Not that he was yet out of the Slough of Despond, but he believed that in hard, active, honest work he had found the first step of the ascending ladder. If he had laid bare his heart to any skilled theologian or severe pietist, or even if had made Mrs Lee his spiritual confessor at this time,

he would certainly have been told that he was still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity," and would have been directed to seek comfort and strength in a more orthodox way; but George was in a great measure left to work out his own reformation, and he set about it in the manner that occurred to him without research. Pious parents would doubtless have directed him to his Bible, to books written professedly to teach righteousness, to his minister, and to similar recognised means of grace; but the Meldrums were not pious people, and it must be admitted that religion had really little practical effect on their life. They were fairly just and moral in their transactions, and moderately regular in their attention to the outward forms and ordinances of religion, and that was all.

It need not be wondered at, therefore, that George, groping blindly about in the thick darkness of his trouble, found his first light in an unusual place, and followed its cheering rays when they appeared to him. Dr Drubber had felt that he might have done more harm than good by a too early interference; and while he was casting about in his own mind for likely ways and means, till longer time had slipt past than he had intended, light had arrived from another quarter whence he would never have dreamt of—for he certainly would never have anticipated that his work was to be begun and to be made easier for him by an obscure poet in the columns of the *Keckleton Chronicle*. And yet the worthy man would scarcely have denied, that God may just as well speak to the heart of man through the words of the poet or the preacher in the present day, as He spoke in former times.

But be this as it may, when numerous difficulties and disagreeable contingencies presented themselves to George Meldrum's mind, in connection with the work which would

likely fall to his hand, were he to accept Dr Drubber's proposal, he turned again to the poem from which he had drawn his first inspiration and impulse towards a higher life, and reading—

> "Take the work that lieth nearest,
> There is danger in delay;
> Look for light where light is clearest,
> God Himself will show the way,"

he hesitated no longer. The post had not yet received a name, the duties had not yet definitely shaped themselves; but be that or these what they might, George went to the manse the very next evening prepared to undertake them.

Dr Drubber was at home, and was delighted at George's prompt decision. The Doctor was considered a little stiff and pompous generally, but he could come down off the stilts when he liked; and that night he wished to be as genial as he could with George Meldrum, for he had a sincere desire to do him good, and, as has been remarked already, he felt that he had been mistaken in his first attempt, and earnestly wished to rectify the error.

Yes, the Doctor was reckoned "a proud man," and not altogether undeservedly; nor was he without a reasonable excuse for his pride. He had been appointed to the parish church of Keckleton when quite a young man, had maintained his position as sole minister of the parish against all intruders through the whole of the Disruption struggle and subsequently, until a preaching station in connection with the Free Church had been established, and ultimately grown into a permanency in an outlying part of Keckleton. He had gained some repute, and also the right to append D.D. to his name, on account of his prowess as a debater on ecclesiastical questions.

He had been looked up to by most of his brethren in the Presbytery, and approached with something very like awe by the humbler members of his congregation; and all this had made him somewhat overbearing and self-sufficient in his prime; but as he advanced in years he increased in humility, although the name and a good deal of the bearing of the arrogant man remained with him, even when he had reached within a couple of years of the allotted threescore and ten.

It was also something similar with the Doctor's sermons—the longer he preached the more he strove for simplicity; but his parishioners never lost the opinion that their minister was treating them to mightily learned discourses, which would be beyond the comprehension of individuals condemned to listen from week to week to a less reputed preacher.

A single anecdote may be quoted illustrative of the opinion just mentioned. An elderly woman of Keckleton had been sent on a message to a lady of good position and education in the county town. The lady chanced to mention that she was coming to stay during the summer months in the parish of Keckleton, and remarked, "I dare say, Betty, I shall attend Dr Drubber's church."

Betty looked a little disconcerted, and then she said, "That's a pity for ye, mem—a very great pity!"

"Why so, Betty?" asked the lady. "I have heard say that Dr Drubber is a learned man and a good preacher."

"'Deed he's a' that, mem; but ye'll be clean lost wi' 'im a' the same, mem, for he's owre learned for strangers."

The lady knew that Betty could barely spell through a chapter in the New Testament, so she asked, "Do you attend the Doctor, Betty?"

"'Deed do I, mem," answered Betty.

"And do you understand his sermons?" was the next question.

"Finely that, mem," was Betty's answer; "but then I've been sittin' under him for twenty years, and ye've been sittin' under that fushionless bodie Macdrumlie."

Dear old Dr Drubber! He rises before us in imagination, with his tall, upright form, his hair white with the snows of seventy winters, his lofty forehead furrowed with the stiff tussle of many ecclesiastical battles; and his face rubicund and radiant with the memories of victories achieved—possibly owing a little of its fulness and roseate hue to generous living, for the Doctor was a believer in the *sana mens in sano corpore*, and could use the good gifts of God without abusing them.

He was, indeed, for a long period a militant son of the Church, but in his latter years he hung his armour on the wall, and did battle less with sectaries, less with theologies, less with ecclesiastical politics, than with human wickedness. And now he strove less to drive than to lead the erring back to virtue and religion. His zeal in his Great Master's service was not less strong, but its strength was put forth with a quieter consciousness of power Whoever doubted his high commission, he did not, and as little did he doubt that the strength requisite to execute it would be granted to him from Above.

So he went on his way rejoicing, and beaming with a benign satisfaction in the good which he was being enabled to accomplish. A jovial man he was withal, when it pleased him to win by worldly attributes and acquirements; full of anecdotes and historiettes of his parish, which he jestingly called "Keckletoniana."

Were it our purpose, we could fill volumes with his "Keckletoniana;" but we have digressed much too far already—Dr Drubber having really no more to do with the action of our present story than in so far as he was helpful in the regeneration of our hero, if we may venture to call George Meldrum by that title.

