

lit
BENONI BLAKE, M.D.

Surgeon at Glenaldie

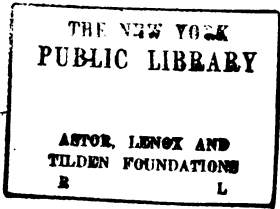
BY THE AUTHOR OF
"PEASANT LIFE IN THE NORTH."

TWO VOLUMES - 1

2v. in 1.

by.

M. MacLennan.



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PREFACE.

PEOPLE will ask, Who is this Dr. Blake, that he should have a book written about him, and that we should be expected to read it? Now that I have written the book, I confess the question embarrasses me. Not that I cannot tell who he is. I know him thoroughly, well as man may know his fellow. It is about the book and the reading of it I am troubled. Then, why have written it? Why not have satisfied myself, in the first place, as to the wisdom or unwisdom of writing it? Cannot you, O friends, bear with human weakness? You see I have written it.

And if you knew the man as I know him I should offer it to you without much misgiving. He is six feet two, and staid and goodly to look upon. He is a physician noted and trusted above all physicians for fifty miles around. He is a justicer of the peace, wise above ordinary justice. He is rich and well-endowed with the world's goods. He is full of excellent sense and of benevolent practice. To him the exalted lend a willing ear; the poor bless him as he passes by. In his great frame he carries about a heart ever so good and so kindly. For all he is I should not have troubled you, but for that heart of his.

I confess that I love the man; and may be thus the little things of his life (our lives in quiet corners like this are all made of little things) seem to me the more cho-

and rare. Beholding him now, in his present estate of goodness and wisdom and riches, notable in many ways and amply clothed with blessings, you could not guess at all that my friend's way to it lay through much that looked like folly, and some things that looked like disasters. Such, however, is the fact. The changes of circumstances and of feeling, which, step by step, led him to be the man he is, appear to me specially strange and interesting, no doubt, by force of contrast with his present wisdom and solidity; and of these changes is my book. What a medley of good and evil, of wisdom and folly, is the life of the best and wisest when taken in review! Nay, you may safely conclude that the goodness and wisdom of even the best and wisest have but slightly conduced to the fortunate issues of their lives.

But what can there have been in a life like my friend's to move to admiration, to laugh at, or to deplore? Well, I fear there was nothing to tell which, now that I have told it in the book, can appear at all uncommon or remarkable. You may guess, however, that in his life there have been some elements of pleasure at most times, and, with greater certainty, you may conclude that there must have been some sorrows for him, as for us all. Of course, there was some youthful love-making, which, by rule, should have been a happy thing. To encourage you to read, I tell you that my friend almost made a sad affair of it.

Religion, our great Scotch religion, is a power mighty and active among such Scotch people as I have had to write of. Something like a great passion it is, whose

workings you may follow, but the springs of which it were vain for me to seek to search out. It has been within my task to try to shew it as a living influence, as in quiet corners of our land you may find it any day.

To those who do not know my friend, I dare say I seem to make but a poor apology. Perhaps, it were wiser to have offered no apology at all excepting that love of my friend which filled me while I wrote the book. And were the book read in somewhat of the spirit in which it was written, with somewhat of sympathy with my friend and me, I do believe the reading would be found not unpleasant. Then I might hope for a smile when I shew you my wise friend acting sillily, and for pity when I tell you of his being in trouble. After all, that is the true mood for reading; and the true story

of even the least eventful life must have moral and some interest for all. Revolving these things, I find myself growing hopeful and I say—Farewell.

GLENALDIE, *May 1, 1871.*

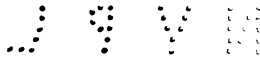


CHAPTER I.

THE Manse nestles pleasantly under the crags, which, pine-clad, abruptly rise and overshadow its little bit of lawn and privet - set shrubbery. At early morning, the sun strikes full on it, gilding and softening each rocky prominence above, giving warmth to the low-lying house, and splendour to its whitewashed walls, heating also the pine-roots in the fissures of the rocks, where the scantiness of the gravelly soil makes it a wonder that trees should grow at all. And, as befits the hardness and poverty in which they are rooted, the pines show no grace of outline, no beauty of colour-

ing. They are dark of hue, and often deformed, and their odour is sharp and acrid. Yet they are the gladness and beauty of the cliffs, to which they give a grace and softness such as no gaudy colouring could bestow, such as no regularity of stem or foliage could impart. While still it is early evening, the western crags, with their pine-deepened shadows, cast the Manse and its environings into gloom. And, gradually, the shadows stream over the valley, as far as the river's western bank, creep over the river too, and out over the plain beyond as the day wanes. The site is picturesque, suitable to foster an imagination full of conflicting fancies.

Yet, apart from its situation, the Manse is not of an inviting or interesting exterior. Its white walls are blank and spectral



cheered by no clinging, creeping, homelike ivy or other plant; their dead outline broken by no rustic porch or geranium-burdened bow-window. The rusty door stands open, cavern-like, in the wall. Buff-coloured blinds sin æsthetically on the narrow windows. The house lacks the engaging aspect of the cheerful home. And manses are usually such happy homes, such cheerful, tasteful homes, that surely there must be a reason for the cold and hardened aspect of this one.

I dare say that all homes adopt, more or less, the mental aspects of their inmates, as, certainly, the homes of the poor bespeak the hardness and dirt-begrimed poverty which oppress the lives of their occupants. In especial I should say, when a manse looks spectral and inhospitable, when its garden lies untilled, and its borders show no

flowers, that a sorrow encompasses its people. At least, so it was here. The Rev. Theophilus Blake had married, after long and heart-sick waiting till that home was his, the girl, then no longer a girl, whom in early college days he had loved with youthful fervour. He had brought her to reign in his manse, under the morning sun and evening shadows, in the fulness of peace and love,—a love fuller, although likewise calmer, through the triumphant patience, which, like Jacob's, had endured for at least seven years, having respect unto this recompense of reward. Then he was thirty years of age, his bride his junior by a year. And if at all his long probation had led him duly to define and measure the blessing, which was his when he brought his wife among his people, it certainly had not diminished

his sense of that blessing, nor abated the ardour of his affection. Indeed, he was not of the mould of man which is subject to changes. Tall and muscular, he was self-reliant, as strong men often are; but he was of an earnest and single mind, strongly affectionate, deeply impressed with the solemnity of the engagements which for so long had bound them twain together in patient waiting. Shut out also by his calling from many vicissitudes of feeling, and from many temptations of life, he had waited without change or fainting, until his day of reward had come. Then his wife was a well-spring of gladness to him, a gladness from warm and gentle sources, dimpling and sparkling in pleasant lights and ways, and welling over until life was very full of pleasure. And not of gladness only, for her greater experience

and fuller apprehension of life and feeling made her oftentimes a mouth and wisdom to him, and a lovable example to his flock. Thus she beautified his life and household, and was very dear to him. She stayed with him but a little while, just until he knew the richness of his happiness. Then she gave him a son; as he said, a son of sorrow; and she left him alone with his grief.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!” How often had he proclaimed it, heart-whole and unsympathetic, reaching not at all to the deep sadness of the meaning! Did the familiar words lighten his burden of grief or help him to bear it? Nay, I fear that words, even the wisest and most sanctified, but little salve newly-inflicted wounds. The minister, with all his knowledge of God

and faith in God, staggered under the weight of his affliction, recognising not that it was good for him to be afflicted. He turned away his face and heart from his child and brethren and people, contracted his sympathies into himself, and, hardening himself in silent woe, went mourning on his way of life and duty. The child he called Benoni—son of his pain and sorrow.

Some natures lack elasticity when thus stricken; and some, very lovable natures too, wilfully keep open their sores, introducing into their wounds foreign matters, which perpetuate their ills, preventing nature from cicatrising them as she would. We are all too prone to do it, wilfully converting what is of God into a malignity of our own devising. And thus it was with the Rev. Mr. Blake; he kept his grief running, he would

not have his grief abated ; he thought it good and dutiful to engross himself in it, to have this one great sorrow recalled by everything around him, to regard it as the chief thing which life had brought him. So a dispensation, which might have widened his sympathies and made his heart very tender before God and toward all men, left him very narrow and hard of manner and of voice ; for when time, after years of grieving, in spite of him, sealed up the fountain of his tears, his sympathies for the life around him were sealed up too almost as much. His natural fervour was desiccated, his affections wasted. Poor man ! who, thus mourning for a love that had gone from him, had lost the capacity to show his love—a love compressed within him, but real and not untender—to the boy that came to him with his grief.

Not that the child lacked aught of nurturing or care. But at the first, and for years thereafter, the father had habituated himself, at sight of the child, to renew his sorrow, to open his wounds afresh. He misunderstood totally wherein lay the submission to the Divine Will, for which he so earnestly prayed.

Thus it was that as the boy grew, the father was restrained and shy with him. Having lost the enlivenment of voice and look which comes of cheerful intercourse with mankind, how could he unbend to the boy? He could not for all he loved him; and how he loved him you might see, when at times he furtively watched the little man at play, and, with sighs, marked the dead mother's sparkling eyes in the child-face of him, and was thrilled almost to motion by the tones of

a voice that had long been hushed. What could such a parent do, excepting this : while as a duty he gave somewhat to the poor, he laid up of earth's treasure for the sake of the child, who was growing up without the personal exhibition of his love ?

Thus, too, it was that when the boy was fourteen, and the father deemed it fitting to enact the tutor, that the youth might be timely prepared for college, and when this unwonted contact with a mind fresh and vigorous not a little affected the parental heart and affections, the man was case-hardened, and had wholly lost the power to exhibit the tenderness which, ember-like, was stirred within him ; nay, had lost the power to express aught of it, save by dry, set speech. So Benoni grew very much apart from those feelings which best mould and

fashion the intellect and heart; without a mother's care and love, poor child of sorrow! without knowledge of the deep thoughtfulness of a father's affection, without sweet home influences. His companions at school rarely chose to ramble to the Manse. They never were invited. The tall, gaunt figure of the minister, with bent head, and grave, grey visage, as he was wont to stalk up and down the shrubbery, frightened them even from the precincts. Indeed, no light-hearted laughter cheered the boy's home; there were for him no pleasant companionships to ripen into the friendships of life. He was thrown inward upon himself, compelled, by oft-repeated prayer, and praise, and much Bible and exposition of it, to seek in such soul-resources as had been given to him for the unreal pleasures which

vague, boyish reverie and fancy can supply. He twisted himself into rare historical and other combinations, in strangest freaks of imagination. Now he was the celebrated, bedizened, slaughter-glorified commander of armies; now, the tender, languishing poet, singing nations into excited admiration of his lays; now, fancying himself clothed with more than human grace and beauty, leading beauteous ladies in capricious captivity. All this, and much more, dreamed the lonely boy, in the brightest sunlight or over his books, in church drowsily or at family worship. And his dreams but indicated the elements of good and evil within him, his proud spirit, his versatility, his love of distinction, his longing to be beloved, and much more that you can guess at.

His poetic fancies alone took such shape

as left a permanent record of them; and often in after life, when age had tamed both him and me, have we sat scanning his early verses, faintly tracing in each boyish effort the rudiments of the man whom I affectionately regarded, much as I faintly traced his practised penmanship in the early handwriting.

Do all boys pass through such a period of reveries, I wonder? Perhaps boys with homes which fill their hearts do not. But at least youthful fancy is apt fastidiously to plot for its possessor a dazzling career in a bright, bright world, of which his self-esteem makes him the cynosure. As for youthful poetry, I think he must be a poor-souled boy indeed, fit only to become a millionaire or a drudge, who knows not its joys. Young human hearts, joyous or sad, will voice their

emotions in rhythm and sweet sounds. If
soul is base and worthless, if soul it be
all, that is not stirred to rhyming at fourteen

It has been said that there was but little
variety in Benoni's life. His dreams alone
brought him vicissitudes of pleasure and pain.
Perhaps they coloured his life as much as
they had been real experiences. Often they
were as vivid as real experiences could be—
sources of substantial and excited pleasure
or of prolonged and depressing pain. Yet
was he very eager to acquire knowledge
such as came within his reach. History and
the few books of poetry, companions of his
father's bygone years, were his especial oft-
sought treasures. Novels there were none.
Indeed, it was well that novels were not at
hand, for his eager fancy, which played such
tricks with history, would have been too apt

if introduced to the fantastic realms of life in fiction, to have overwrought itself in false and injurious conceptions of the world he was approaching, and in restless longings for it.

Thus the boy was as self-engrossed as was his sire, and as little demonstrative of the intense activity of fancy and feeling within him. Thus, too, father and son came to each other with the bodily presence, and then went each his way, and knew, neither of them, the loving soul which the bodily presence of the other shrouded and concealed, or guessed the true joy which each would have grasped, if they had come really to know one another. It is very sad that such mistakes should occur; sad, although, no doubt, our inability to read the hearts of our fellows saves us many a bitter pang.


