

*ROBIN RIGG AND THE MINISTER.*

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ROBIN RIGG was a West of Scotland ploughman chiel, who was in farm service in Upper Clydesdale. Robin was an

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honest, plain-going, unsophisticated man, and, although neither a scholar nor a theologian, he was none the less a consistent doer of his daily duty in an humble but serviceable way. In point of fact, Robin, honest man, never meddled with, nor even consented to listen to, discussed theology, nor church creed and government, excepting, perhaps, on a Saturday night, when the "clachan yill" was in his head. For Robin was a real typical Scotchman, and took to the discussion of theology when "fou" as naturally as a retriever dog takes to the water. But even then Robin Rigg was often badly at sea on this subject, and was in the habit of roundly declaring that "kirk theology was for a' the worl' jist like a bit o' teuch girsle—wersh in the mouth, an' unco ill to chowe."

Anyhow, Robin, honest man, never made much real progress in the knowledge of things spiritual, as exemplified in the text of the Shorter Catechism and the written law of Moses. He hated technical points and confusing details, but went in heartily for facts as being something that he could get "a guid hand o', an' see clearly wi' his ain twa e'en." For instance, he could admire the rig-an'-fur of a new-ploughed field, he knew the points of a horse or a bullock, he could tell how many handles a plough had, and was a pretty safe authority on the weather, but he was not at all up in the text of the Ten Commandments, nor in the obligations attached to church membership. The tone of his mind, in fact, was the reverse of evangelical, and on Sundays, when he gaed to the kirk, he sat in his pew and simply "tholed" the sermon as he would have done a dull toothache—with this difference, that while the toothache kept him painfully awake, the sermon commonly sent him asleep, for which reason Robin cannily thought the minister's sermon much the easier to "thole."

But Robin was now a full twelvemonth married, and a certain interesting event, not by any means unusual in the

circumstances, had quite recently happened at his humble fireside, which necessitated on his part a regular attendance at church for a few Sundays at least, with a prospective private call at the minister's house in addition. A wee stranger had taken possession of his goodwife's knee, and, acting under the shrewd direction of his better-half, Robin had been putting in a preliminary attendance at the kirk for the past two Sunday afternoons. The interesting event was quite a new experience to Robin, and he was naturally much concerned and put about as to how he would be best able to fulfil in a proper and becoming manner all the necessary civil and religious obligations it entailed upon him. And the amount of exacting and trying work he had to face and go through in connection with the birth, registration, and church baptism of that same small six-weeks-old son and heir, fairly amazed him, and in the end all but completely dumfounded him. Why, the whole subject, small as it was, was tied round and round with no end of formal red tape, and was officially stamped with equally red and equally formal impressions of sealing wax.

"Faith," thought Robin to himself, "it's a fine thing for the circulation o' the bluid to be a faither! It's no six weeks since I got a son an' heir, an' I've been on the happy trot efter yae thing an' anither ever since."

In the first place, the event was not a week old when Robin, the happy father, had to trudge into the town to buy a second-hand cradle. And a particularly happy man was Robin Rigg, as you may easily conceive, when carrying home that same night that very important article of domestic house furniture—a cradle. And what a cradle! He had purchased a bargain, and nothing less. The cradle he had purchased was a capacious and most substantial-looking article. In other family circles it had done veteran service in the domestic line for at least a couple of generations back. He had purchased it for three-and-sixpence,

cash down, and the article, in the lump, was about value for twice the purchase-money in old wood. Talk about rockin' twins in a cradle! Why, that same old cradle had ample accommodation for triplets—aye, or even "quadrupeds," as honest Robin sincerely put it. The cradle secured, the happy father had next to register the child's birth. This done, he was next advised by his better-half to make strict inquiry as to the best and safest method of "gettin' the pock on the wean's airm," which, once accomplished, put many squally, sleepless nights in beautiful prospect for poor Robin, with the purchase of some soothing powders, and a baby's rattle in addition!

But by far the most momentous and trying obligation which Robin was called upon to face was the ordinance of Christian baptism. The mere "haudin' up o' the bairn" in the church gave him no concern whatever, that being a question simply of physical strength. And he had lots of that. He could easily "haud up" twins, triplets, or even "quadrupeds" for that part of it. But the preliminary examination by the minister was what gave honest Robin the shakers. So long as folk sensibly kept to horse and kye, the crops, and the weather, he was right enough; but bring up the Law of Moses, or the equally confusing text of the Ten Commandments, and honest Robin Rigg was at once floored, felled, and flabbergasted. But it was absolutely imperative that the child should be baptized in the regular way, at whatever personal cost. Mrs. Rigg firmly insisted on the kittle point, and there was no escape from the inevitable.