On the evening in question the Doctor brought himself down to the level of George's intellectual platform, and explained to him all his plans with regard to the newly-projected institution—the name of which he fixed as the "Keckleton Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society."

He had turned various names over in his mind, and although it would have been quite easy to have struck out something more original, yet he saw no good in throwing away a suitable appellation because it had been used before. He meant the Society to be what its name implied. The young men should, as far as practicable, try to improve each other. A principal feature would be the evening classes, and for each of which he hoped to find suitable teachers among the young men themselves. George, for example, he considered admirably adapted to take charge of a class for writing and accounts; but even more valuable would his services be, as an example and an authority, to bring in and form into orderly habits the wilder spirits of the Athletic Club, over whom he was well known to possess much influence. There would also be a good deal to do in getting arrangements made for lectures and entertainments, and in making and carrying out these George would be most useful.

The Doctor did not appear to know, and most probably he was really ignorant of the fact, that George had been struck off the list of vice-presidents of the Athletic Club. George did not think it necessary to say anything on the subject, for he was beginning to take a brighter view of the future, and did not doubt but that he might regain his influence. Finally, the Doctor made George stay to supper with Mrs Drubber and himself, and thereafter sent him home hopeful and comparatively happy.

The Mutual Improvement Society proved a success, to which George Meldrum did actually contribute no inconsiderable share. At the closing entertainment, the

Doctor publicly acknowledged his own indebtedness to George, and complimented him upon the tact and success with which he had managed the class put under his care, and also pointed out how much the Society had been benefited by his active and intelligent participation in the management of its affairs.

Rosa Lee was at the entertainment, and she thought she never saw George Meldrum look so handsome. It might have been that the sufferings he had come through, and the more intellectual pursuits to which he had been devoting himself, had refined and improved his features. At any rate, Rosa thought his face beautiful, and her heart went out to him as it had never done before

CHAPTER VII.

YES, Rosa Lee's heart went out to George Meldrum as it had never done before, and she had no power to recall it; but what was most unfortunate for her, George gave back no visible sign, no audible response, no trace whatever of being animated by a similar affection. He saw Rosa come into the meeting. He politely showed her, in his official capacity, to a seat in a good part of the schoolroom in which the entertainment took place. He got her a programme, and he did precisely as much for others round about her. He shook hands with her and bade her good-night after all the performances were concluded, but he gave no perceptible pressure to her hand which could be taken to have a sweet secret meaning in it, and he made no offer to see her home. In fact, he left her to be borne out amidst the throng without exhibiting the remotest concern, while he was standing not far off, either bidding persons, towards whom he could feel only indifference,

good-night, or giving directions about the removing or replacing of certain articles of school furniture, or similar unimportant matters, which could quite well, she thought, have been left over for the schoolmaster to see to in the morning. Worst of all, he had smiles and civil words for everybody, but no special recognition or attention for Rosa Lee. If he had been distinctively cold or pointedly neglectful she would have been better pleased, than to have been prized by him as she had at one time been, and now to be classed with the rest of his indifferent acquaintances. If he had been sullen or disdainful, she thought, she could have done something to win him back; but there was nothing to be done save to blot him from her remembrance, if she could, since she had evidently become to him neither more nor less than any other woman, and she could not think of him save as the man paramount to all other men whom she knew.

Rosa had agreed with her mother, when the assault upon Birdie Briggs was committed, that a man who had been in vulgar strife with a dweller in the Gutter Wynd —a man who had a coarse pugilistic encounter with a bird-catcher, and beyond ordinary disreputable even for that—a man who had been seized and handcuffed by the police, committed to the lock-up and lodged in the jail, who had stood in the dock, accused and found guilty of a grave criminal charge, and severely reprimanded, solemnly warned, and sentenced to a heavy penalty by an eminently lenient judge—could never more be looked upon in the light of a possible husband by her, and she had gone so far against George Meldrum in his degradation as voluntarily to express the hope that he would never dare to approach her in the character of a lover again.

All that took place not much more than six months ago; and now she had been pleased enough to shake hands with him, to regret that the ceremony had not

been performed with more emphasis on his part, and to be going home grieved and depressed because he had not offered to accompany her, and because she thought that his love for her had passed away. But then Rosa made this excuse for herself, that George had become rehabilitated in respectability, elevated and beautified by leading a better life. Yes, that was it; he had sinned and suffered, repented, and now stood respectable and respected. And even the very last "Moral Didactic" of the Keckleton poet concluded with these lines—

"If thy brother shall have stumbled,
Stretch thy hand to raise him up;
If he stand ashamed and humbled,
Mix no wormwood in his cup;
Add no aloes of reproaches,
Rather dry the sinner's tear—
Gilded coronets and coaches
In the eyes Above less dear."

How could she chide her own heart for forgiving George Meldrum, when everybody else had forgotten his misdemeanour? or how could it help loving him, clothed as he was and beautified by the moral regeneration which he had palpably undergone?

Oh, what a joy and delight would be hers, if he would only put it in her power to extract from his cup any drops or dregs of wormwood which might yet remain, or to wipe away any repentant tear which might yet up-well from his eyes.

When she reached home Rosa was eloquent in praise of George to her mother, although she took what care she could to conceal her own renewed interest in him.

"It was such a good thing for himself," she said, "and it would be such a pleasure to his parents that he had changed so much for the better."

Mrs Lee agreed with her daughter, and expressed a hope that the improvement would continue; but she

quoted the passage of Scripture about the seed which fell upon stony places where there was not much earth. Then she endeavoured to turn the conversation upon a certain young banker who had been following Rosa for some time with his attentions; but Rosa all at once became so tired and sleepy that she had to "kiss good-night."

Yet when she went to her bedroom it was not to sleep. She threw herself into an easy chair, and had "a good cry" to commence with, and then she sat awake more than half the night, thinking about George Meldrum's good qualities, and his handsome face and figure, and regretting that she had stood so far aloof from him in the time of his trouble.