Closely, and with somewhat of bitterness, the story of his life's advent clung to the boy, as he had picked it up in fragments, and as he had heard his father's sorrowful references to it and to him, the child of grief, while still he was a child, and while the father doubtless thought that his unrestrained expressions could not wound the spirit of the little one. At school his name had been often discussed with all the freedom of schoolboy disquisition, its oddness and its origin duly commented on, and its bearer designated "the young Jew." Proud and sensitive, he winced under the doleful sarcasm, keenly pointed for him who longed so much in secret for the love a mother would have bestowed on him. He would write his name "Ben Blake" among his schoolfellows. He would knock down any boy who addressed him by

the full name of that miserable son of Israel; and, being a boy large and powerful beyond his years, he was generally able so to treat those who neglected compliance with his wishes as to compel it. But when his father became his tutor, all his exercises were subscribed "Benoni." Was this caprice simply? I think not. It was the proud unregulated spirit of the youth that felt a lurking bitterness in the name, an abiding bitterness in it for him and for his father, and chose to turn over and roll the unpleasant thing as if it were wondrously sweet in his mouth. Indeed, away from his jeering comrades, the name had little of distaste as a name, and was associated chiefly with a blunted regret that he had never known a mother—a fact which somewhat roused his sympathies for himself.

I have written so far of his early life that you may know a little of the influences which moulded him into the man he grew, that you may, perchance now and again, pity or palliate his conduct or sympathise with him. Otherwise we have little interest in his young days, for he was twenty-four years of age and had newly taken his degree of Doctor of Medicine when the proper business of this biography commences. In person, he was tall and of manly mould, with much of manly grace of bearing and address. Mentally, he was the outgrowth of the boy I have told you of; dreamy and poetic, he was but slightly modified by what little he had seen of real life. He had taken his degree creditably, not with special distinction.

There still clung to him much of the specialty of his young years. His port-

manteau, when set down at the Manse, bore in large, unmistakable letters, the name "Benoni Blake, M.D." And still he would sit, smoking now, for hours in fitful musing, shaping out in fancy the life for an opening to which he was somewhat impatiently waiting. His father, still solitarily, went out and came in in his silent way. There was little intercommunion between them. The father had wished the son to enter the Church, and he would not. Perhaps he, too, had formed visions of his son as a preacher favoured of God, and had had hopes that, in the beauty of holiness, he and his son might have seen each other face to face, and loved each other openly in the love of God. If so, it was otherwise destined, for the lad resolved to study medicine, induced chiefly thereto by occasional drives with cheery Dr.



Nicolson, the parish surgeon; perhaps somewhat disgusted, too, by the violent agitation which at that time was rending the Church asunder. Then the father became more taciturn than theretofore. Still he did everything that a father should do to promote the career of his son, still loved him in that shy and silent way that had become his nature, still faithfully hoarded for him and invested his hoardings, deeming them valuable only for his son's sake. He had always blessed the lad when he left the paternal roof, always welcomed his return to it, tenderly within him, outwardly with such measure of warmth as was his. Years, and his habitual sadness, had greatly changed the preacher. His hair was white as driven snow, his handsome face more barely and coldly chiselled, his figure somewhat bent. How we all mistake

and mis-select our blessings! What a rich store of freshness and strength and happiness had the man closed against himself when he would have his child a child of sorrow only! What life and vigour should have been his if his stalwart lad had been the son openly adopted of his hope and love! Well, well! who sow in tears do not expect a harvest of pleasure. Meantime, father and son looked for an early separation, when some practice, or medical assistantship, was found for Benoni, the doctor; and they met daily at breakfast and conversed but little. Prayers followed, and then were present old John, the minister's man, old Nannie, the housekeeper, and the little maid-of-all-work whom Nannie held in bondage. The father dined alone in his study. They all met again at night for worship. Not a lively

life that for a young medical man, but Benoni was used to it. He suffered much, however, from John's grins and nasal peculiarities in conducting the psalmody.

Dr. Blake had thus been loitering at home for a month, spending an occasional day in fishing, occasionally condescending to drive out with Dr. Nicolson on his visits, sometimes to advise him in the treatment of his cases. Systems of therapeutics rise and wane, you know, so that what in our college days was the only sound practice is in our old age regarded as injurious, if not death-dealing. Only the young men or the men of steady reading are abreast of the scientific knowledge of the year. And Blake was too freshly from his studies to read, so that time was often heavy on his hands. Sometimes his visions of the distinction which awaited

him faded into despondent realisation of the inactivity with which he was environed.

He was in one of those desponding moods, stretched in the sunshine on the lawn, when old Nicolson came, inviting him to visit Robert Thomson, son of the farmer at Tighnagrein, who was suffering from phthisis. Benoni might be able to suggest some palliative, remedy there was none. Silently he put away his pipe and got into the surgeon's gig, and by-and-by they were in the room of the patient, who was very worn and gaunt. He was scarcely so old as the young doctor, yet death was too plainly stamped on his face. He had a complication of disorders, Benoni found, and had just had a spasm—a painful period of laboured breathing which comes with such distress to the wasted and weak. A girl, still “in her teens,” whom

Blake recognised as the sufferer's sister, was propping his head with her breast and arm, and tenderly wiping the clammy sweat from his pallid face and brow. Blake remembered the girl—he knew her by sight when he was a boy. He had not seen her for years, and, when he last saw her, she was but a child. Now she was a woman, and a woman with so much tenderness glistening in her earnest face and tearful eyes, as she ministered to her brother, that the young doctor's whole sympathies gushed out towards her. What would he not have given if his science could have restored the dying brother, could have suddenly filled that tender, pained face with joy again! Not for the first time did he form such wishes. That was the sort of distinction he had often dreamed of and longed for—a distinction consistent at once

with selfish vanity and the purest benevolence. He would have cured the brother's malady and healed the sister's sorrow, if he could; but he knew the conditions of the disease. Gentle words of sympathy he naturally gave them. Some little things he suggested which might soothe the sufferer. Then he left them.

But the picture did not pass away from his brain and heart. He could not quit his thoughts of that pained and tender girl. He asked himself again and again, "Why have I no soul to love me, to share my pleasure or my suffering?" He forgot how little of either he had to share, so he recklessly added, "Life is not worth living without love."

CHAPTER II.

TIGHNAGREIN was a small farm of only one hundred acres, but the land was rich alluvial soil, at a bend of the river on its eastern bank, a mile upwards from the Manse. Mr. John Thomson farmed it at a rent of £130 a year, so that, notwithstanding its fertility, much effort and strict economy were needed to make it meet the wants of a family and pay this considerable rent. Indeed, the family was essentially that of a working farmer, and each member of it was taught betimes to aid in the work. Thus the men-servants were only one ploughman, a halfling, and a herd-boy; and the farmer thought it

quite the right thing for himself or one of his sons, of whom two had come to man's estate, to drive one pair of horses, and guide one of the ploughs. Bessie Thomson, only daughter, milked the cows, attended to the dairy, and managed the household, aided, of course, by women, who generally worked in the fields. Bessie's mother was dead, and the girl, yet only nineteen, had done all this for four years past. Her youngest brother was still a schoolboy. Such was the household.

But although they were working people, hard-working people at times, still they affected a certain gentility, which manifested itself in their home and ways. The home was only a cottage, low-walled and thatch-roofed, but it was a very pleasant home to look on. Built as three sides of a square,

one side and the rear constituted the dwelling-house proper. The two rooms of the third side were used as a milk-house and laundry. The lime-harled walls were covered—the projected gables with ivy, which twined in greeny convolutions round the chimney-stalks—the walls within the square with honeysuckle and the pretty coquettish clematis, which seems fain to cling, but does not. The court was causewayed, except a small piece in the centre, where grew a magnificent holly - tree, which, although pruned and rounded into a cone-like shape, contrived to throw a deal of shadow upon the little court. The roadway passed along the gables, and beyond it stood a score of fruit trees—apple and cherry and plum trees,—stretching, a little orchard clump, down to the river. A garden surrounded the rear

and sides of the cottage, yielding mostly vegetables, and a few flowers. Here, in season, the cabbage-rose bloomed luxuriantly, and hollyhock and dahlia vied in emulous beauty, and the bushy fuchsia displayed its charming bells amid abundant greenery. Such was the farm-house of Tighnagrein—a home of effort, of order, of beauty, which seemed to tell the outer world that there was much of peace and love within its lowly walls, that the indwellers were of earnest hearts and minds, doing with much of soul and strength what the hands found to do.


But sorrow, which takes no account of fragrance and beauty, nay, which sometimes seems to regard them with special jealousy, had found its way into this pleasant dwelling. Only five years ago, the mother, who

had inspired much of this love of order and of grace, had died after months of ailing, leaving for long to the survivors a painful feeling of insecurity. Now it was the eldest son, Robert, who was ill. Heated in the grain-field last autumn, he had thoughtlessly bathed in the chill river and caught cold; and neglecting the cold, he became ill, and now he was wearing and wasting away before the eyes that loved to look on him. The sorrowing father and brothers and sister anticipated the worst, while still they strove by tenderest nursing to stem the insidious disease, eagerly hoping against hope.

Into this house it was that Benoni Blake had entered—a home which strangely contrasted with his own in several ways. Here he saw the tender love of a sister pouring out its fulness on the suffering brother, and

the brother's wistful eye looking back his gratitude and affection. Do you wonder that he cried out, "Why have I no soul to love me?" when you think of his isolated life?

At any rate, I am not surprised that "the case" engaged his sympathies, and set him cogitating what might do the patient any good; or that next day on his way to Lochaneil, with his fishing-rod and basket, he should have presented himself at the cottage to inquire for the patient and to deliver some medicine. Nor am I surprised that when he departed, at the end of half an hour, he should have just a vague feeling of disappointment, for he had not seen Miss Bessie. She was butter-making—an almost daily work at midsummer. His visit, of course, was to the sick lad. He made no inquiry for Miss Bessie.



He had a day of successful fishing, and it was but a commonplace courtesy to call on the patient on his way home from the loch, and then, meeting Miss Thomson, to offer for her acceptance the choicest trouts of his basket. It was a commonplace courtesy, I say; yet to my mind he flushed unnecessarily, and stammered in offering them more than was appropriate. Indeed, I fear that since he saw her yesterday, the young man had taken the liberty of introducing the person of the young lady into his absurd day-dreams, and had commingled her home affections with what he regarded as his own blighted sunless being, in a singular combination, of which the result was his happiness overflowing. She took the gifts frankly, unsuspectingly, and gave him thanks. The trout of Lochaneil are excellent.

So it went on for a number of days. The young medical man visited Robert Thomson daily, with the approbation of Dr. Nicolson. "Your visits may cheer him a little. Give him a placebo now and again. I can do nothing for him," said the old surgeon. Thus, also, Benoni Blake almost daily saw the patient's sister, and went on daily mixing her up with those foolish dreams of his, foolishly fancying that love, such as he was certain she could bestow on him, was better than aught else in life, yea, than life itself. Yet it was only a matter of course that, as Nicolson had relinquished the patient, the junior to whom he had left him should be very punctual in his visits. Indeed, Benoni's attention in this instance greatly elevated him in the opinion of the old practitioner, who had hitherto regarded

the lad as a listless, idle youth, without energy sufficient for the active duties of their arduous profession. He did not for a moment think that the dreaminess of the young man was the source of his present energy.

The bridge by which the river was crossed lay half a mile down the stream from the Manse, which made the daily walk of Dr. Blake four miles instead of two, which it would be if he went by the river bank and forded the water at Tighnagrein. It was not in the young man's nature to subject himself for long to that kind of task. Consequently, soon after his visits commenced, he one day bade old John saddle the minister's horse for him. He would go direct across the river, and leave the beast at Tighnagrein till he came back from

fishing. Now Benoni was no favourite of John, for the lad spoke little to those around him, and, in his self-engrossment, never dropped at home those little words and deeds that engage the hearts of folks like John and Nannie. Besides, Benoni was at times sarcastic on John's merits as a conductor of psalmody, wherefore John was well-nigh at open feud with him. So, when ordered to saddle the horse, John gruffly replied, "Na, ma man; I wadna dae it for the minister himsel'. I ken what ye'd be aifter if ye got the beist. Ye'd gang galloping ower the lea; syne intil the cauld water; an' syne tie him up in a teem byre or the lik' to grind his teeth till ye cam' back. Na, faith! ye'll nae get the horse, I'se warran'."

Young Blake was too apathetic to think

twice of John's speech or actions, knowing indeed that to become indignant would serve no good end. So he picked up his rod and basket and went off, waded the river, and went up through the orchard to the cottage, his knickerbockers—then a new-fangled costume, confined to country sportsmen and young men like Blake—dripping. At this the ailing Robert feebly exclaimed. Bessie, too, was thrown off her balance, and, for the first time, spoke out in tones which Blake accepted as sympathetic toward him. She was so sorry that the doctor had wet himself. Jamie's stilts, too, were lying on the west bank, "in the whins forenent the orchard." He always left them there when he went to school.

"Stilts!" said Blake. "How stupid I am! I forgot there were such things. I

used to use them in the river capitally. I'll use James's next time, if I find them."

"I use them sometimes still," said Bessie again, "when I am to go to Kirkstyle. Stilts are right handy. But I am so sorry you are wet, doctor."

"If you do not find the stilts on the other bank," said Robert, "call out. I am sure to hear you, and some one will fetch you a pair."

"I'll do so," said Blake. "Meantime, my only concern is that I have wet your carpet. For myself, as I am going to fish, the chances are I'll be wetter before I return."

