

THE SOLILOQUIST.

HE addressed no one. He took no one into his confidence. He was the supreme individualist. Not that he was a man without words. Far from it. Speech flowed from him in a quiet continuous stream. True, the sequence was at times checked by certain drifts and cross currents of thought. Taken as a whole, however, it had continuity and completeness. Any little pauses there were, were of that nature which but prepares the mind of the hearer for further thematic development.

He was bound for Paisley. So much we learned when he handed over his tuppence to the conductor. "I lost my railway ticket," he explained, "I put it in my waiskit pocket, an' when I went into my waiskit pocket to fin' it, it wisna there; an' that's no' the only funny thing that's happened the day." This indicated at once that the mind behind it was one of singular coherence. Having had his say, he settled down and we all thought he was going to sleep. Not so. After a few preliminary mumblings and an abortive attempt to whistle a tune during which the muscles of his lips seemed to collapse, he spoke. I may say his speech lacked edge, not that it was blunt; but it had a slight turgidness which, unfortunately, I cannot transcribe. The important thing, however, is that he spoke.

"Man was made to murn—ay, that's true!—to murn—eh, Rabbie? Noo if man was made to murn, whit about weemen? Nane o' them hae dealt wi' that—naw!

—they're frightened—frightened! For 'conscience doth make cowards o' us all.'

"I wunner whit my wee crimson-tippit floo'er'll say to me the nicht!—'Better to bide at the close mooth than on the hoosetaps wi' a brawlin' wumman'—that's whit I say. No' that she's exactly brawlin'—naw, fair do, I widna say that. But she can pit doon her fit. 'Like dew on the gowan lyin' is the fa' o' her fairy feet'—I don't think. That's just a sang, an' of coorse nae man can be held responsible for whit he says about a lassie in a sang, especially when she's got the glammers on him.

"'My pretty Jane' before yer merrit, an' 'Here you!' efter yer merrit. As the sang says, 'Kind, kind and gentle is she'—but the question is—*is* she? That's the rub, as Shakespeare says. A' thae things should be put in the past tense, an' then there wid be nae regrets. It's the regrets that knocks the stuffin' oot o' ye; I ken. 'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.' That's Rabbie again. He kent tae. We baith kent.

"But it's no' man's inhumanity I'm thinkin' about the noo. Ye can aye gie a man a batter on the lug. A wumman's different—'Tis thy voice, my gentle Mary'—only her name's no' Mary. Mary's are a' saft. If ye want yin that'll staun' up to ye, day in, day oot, tak' a Jean. Mind ye, there's something in that; I never kent a mi-mou'd Jean yet. Rabbie kent that tae. 'Baith day and nicht my fancy's flicht is ever wi' ma Jean.' It couldna be itherwise; they'll no' leave ye alane. Talk about a limpit on a rock or ivy on a tree—they're simply no' in it. I ken.

"Ay, there's a lot in a name. I've studied it.

Maggies are sonsy, Annies are sully, Maries are saft, Betties are guid managers, Bellas are hailykit, Jessies are sapsies, but Jeans!—they're either throughither or sherp, an' sometimes they're baith—"There's nocht but care on every haun"—Of coorse there's exceptions to a' rules, but the rule staun's a' the same.

" 'Whit signifies the life o' man?' Nothin'! I tell ye—sheep! slaves! ca' us whit ye like. 'It's fine to get up in the mornin', but it's finer to lie in yer bed.' You try it. There's the wee nippy vice at yer ear—'Come on, noo—did ye no' hear the alarum?' Alarum! If there's wan neck I wid like to thraw it's the man's that invented alarums. Some bloomin' foreigner! Naw, Rabbie, ye were wrang—a man's no' a man for a' that; a man's a slave, an' the alarum clock is jist like the hangman's whup—'to keep the wretch in order.'

"Between alarum clocks an' human syreens I think the sooner we men haun' in oor checks the better. Oh Liberty—Liberty! That's funny when ye come to think about it. Liberty! It soonds weel, but it's a' a tim can. The sacred name o' Liberty! I like that. They dinna ken my snowy-breasted pearl. *Peril's* richt. 'They call her the gentle maiden wherever she takes her way.' Ah weel, mebbe I'm owre hard; they hae their ain t'dae; an' they've warm he'rts if they've nippy tongues. A' the same, 'man was made to murn'—that's the truest word Rabbie ever said.

"Is this Paisley Cross? My! Gie's a haun' up Jake, canny noo—that's it!"