When she did fall asleep it was to dream of George Meldrum, and she saw him in her dream beautiful as an angel of light; but when she went up to speak to him he was suddenly changed to a marble statue, still beautiful, indeed, but gazing at her with a stony stare, and with the same fixed smile upon his lips. She thought she took his hand in hers, and it chilled her to the bones. Then she awoke and went shivering to bed in the grey dawn of the morning, and was ill and unable to rise to breakfast when the "grandfather's clock" in the passage struck eight.

Then her mother came in to see why she was not getting up, and finding her hot and feverish, treated her for a cold, which, no doubt, she had caught, though not exactly in the same way as her mother said—namely, in consequence of her having gone to the entertainment without a certain wrap which her mother had thought she ought to put round her. She never told her mother about falling asleep in the chair, but meekly promised not to be so giddy and thoughtless in time to come.

Rosa's cold did not keep her in bed many days, but she had a fever of the heart which remained to burn and

torment her. After she got about again she continued to hear a good deal about George, and all she heard was to his credit. She was informed that he was becoming a model man of business, in consequence of his intelligence and steady habits. No grain merchant in the district equalled him in early and extensive information as to the state of the southern and foreign markets, and in regularity and temperance he was everything that could be wished. Though he had taken no pledge to abstain from intoxicating liquors, and did not, in fact, altogether abstain, yet he drank little or nothing when business necessitated his entering a public-house.

Rosa endeavoured to harden her heart against George, by picturing him to herself as a mere money-grubber who would never marry anybody, or marry only after he had passed his prime, and required rather a nurse for his old age than a faithful wife to share his love. But do what she could he was constantly in her thoughts.

As for George, he seemed neither to seek her nor to shun her; and they met more frequently than, as their relations to each other now stood, Rosa desired. Rosa could hardly account for the fact of their meeting each other so frequently. She was very sure such occasions were not of her seeking, and they seemed to give George neither pleasure, pain, nor embarrassment — he simply behaved towards her as if she had only been an ordinary acquaintance. Even if he met her alone in her walks, he would, if in a hurry, merely raise his hat and pass on, or if sauntering at leisure, shake hands with her and then leave her, as if she troubled the current of his being in no conceivable way.

Such meetings, on the other hand, caused the cruelest sufferings to Rosa. Fain, fain would she have said or done something to endeavour to awaken in George the old feeling if possible, but maidenly modesty forbade.

She could only hide her love, and let it gnaw her heart in secret. She was not without trying various means to divert her thoughts from the one all-absorbing topic. She tried reading, systematic study of the poets, music, and the closest application to work in the hours set apart for that purpose; but all in vain to bring any surcease of sorrow for the lost lover, who was not dead, nor far away, but who now appeared to love her no more. She tried to school her heart to love the young banker, who was really a comely and an excellent youth, and seemed to worship the very ground upon which she trod, but her heart obstinately rebelled against all her teaching.

Poor Rosa Lee! She had not at this time even the slender distraction of the "Keckleton Poet's" impractical love epistles to fall back on, for he had returned from the South with a load of German books, and had plunged over head and ears into the study of Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and German transcendentalism; so that even the "Moral Didactics" had now disappeared entirely from the "Poets' Corner" of the *Keckleton Chronicle.*

Next Rosa obtained the permission of her mother to invite, on a visit of several weeks duration, her old friend Mary Moffat, from Heather Brae. Mary was a sprightly brunette, and one of the best of companions for driving "dull care away" that Rosa could have chosen; only she did not dare to let her lively friend know the secret of her unfortunate love, otherwise she would certainly have taken some means to let George Meldrum know of it, in the hope of bringing about a better understanding between them, and of that poor Rosa had now lost all hope. So when Miss Moffat's visit had come to an end Rosa still felt the gnawing heartache tormenting her with increased acuteness.

She became unusually sad and grave, and spent many, many hours in lonely weeping. She sincerely desired to

die; but death does not often come to the young and the vigorous merely because they have been crossed in love.

Mrs Lee had not been unobservant of her daughter's depression; but now she questioned her more closely than ever before as to the cause of it.

Poor Rosa gave evasive answers as long as she could, but finally burst into tears and exclaimed, "Dear mother, you must let me go away altogether from Keckleton!"

"My darling child," answered Mrs Lee, deeply moved, "why do you desire to go away from your home and from me, to whom you are dearer than the light of day?"

"O mother! darling mother!" cried Rosa, flinging herself into her mother's arms in a paroxysm of grief, "can you forgive me? In spite of all that you and I agreed upon regarding George Meldrum, I still love him! I cannot pluck him from my heart, and I am constantly meeting him."

Here Mrs Lee uttered a distressed "Oh!"

But Rosa went on—"Not meeting him by appointment, mother, but only by the merest chances. Nothing ever passes between us but the coldest, most distant civilities. Neither he nor I can prevent those chance meetings from happening, and they are indescribably painful to me. O mother! I shall die if I stay much longer here, or I shall go out of my senses—I know—I feel that I shall."

"My poor child! my dear, darling Rosa! I never dreamt of this," said Mrs Lee, pressing her daughter passionately to her breast.

Then for several minutes not a word was uttered by either, but mother and daughter mingled their sobs and silent tears together.

When the violence of their emotion had somewhat subsided, they sat down together side by side upon a sofa, and conversed more calmly on the subject. So great was Mrs Lee's affection for her daughter, that she would have

sunk her distrust of George Meldrum's reformation, and abased her own pride so far as to have gone to Mr Meldrum and revealed to him the state of her daughter's feelings for his son; but although Rosa knew nothing about the interview which had taken place between her mother and Mr Meldrum soon after the trial, she would not hear of anything being done to bring George and herself together.

"No, no, mother!" she said, "that must not be; George no longer cares for me. His heart is cold, dead as a stone to me."