This was the first time that Bessie had shown any interest in Blake as a man, and to him it was pleasant to have excited her interest even in so slight a matter. It was pleasant for him, but I do not know that

to follow his example would be judicious for young men generally as a way to the sympathies of woman. Blake, as I have said, wore knickerbockers; and, moreover, had fine limbs.

So next day Blake found the stilts at the river bank, and forded the water dry-shod; and so on it was till Saturday following, when, arriving at the accustomed spot, he found not the stilts. Jamie did not go to school on Saturdays, and the stilts were consequently somewhere on the other bank. Blake halloed, and Miss Thomson came through the orchard, looking very charming with her blushes and her print frock. The river was scarcely fifteen yards in breadth, and not more than knee-deep. Blake said across the stream that he wished to sit awhile with Robert, that he did not wish

to go to him damp, or to wet the parlour, otherwise he would make "no bones" of the brook. She poutingly replied that Jamie was gone birdnesting, and that the people, women-servants and all, were busy in the turnip fields, but, if he waited, she would come to him in a few minutes. And wait he did, I do not know wherefore. He was at that time of life which does not usually suffer heroines to take trouble, or which pauses at obstacles in the way to them.

She disappeared towards the cottage. He lay down on the bank. By-and-by, she came again, carrying two pairs of stilts, which she had hastily bound together, so that she had a pair in each hand. Very pretty she looked as, plunging first one then the other stilt into the water, she stepped off the eastern bank, and came towards him

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through the stream. And he lay still and watched her coming—coming like one of the spirits of his day-dreams,—the gentle breeze blowing out her lilac dress and flaunting it behind her, draping her, simple as the dress was, with aërial grace. It was a charming vision. And she—why did she blush so much, why, for the first time in the presence of the young doctor, did she become conscious that he was a young man and she a maiden? Indeed, indeed, she had no thought of him even now; never raised her eyes to him, save as to the young doctor whose skill was being exerted on behalf of the brother who engrossed her love in his sickness. But I cannot recommend walking on stilts as a feminine exercise. Naiad-like, no doubt, she looked, as in the sunlight and the breeze she seemed air-borne

over the surface of the stream; but it is not given to all girls so to stalk in gracefulness.

Somewhat distraught she must have been, and I am not surprised thereat. She had hasted too much to forward the doctor's coming to her brother, and thus the pairs of stilts were but indifferently tied up. In mid stream the strings that bound them came undone. She tried to clutch and hold them together, but her small hand sufficed not to grasp them. So while Benoni was dreamily gazing on the charming vision—this real and corporeal vision of beauty—there was a little cry, and the dream collapsed. Down came the maiden into the river. Then Blake did, exactly what you, my manly reader, or I should have done, had we been there, although neither you nor I are troubled much by day-dreams,


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although we are not sighing and yearning for a love that has not come to us. He plunged into the rivulet, and instantly had the dripping girl in his stalwart arms, and was bearing her to the bank whence she had come, speaking gentle words to her as he bore her, upbraiding himself also as an unmanly stupid in that he had suffered her to essay the unwieldy stilts for him.

He would have carried her straight into the cottage; but, apparently, she was more discomposed than need was, for the incident was but a trifle. And in the orchard she struggled to get from his arms, just slightly struggled, and he set her down. Then she ran, dripping and flushed, from him; and he found his way to Robert with his apologies and regrets.

The incident was the veriest trifle; yet it

was just the sort of incident which gives rise to complex emotion when two people so young are the actors in it. To have been seized upon and carried in such wise, "as if she was a baby," was an outrage—I will not say an altogether unpleasant outrage—on the womanliness of the maiden. For the imaginative young man it had peculiar interest. He who had long gazed on woman from afar (it is horrible, but true, that he had dissected two or three), who had idealised womanhood till it seemed something of another life and world, who had been entranced by the vision of that beauty on stilts,—that he should have grasped and carried on his breast that beauty, albeit she was soaked in water, was a very extraordinary experience, worth more than all his inane reveries. I fear it bound him to



the course on which his dreams had been running for a fortnight.

Wet as were his feet, Benoni sat for long with the invalid; not discoursing much, he was too full of things unspeakable; but I dare say the simple presence of a doctor has in it much of reassurance for the ailing. In fact, Benoni sat for full two hours, until Bessie came to the parlour, bearing milk and cakes. Was it strange that she never looked into his face, and that, when he spoke to her, she answered him with down-cast and averted eyes, and with blushes, and that she hastened from the room instantly on laying down the food she brought? Well, perhaps it meant nothing. But I do not wonder that, when, on his way home, the lad stalked into the stream again, he looked around him, and would fain have seen the .

vision of the forenoon and re-enacted the scene again. In his imagination he did re-enact it, many times and with wonderful variations, thus strengthening the hold which the incident had taken of him.

When he called a day or two thereafter, Robert was sleeping, so he sat on a bench in the court and lit his pipe. Bessie was churning, and he listened to the peculiar thud and splash of the churning as he smoked. Should he go to her? It was some time before he laid down his pipe and ventured. She welcomed him with blushes. Her arms were bared above the elbows; round, plump, shapely arms they were, which much commended themselves to the young man, who, as a surgeon, was a connoisseur, of course. He would try his hand at the work, and he went to it awkwardly

in his strength, and his spasmodic efforts amused her. Then their talk wandered to the ailing brother, of whom the sister spoke with glistening eyes.

“Ah!” said Blake, “I envy him! I could this moment lay down my health and strength and take on his weakness and suffering to have the same sweet solace—the love of you and of father and brothers.”

The girl looked wonderingly at the young man.

“We only give him what it is natural to give him,” she said. “Even were he not our brother, his suffering while we see it must move us.”

“But it must be very sweet to be beloved as he is,” cried the young fool. “What would I not give for such love? I never knew a mother’s care, Miss Thomson. My

father turns his heart from me, or conceals it from me. He used to call me the child of his sorrow, and so he named me Benoni. Oh, how I long for some heart to show me something of its tenderness and love! All my world is sad and lonely."

What could the young girl say to a pitiful statement like that? She went on with her churning, and answered not. But somehow young Dr. Blake appeared to her thereafter in a new light—no longer, as a doctor, but as a man to be sympathised with, pitied, soothed. It was so natural that he, unloved, should have that earnest longing for love. Indeed, the sentiment was very pretty; and this confidence of his personal yearnings was most interesting. She felt, when he left her, that, indeed, she could give him some, just a little bit, of her love for Robert, to whom

he was so attentive and gentle, if she only knew how it could be done. Ah, my little girl! there are maladies more insidious than Robert's; there are passages in life more dangerous than are stilts in a stream-course. Pray Heaven she have no fall!

Flirtation is very well in its way; but, at best, it is a spurious thing. In the first workings of love in earnest there is a subtle intoxication that is very seductive. It is so pleasant, and you are so sincere, that you never think what it is, do not know it to be love, until it is full-grown and all-engrossing. So, wholly unconscious of the spring of her actions, Bessie Thomson gave the young man kind words and looks, because she "felt for him"—that was it. He recognised this softened disposition, this will in her to sympathise with him, and

paid back her good-will—perhaps feebly in words, but speakingly with his eyes. Thus their sympathies began to intertwine, unconsciously on her part, thoughtlessly on the part of both, delightfully for him who so longed for sympathy. Yet, as thus he came into closer contact with the girl, as their minds met, it became apparent to the man of superior education that she was not all perfect; in truth, that she was defective in much; that her range of thought was well-nigh limited to her homestead and her Bible. She knew no music, for which he had a passion. She had read literally nothing. He saw all this; but what of it? It was not intellect he wanted, it was a woman's heart to love him; and he foolishly thought that if her affections were fixed on him, his happiness must be secure. His thought was not of

happiness through his love reciprocated. He thought only of the delight of being beloved.

Miss Marjory Robison was the sister of a neighbouring farmer. Several years the senior of Bessie Thomson, she was a very sensible woman, quite a person of excellent sense indeed. She was greatly attached to the younger and more ardent Bessie, perhaps from certain diversities of character, on the principle that actuates humanity—like things will not to like. To Miss Robison it was that Bessie confided the secret of the young doctor's unhappiness, and his craving for happiness that did not lie in his path.

“He is a silly young man,” said Miss Robison. “Yet a great, big, sensible-like fellow, too! But really, Bessie, this tale of

his woes and his longings looks very like making love to you!"

Bessie scouted the idea. The thing had come about in the most natural way in talking of poor Robert. Marjory was speaking nonsense; yet somehow, after this new view of the premisses, Bessie was more constrained with the doctor than before.

CHAPTER III.

EVERYBODY knows the fitful, deceitful nature of the malady which was slowly but surely wasting Robert Thomson's life. It chanced to put on a favourable aspect at this time. He perspired less by night and felt better by day, less weary and weak. He ate, too, with new appetite. "If I could only get some flesh laid on me now, I should be better," he said cheerfully. "I am better ever since I began to take Dr. Blake's drops." So new hope arose in the household, and each heart of it turned towards the young doctor with gratitude and admiration. It was not in Bessie's power to maintain the reserve which,

for a day or two, had marked her communications with Blake.

“Under God, we have to thank you, doctor,” said her father.

The girl looked thanks a thousand times more expressive through her glistening eyes. Benoni was sorely tempted to magnify his profession and himself, but to deceive was not of his nature. So getting the father and sister apart from the patient, he told them plainly that it was not his medicine which had effected the change.

“A little good may have come from my talking with him and cheering him, but physic is of no avail here. The disease itself simulates favourable turns; but do not be deceived. I always fear most when these good turns come, for the slightest indiscretion may be fatal.”

But when the apparent improvement continued for a week, the family would not have it as the young doctor stated it. "He has done him good, great good!" they all said; and of course their gratitude was in proportion to the advantage which their ailing loved one seemed to have had from their benefactor.

It was at this time that Blake one day stepped into the milk-room, where, I believe, he had become a regular visitor. Miss Robison was there, standing by the churn at which her young friend was busily at work, and she smiled when he appeared. Blushing, he stopped abruptly at the door, in too evident embarrassment. I dare say that from these small facts you will be disposed to conclude that Miss Robison, although a lady of sound sense, as I have told you, was lacking in politeness. Well,

I believe you will not wrong her if you do ; for good sense, in her sphere of life, too often asserts itself as above the rules of strict politeness. So Blake stood blushing at the threshold, and presently, no doubt, he would incontinently have backed out and disappeared, for with all his manliness and imaginary heroism, he had not conquered the shyness of hobbledehoydom in matters of sentimentality. But the young girl, with the unhesitating utterance of an old diplomatist, spoke out.

“Here is my doctor! Come in, please. How kind to come to tell me of Robert!” Then she introduced them. “My friend, Miss Robison—Dr. Blake;” and she went on with her churning as if the presence of the young man was the most natural thing in life.

“I am glad that he continues to feel

easier," said Blake, with a stammer, as he advanced into the room.

"We owe you so much, sir!" said Bessie. "He comes every day, Miss Robison, and sits for hours with poor Bob. Poor Bob!" she repeated plaintively.

"Young doctors, I think," said Miss Robison, "are more thoughtful and more concerned about their patients than old ones. Of course, they all get into the way of thinking that to die is the rule of disease. Nicolson is an old beast! He was not the least sympathetic when I had that hay-fever; and if a case goes over twenty days, I am told he deserts it."

"You are entirely mistaken," said Benoni. "As to sympathy, much of it is not desirable in a doctor. It mars the just balance of the intellect, and he needs calm diagnosis and

consideration. Our profession must also necessitate the plain statement of truth, and overmuch sympathy often makes the statement of truth painful. Then, again, as to deserting his patients, Nicolson never leaves them, I'll be bound, until they cease to need his aid, or are beyond his power to help. Miss Thomson, neither Nicolson nor I think Robert better in the least."

She ceased her churning at once. "Is there anything happened—any new symptom?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing has happened," he said. "He is as you left him an hour ago; but again I tell you the sad truth that the seeming improvement is illusory. It is right you should believe it."

"My poor brother!" she said, as she sat down on a stool. "My poor brother! God

be merciful!" She was evidently in deep distress.

"Dear Miss Thomson!" he said, very softly but distinctly, "I feel all the pain of telling you this truth. Hard doctor as I ought to be, I tell it you sadly, sorrowfully." Then turning to Miss Robison, he continued, "It is but right they should realise it, although it touches me deeply to pain her tender love for her brother. What has life to compare to such affection?"

He shook hands with them and went out.

This brief interview illustrated very fairly the character of young Blake. Modest he was, even to bashfulness, in matters of sentiment, manly in word and action; constructed of solid materials, notwithstanding the "moonshine" and nonsense which we know entered so largely into his composition;

suitable for every-day life as well as for day reveries ; somewhat impetuous, and grotesquely tender. If his weakness, perhaps I should call it his largeness, of heart, shall lead him into unpleasant complications, his sound head and nature will surely keep him right. No doubt of it, he shall do the work of his life fairly well, wherever and however his lot may be cast. He was sound and honest ; and his honesty flushed in his open face, and was apparent in his upright, large-boned frame. He will always be a man of human sympathies — sympathies which may betray him ; but, if so, their direction shall generally be right. But meantime the girls are at the milk-room window, looking after the tall powerful lad, as he strides away for Lochaneil.

