CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER THE DOMINIE'S JURISDICTION—THE PARISH "DOLES."

"There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school;
A man severe he was, and stern to view—
I knew him well, and every truant knew."

NEXT to the auld hoose at hame, some of the most pleasant memories and incidents of our early days cluster round the village school. The village school of Aberlour in my time was taught by George Gillan. A man portly in person and "stern to view," he ruled us firmly and taught us well, considering the means that he had. A solitary map, as yellow as a duck's foot, and on which an outline of the eastern hemisphere was dimly visible, hung above the fireplace. As we took our turns at the fire upon a winter's day, that old map was scanned with eyes that never wearied of tracing its outlines. What a field lay within the four corners of that tattered map for our imaginations to revel in! There was one object that brought a realization of that far East very near to us. A mulatto, sent by his parents to be taught and cared for by the dominie, was an object of interest to us all. For his instruction an object was occasionally brought ben from the master's room to the school that never failed to draw all eyes towards it, namely, a large terrestrial globe. The first sight of a new planet could not have caused a greater sensation in the breast of an astronomer than did for the first time the sight of that revolving globe. On one occasion the dominie, pencil in hand, was eagerly tracing the outlines of continents and seas for the edification of the eastern mind, when he suddenly ceased, and, lifting the lid of his desk, took out from a recess "the muckle tag." He placed the pencil in the mulatto's hand, and ordered him to point out certain places upon the globe; but instead of doing this, he buried the fingers of his right hand, pencil and all, amongst the

long black curls that covered his head. In the twinkling of an eye "the muckle tag" was laid on the malutto's head. Like a man at the flail, the dominie poured blow upon blow, until the poor fellow howled like a wild beast. Every heart in the school trembled and stood still. Never before was such a sight seen. For the remainder of that day a subdued silence reigned in the school. The sight of the mulatto's ebony face, covered with tears and contorted with shame (for he had reached to man's estate), left a depressing feeling upon us all for many a day. "The muckle tag" was a ponderous strap of leather about two feet in length, with one end cut into fingers two or three inches long. To harden the points, they had been slightly singed in the fire. The dreaded instrument of torture lay like a serpent coiled up in one of the pigeon holes of the dominie's desk. It was only upon special occasions that it was brought out. "The little tag" lay all day upon the top of the desk, ready at any moment. Though small in size, it bit sharply. The fingers that are writing these lines seem now to tingle at the bare recollection of "the little tag!" But there lay within that desk a thing that was dreaded more than any instrument of corporal punishment. Ye modern imitators of "Old Noll," that despise symbols and emblems of authority and cry "Away with such baubles," you ought to have been present upon the one occasion that I ever saw "the wig put on!" The foundation of that emblem of moral disgrace was an old blue bonnet adorned with old clouts and thrums of various colours. When the "maister left the skweel" and went ben the hoose for a few minutes (a thing that he seldom did in school hours), I have known a boy bold enough to lift the lid of the desk and take a peep at "the wig." The only boy in my time that ever "wore the wig" was looked upon as a moral leper. Never shall I forget the occasion when it was "put on," or the sight of that boy as he stood before the assembled school. Girls and boys were alike surprised, and seemed in some measure to feel the shame of the culprit's position in bringing disgrace upon the school.

The periodical visits of the minister broke in upon the monotony of the long school hours. When he opened the door and strode in, the master left his desk to meet him. As he uttered his usual salutation, "Peace be here," every voice was hushed.

On one occasion the weather was very cold. On entering the door he looked at the box where the peats were kept. This box was exactly like a large coffin without a lid. It stood against the wall on the left hand side of the door, and during the winter every boy was expected to bring a peat and throw it into this box. The minister looked at the box and said, "I hope, Geordie, that a' yer scholars bring their peats. If I am nae mista'en, I saw the ither day mair than ae loon pass the Manse wi' nae peat at a'." Then looking round the school, he asked, "Is there ony boy or girl here that doesna bring their peat reg'lar?" There was no response to this appeal, but there was more than one loon in the school whose conscience smote him. The writer, owing to the meagre size of his father's peat stack, had often brought only a half. It was nothing but a moral necessity that compelled the writer to substitute a half peat for a whole one, for he well knew the slur of being "a half-peat loon." But even good sometimes resulted from the sympathy and fellow-feeling of "puir loons" that could only add half a peat to warm the school. The writer made the friendship of one whose memory he dwells upon with mingled feelings of pleasure and thankfulness—thankful that he was early taken home to his Father's house, where there are no distinctions of rich and poor. Early one morning, it was said, Lizzie Farquhar opened her door, and found upon the step a child wrapped in a blanket. She took in the little stranger, warmed and fed him, and went to the minister to tell her tale. He answered, "Ye maun keep him, Lizzie, till we try an' fin' oot fa he belangs tae." That secret was never found out, and he never left Lizzie's humble home till he was carried to the kirkyard in his early manhood.

It was in the humble dwelling of poor Lizzie that the writer first made acquaintance with the Tinker of Elstow. When he opened the yellow pages of that well-worn "Pilgrim's Progress," and read and re-read the story of poor Christian, he discovered the secret that made Willie A—— different from other boys. If any boy or girl should happen to read these pages, I would like to impress upon them that they possess in that book a treasure that they cannot fully estimate at its value. In my early days books were really a treasure, which only well-to-do people possessed.

The only educational adornment upon the walls of the village school was the old yellow map referred to. It hung there neither

for use nor ornament. The dry monotony of the system of teaching in my time contrasts in a striking manner with the teaching of the present day. The very name of the "Shorter Catechism" brings a feeling of depression. The writer felt that the boy who exultingly answered the minister that "he was past redemption and turned the leaf," was a boy to be envied.

Compared to the present time, the schoolmasters had few holidays. There was one afternoon's play given once a quarter that never failed to interest us. When we saw the master bring from his parlour two canvas shot-bags full of bawbees, we knew that the "puir fowk" were waiting to receive their "doles." When the minister entered with his usual salutation, we were dismissed for the day. On one occasion, the writer and a few other boys were "keepit in" to finish our tasks. The minister and the dominie counted out the bawbees of the different recipients into little piles upon the desk lid. Jenny Dean was the first to be called in. The minister saluted her with, "Weel, Jenny, I'm tauld that the last time ye got yer siller ye called at The Cottage an' bocht half-a-mutchkin, an' took it hame in a bottle." "Half-a-mutchkin! Deil burn their tongues oot that telt ye sic a lee! It was only an aul' gill for Willie fan he tak's a sair belly." "Weel, Jenny," retorted the minister, "puir fowks' siller mauna be spent in whisky." Old Lizzie Farquhar was the next to come in. "Afore I gi'e ye the siller, Lizzie, I maun speak tae ye about that loon that ye're bringin' up in sic a manner. They tell me ye clead him like a gentleman. I saw him at the kirk wi' a coat wi' tails till't. I thocht ye had mair sense, Lizzie, than dae sic a thing." "Weel, sir," replied Lizzie, "I got some 'oo in a present, an' I span't mysel', and ye ken, sir, Willie has gane tae learn tae be a tailor, an' the makin' costs naething. He's nae verra strong, an' he needs tae be weel happit." "Aye, aye, that's a' verra weel; but puir folks maun never set their heads ower high for fear o' a doonfa'," said the minister. Every successive recipient that got their bawbees got also a crumb of sage advice in one form or other. But to the credit of our parish, the recipients were few.