Mrs Lee said that her daughter might be mistaken; but Rosa interrupted her by again breaking passionately out with the assurance that George had ceased to love her, and that his heart was dead as a stone to her.

"There is no remedy, none, save to let me go away from Keckleton till George is married, or till I shall somehow have driven him out of my heart, if that can ever be done while it beats with life!"

"My daughter, my daughter!" cried Mrs Lee, with a great and bitter cry, "I cannot part with you!"

"Then, in God's name, mother," moaned Rosa, "sell the business and let us both go away together."

Mrs Lee threw herself down on the sofa, and writhing in her agony, gasped—

"O Rosa! I cannot, I cannot go away from Keckleton. Here was I born and brought up, and here was I wooed and won by your beloved father. At Silver Dell Cottage did we spend our brief years of wedded love; in that cottage were you born, and in that cottage did my darling husband die; in our town's churchyard his body lies, and there also must mine be buried!"

"Mother, mother!" cried Rosa, "forgive me; I was selfish, most unkind to think of such a thing—how much more so, to propose it. Neither of us shall go the one from

the other till death part us! I will stay by you, and die by you; you will bury me in my father's grave, and when you die our dust shall mingle together."

"No, no, my darling!" said Mrs Lee more calmly, "that must not be. You shall go away from me for a time, and only for a time; God will give me strength to support the separation, and you will return to me recovered or resigned."

And so ended this distressing scene, and thus it was decided that Rosa Lee should leave Keckleton.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE were many more conversations and discussions between Mrs Lee and Rosa regarding their contemplated separation, but none of a character so painful to either of them as that recorded in the previous chapter; for the mother made up her mind that absence from Keckleton, for however brief a space, was absolutely essential for the re-establishment of her daughter's mental peace.

That point once determined upon, parent and child mutually strengthened each other, and both set about preparations for the inevitable more calmly. It may be remembered that Mrs Lee had an uncle, a brother of her father's, in business in Glasgow. It may also be remembered that that uncle failed, and ruined "Mercer Miller" of Keckleton. Out of the wreck of the Glasgow business, however, Mrs Lee's cousin (the son of the uncle who had brought her father to ruin) established a smaller concern, and carried it on with success, in Argyle Street in the same city. Mr Miller, the younger, had kept up an uninterrupted correspondence with his cousin, Mrs Lee, and his advice and assistance in selecting and purchasing

suitable goods for her customers had proved of very great service to her.

It was by Mr Miller's advice that Mrs Lee commenced to supply the materials for the dresses and other articles of ladies' attire, which she had only made up at first, and the new branch had proved by far the most lucrative part of the business.

It was thus naturally to Mr Miller that application was now made on Rosa's account, and a letter was very soon received from that gentlemen to the effect that Rosa had better come through to Glasgow, and Mr Miller would either employ her himself, or, if he had not a suitable post for her in his own establishment, he would not be long in meeting with one for her elsewhere. The letter went on to say that, pending Miss Lee's settlement in a situation to her mind, or, for that matter, as long as she liked, she would be most welcome to take up her abode with her relatives. Mrs Miller and her family—for Mr Miller was married and had several grown-up daughters—would be delighted to have her as their guest.

This arrangement being gladly accepted, matters began to wear a more cheerful and brighter aspect with the Lees, and the preparations for Rosa's departure were diligently pushed forward.

There was no necessity in the altered circumstances to make any undesirable revelations to prying customers, or neighbours, or friends at Keckleton; for what could appear more likely or befitting than that Rosa Lee should go to reside for a time with her relatives in the south, in order to get further insight into the various branches of her business, seeing her mother had not been regularly trained to it?

But when the time actually arrived when it became necessary for mother and daughter to part, the separation was a painful ordeal for them both. Perhaps it was Rosa

who showed the greater distress. She ventured again to revert to the idea of her mother selling the business, and, if not breaking up her connection with Keckleton entirely, at least coming on long visits to wherever Rosa might finally happen to settle down.

Mrs Lee replied that she was thankful to say she was in a position to sell the business, or retire from the active management of it when she saw fit; but as for leaving Keckleton, that proposal was one she should never, she believed, see her way to entertain.

"No, Rosa, my love," said she. "The young sapling is easily transplanted, and often flourishes better in new soil; but the gnarled trunk, which has struck its roots deep, and for long years entwined all their tendrils around congenial objects, cannot safely be uprooted from its accustomed place and replanted in distant earth. It soon languishes and dies in the foreign soil and atmosphere, in spite of all the cultivator's care. So also would it be with me, Rosa: I could not now endure to leave Keckleton—I could not tear asunder the familiar associations. My heartstrings would break with them. No, no, my love; you must endeavour to overcome your trouble, and return to me; or, if your heart should become bound by new ties, and you should learn to flourish at a distance, with God's help I must learn to support your absence."

And so, with many tears and kisses mixed between, mother and daughter separated.

The reception Rosa Lee met with from her relatives in Glasgow was in every way equal to her anticipations, and after looking about her for a few days, and visiting a few of the "lions" of the city in company with one of her cousins, a good-looking and amiable young girl, about a year younger than herself, she became an active, useful, and by-and-by trusted employé in Mr Miller's business establishment.

It will be easily understood that Mrs Lee missed the companionship of her daughter very much; but she was a self-reliant woman, who had for many years been accustomed to stand chiefly unaided, at least by human support, in the battle of life, and so she made the best of the circumstances.

Wanting the active assistance of Rosa, her business engrossed the most of her time; but still she found in spare moments sufficient leisure to keep Rosa well posted up in all that was going on at home, as well as in whatever was likely to interest her elsewhere, at Keckleton.

Rosa, on her part, found it one of the chief pleasures of her new life to write long letters to her mother, and it was very comforting to Mrs Lee that, as time wore on, those letters became more and more cheerful in tone, and that the references to what was known between them as Rosa's "sore trouble" began to diminish in number.