“He is a manly fellow, after all,” said

Marjory Robison. "Indeed, I did not think it."

"I am sure he is skilful," said Bessie. "And his ways are as gentle as a lady's," she added in a whisper.

So the short interview had made a very favourable impression, notwithstanding the doctor's disconcerted look at the outset.

On he strode towards the loch, all his sympathies keenly excited. He was well-nigh in positive pain. And why? Simply because the plain words drawn from him in explanation of Dr. Nicolson's absence had brought tears to Bessie's eyes, and he had seen them. Of course he was not the first young man who has melted at the sight of a tearful girl. But as he strides on, he thinks how he could, nay, his imagination is so vivid that he does, take the young girl

in his arms tenderly and kiss her tears away. He will comfort her, he will supply to her a brother's love, and more. His love shall rival her own powers of affection, shall surpass the love of woman. He was powerfully affected by the vision of love and bliss which his fancy pictured, and he sat down on the lake-side to calm himself, that his dream might die away.

And as he lay in the sunshine, with his dream still strong upon him, a weary sense of his forlornness arose within him. If he were to fall ill, of course old Nicolson would doctor him, faithfully according to his lights, and his father would probably come to him twice a day for a few minutes, chiefly for religious exposition. His sole nurse and comforter would be old Nannie, the house-keeper, in her old mob-cap, and with her hard old face, calling him "Benoni dear,"

while his soul sickened at her. He thought tenderly of his chance of dying to-morrow or the next day, or very soon. He felt certain that his life was destined to be short. And no one would miss him greatly; no heart would be rent with pain at his untimely fate. His home, the Manse, would quickly thereafter be much as it used to be while he was at college, much as it would be shortly when he went forth to the world. What a difference in his fate and that of Robert Thomson! Verily all varieties of life had compensations, Thomson's affliction ample compensation in that fulness of love. For him, Benoni Blake, alone, there was no equivalent for his misery—and so on he went, forgetting that the major part of human misery is self-sought-out or self-created. And yet he reasoned with himself

that cases like his, just as cases of every-day disease, must have their remedy, might be cured if the remedy were sought for—and here the phantom of Bessie Thomson again got mixed up with his musings. I fear that he concluded that she was the only antidote for his malady.

He fished very badly that day. How could it be otherwise? He caught scarce half a dozen trout; but he called at Tighnagrein on his way homeward, and was again entranced at the sight of Bessie. He followed her into the milk-room whither she went to deposit her fish; and when she had laid down the platter with them, he took both her hands in his, and looking earnestly into her brown eyes, he told her how forlorn and wretched he was, truthfully told her that day and night he was pining for affection,

exaggerating his case, I dare say, not a little. He drew from her some words of sympathy, ejaculations of pity for his distress. Then he pressed her further. Could she not give him what thus he so sorely wanted? Could she not spare him a little of her love? And when she, abashed, spoke not, he told her that he knew her heart was full already, but he believed that hearts, like some liquids, could dissolve and assimilate new substances, even although previously replete with other solutions.

“I love you for your full love for Robert. Will you try to love me somewhat as you do him?”

“Oh, doctor!” she said at length; “you can’t need love so badly as all that, and you so strong! Can I think of loving any one while Robert is so ill?” Then she

disengaged her hands, and was instantly at the door, where the woman within her broke out, with a laugh half painful, to finish her answer, "Unless indeed it was his doctor."

So she left him, and knew not how he went away.

Miss Robison called again that night, as she went homeward from a day of visiting. Miss Bessie did not mention her evening's interview. She could not tell it to Miss Robison; scarcely could bring herself to recall it and its incidents—the poor fellow's pathetic entreaties; the earnest statement of his forlornness, which had left on her mind the impression of a vivid fact. How could she submit them to Miss Robison's "good sense?" They were not for consideration even by her own "good sense." How much better it were for mankind that love, like

anger and our other sentiments, were rigorously examined!

Indeed, the matter discomposed the girl greatly, the recollection of it keeping fast hold of her, while as usual she watched at her brother's bed. The sensation of a direct appeal to her love was entirely novel—and chiefly it was painful—a mingled, jumbled pleasure and pain, which was strangely distressing. For, first of all, there was something dreadful in the thought of giving a life's love to a strange man, which meant any man outside her own family circle. But then, again, although in that sense Blake was "strange," yet she seemed to have known him for long. Somehow he had become identified with Robert; and he was so earnest, so full of feeling, so gently entreating, and, by contrast, he was so tall

and large and powerful! He was certainly serious—very serious. Had she treated him aright? she questioned herself; and she was not satisfied with her own replies. That broken laugh as she left him, those petulant words, “unless it was his doctor,” jarred on her mind now. Indeed, she had treated him with ill-deserved levity; and how was she to meet him again? Oh, dear! oh, dear! she was well-nigh beside herself with thinking of the whole affair. So when she lay down, in her simple-hearted way she put the matter, which thus oppressed her, before God, for, in her brother’s illness, it was her nightly way to put herself very lowly at His footstool, very lowly, but as near to Him as she could reach. To-night her new concernment was stated in thought, not in words. But she lay awake and

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tossed on her bed for long thereafter, and I dare say that in her dreams the young man haunted her still. I fear that more than half her distress came from the fact that she was more than half in love with the lad, although she did not know it—would not, could not have believed it if you had told it to her and pressed it upon her understanding with fullest exposition.

Some things concerning her you must fully realise. She was an earnest, simple girl, with nothing of the coquette in her nature. Of keen sensibilities, honest as became her home-breeding, with a strong sense of duties, perhaps without much breadth of nature, with no little hardness of manner and of will, but pure and good, she stood open-hearted and real before God.

The morning brought her freshness and

strength. Still her first thought was of that interview in the milk-room. The distressful thoughts of the night before were in great part gone from her, yet she shrank from a repetition of the scene. She tried to frame an answer for Blake, if he came again seeking her love—not wholly a negative answer, I believe; but she could not resolve on words. So she loitered in her dressing, seated on the bed-room floor, amid her simple garments, bungling the lacing of her stays in thinking of him; thinking of him still while she braided up her hair, and secured it all awry; thinking of him still while she milked her cows and went, somewhat mechanically, about her household duties. You see she was far too much alone with her thoughts, which it is not good for young people to be. You will commend her

prudence, however. As she could not suit her words to answer him if he sought her again, she definitely resolved on one thing, and that was to fence herself from a repetition of the scene which so engrossed her. She would have Kitty Vass, the servant lass, with her all day. That would ward off distress from both the doctor and herself.

He came as usual, and Kitty Vass was with her. And now, when there was occasion for her good sense, it entirely vindicated itself. She received him just as she used to do, with her usual frankness, her usual sweetness, not one whit constrained, with not the slightest trace of coquetry. He could not guess what a weary night she had passed, or how much the thought of meeting him had stood between her and comfort. Kitty Vass, however, was disposed

to think herself in the way. Being ignorant of the real reason for her presence, she was for taking herself off, but was peremptorily ordered to remain at her work, whatever it was. So the lad saw that Bessie had arranged to guard herself, and he took it rather amiss. "She is like all the world besides," he thought, "bent to keep me from the solace of love, to keep me still outside and apart from human sympathy, to leave me still to feel I am Benoni, child and man of sorrow."

It was very silly, but away he strode, in great dudgeon. He would not go fishing. He plunged into the river, and went home wards, cursing the fates, himself, and mankind. He was in a fine state of pique and fury when he reached the Manse. Entering the parlour, he found Dr. Nicolson with his

father, and his father was speaking with more animation than Benoni had known him show for long, so much animation indeed that he went on after his son had entered. "If we do sell part of the bank stock for his benefit now, it will only be forestalling what will be his by-and-by." But then their conversation ceased, and Nicolson got up to welcome his young friend and to tell him that he was specially waiting for him; for a man had been found dead on the moors, ten or twelve miles away, far off from any habitation, and the authorities had given orders to ascertain the cause of death. Two surgeons were needed, and Ben must go with him.

So our young friend journeyed with Dr. Nicolson away among the winding hills, by sinuous mountain passes, by dense fir woods,

over barren heaths, across rugged stream courses; and their road, if road it should be called, was merely a rough cart track. At length they reached the shepherd's shieling, on the grass plot behind which lay the dead body of the ill-starred wayfarer, covered by a tattered plaid. Daylight was rapidly fading into that transparent azure — not night, but gloaming—which tints so softly our highland nights in July. The pinky sheen of the sun, unseen in its setting beyond the hill-tops, was still faintly burnishing a lofty western peak. The grouse cock was gurgly crowing on the hill-side, the curlew screaming on the low-lying marsh. Benoni stooped over the corpse, and raised its coverlet. It was a wasted, weary face, which perhaps in suffering had won that look of intellect which it now bore in death.

“Who was he?” asked Benoni of the approaching policeman.

“I have not found out, sir,” was the man’s reply.

“Poor fellow!” said the young doctor sadly; and, indeed, his eyes, and heart too, were full, in pity of him who thus had perished, untended, unnoted, unrecognised. Nicolson came up and saw something of this softness.

“Come along, Ben,” he said gruffly. “It’s too late to work now. The old beggar will keep till to-morrow. Let us have something to eat.”

And he got the lad into the shieling, whither his basket of provisions had already been conveyed; and presently, such is life, the fate of the dead man was forgotten, over a tumbler of punch and supper

of cold meats. Indeed, the business on hand was sufficiently picturesque. The picquet of shepherds and gamekeepers, the uniformed policeman, all seated or squatted round the hearth in the centre of the bothy; the fiscal's assistant, a somewhat grave and sententious man; the hubbub of conversation; the occasional yelp of a dog whose tail was trodden on, and the whisky, no doubt, all combined to make up a scene which gave new direction to Benoni's thoughts, so that he slept soundly when at length the party broke up and he lay down on some freshly-pulled heather under shelter of a blanket, Nicolson occupying the only bed in the shieling.

Next day, they made their post-mortem examination; made it in the glare of day, and with dulled sensibilities—as a piece of work, of course. And evening found Benoni

again at home, doing his best to entertain the fiscal's assistant, who deemed it necessary that Benoni should accompany him to Fifeburgh, the county town, to make explanations to the county authorities. So on the third day he went to the town, where he was agreeably received by the sheriff-substitute, a man with a family of daughters. The handsome young doctor was asked to dinner and passed the evening with music and dancing and song, as is the custom in such rural families. Thus the fourth morning dawned on Blake before he finally returned home. And he was in great spirits. His craving for affection was well-nigh danced out of him. He had sung again his student songs, in good voice too, and their melody still lingered with him pleasantly. The world was much more jolly than it was a

few days before. It seemed fairly stocked with young ladies very agreeable and pleasant to look upon, and there was good music in it besides. Furthermore, and above all, he had his first fee of six guineas in his pocket, and who could be unhappy with a first fee like that?

The world was a very good world indeed! just such a world as it undoubtedly is for young hearts in healthy frames, when on the morning of the fourth day Benoni started for the paternal Manse. He drove the minister's horse with a zest and energy which must have greatly discomposed that steady steed, incited by the eager youth to the unwonted speed of eight miles an hour. And as he drove along he sung again his songs of the night before, and spoke much to his horse in the exuberance of his spirits, and thought

of fishing next day, and what not. But that one thing—the one thing of four days before—was not to him now so present, so important. Indeed, he kept it out of view and out of thought. Not that he was fickle or inconstant or anywise open to blame, much less faithless, excepting in such measure as these things cleave and appertain to humanity generally; for the necessities of to-day, keen and urgent as we feel them, assuredly pass away with the evening-tide. Our sensibilities will either be duller on the morrow, or the edge of our needs will be blunted, or we shall be fresher and stronger to endure them. Sad indeed it is, bad as well as sad it is, when sleep and change of scene operate no change of emotion. Then there is disease of the mind or heart.

And what of Bessie Thomson during

these days? Had she variety of scene, or music, or dancing, or song, or any equivalent to lead her mind into new lines of feeling? Oh no! In the wonted routine of household work, of sick nursing, and family engagement, morning, noon, and night came to her all in their old leaden way, came and found her self-contained, externally calm and gentle as she ever was. But within her all was not so calm and so well. How could it be? When Blake, on the day of his last visit, came not back to the cottage from the lake, as was his wont, she felt greatly relieved, smiled pleasedly to herself in her inward satisfaction, and was very gracious to Kitty Vass when she dismissed her. It was so in keeping with the doctor's good sense, his quick insight. He must have known how much the interview

of yesterday had distressed her. How considerate not to repeat it! She was aglow with admiration of him, good fellow as he was!

But when he came not next day, this first interruption of his visits since he began to visit her brother troubled her more than she would willingly admit; and before evening she was painfully scrutinising her conduct towards him. She could not forbear speaking to Kitty Vass of the strange fact that the doctor came not, speaking so much of it indeed, that Kitty, who had some little experiences of her own, shrewdly guessed that the young mistress had personal interest in the doctor's coming to her brother. But when night came, and she was left wholly to her own thoughts, it certainly was a bad time for her. She thought over and over

again of each detail of that milk-room interview. His dark eyes, those pleading eyes of his, were still pouring their light and loving entreaty into her soul. Again, with exaggerated fancy, she wrenched away her hands from him, and laughed him to scorn, while his pity-moving words, asking her love, were still sounding in her ears—those tones that, somehow, were more musical for her than any other voice she had ever heard. Then, too, she had denied him, when he came again, even the poor luxury of stating his sorrow, and had received him as if she knew nought of it. Was it not fitting that he should be indignant? Had he not just cause for resentment? She had no doubt of it. She was the victim of that wretched spirit of exaggeration which brings so much unreal misery to those who suffer from it.