"Noo, Robin," said his worthy wife one afternoon, "ye'll snod yersel' up a bit, an' tak' a stap along to the minister's an' arrange about the baptism o' the wean; for the bairn's noo haill six weeks auld, an's a braw, sonsie wean at the age, although I say't that maybe shoodna."

"An' what are we to ca't, then?" asked Robin, scratching at his puzzled head.

"Oh, what better could we dae than jist to ca't efter its ain worthy faither," answered the wife.

At this handsome compliment honest Robin smiled from ear to ear, till his unsophisticated face assumed the open expression of a well-boiled potato.

"Wee Robin! wee Robin Rigg!" muttered the delighted parent, "what a nice, naitural, nackie bit name for the wee mannie! Ay, ay, wife; I'll e'en gang an' see the minister about the maitter this very nicht. But d'ye ken, wife," added Robin in a sort of frightened underbreath, "I'm a wee fear't for some o' the ticklish questions he may ask me; the Commandments frichten me a'thegither."

"Oh, man, ye needna stammer owre that simple maitter; jist tell him there's ten o' them an' be dune wi't."

"Ten o' them," mechanically repeated Robin, counting over his ten fingers, "ten o' them; a' richt, I'll try an' mind that."

Within half an hour Robin was on the road to the minister's, his weather-beaten face specially washed for the occasion, and about a whole pennyworth of hair oil rubbed into the roots of his rather toozie hair to "mak' it lie doon kin' o' Christian-like," as Robin phrased it. When nearing the manse door Robin took a sudden fit of the shakers, and was so badly plucked of spirit that he was forced to go back a couple of hundred yards to the village inn for a refreshment. Arrived there, he called for "a gless o' the very best," in a burning hurry—like a man anxious to catch a train.

"Ye're in a fell hurry, Robin," remarked the innkeeper.

"Haud yer tongue; I'm gaun up to the minister's, an' I'm in sair need o' a nerve-steadyin' dram."

"Gaun up to the minister's, Robin? What's the maitter? A's richt at hame, I hope?"

“Oh, ay; a’s richt enough at hame,” replied Robin; “in fact, I may truly say that things are fair bloomin’ owre-bye; I’m gaun to see the minister about a baptism.”

“Whew!” whistled the innkeeper, “is that a’?”

“What! is’t no plenty?”

“Plenty! man, Robin, that’s but a sma’ maitter to be in a way about; I’ve been thirteen times on that same errand mysel’, nae less!”

“Thirteen times!” exclaimed Robin, in blank astonishment. “Faith, lad, ye’ve had your kail thro’ the week! Thirteen times! let’s see what that means. It means thirteen bottles o’ whisky, thirteen cheeses, thirteen pocks on the airm, thirteen visits to the minister, thirteen public appearances in the kirk, and thirteen cradles! Faith, my man, ye’ll ken a’ about the maitter then?” added Robin, scratching his perplexed head.

“Ken about what, Robin?”

“Oh, the answering o’ the minister’s questions. He’s new to the parish, ye ken, an’ I’m no certain hoo he may tackle me. Besides, I’m a fair ‘frost’ in Scriptor.”

“Tuts, man, that’s an easy task, Robin; it’s a’ as plain as a pike staff, an’s as easy to answer as—‘Whaur was Moses when the can’le gaed oot?’ If ye but ken the simple Commandments ye’ll dae brawly.”

“Ay, but that’s jist whaur the shae grups; ye see, I’m no deid sure o’ their number, although I think oor wife tell’t me there were jist nate ten, if I’m no in error there?”

“Oh, that’s but a sma’ maitter to hing in doubt owre,” said the innkeeper, with a sly laugh; “some say there’s ten, an’ some mak’ oot there’s eleven, but gie him plenty o’ them, Robin, an’ ye’re as safe’s the bank.”

This was so far good, Robin thought, but it failed to fully reassure h’m. The innkeeper’s facetious words, however, along with his inspiring whisky, had a certain screwing-up effect on his wavering mind. So up to the door of the manse he

boldly went, and was presently standing uncovered in the presence of the veritable minister! After a cordial greeting the reverend gentleman very naturally inquired of Robin as to the immediate purpose of his visit.