Those letters were on both sides a great solace to the two women; but it will not be necessary to go further into their details than is required to show the progress of events as bearing on the fortunes of those concerning whom this narrative treats.

Rosa had been in Glasgow only about four months, when one of her letters informed her mother that she was getting to be "as merry as a cricket." She was constantly adding to her stock of acquaintances, and frequently went out with Bella Miller after business hours. Bella was one of the sweetest tempered girls she ever knew, and very good-looking—not just quite a beauty, but very near it. They often went in company to the house of one of Bella's married sisters, a Mrs Donaldson, who was fond of music and a good player. Bella was not a good player, and did not care much for music; but she was a dear, good, clever little darling all the same. Rosa herself was improving her own playing under the kind help of Mrs Donaldson.

There were much finer pianos at Mr Miller's than her old-fashioned thing at home, which, if ever she got rich enough, should be superannuated. Mr Miller liked, he said, to have Scottish music played for him at night. He said it was much more stirring than English or foreign pieces, though he generally fell asleep all the same. She had known him ask for a particular set of strathspeys, and when she had played them in her best style and thought she had an admiring listener, and waited for the "Thank you very much, Rosa," which frequently rewarded her performances, she would sit some minutes with her hands on the keys, and then observing that Mr Miller had slipped away to the Land of Nod, she would leave the piano and let him enjoy his "forty winks," which, if not interrupted, would often last a minute each. Mrs Miller and Bella would often tease "papa" about the "forty winks set to music;" but he was very good-natured, and always joined in the laugh against himself.

Mrs Miller, who was kindness itself, paid her no end of compliments upon her playing, which was nothing great after all. Mrs Miller said that she would have to act as chief musician at the Christmas, or rather New-Year's party which Mr Miller always gave his "people." That meant those employed behind the counters, and a pretty large selection from the workrooms. She would have to practise during almost all her spare hours till the "party," but that would be no punishment to her. There were two pianos at Mr Miller's, both capital ones. She was told she might always go to the one in the drawing-room when there was too much conversation or distraction in the parlour. She had "the run" of the whole house, and a nice little room to herself besides. Music had been a very great solace to her. As the harp in the hands of David drove away the evil spirit from Saul, so the piano under her own hands drove away her "sore trouble," when

it came upon her. That was much less frequently now. She thought it would soon leave her altogether if she were not to return to Keckleton; but she did so long to see her own dear, darling mother; and yet she dared not return to Keckleton to stay. When she did come, it could be only on a flying visit, and that even not yet.

Mrs Lee's letters were certainly less gushing; but, as has been stated already, they kept Rosa amply informed regarding all the doings at Keckleton.

Briefly summarising their contents on till the end of the sixth month after Rosa's departure, they informed her, amongst other things, that Mr Best, the young banker already alluded to, had got a capital appointment in the City of Glasgow Bank, and having called upon Mrs Lee to say good-bye previous to his departure, had begged to be favoured with Rosa's address, which had been furnished him. He would most likely call upon Rosa, and her mother hoped he would meet with at least a kind reception, for he was a very worthy young man.

Mrs Lee herself had never felt the business so heavy and wearing, and she was seriously thinking of either selling it or taking in an active partner, and retiring to a cottage in the outskirts of Keckleton. The latter plan, she believed, would be the more profitable; and if Rosa could not see her way to return to her before next winter, she would most probably carry it out.

Dr Drubber's Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society had been as great a success as it had been the previous winter. Mr Montgomery, "the Keckleton poet," opened the session with a lecture on some sort of German philosophy—transcendental, or some such name. The Doctor had praised the lecture very highly, on proposing a vote of thanks to the lecturer; but, unfortunately, nobody save the Doctor appeared to have made "head or tail of it."

Mr Montgomery called before he went south with his pupil, and sent "ten thousand good wishes to Miss Lee," which ought to have been delivered some months ago.

Mary Moffat had got a great sum of money from a rich uncle, who had not been heard of for a great many years, but who had suddenly appeared at Heather Brae some months ago, and before he went away south again had left bills for several thousands with Mr M'Kinlay for Mary's use; and given him (Mr M'Kinlay) instructions to pay over a yearly allowance of several hundreds to his niece till his death, or her own marriage, when he would make provision for an enormous sum to be paid her—Mrs Lee could not recollect how much, but a very large sum indeed had been mentioned. Mrs Lee had all this from Miss Moffat's own lips, for she had called, and did not seem to be one bit prouder, but rather humbler, in consequence of her rare good fortune.

No word, however, was said about George Meldrum, because mother and daughter had agreed that his name was to remain a tabooed subject between them.

It was about the latter end of April or beginning of May that Rosa received a letter from Keckleton which greatly distressed and alarmed her, and determined her to return home with the least possible delay. The nature of the letter and its ultimate results will best be deferred to a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE letter which had so greatly alarmed Rosa Lee, and abruptly recalled her to Keckleton, was from Miss Gill, the general superintendent of Mrs Lee's business, who had been in her employment for a good many years.

Miss Gill wrote that Mrs Lee had been out of sorts for several weeks, though still out and in to the several departments of the business as usual; but that two days previous to date of letter Mrs Lee had been confined to her own room, and only that day had consented to let Dr Watson be sent for. Dr Watson intimated that there were grave symptoms apparent—great physical prostration and derangement of the whole system. There might be no immediate danger, but Mrs Lee would require to be kept remarkably quiet and carefully nursed, and possibly she might not get very soon well, even although the strictest attention were paid to his orders. Mrs Lee had, moreover, with much reluctance, permitted her to write to Miss Lee, desiring only the fact of her being out of sorts to be mentioned; but the writer had taken the liberty to go beyond instructions, because she thought Miss Lee ought to be put in possession of all the facts, in order that there might be no unpleasant reflections if anything more serious were to occur.