Her household duties did not relieve her. Her midnight vigil only aggravated the dis-tempered fancy. Even prayer itself brought her no solace. Indeed, while on her knees, bent humbly to her Maker, the maiden first guessed the truth—that she loved the lad whose love she fancied she had put away from her. It was a sad discovery! which long detained her on her knees, concealing her face, her blushing face, on her bed-side, as if thus, and in the darkness, she could have concealed both her face and her secret from God. But having thus admitted to herself that he was dear to her, at length she found a few broken, faltering words of entreaty that he might come to her again—come with words of love which she might reciprocate. She was a dear, honest, little girl, as I have told you.

And the next day came and brought no answer to her prayer, for the doctor came not. She was compelled, too, to listen to the doctor's praises more than was reasonable, for Robert had not felt so well for many a day. The doctor's marvellous "drops" had done him so much good. Robert had no doubt that Blake came not back simply because he knew he was not needed. There never was a doctor so kind, so skilful. And the praises were pleasant to Bessie's ear, even while they pained her, because he returned not. She alone bore the cruel secret, that he came not because she had evilly entreated him.

Miss Robison came to her that evening, much about the time, I take it, when Blake elsewhere, enamoured of himself and well voiced by dancing and a little wine, was

singing "Still so gently o'er me stealing," to the delight of other hearts of course. The staid and sensible woman was confounded when the young girl threw herself on her bosom, sobbing and in tears, telling her how bad and wicked and rude she had been, exaggerating the doctor's gentleness and loving entreaties and her own barbarity, exonerating him in the matter of offence-taking. He was all goodness, she all unworthy!

"Nay, child," said the elder woman, "you are over head and ears in love with the lad, and it is a bad business. Nobody should let her heart master her reason. Love is like bathing; if you go beyond your depth, you shall be drowned. You must calm yourself, Bessie! Depend on it, Blake has other reasons for staying away. If he is

in love with you at all, your treatment will only bring him 'to heel,' as shepherds say to their dogs. If he is not, Bessie, you must just shake off all concern for him, as a sensible girl should do. You must not get drowned in your love."

"Oh, poor fellow! I should not mind for myself, if he could be made happy," said the inconsequent Bessie.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was noontide when Benoni arrived at the Manse, and it was only natural that as he again drove up the old avenue, a change should come over the spirit of his dreams and feelings, notwithstanding the brightness of the day. He let the old horse walk under the shadow of the trees, and as he got sight of the dilapidated churchyard beyond the Manse, and presently found himself in front of the bleak walls and narrow windows of his home, the gloom of his ordinary life began to cast its shadows on him. With much shouting, he procured the attendance of John; and when the old man had taken

the horse's head, Benoni dutifully inquired concerning his father.

“Troth! I’m thinkin’ he’ll be in the studdy, warstlin’ wi’ his serman,” said John. “It’s Saiturday, ye ken. Bless us,” he went on as our youth alighted; “ye maun hae driven hard, lad! Ye’ll gang rampawgin’ ower the country disseccin’ deid folk, an’ then cam’ hame lik’ mad! The beast’s sairly haited.”

“Cool him carefully then,” said Benoni sharply, as he went into the house.

John walked to the offices, leading the horse, speaking aloud to the beast as he went. “The old maister wadna gar ye swite that way, puir cretar! Them young anes hae nae mair regaird for brute beastes than for auld folk lik’ me.”

Certainly John had shown no cheerful

welcome to his young master. The lad saw his sourness.

Inside the house, old Nannie came to him in the lobby as he hung up his coats. "Losh! whaur hae ye been, Bennie?" she shrilly asked. "Haverin' about the toun, nae doot, 'stead o' comin' hame betimes last nicht; keepin' folk wauken an' gauntin' till morn waitin' for ye! Ye'll nae hae haed mait the day, I warran'."

Benoni turned from her in disgust, and went into his father's study. The minister stopped his work and lay back in his chair, saying quietly, "Have you got home, my son?" and the son said, "Yes, sir." They sat idly looking at each other for a few minutes without speaking. Then said the father, "Give me Henry's Commentary," and the son did so, and retired. And this

was precisely the tone and tenor of the every-day life of the household. It was not exhilarating; but of course people get used to every-day life even of this sort, and cease to attach anything special to the tones and incidents of it. Whether Benoni's impression of it moved him, or whether it was simply the reasonable medical man who instantly set to his duties, I cannot tell, certainly it was not any ardent love within him that suggested thoughts of Tighnagrein again. But he called aloud to Nannie that he was going there, and would return to dinner.

As he went past the stable, old John came after him. "Dae ye ken ony physick tae mak' the auld horse cool? She's a' ane lawther."

"No, John, I know none except what would stop an old man's nonsense, and make him sweat too."

“Och! I didna ken,” answered John. “Ye hae dune sae muckle for thae folk at Tighnagrein, that I thought ye might hae some skill tae spair for oor ain beastes.”

John’s utterance of the words “thae folk at Tighnagrein” was specially emphasised, so that the young man’s cheeks flushed, and he recalled very vividly his interview of the milk-house on the Tuesday before, and, sooth to say, his part therein seemed by no means the part of wisdom. Could it have got spoken of? That thought was dreadful; for he now suspected himself guilty of much folly. He called himself a fool, and I own that he had acted like one.

But it will not do to flinch his duties; so, by-and-by, he is at the ford, and finding the stilts, he is speedily across the water, and with the ailing Robert, who is much

as he left him. Blake explained all the circumstances of his absence, telling the full story of adventure; and the invalid is delighted to hear of the town and of the people whom Blake encountered. Oddly enough, the leading incident of the story, the death of the poor wanderer on the moor, had little interest for either of them. Blake was in the narrative of his party at the sheriff's when Bessie came. She did not know that he was there. So, when she, in the doorway, saw him, a strange tremor thrilled throughout her, and her first impulse was flight. But she felt that flight would only betray her, and be rude to boot. So with a struggle, she forced herself into the room, forced herself to go to him with extended hand, while her heart was fluttering into her mouth, and her face alternately

crimsoned and paled in a way she could not control. With difficulty she asked, "Have you been well, doctor?" He briefly explained his absence, and did not notice her perturbation. Then he proceeded with his narrative of the party. He could have sung to them the songs he had sung so well the night before; but, of course, that he could not do in this "the house of affliction." By the time he ceased, poor Bessie had greatly recovered herself, recovered herself sufficiently to see that he was thinking of her not at all, and that all his ardent craving for her love had died out of him. I fear her heart sank within her and her blood ran coldly when, distressed by the too apparent change, she left the room. She retreated to the milk-room. Well, I own it! There was perhaps in her little heart just

a little thought that he might come to her there by-and-by ; but, indeed, she always had some work to do in that room. He came not, however, and by-and-by she saw him, the broad shoulders and handsome legs of him, stalk down the court and through the orchard, and disappear. Do you think her poor heart was sore? I fear it was.

You see what pitiful nonsense this matter of love is; how it makes fools of us all. One of my critics says that I am not orthodox regarding love; and as a kindly, lovable critic I accept him. But I will have no orthodoxy other than the truth of facts. And surely you will agree with me that if young Blake, of whom now you know something, had tied himself in an engagement on Tuesday last with my sweet Bessie Thomson, he would have done

an unwise thing. It would not have been done in orthodox love, which I suspect is only for the poets and critics, but simply in a foolish mood, a silly frame of mind, which needed not a wife to cure it, but only a little change of scene. And is it possible to be entirely patient with the girl herself, who is now fevered and excited for him through the operation of her own sensitiveness, her imagination, which she holds equivalent to her consciousness? Is it orthodox, I wonder, to say that love is mostly self-delusion, and, to the sensitive soul, self-torture? At any rate, Bessie was sorely hurt.

Blake went home; and fell into his old mode of life again. The strength and freshness of his four days of travel speedily declined. His old moods and thoughts and

fancies returned upon him. I am sorry to say that certain beauties of the county town in low-bodied muslins occupied the greater share of them, well-nigh squeezing out the silly girl who now was sadly and secretly paining and pining for his versatile love. Yet, indeed, she did make some part of the beings who came to his thoughts. It was not in his nature to shut out from his day-dreams any girl with whom he came into contact, much less the angelic being who so recently had been, so to speak, his sole stock in trade.

For two or three days she met him, I will not deny it, with the hope, to herself, unacknowledged, that he would be himself again. But he was not. He met her with bluff forgetfulness, unconsciousness, of that special amatory interlude. And I beg you to consider that this came not of defective

feeling, indeed you know enough of him to say it did not, but of the rude mental strength resulting from his journey. At last, self-conscious, she shrank out of his way, would not go to him, could not look on him, turned from the window when she heard his footstep in the court. She would try to kill her love for him in lowliness and self-repression with abasing epithets. I think this nursed it rather.

Miss Robison came to her in this mood, inquiring how her love prospered; and Bessie, with the license of friendship, answered tartly, Why should Miss Robison trouble herself? Did she want the handsome doctor?

“Lassie,” answered the monitress, “did I call him handsome? Why should I want the boy? The best love the like of him could give would be calf-love. One could

not make much of a bolster of it. A pillow of stone, like Jacob's, would be safer, even if colder, than moonshine like it. But I see, my dear, that you fret. Now, never fret in love; it spoils your face, it spoils your pretty conduct. He is fickle, I dare say. All these young lads are; but he is of the soft-hearted kind, and you can whistle him back. Flirt a bit with him, flounce your petticoats at him, and he'll come all right and true again. I am quite serious."

"I cannot flirt with him! I cannot look him in the face! He is too good to be trifled with!"

"You silly girl! I don't wish you to trifle with him. I only wish you to catch him in love and truth, and to make him all your own. To do it, you 'must use the means,' as the ministers say; and the means are just

the graceful play of the charms which God has given you — the sensible and natural actions of your nature, child; nothing more than that.”

“I cannot approach him, Marjie! I can’t go to him with wiles to play him into love of me! I would die sooner than do it! He would see it too, and despise me and my manœuvres, even if I could behave so to him.”

“Very well. Take your own way. I dare say the sensation of a love-sore heart is pleasant. Like a mild form of toothache, it is bearable, I suppose. You have my sympathy, and it elicits all your own, of course. It must be nice!”

“Now, you are vexing me, quizzing me! My heart is too full for it! Don’t do it, Marjie.”

Then the girls kissed each other, and Bessie sat on her friend's knee, whimpering—at least, strongly disposed to whimper. I am sure that if my young friend, Benoni, had been there, and seen this little bit of womanly play, he would have been booked and “done for” right out of hand. Fortunately for the stronger sex, feminine delicacy keeps out of sight all such little episodes, screens and conceals the wondrous movements of women's hearts, which if we saw into there should be left never a bachelor of us all.

But in a day or two Bessie's condition attracted the attention of the ailing Robert, who, contrary to the wont of invalids, was not wholly engrossed by his own ailments; and he spoke to her, anxiously asking if she was ill, anxious because he feared that

the malady which beset him might fix on her more delicate organisation. Thus questioned, she declared she was not ill—she was quite well, she said; but she burst into tears while she said it, and incontinently went off from her brother's room. He was left in no doubt that she was suffering. He spoke of it to her father, to her increased tearfulness and distress. Therefore they both mentioned it to the doctor. And the young doctor was of course delighted with the thought of this lady-patient, and of prescribing for her his choicest pill and potion. So presently, when she did not come to him, he sought her, audaciously sought her in the milk-room, where I am sure he should have been ashamed to enter, but she was not there. He must find her, and so he went from room to room till he found her

in the kitchen. Like a "dove" among "pots," she looked at his coming, fluttered and abashed. She never raised her eyes.

"Miss Thomson, Robert says you are ailing, and I have come to inquire for you. Can I be of use, do you think?"

"I am quite well, I thank you," she answered blushing. He took her hand to feel her pulse in that matter-of-work, untender way which young doctors sometimes have, and "Let me see your tongue," he said brusquely. Then her colour and her tears rose promptly, and, like a startled fawn, she broke from him, and hurried to her room.

Most extraordinary treatment of a medical man! thought Blake. It must be some maidenly ailment that bothers her; and therein he was quite right. And the result was to fix the girl again in his thoughts,

to set him dreaming of her, ill and languishing, and of his gentle tendance and sedulous care of her, and of dalliance and love-making. Had she deliberately and of malice aforethought, showed him her pretty mouth and pearly teeth, and tempted him, as Miss Robison advised, to the ravishment of kisses, she could not have acted more effectively than she did. But then this came not of the merit or appropriateness of her conduct, but of the eager temperament of the youth, naturally heated to ebullition. Her abrupt and unreasonable conduct was the very thing to rivet his attention and to set him thinking of her. He was a very silly fellow.