"It's—it's—it's about oor bairn," faltered out Robin, twirling his bonnet between his hands.

"Oh! your child; nothing serious the matter, I hope?"

"No, no," said Robin, with a proud alteration of the countenance, "the bairn's only six weeks auld next Wednesday night, an' I may tell you he was never in better health in his life. The mistress has sent me alang to arrange wi' ye about the baptism."

"Oh! a baptism, is it?" said the minister. "I'm very glad to find you here on such a happy occasion. Kindly be seated for a little; you know it is necessary that we should have a little conversation, and that I should put a few simple questions to you before undertaking to baptise your child."

"Weel, then, minister, ye'll bargain no to gie's ony ticklers," put in Robin, distractedly working his bonnet in his hands.

"On the contrary, my good man; I'll try to be as plain and simple as I possibly can. Of course, you know the text of the Mosaic Decalogue?"

"The what, did you say, minister?" exclaimed honest Robin with a start.

"The Decalogue—the written law of Moses, you know?"

"If, eh—if, eh—if a conversation on the weather, or on the craps, wad pit the job by, I could meet ye hauf-way there, minister," said Robin.

"Oh, nonsense! nonsense!" said the minister. "Of course you know how many commandments there are?"

Robin scratched his head in deep perplexity. The awful suddenness of the question seemed to knock his memory all to pieces. How many commandments really were there?



he asked himself. His wife said ten; some said eleven; while the innkeeper said—"Gie him plenty o' them." Resolving the kittle question in his mind for a few moments, he at length faltered out—

"You were askin' me, minister—you were, I say, askin' me. Wad ye kindly repeat that last question, minister, as slowly and as distinctly as ye can, so that I may be able to grup the various heids o't?"

"Oh! it's simply how many commandments are there, my dear, good man?"

Robin tried to think out the question, but his memory had taken leg-bail. Remembering, however, the innkeeper's advice to "gie him plenty o' them," he stood in doubt for a moment, wondering what generous figure he might best venture on, with credit to himself and satisfaction to the minister. Perceiving his perplexity, the minister once more said, by way of encouragement—

"The question, my good man, is a perfectly simple one; it's just this: How many commandments are there?"

"Sixteen!" shouted Robin.

The minister fell back in astonishment and concern.

"Robin, my good man," he said, "you are not, I fear, quite prepared to have your child baptised."

"Oh! quite prepared, minister; I've a bottle o' whisky an' a twa-stane cheese laid by against the occasion."

"No, no, my good man; I now perceive more clearly than ever that you are not fit to hold up your child for baptism."

"What, minister! me no' fit to haud up the bairn! Man, I could haud up a young calf"—(keeping his hands see-sawing up and down in the air.) "No haud up a wean! Man, I could haud up twins, triplets, or even quadrupeds!"

"Oh, deplorable! deplorable!" sighed the dumfounded minister. "You must go home, my dear man, and consult



your good-wife on the matter, and I'll look in on you to-morrow night, when I hope to find you better prepared for examination."

This said, the minister retired to the privacy of his study with great precipitancy, while honest Robin, thinking he had asserted his "preparedness" in proper style, set off for home.

"Weel, Robin, hoo did you succeed wi' the minister?" was the very first question put to him by his worthy wife.

"Oh, wha could succeed wi' yon learned auld buffer? He fairly knock't the breath oot o' me wi' the first question," answered Robin.

"An' whit was that, Robin?"

"Jist imagine! He wanted me to tell him, richt aff han' hoo mony commandments there are. There was a 'whussler' for ye!"

"Ye great gommeral! to stick at a trifling question like that. Didn't I tell ye plainly enough the number o' them? Siccan stupidity I never heard tell o'!"

"An' hoo mony dae you mak' them oot to be, since ye're sae very clever?" warmly retorted Robin.

"Jist ten, and neither less nor mair, as a'body weel kens."

"Ten, did ye say?—only ten? Ha, ha, ha! Woman, I offered him sixteen and he wadna look at them. But hark ye, guidwife, the minister's comin' roun' here the morn's night, so if ye mean to retain your Christian diploma, tak' a warnin' frae me. Avoid the rock I struck on, an' dinna ye offer the greedy auld gentleman less than twenty!"