It will not be wondered at that Rosa was greatly disquieted and distressed by the intelligence conveyed in Miss Gill's letter, and hastened home as speedily as was possible by the travelling conveniences of the period, which were not so complete as they have been made since that time.

Rosa was glad to find her mother no worse than she had anticipated, nor even so ill, for she had alarmed and distressed herself with the most gloomy forebodings from the receipt of the letter till her arms were around her mother at home.

Mrs Lee was extremely delighted to see her daughter, although she had not expected her, for Rosa had not written, knowing perfectly well that she herself would reach home before any postal delivery of which she could take advantage.

Unfortunately the agitation of the unexpected meeting was too much for Mrs Lee in her weak, nervous condition, and it made her so feverish and poorly that Rosa had to get her to bed and send for Dr Watson, who happily was at home and returned with the messenger. The Doctor administered a soothing draught, under the influence of which the patient enjoyed a long sleep, and awoke much refreshed and invigorated.

During his visit Dr Watson had entered at length into the nature and cause of Mrs Lee's illness, informing Rosa that her mother must have been overtaxing her energies for a considerable period. If circumstances would at all admit, he said, Mrs Lee would recover much more speedily if she were away altogether from her business, and went to some retired country retreat at first, and later on, when the summer weather arrived and the patient's strength increased, took up her residence at some quiet seaside place. The patient, in the meantime, must in any case be kept perfectly free from worry and anxiety of every kind, because she was suffering from a prostration of the whole system and a nervous derangement which could be removed only by absolute rest and good nursing—two remedies which were more requisite to Mrs Lee's restoration to health than all the medicines in the pharmacopœia.

In a careful and cheery way Rosa told her mother what the Doctor had said and directed.

"And now, mother," said she, smilingly, "you are no longer to command your daughter, but obey her and be very submissive to all her orders. Listen, therefore, to all my intentions with respect to you while you are an invalid. You are to keep your mind perfectly easy on every subject, and let your clever daughter Rosa manage you and for you. She has for nearly six months had the almost absolute rule over a whole roomful of giddy

girls, and surely she may be entrusted with the management of one prudent, dear, amiable, invalided old lady—well, not old lady exactly—'fair lady leaving youth in shady distance,' as our Keckleton poet somewhere says. First, then, as to the business. Miss Gill and I will make that all right. The details of our arrangements will be communicated to you when you are better able to bear them. In the next place, I am going out this very afternoon, while you are in a refreshing sleep, to look for a quiet country retreat for you and your nurse—that is myself. This retreat must be recommended by several qualifications before it can command my approbation. It must be well sheltered from the north and east winds; it must also be dry and airy; and it must be near to Keckleton, in order that it may fall within the range of Dr Watson's ordinary visiting rounds, and to make it no great trouble to fetch, on short notice, anything which the dear patient may require or fancy—for she may possibly be a little whimsical in her desires, and her wishes must be gratified so long as they do not run directly contrary to the Doctor's orders. The retreat need not be very extensive in size, nor very elegantly furnished—a couple of modest rooms will do. The servants need not be very numerous, for the 'fair lady leaving youth in shady distance' will be waited upon by Rosa Lee, whom she will find to be the most dutiful of maids and careful of nurses. The service otherwise may not require a single additional domestic, but it must be cleanly, cheerful, and ready, and these are the qualifications which will be insisted upon. Well, I think I know already where all those requirements can be met with at an expense quite within the limits of the purse of the lady who has to be provided for—namely, at the house of Mr Thomson, the florist and market gardener, situated on the sunny side of Hazel Wood."

Mrs Lee smiled, and told Rosa that she had acquired a rare "gift of the gab" since she went to Glasgow; then she drew her towards herself, fondled her, kissed her, and promised a ready compliance with all her high commands. In the course of a few days Mrs Lee was comfortably installed in apartments at "Gardener Thomson's," and was sensibly improving.

About six weeks after, when the warmer weather had fairly set in, another move was made to the quiet seaside village of Cozy Creek. The accommodation at the Creek was not quite so comfortable as at Gardener Thomson's, but that, Rosa declared, was a recommendation rather than otherwise.

"Her patient," she said, in her mock heroic style, "was getting too delicate and dainty in her tastes and habits. She must cease, however, to consider herself a debilitated member of the 'upper ten,' and condescend to 'rough it a bit.' If she were too comfortable within doors, she would get too idle and luxurious. Being no longer an invalid, it was her nurse's intention to have her out upon the shining sands, or upon the rocky heights, inhaling vigour from the pure sea breezes as often as the wind and weather would permit."

The result of Rosa's management was that she had her mother back at Keckleton, with a new lease of life and good looks, before the leaves began to wane upon the trees.

Alas for poor Rosa Lee! She had nursed her mother into health and strength again; but almost as soon as her task was accomplished, her own "sore trouble" returned upon her.

She had not met George Meldrum since her return from Glasgow, and while she was anxious about her mother he had been nearly absent from her thoughts; but that care ceasing to press, George was fated to resume

his former place in poor Rosa's mind. His influence was again awakened in this wise. Photography was not then what it has now become, but still it was capable, in skilled hands, of reproducing a well-known face or figure with little less power, and the pure atmosphere of Keckleton was very favourable to the operations of the art.

Now it happened that one of the best of the Scottish artists in that line had come down from Edinburgh on a summer visit to Keckleton, and was producing work which was being greatly admired and talked about.

Rosa, among others, heard of his superior skill, and obtained her mother's consent that they should get their *cartes de visites* taken by him, so that if they should be separated again, each might possess an artificial resemblance of the other. They were photographed accordingly, and Rosa called one day to get the finished portraits. The photographer had on a table in his studio a number of specimen *cartes* in an album, which, with the view of extending his reputation, he invited Rosa to examine. Rosa naturally turned to recent work, and came upon a portrait of George Meldrum, finished in the photographer's best style. She was fascinated with it, and delayed so long over that particular *carte*, that the photographer, who was standing by her, no doubt thinking that she was charmed with his skill, observed, as if in answer to her evident admiration—

"Yes, Miss; a most successful likeness that. It has come out beautifully. But the subject was capital—could not be beat, in fact. We always retain specimens, Miss; and when I place your *carte* in the album, that one and it will be the two handsomest portraits I have produced."