He came back in the evening to inquire for her, which seemed kindly. He found her so that she could not escape from him, and

his voice was full of tenderness and sympathy when he asked for her now. She, palpitating and downcast, did not see his dark eyes wistfully watching her face. The interview was not without pain to her; and still it soothed her soul, bruised with bruises chiefly self-inflicted. All that passed between them was little—nothing in reality. It might any day have passed between indifferent people. But a certain tenderness of tone and manner was established between them—that tenderness, in their special circumstances, of soul to soul which yields shocks of electric sympathy, very exciting, invigorating, peculiar. She was strengthened and soothed; he was inflamed.

As he went home, he met old John, who broke out, "I was pitten for ye! Auld Nicolson's waitin' for ye. But ye'll gang

haverin' aifter deein' folk that canna be bettered, and ye'll no be hadden whan ye're wanted wi'oot the lik' o' me till gang chaisin' for ye, although Betty Murchison's faun aff her pait stack and brake her thigh-bane, and the doctor's seekin' ye till set it wi' him."

True enough, when Benoni reached the Manse, Nicolson and his gig were waiting for him, and he was quickly transported to Betty's cottage, which was close to his other patient at Tighnagrein.

Surgery was Blake's strong point at this time, and he was the chief operator in this instance, for the elder surgeon was out of practice in such cases. And tenderly Benoni treated the poor woman—as tenderly as if she had been the first lady in the land. Poor Betty! In earlier life she had suffered

or accepted wrong, and had led a life unloved and little cared for, struggling for sustenance till now she was in middle life. The kindness and consideration of the lad in treating her, his feeling expressions for the pain she suffered under his necessary operations surprised and distressed her.

“Wha wad expec’ gentles tae be sae thoughtit for a pair limmer like me? The pain is naething by their kindness. But I canna see whatna way I’m tae win through for sax weeks wi’oot going till the session.”

“It is well that the law provides for such cases,” said Blake. “You have wrought while you could, Betty.”

“Ay, oich! I did wark, sair and eident, to fend aff want; and this is the Lord’s ain sending.”

“Not so,” said Blake. “You broke your

leg, Betty, because you were careless and fell. It was you, not the Lord, that stuck your ladder on a stone slab."

"No, but," said she, with many "oich, oichs," wrung from her by her pain, yet continuing the argument with the zeal of a true Scotchwoman. "No, but it was the Lord's wull for it tae slide aff the stane; there's whar it is."

"Don't argue with her, Benoni," said Nicolson; "she has more faith in the Lord's will than in her own or your contrivings. Don't disturb her faith. Indeed, there is more in it than we need trouble with. It is not your setting or splints that will make her leg whole again. Man may do a little, but the great things are of God. Meantime, Ben, the best of the argument is that it should be both your and the Lord's will to send

her from the Manse as much food as will pass Sunday. See, this pickle meal in the bowl is likely all her store."

"Well," said Blake, with a rueful recollection of the Manse, "it may be both my will and the Lord's to send something. The important point is, will it be John's?"

But when Benoni applied to John to fetch some provisions to Betty, he was surprised at the grunted alacrity of the old fellow.

"Hoo muckle meal wull I gie her? I'm guid for carryin' a bow that length yet. It's wark o' needcessity and mercy."

There was no doubt about John's ready will and service.

Work is healthful to the young mind, dispelling visionary thoughts and emotions indefinite, so that I dare say the young man would have lain down and slept dreamlessly,

without thought of love or beauty. But when he went out to the lawn to smoke his last pipe, there was John waiting for him. And John took off his cap to the young man, a courtesy he had never before accorded to him, and said he :—

“I did yon, Maister Benoni, doctor; I did yer biddin’. I ken noo that the blessin’ o’ the Lord and yon puir body will be upon ye for yer lovin’ kindness even till Betty Magdaline! A hantle mair are blessin’ ye, forbye her. I was wast tae Tighnagrein, and Miss Bessie will gie her a sup milk ilka day, and mair, am jaloosin’. She’s a verra bonny an’ natral-haired lass, is Miss Bessie. Ye’re sae guid tae the puir and sick that needs it, ye’ll get the blessin’, maister doctor! Sae didna mind me when I say ill-faured words till ye. I’m no but an ill-faured, havral carle, that

dinna ken better ;” and the old fellow bowed himself away.

Benoni saw into the old man’s heart. What kindness he had shown to Betty, thinking nothing at all of it beyond soothing her while under his hands, had affected John and vanquished him. The law of kindness rules all hearts—peers and peasants. The apology and the praise were eminently satisfactory. And then the mention of Miss Bessie—why really the young fellow is going to bed!

CHAPTER V.

BLAKE was early afoot next morning. It was Sunday, "the Sabbath morning" of Scotland, which always must be full of its special associations to the Scottish mind, at least in Scotland. I know not how it is, or wherefore; but the morning of "Sabbath" has, from boyhood until now, in the maturity of life and experience, ever seemed to me to awake with an impression on all things that this is a peculiar day. Our fields are usually quiet enough. The ploughboy's whistle or the herd-boy's call is rare enough on working days, and seems no more to break the rural quiet than the song of the goldfinch or the

lark. But on this morning, the whistle and the shout are stilled; the cattle low with hushed or subtoned lowing; the sun shines with less of garish light. Yet may it be nothing more than the reflex feeling of the Scottish mind, subdued to meet the advent of the sacred day, which feels and perceives external things quieted and composed to its own tone. Be it as it may, I believe no true Scotsman can walk out in his country's fields on the sacred morning without sharing the feelings which I indicate; without some sentiment that nature herself has specially prepared the day for holy resting. Blake felt this as, in a dreamy pensive mood, scarce fully awake, he walked down the avenue in the morning light that flickered through the trees. It was just six o' clock, and he was bound to visit Betty to ascertain

how she got on—a kindly work, in unison with the sacred morning.

At the head of the avenue he met old John ; and John, taking off his cap, accosted the young doctor.

“I hae been speiran’ for her, pair body! She’s sufferin’ sair wi’ her leig. There’s muckle pain intil’t. But whouy! yon Miss Bessie Thomson, the dear bit lassie, was sweepin’ oot her hail bit bield, and makin’ her a cup o’ tea whan I reached wast.”

John went his way to his horses ; the doctor spoke not.

Blake went up the eastern bank of the stream, treading through the lank grass, wet with the night dew ; past the patches of aftermath, delicately fragrant beyond all other perfume ; through the reeds and sedges at the bend, where the hardwood plantation

runs down to the river ; past brambly brake and gurgling shallow, till he came near to Betty's hut. Then, a hundred yards off, he saw a slight female figure, bright in morning raiment and in the morning sun, moving lightly away towards Tighnagrein. It was certainly Miss Bessie, whom in the hope to meet he was hastening along his damp path, incited by John's mention of her early visit. At sight of her he stopped abruptly and gulped down his emotion. His first impulse was to shout, but propriety checked that. Then he sprang forward three steps ; he would run after her. Was it not necessary to ascertain Betty's precise condition from this her self-elected nurse ? But the maiden was moving so rapidly that she must be at Tighnagrein before he could overtake her, and it seemed unreasonable and unseasonable

to intrude himself there at six o'clock of the morning. So he faltered and stood stock still, gazing at the receding nymph. Then he sprung forward and bounded after her; for then first he recollected that she herself was ailing. He came up to her at the orchard.

She heard his hurrying footsteps as he came, and she turned to see who it was. Now, there can be no doubt about it; she had gone to Betty's cottage with her head full of the young doctor. I do not say that he was the sole cause of her going. I am sure she would have gone on this work of benevolence, to see the injured woman's room swept out and her fire alight, and to give her tea, although there was never a young doctor in the world at all. But certainly the knowledge that this young

doctor was interested in poor Betty, must frequent poor Betty's hovel, and might possibly surprise her in the midst of her well-doing, did lend a zest and piquancy to her charitable mission. "Do not your alms to be seen of men." Shall we blame the feminine heart that makes an exception of some one man, makes it almost unconsciously? But now, when thus she saw him hurrying to her, she had again that beating of the heart, that bounding and alternate check of her blood-flow which had so often beset her at his approach. She wished herself within the cottage. And really, although young men will not think of it, there is some loss of dignity in hurrying thus even towards beauty with rapid, unreasonably long strides, with mouth somewhat agape from the running. So there she stood waiting by the

orchard dyke while he came up panting and crying out in the effervescence of admiration—"Oh you dear, good, loving girl!" just as he reached the dyke-side. Simultaneously he was horrified by a gruff voice, "I canna tell how muckle I loe ye, Kitty Vass! but I cud squeeze yer heid till it swall," growled from beyond the dyke, giving notice that they two were not alone, that near them other human hearts were beating with emotion kindred to theirs, if coarser. When Blake, astounded, looked over the dyke for the speaker, he saw a stalwart swain squatted on the dyke's escarpment, with Kitty Vass on his knee, his arm around her throat—more ardently than comfortably, I fancy.

What have I written of the special stillness and sanctity of the Scottish Sabbath? Human hearts, you see, will participate in

the repose of nature no more on Sabbath morn than on Saturday night. I am ashamed to think of it. Humanity crops up at improper times as often as matter does in wrong positions, and the world, you know, is full of things misplaced. But I remember, when Blake told me this droll passage in his courtship, the sadly comical smile that twinkled in his usually pensive eyes as he rehearsed the ploughman's loving ejaculation—one of the few smiles that flickered on his face throughout the narrative of his early and saddened love-making.

You may imagine how disconcerted he was. The lovers within the dyke "never let on." Blake found himself openly committed by his speech—that Miss Thomson also was compromised, yet he could find no words to qualify his admiring excla-

mation. He sprung back from the dyke in sad confusion, but the girl brought him composure.

“There is nothing but common charity in my going to see her, doctor. It is you who are kind, getting up so early,” she said.

Blake stammered a reply that duty made it necessary. A blundering stupid reply it was.

“I think you will find her as well as could be looked for,” said Bessie.

“I must be off to her then,” said he; and thus they parted; a most loving little meeting (I am sure you, reader, are also disappointed) broken off and bungled through the inopportune loves of these two boors on the other side of the wall. I am quite sorry for it, for I do delight in respectable young people making love prettily. Their ardour,

their bashfulness, their stupidity even, all combine to make it very interesting to me.

I own it, Bessie was more vexed and annoyed by the interruption than the most sympathetic of my readers. It was wicked of Kitty Vass to be out with a lad so early on the Lord's day; and at first Bessie was disposed to view the matter as a grievous breach of law and propriety. But there were great satisfaction and no small soothing in Blake's outcry as he came running to her, "Oh you dear, good, loving girl!" These were the very words. I am certain she will long remember them, will cherish them fondly. If anybody is very, very sorry for her disappointment, I am bound to comfort him or her as best I may. Well, the words were so pleasant and soothing to Bessie, that by breakfast-time she could

think of that outcry of admiration only. I am glad the effect of the words was not spoiled by a protracted and lackadaisical interview, for they so filled her with pleasure that she went about the duties of the day peacefully, and to church, and joined in praise and prayer with more tranquillity than for several Sabbaths. She, indeed, had cause to expect some modicum of comfort at church. Not so much, I fear, in the utterances of Blake the father, from the pulpit, as in the dreamy dark eyes of the son in the square pew below, staring those dreamy stares at her, which had made her on several Sundays past almost forget both sermon and preacher. Very deceptive comfort she had found it, dissipated by the unconcernedness of the young man's first words or deeds thereafter; sometimes painful, when she feared

that his steadfast gazing would draw down on her the attention of the congregation, of which he, in his reverie, was quite unconscious. To-day the staring was extra-pleasant, on account of the import of that outcry.

Bessie stayed at home that afternoon—to minister to Robert chiefly, to “keep the house” in part, for the domestics were expected to go to church. While sitting in Robert’s room, reading to him, she became aware of an unwonted noise in the laundry, where no noise should be on the sacred day; and, forthwith going thither, she found the same great ploughman and Kitty Vass in much the same involvement as Blake had witnessed in the early morning. Bessie was very indignant. Had she not good reason? Was not this unblushing want of decorum most reprehensible? At least, Bessie thought

so; and the big ploughman having slunk away, she began to chide the girl with all the austerity that her years of management had lent to her youth.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” she said, “flirting and having lads in when you should be in church! You are breaking God’s day,” she cried warmly.

“I didna get ma new bonnet, mem,” deprecatingly said Kitty.

“If you could not go to church, you should be reading your book, not sporting with a man.”

“It’s nae but Donal’ Bain,” said Kitty; “I’m nae strong enuch tae drive him frae the toun.”

“Will God take that answer, think you? You were with the man by sunrise of the Sabbath.”

Kitty stood fairly at bay, and like all

creatures in a state of nature, thus driven to bay, she charged the enemy.

“Perhaps,” she said, “if ye haedna a braw sweetheart yersel’, ye wadna hae seen me betimes.”

And the charge was quite successful. Poor Bessie was utterly routed. Not only was it apparent that her secret was detected by the lass, but her conscience inwardly pricked her. Her own heart and conduct were at fault. She had no right to cast stones at her erring sister. The tears came into her eyes. She accepted defeat without a word, and, vanquished, quitted the laundry.

It was very sad and painful to be thus convicted of evil, such evil thoughts and deeds on the holy day. What could she do but this? She shut herself up in her room, and prayed earnestly for forgiveness,

baring all her heart before God, craving Him in his great goodness to purge away what of her love was earthly and evil, and to restore her to a right spirit. "Purge me with hyssop," she, bruised and broken, cried, "and I shall be clean. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Even her best deeds, her church-going, her charity, were all mixed up and confused with the selfishness of her affections — her good things worse than filthy rags in the Omniscient Eye!

How could she go back to Betty at five o'clock as she had promised? It was with no small effort that she forced herself to go, for all the alacrity of the morning was gone out of her, supplanted by a painful consciousness of her double motives, a painful suspicion that even now, after her prayers

and her penitence, she had not, could not put from her the detected selfishness that was so wrong as a spring of well-doing.

She went—and found Blake there before her. It was too bad really; not an answer to her prayers at all, but a trial and temptation additional. What helped it that an old crone was sitting at the hearth, sighing, “Heich-ho!” responsive to each painful exclamation of the injured woman? For Bessie knew that the lad would stay till she had made things comfortable for the sufferer and given her tea, however she might protract the doing of it, and would accompany her home, to visit Robert, when she went. So she set to work, tucking up her frock tidily, and arranged the bed as best the circumstances permitted, swept up the hearth, set water to boil, made tea and served it, making

only an occasional reply to the young doctor, who would have her know of legs much more broken, as also of broken bones in general. Poor Betty was little observant; full of complaints only, crushed by her calamity and by gratitude.

When he took to praising her kindness in ministering to the afflicted, then the girl's trial was renewed, and all her consciousness of her selfishness returned to her. Yet her prompt mind led her at once to silence his praises. Even although she should offend him, she would hold to her allegiance to the right. So, to the lad's discomfiture, she told him, "Our best deeds are vile and sinful before God. Can we ever forget ourselves even in our works of mercy? When I would do good, evil is present with me. I wish, I wish, doctor,

that I could render service to the poor pure-hearted as I should render it to God!" The lad was silenced. What could he say to piety like that even in that prettiest of embroidered petticoats, on which he had been doating for the last half hour, from his seat on the top of Betty's chest? Piety was not in his line of sentiment. He was contented with his duty, and as much poetry as he could mix with it.

Yet home he would go with the petticoats, however much infected with piety. Perhaps the infection gave them a piquancy because he could not comprehend it; and, as they went, he offered her his arm—a common courtesy in rural parts. Nay, she would not accept it, although I cannot for the life of me see any possibility of sin in it. Then he asked very solicitously about her ailing

of the last few days; and she had to gulp down some qualms of conscience as she said it was nothing. Then said he,

“Dear Miss Bessie, you are very tender-hearted, very sensitive and good, I wish you could impart some of your goodness to me;” and he bent down, gazing into her face.

“Dr. Blake,” she said, “we must not bandy compliments to-day. Let us not do it. This is the day God made; let us be glad therein—not in our sinful selves, but in Him only.”

And piety carried the day, and love was again balked and driven from the field. So Benoni in silence followed the girl, as she went forward along the narrow pathway—followed her, admiring the petticoat aforesaid, and much more the dapper little feet, which were fairly displayed as she stepped along. What untenable positions will not Satan

take up, lurking now in an embroidered skirt, now in a boot gusset! It grieves me to think of it.

But while thus in the measure of her lights and beliefs, Bessie would shut out her love so that she might not sin, do not think that her efforts were painless, that she had no sharp internal struggle. When at night in her room she would have drawn near God, the thought of how much she had lost in the effort to serve Him came very vividly and grievously to her. Would she ever again have such an opportunity of meeting Dr. Blake as at that time, when he, staring his softest stare, had asked for some of her goodness? Would not this, her repeated repulsing of him, finally drive him from her? It might so be. He might never again solicit either her goodness or her love. But

God must be before all other gods, or idols, or loves. And she felt so dependent on God, who alone could trim the flickering lamp of her brother's life so that again it might burn brightly, or could quench the smoking flax of it! Ah, verily, little one! such dependence on Him, even although mistaken, has much of strength and sweetness in it—strength to resist evil, real or imaginary (and how much of our evil is of the mind alone!); sweetness in the confidence of dependence on Him whose wisdom rules all things to work well for those who fear Him.

Well, well! surely there is to be something more in this book than the namby-pamby loves of these two silly ones? You are quite right, dear reader! There are other emotions in life than young love; though perhaps none so universally exciting to sympathy.

For instance, there are the parents of these silly people. They have hearts, I suppose; but naturally you and I care little for old dried-up hearts, which have burnt out their fires, tired themselves in beating, perhaps are slightly ossified. Yet even in old, old hearts, soft corners will be found, stuffed with odd soft things there treasured and concealed. Age betakes itself oftentimes to concealing its treasured things, while youth, you know, from eyes and voice and face, cries out of its love or its suffering on slightest provocation, oftentimes without reality. Just by way of change, then, we shall have a peep into the old desiccated heart of the Rev. Theophilus Blake, and try to dissect it, as his son would say, with whatever of skill or science we are able to bring to the operation. To him let us devote the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Rev. Theophilus Blake was in his study. He was attired in an old dress-coat, woefully threadbare and rusted, but which nevertheless was dear to the man, by long familiarity, fitting into all the angles and crooks of him—in some sort, forming part of his moral as well as physical self. He was alone, and at his writing-table. He was perusing a letter which he had just done writing, and which, as it is now before me, I may here insert:—

“THE MANSE, BY FYFEBURGH,

“*5th August, 1844.*

“MY DEAR SIR,

“I am still in this valley of sorrow and selfishness and sin, digging up wells which

are not much of pleasantness, ever yearning for sweeter waters. I hope God has cast your lines in pleasanter places. Indeed, if men's acclaim, if distinction among your fellows can at all satisfy the heart as they fill the ear with gratification, I judge you must be happy. I pray so be it.

“Now, I am concerned about the future of my son, who is very dear to me, *especially* dear to me when *I think* of him, as now, for he is rather the son of my thoughts than of my loins—offspring of her who left me lonely so long ago. Here, in my study, I realise him; here I can draw near to him in my loneliness. But the veil of my sorrow shrouds him from me, so that, when we meet, he seems afar off, unreal as now is the beloved one who gave him being. Yet loving him much, I would consult for his happiness.

“He has chosen the profession which you

illustrate, and took his degree nearly three months ago. Since that he remains here until the world shall open to him. Perhaps this is not well. Can you suggest aught to advance him? I have money to purchase, if you know of a suitable practice. Yet the £3,000 or £4,000 I have are nowise mine. I hold them less than nought save as they may minister to the happiness of the lad, for whom I am but trustee. The money, meantime, yields me a large percentage. Yet would I sacrifice the excellent investment, in part, or in whole if need be, that my son may do well. Will you kindly think of it, and write me for the sake of former and happier times?

“And I am, my dear Whatmore,

“Changed, but ever sincerely yours,

(Signed) “THEO. BLAKE.

“To JOSEPH WHATMORE, ESQ., M.D.,

“*Saville Row, London.*”

“I hope it may not be necessary to purchase,” said he to himself. “I have had fifty-six pounds of dividend for my hundred in five years, and the hundred is now worth two. The boy will be rich if I retain it!” Then he began to re-read his letter with a strong dread lest his esteemed investment should be broken in upon. “Ah me, ah me!” he went on, “if Mona had lived to see the lad, and had this money, all this money, how happy we should be!” and here two large salt drops streamed down his cheeks and fell upon the paper. “He is so like Mona, and yet like me too, before death laid his hand on us.” So engrossed was he that he did not hear a carriage which drove up to the Manse door, but went on soliloquising, “He does not guess that he is dear to me, my son, so dear to me! Hah, hah! He’ll find it out

when he comes to know that I have saved for him, saved for him so much. Tell him about it! I can't tell him about it, nor about my love either. He would think that I loved neither God nor him, hoarding all that money. My boy, my son! He will find it out by-and-by when I fall asleep. God knows I love not the money, but the lad only."

He was protesting too much, you must perceive. He was conscious that while his nature was otherwise setting hardly, the love of money was growing on him; and that, year by year, he had realised the full joy of adding to his treasure. No doubt, riches had come to him without stint of the exercise of all duty and reasonable charity, simply because he did not waste and could not use his money. Still the sense of pleasure had increased with the heap, and he knew in his heart that he rejoiced in

his wealth. He felt this an ever-present sin. Therefore would he deny it, therefore strive by protestations to clear himself of it, while still it cleaved to him more closely, and weighted and hampered him as a besetting sin will do.

There came a tapping to the study door, and Benoni entered. He never entered without knocking.

“Father,” he said, “Sir James Fanflare is in the dining-room. His annual visit, I suppose.”

“Oh!” said the minister, with a look of vexed annoyance. “Sir James! He always comes at inappropriate times. I was fain to be alone just now. Go to him, Benoni; I must change my old coat.”

Benoni went to the baronet.

Sir James was old, his teeth were sadly decayed, and his face dried and wrinkled. His wig however, was appropriate and good, and

lent to the head some appearance of vigour, which was supported by whiskers, grey, but well trimmed, in narrow ledge down to the chin—a mutton-chop whisker I have heard it styled. Otherwise the face was well-shaved and hard to look upon. He was thin and wiry of figure ; about five feet nine in height ; but, as he stooped, he looked less. He was dressed in a brown surtout, white waistcoat, and grey trousers—the trousers, which fitted rather closely, being detained by old-fashioned straps to feet that were somewhat large. No one would have suspected that he was a baronet and vice-lieutenant of the county. He presented all the appearance of a superannuated but well-preserved gentleman's servant. His stoop and general aspect betokened a habit of bowing and scraping—it might be only urbane consideration for those around him ;

his large mouth, garrulity; his twinkling eyes, inquisitiveness; the whole man, a gentle plausibility, penuriousness, but not unkindness.

Benoni entered the parlour, and the baronet came bowing to him.

“Young man, you are Dr. Blake, no doubt. I have heard of you. Haw! what an immense lad you are! Tell me, why did you choose medicine? How are you to live by your profession? it is but a poor business in this country. Haw! how you have grown! you were only a boy the other year.”

“I see you regularly at church, Sir James; but I dare say I have grown.”

“Haw! I always go to church, of course; haw! very proper to go to church in times like these, when revolutionists have broken up the old Church and are attacking the land!

But is the minister well? I have called for him. He never returns my calls. Haw! he is peculiar, very peculiar! He won't come to me, although I got him his presentation twenty-five years ago, and I call regularly for him. Very peculiar, haw! At his age I was fond of calling and dining. But what are your plans?"

Here the minister entered.

"How are you, Sir James? I hope her ladyship is well, and the young ladies."

"All well, I thank you, Blake. I was speaking to your son. You have made him a doctor. Haw! I wonder how he is to get his living by that? He is so large a lad, he must be expensive; my sons are under five feet eight, and they cost money, I assure you. Great lads always are extravagant. Haw! a minister's stipend is

not much; a doctor is worse off still. Why did you make him a surgeon, to starve? There is Nicolson, haw! has toiled like a slave for twenty years to my knowledge, and I believe his pony eats most of his earnings."

Benoni left the room, disgusted. He felt quite able to earn his living if only left to himself.

"I am told he has good parts as well as a great body, Sir James. I was just writing to a friend to look out for a practice for him. I can buy one. He chose the profession; I will see that he gets a fair start."

"Buy a practice! haw! that means to pay a round sum, Blake—a thousand pounds not much for a fair one. You must be cautious. You will be getting into debt. I had my early struggles, you know. Why not your son? He will be better for it."

“I will not go into debt, Sir James. I have some ready money, perhaps enough, and some invested—not mine—valueless to me. It is his, and for him alone.”

“Haw! glad to hear it, Blake. Knew you had a few hundreds. Haw! did not know of your investments. Lady Fanflare’s money is in Consols. Yours on bond, eh?”

The minister hesitated. He had already said too much. Sir James went on.

“Not on bond. Haw! What are your investments, man?”

Thus pressed categorically, the minister slowly answered that he was a shareholder in the Bank of Van Diemen’s Land.

“Haw! haw!” cried the baronet, “very flourishing concern! Morton, at Fyfeburgh, sold some the other day at £210. How many shares have you?”

“Eighteen,” said Blake. “Mr. Morton put me in the way of them.”

“Eighteen! Haw! Why, the lad will be rich. Had no thought, Blake, you were so well to do! You are worth £5,000, every penny of it. Don't contradict me. The lad may do nothing, if he is moderate. You may buy him whatever you have a mind to that suits him. Haw! £5,000! I am glad you have done so well. Handsome lad, too! Haw! You must come to see me, Blake.”

Blake shook his head.

“The lad knows nothing of this money, Sir James. He looks forward to working through life. I will do what is reasonable for him just now; he will know of the money time enough.”

“Come to the Lodge, though, Blake; bring him with you. Your duty, haw! He should

know some of our county families with his prospects. Bring him, I say, Blake.”

But Blake still negatived the proposal, even while expressing his gratitude, and shortly the visit came to an end. By this time Benoni was at Tighnagrein.