Rosa answered never a word. She blushed crimson, mechanically received the portraits, and came away with the old fever of the heart rekindled and flaming more fiercely than ever.

For days and nights it burned and burned, till poor Rosa became sick of body as well as of mind.

Her mother, more observant than on a former occasion, soon noticed her struggle, and said, "My poor darling, I fear your 'sore trouble' has returned."

Rosa laid her head upon her mother's shoulder, and answered with a sorrow too sad for tears—"O mother! I must go away again."

Mrs Lee shed no tear either. She simply kissed her daughter's burning brow, and sighed, "God's will be done!"

That evening Rosa went out to take a look of the old familiar places. She was very depressed, for she thought she could never return to Keckleton after she went away this time, and would see them no more.

She wandered out in the way of Silver Dell Cottage, for although Mickle Mills was near it, yet one last look of her birthplace, and the house in which her beloved father died, on whose strong arm she and her mother might now have leaned—one last look she must have.

"And her mother? Oh! her dear, dear mother! Could she go away and leave her mother alone, perhaps to overwork herself, to overtax mind and body, and fall ill again with a more serious illness?"

Overpowered by her feelings, she sat down upon a log by the roadside. She heard steps approaching. She raised her head, and through the mist of her tears saw George Meldrum within a few paces of her.

To conceal her agitation was beyond her strength. She rose up hastily, staggered forward a few paces, drew back, and sat down again to prevent herself from falling. By this time she was pale as death, and trembling like an aspen.

George Meldrum took a step or two past her, halted irresolute, turned back, and stood before her.

"Miss Lee, are you ill?" he asked. Then receiving no answer, he asked again with an accent which fell on Rosa's ear with indescribable tenderness, "Rosa, is there anything the matter with you?"

Rosa made a supreme effort over her feelings, looked up, and answered, "Oh, it is nothing. Only a little faintness. It will soon pass off. Indeed, it has almost gone. You need not wait. Never mind me."

And Rosa smiled a sweet, sad smile; George gazed upon her for a minute or two; their eyes met, and the electric thrill of love vibrated to their mutual hearts. In a moment George was, not at Rosa's feet, but at her side, with his arm round her waist, and pouring into her ear such a tale of shame, of a sense of degradation, of suffering, of despair, of reviving hopes, of resolution to rise to a better, nobler life, and be at least worthy of her—such a tale of a fervent love and strong, which had never known abatement, but had been concealed and restrained till it could be offered with a less crushing sense of inequality—such a tale of love, in short, as only an impassioned lover in some such position as that of George Meldrum could have uttered.

And as for Rosa? She leant her head on her lover's shoulder, and simply said, "And I too—I also have loved and suffered."

Then there was a fresh outburst of feeling and bitter self-accusations on George's part, which Rosa checked, and unwinding his arm, she rose to depart; for were they not seated by the side of a road which, if not very public, was still occasionally used in the evenings by strolling lovers? And Rosa returned home, but not unattended; and that night there was joy both in Mrs Lee's house and at Mickle Mills.

CHAPTER X.

THE engagement between George Meldrum and Rosa Lee, which had been so frequently proposed but never entered into, was now eagerly contracted with earnestly plighted vows on both sides; but the marriage was not to be immediate. Not a few preliminaries had, in the first place, to be attended to; one of those, and perhaps the principal, was the preparation of a suitable house for George Meldrum and his bride.

George's parents would have willingly enough retired from Mickle Mills, and set free the dwelling-house for the young couple. Mickle Mills House was a substantial and commodious enough building, according to the ideas which prevailed at the time when it had been erected; but it did not come up to the notions of modern convenience, and did not meet George Meldrum's views of what was required for the lodgment of such a treasure as Rosa Lee. At the same time, he knew perfectly that no modern mansion, however well contrived, would ever satisfy his father and mother so completely as the one to which they had been so many years of their lives accustomed.

Rosa, too, declared to George that she would not submit to be hurried. There were, she roguishly averred, many things to be thought of before she married him. She must first settle her dear mother comfortably near where she was to be planted herself; and now that she had secured him hard and fast, she would like to enjoy a little untrammelled flirtation, as it would be her last chance. For the latter purpose she knew a perfectly safe man, namely, Mr Walter Montgomery, who possessed, as he himself admitted, an elastic heart capable of affording room for any number of fair faces. Pending

all these arrangements, there was no reason, she added, why George and she should not see each other to their heart's content, and try one another's temper almost as much as if they were man and wife.

George, on his part, declared he would pay her out for all unnecessary delays and naughty speeches; but in the meantime, having caught the bird, he must set about getting ready a cage large enough not to make the pretty creature greatly miss its freedom, and elegant enough not to cause it to regret any former perch.

It happened that George had, a little before this, made several very happy hits in commerce, for he had been far-seeing enough to anticipate that the complications which ultimately led to the Crimean War would tell immensely on the price of grain; and he had consequently induced his father to buy largely while prices were low.

George was to receive a commission as purchaser, and, moreover, to pocket every penny above ten per cent. on sales. War was every day becoming more imminent; grain had risen enormously; and the Meldrums were realising high profits, a very considerable part of which was placed to George's credit.

He was, therefore, quite in a position to gratify his own wishes in regard to a house, without reference to his father, who, however, would not have been inclined to confine him within too narrow limits. Houses were plentiful enough at Keckleton, but George made up his mind to build one, and, if possible, on his own property. Luckily, while casting about in his own mind whether to buy outright, or only to feu a site out of several which were offered him, the little property of Silver Dell was announced for sale. The extent was stated to be about eighty acres, partly arable and partly woodland. Mr M'Kinlay was the agent; and the upset price for it was put down at £4000.

It was believed, however, in Keckleton that the upset price would not be reached. George could not advance the full sum for the purchase himself, and leave sufficient for building and furnishing, without crippling himself in business; but he knew how to raise the extra capital. Within twelve months he might make it in trade; or if not, he could borrow it at a fair percentage, or his father would lend it him free of charge.

He did not, therefore, let the property slip through his fingers from delay. Within twenty-four hours after he knew that Silver Dell was in the market, he was in Mr M'Kinlay's office, and had offered the sum of £4000 —one-half cash down, and the rest in bills at three, six and nine months. Within a week the offer was accepted, and in three days more the plans and specifications for "Silver Dell House" were in active preparation.

The property of Silver Dell included the cottage in which Rosa Lee had been born.

"Why should she not make her first married home there, and vacate the cottage to her mother when the house was ready for her reception?"

The proposal was George's. It was Mrs Lee who accepted it in a perfect whirlwind of delight, putting her hand upon her daughter's lips when she began to make objections on the ground that she would thus be in for an "earlier marriage than she had bargained for."

Silver Dell Cottage was therefore set in order, and the preparations were urged forward, so that the marriage was fixed for a date exactly three months from that of the engagement.

Of course Rosa had to write to Glasgow, and explain at great length to her darling Bella the turn that her fortunes had taken. And Bella wrote back at similar length, expressing the great joy and regret of the whole House of Miller.

There was joy that Rosa was about to be married to the man of her choice, and such a nice young man, too, that they were all in love with him from Rosa's very description of him; and there was profound regret that darling Rosa, whom both papa and mamma declared that they had learnt to love as if she were their own child, and whom Bella had for ever enshrined in her heart of hearts, had to leave them. They all regretted the loss of Rosa, she had been such an acquisition! Papa said he had never had any one to play to him like Rosa since Ellen (Mrs Donaldson) was married; and mamma and she (Bella) had made him quite cross by making the innocent remark that his "forty winks" had never been so long and profound since Rosa had ceased to set them to music.

"We would all like to be present at your wedding," the letter went on to say, "but papa could not well get away from his business so long; and mamma, being a very bad traveller, could not undertake the journey. It is the same with Mr Donaldson as with papa; and, of course, in the case of Mrs Donaldson, with baby and the other children on her hands, the thing is altogether out of the question. But there is one who will be present if life and health remain, and railways and coaches continue to run, and that is your ever-attached and loving Bella."

Then followed a P. S. nearly as long as the letter itself. It ran nearly thus:—

"What a lovely bride you will make in your long snowy veil and your orange blossoms, you darling. By the way, you will have no more use for Mr Best now, and I have half a mind to adopt him. I mentioned in a former letter that he called to ask for you a day or two after you left, when your mother was ill. Mamma was out, and it fell to me to see him, which I did for your sake, in my most attractive manner. He looked so distressed and so woe-begone when he learnt that you

had returned to Keckleton, and the painful reason which caused you to leave us, that I thought it only my duty to be as kind to him as words would permit, and invite him to call again to hear your news. He thanked me most politely, and would be so happy to call again to learn how your poor mother was progressing. Well, he has kept calling and calling ever since that time, and I am sure the touching interest he has shown during more than four months in your mother's health would have melted your heart to pity and love if you had not wholly given it up to another. When I got the letter telling me of your engagement to Mr Meldrum, I broke the news to Mr Best as carefully as I could, and was quite prepared for a scene. I was afraid he would break his heart on the spot, go into fits, or something dreadful, knowing as I do what a dear, delightful darling is lost to him for ever. But he bore up wonderfully well. I offered him my smelling bottle; he took it, and has never since returned it. When I asked how he would be able to bear the shock, he said it was rather too great for one, but two might support it. He thought he might struggle on to live even after your wedding if I would lend him a helping hand: 'just this dear little hand,' said the impudent fellow, seizing and kissing one of my paws. Of course I was quite indignant, and showed him to the door, where he actually would have repeated the offence if I had not been very severe with him. Notwithstanding this rudeness, and my displeasure in consequence of it, he was back again in a few nights; for papa banks at the 'City of Glasgow,' and so my fine gentleman has contrived to pick up an acquaintance with him, and I do believe fishes for invitations to call, and comes at the very moment when he knows papa will be having his 'forty winks,' and mamma will either be following the same evil example, or watching that no one breaks in upon papa's slumbers, while this poor

child is making believe to prosecute her musical studies in the drawing-room. However this may be, and in spite of his impudence, Mr Best is a fine, handsome, merry fellow, and now that you have no more use for him, I may—— But good-bye and God bless you, my own darling Rosa."

Well, time flew over George Meldrum and Rosa Lee on his swiftest wings, and brought with him the happy wedding-day. A fair, bright, beautiful day it was; and if any tears were shed on it, by any member of the gay bridal party, they were tears of joy and gratitude.

Miss Miller and Miss Moffat were the bridesmaids, and Mr Walter Montgomery was the bridegroom's best man. Wedding presents had been so liberally bestowed upon the beauteous bride, that we must leave their enumeration and description to the imagination of the reader.

Dr Drubber performed the marriage ceremony, and afterwards proposed in glowing terms the health of the newly married couple at a sumptuous banquet that was given at Mickle Mills in honour of the occasion; and the "Keckleton Poet" recited an epithalamium which is still preserved in the archives of the Meldrums, and remembered at Keckleton as the grandest effort of his muse.

It only remains to be added that, by the time Silver Dell House was ready for occupation, there was being danced at the cottage on her grandmother's knee a second Rosa, whose infantile graces gave strong promise that she would some day equal in beauty and attraction the first ROSE OF KECKLETON.

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