The minister was wearied and excited by the visit. The baronet's annual visit never exceeded a half hour in length, but it always worried the minister, unaccustomed to forced conversation. On this occasion its effects were aggravated, for the minister had been led to talk of his money, which was part of his inner self—a sort of life secret; and he was angry with himself, because he had talked of it, angry because he was sure that the world would come to know of it, for Sir James was garrulous, and delighted to magnify a man like Blake, whom he respected. Most of

all the minister was concerned lest his son should hear of it; very sensitively dreading the loss of his son's good opinion, dreading lest he should deem it was this money which in any part warped his soul. In all these northern parts, no one but Dr. Nicolson and Mr. Morton, the bank agent at Fyfeburgh, knew of his riches. Now they were sure to be talked of. Sorely vexed, he walked up and down his room in perplexed bewilderment as to what he should do. Common sense bade him tell the lad, and be done with mystery about the matter. What if his son should say, "All these loveless years you loved this wealth and hoarded it?" He could not tell him.

He could eat no dinner when his slender meal was brought to him. He longed for tea, but such was the mastery of habit that

he could not order it before the accustomed hour. Perhaps, in his routine of life he had become so feeble of mind that he feared to trouble old Nannie.

In the evening, before tea-time, Dr. Nicolson came to him, intent to get a subsidy of meal for some poor person ; for, as the minister rarely went abroad, he was dependent on the surgeon for information where charity ought to be bestowed. The surgeon came, and found him in this state of excitement. Skilled to deal with the peculiarities of the isolated man, Nicolson often sat with him for hours, in sympathetic silence mostly, now and again uttering a detached sentence. This afternoon he quickly detected the nervous irritability under which his friend was labouring, and therefore he sat still, without uttering a word, while the minister perambulated

the room at a pace much quicker than his ordinary leisurely shuffle. At length said the minister, "Sir James was here to-day."

Nearly ten minutes afterwards, Nicolson replied, "He's a talkative, mean curmudgeon."

The silence was continued until again the minister spoke—"I told him of my money and stock: he asked me questions."

After a pause Nicolson said, "That's bad. He'll tell it everywhere he goes."

And the minister took up the response more quickly—"The boy will hear of it; what is to be done?"

"Tell him yourself about it," said Nicolson, sharply.

Blake looked piteously at his friend, standing still on the floor in thought.

"I cannot; you know I cannot," he slowly and sadly said. "He would think I loved

money all this while that I have been shut up from him. He would despise me!"

His tone of voice was piteous, for his heart was really full of fear of this thing.

"Ben would never think of it," said Nicolson. But therein I really believe he was wrong.

Nanny popped her head in at the study door, announcing tea in her own way, "Tea's un;" and the gentlemen went to the dining-room.

There Benoni was waiting, reading a newspaper. Dr. Nicolson and he fell into talk about certain cases, which interested them jointly, and the minister poured out the tea. They soon exhausted their cases, and then there was silence. After a time, said Nicolson to the young man bluntly, "Would you like to be rich, Benoni?"

“I have no wish for riches,” said the young man stoutly.

“What on earth then do you desire?” asked the doctor.

“Desire!” half shouted our young friend in tones of bitter feeling, “Desire! I desire to be beloved!”

There was a dead silence. The minister, who was about to put his saucer to his mouth, held it suspended for a minute or more; then he set it down, got up and left the room. Nicolson took to strumming on the table, and was silent. He sipped his tea, and then followed his friend to the study. He found him on his knees and in tears. The minister rose on his entry. “I am sorry,” said Nicolson. They shook hands, neither looking into the face of the other; and Nicolson took himself away.

Was not this an odd jumble of emotion to be brought about by the possession of £5,000 well invested? "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith," says the wise man. Here was no hatred at all, but great love, and the ox was stalled and fairly fat withal, yet the conditions brought not aught of joy or peace, aught of the realisation of that betterness which the wise man predicated. But then the cause of failure is apparent, for the love which the wise man desiderated was not stall-bound like his ox. Fed and tended no doubt the love must be, but not chained and stupefied. The love that makes hearts glad must be free, communicative and communicated by genial word and look and bearing, responded to with a feeling of its reality, vitality, and power. Ah me! What

sad mistakes do flow from imperfect communications of hearts with hearts, in this weary world, wherein we all suffer from lack of power to communicate! How often must it happen that our frigid bodies will transmit to those around them no scintillation of feeling to tell of the warm hearts within!

Benoni went to the shrubbery to smoke, and thoughtlessly lay down in the shadow of the privet hedge, full in view of the study window in the eastern gable of the house. His newspaper was in his hand, but his thoughts were not of it. He also was in sorrow and perplexity. What feeling had been excited in his father by his desire for love? He could not tell for certain; but with that perversity of temperament so common at his age, he would persuade himself that his parent thought he did well to be

angry with him, the son of sorrow, yearning for that which God had so clearly not designed for him. Bitterly he thought of this. No doubt he was hugely mistaken; very wrong indeed to have so viewed the matter, which perhaps ought not to have been in his thoughts or to have troubled him at all. Yet I do not wonder at it, think none the worse of him in that he did feel it, fretted and vexed himself, believing that his father was angered by his presumptuous sin in craving for what was not destined for him. Poor lad! He could have cried out in his miserable sense of unlovedness. Would that he had guessed the truth of the case! had seen into his poor father's heart! For at that moment the father would have given all he possessed for strength to throw himself on the lad's neck, crying, "O my son!"

The minister was indeed discomposed, sorely troubled. He loved the lad very dearly, yet he had so acted under the influence of circumstances and of habit that the lad did not know his love. It was clear that, even in his yearning for affection, he counted not his father's heart as one of the possible sources of the love he cried out for. And then that money! Could the lad believe otherwise, even if the father now went, saying, "Lo! all that I have is thine," than that for all those unloved years, he, the father, had loved Mammon much, his son not at all? Nay, was it not certain that, in his contempt for riches, the youth would regard with aversion both the bribe and the briber who would approach his heart with a tale of bank stock? It was a painful dilemma. Yet in my heart, I would that

all our fathers had had a similar difficulty in shaping their conduct towards us, their sons. Our fathers had common sense, you know; and they neither had themselves, nor bequeathed to us, peculiar mental constitutions such as shirk the proposition—"I love you, my boy! Here's £5,000 for you."

The minister, however, fairly broke down, able neither to make any such overture of love nor to face his son at all that night. So, when the hour for worship came, he came not into the dining-room with "the books." Nannie brought his instructions that the doctor should read, and that the singing and prayer should be transacted by John. It is only justice to the memory of old John here to state that he availed himself of his gifts to the full, singing many stanzas, and

praying for full half an hour, until Benoni, wearied on his knees, happened to stretch out his leg, and accidentally to molest him in the rear. John subsequently confessed to Nannie, who scolded him for his protracted performances on the plea that the minister's gruel was late, that he "was thankfu' for the doctor's hint; for whan the speerit was yon way upon him, he didna ken whan tae stap o' himsel'."

Benoni must certainly visit his father in his bed-room, yet it was after much conflict within him that he did it. But tapping at the bed-room door, he was told to enter, and did so. "You are ailing, sir," he said.

"Oh, it is nothing! I was put about by that visit to-day. A sleep will compose me."

"Do you think I can do anything for you?"

“Nothing, my son.”

So the young man stood silently for a few minutes, staring at the old parental breeches, stretched lankly across a chair's back; then he said “Good-night,” and retired.

Now I wish to ask you, Did not the Manse do well to put on, day after day, that spectral, uncomfortable aspect which first we noted when I introduced you to it? Would it not have been a false and hypocritical Manse, proclaiming “Peace, peace, when there was no peace,” if it had looked other than it did?

Benoni stood out in the August moonlight, smoking his pipe before going to bed, thinking sadly of the world he was fixed in. To his young mind all things seemed unsatisfactory, sadly in need of readjustment. Fathers should have been fore-ordained to

love their sons, which, you will understand, means to bedear and make of them. Pretty girls—yet the youth was thinking of only one girl, just as of one father—should have been appointed to accept love from the like of him, should not have been over-prudishly constituted. Something also he must have noticed that morning, for it was part of his scheme that young girls on Monday should be fresh and cheerful, not blear-eyed and tearful, as if they had spent Sunday night in recounting heinous sins. Pshaw! he is but a silly noodle! I, at fifty, am inclined to deem the world unsatisfactory, but it is from another point of view altogether—the lack of that £5,000 so excellently invested. It should not be long in Colonial Bank Stock, I promise you, were it mine; for I know certain young people

who, doubtless, would deem it very opportunely bestowed on them, but who would deem my love of them nowise enhanced thereby, so sure are they of that love.

It would undoubtedly tend to the better ordering of the world, if young people and old would rightly apprehend what it is good and right to do, and, apprehending that, would do it, leaving results to follow as they may. Thus, father and son in this dull Manse might have been happier. So also with you and me now; let us ascertain the appropriate and do it. Vague and vapid sentiment is the bane of goodness. Specially let us shake ourselves free of that, and do what is given us to do with such power as is ours. Our limbs may tremble, but shall not fail, if we aim to do the right.

CHAPTER VII.

BENONI was smoking his pipe under the shelter of a tree in the avenue on the second morning after Sir James's visit. It was raining, and he was waiting till noon, hoping the weather would clear up and favour him in his visit to Tighnagrein and to Betty Murchison. A servant in livery rode up the avenue and went to the Manse door. Benoni followed to see what this phenomenon might portend. The man was tendering a billet to Nannie in the doorway, and she was refusing to reach forward for it "for fears o' the horse," which was fretting and champing its bit in the rain.

Benoni took the note and found it addressed to himself,—“Dr. Blake, The Manse.”

“From Sir James Fanflare,” said the groom. “I will bear an answer if you wish.”

Blake bade the man put up his horse at the stable to rest and bait, and to come to the Manse thereafter for refreshment. Then he went into the house and read the note.

“FANFLARE LODGE, *7th August, 1844.*”

“Sir James and Lady Fanflare desire the pleasure of Dr. Blake’s acquaintance, and will be happy to receive him at the Lodge on Wednesday, 14th August, on a visit of three days. Dinner at seven.”

An invitation such as this was totally unexpected by the young man. For a while he could not think of it seriously, and you

can easily see the reason. He was in the full pursuit of his love vagaries, somewhat piqued by the inexplicable coyness of Miss Bessie Thomson, and somewhat unwilling to interrupt the pursuit of her, such as it was. On the other hand, all that he knew of Sir James and the Fanflare family was that they were stiff and proud, which was within his personal knowledge, and that they were comparatively poor, according to report, narrow-handed and economical and so forth, people not at all likely to harmonise with him and his specialities. Yet he must think of it, passing the family before him in review as they usually went into the church from the family coach, Miss Fanflare leading the van with elevated head and a look of scorn, tossing her feathers as she went and flaunting her silk frock. She looked every day of forty

years, although the tossing of her head would have accorded with twenty. Miss Georgina followed, not much younger, certainly bearing herself with as lofty an air, and by her side Miss Minnie, who assumed the aspect of childish simplicity, dressing in girlish muslins and modes, notwithstanding that she was twenty-eight years at least. After them came Lady Fanflare, all dowdy stoutness and satin, at a gentle amble peculiar to her. Her distinguishing feature was her hair, whitened with years, neatly worn with a curl on each side, giving her the appearance both of lady-like matronhood and of good sense. Sir James brought up the rear with his figure of manservantism and garrulity. What was Benoni to reply to the invitation of people like these? He did not exactly compare the things, but his dawdling hankering visits to Miss Bessie

and Tighnagrein seemed unspeakably preferable to society like that. Yet there was a pleasant satisfaction in being the recipient of so distinguished an invitation, and his vanity was mightily gratified. He was too excited by its reception to decide on either acceptance or refusal at once, much less to construct a reply. Therefore he told the groom that he would answer by the post.

It continued to rain; but Dr. Blake was excited, and set off for Tighnagrein; and by the way he made up his mind that it was his duty to abide by his patients and to refuse the invitation. It is needless to analyse the motives of this resolve. What on earth was he to do for three long days with stiff people whom he did not know? He must be misplaced; could not behave naturally; should be bored. All that, of course, besides his duty

at Tighnagrein. Therefore he would not go. But his pride in being invited was nowise abated; and he must needs show the note to Robert Thomson and talk about it, and say aloud to Miss Bessie, "I am in doubt about going to Fanflare Lodge," in a bumptious high way. And she, when she saw that his head was touched with vanity, and knew that there was a danger that he might go where both his heart and his head might be turned from her for ever; she also, in her inexperience, fell into a mistake. Growing chill at heart, she spoke cold words hesitatingly—words not at all suitable to the mood of the lad, and which somewhat touched his pride.

"You do not know them," she said. "How queer to ask you to live with them just three days!"

"I do not know them," replied he. "But they are great folk and desire to know me, and three days are a long time in a great house."

"I like friends to whom I can go and whom I can leave when I please, and who will have me at my own pleasure."

"So do I; but after this visit, if we like each other, I could go and come when I like."

"How are you to know if they like you?" asked she pettishly and with doubt.

Forthwith his mind, easily piqued, began to meditate the experiment, and to think of pleasure in going to Fanflare now and again.

"One can't tell the small things that let you know the feelings of people about you, although I am sure I never could mistake them. No one, sitting an evening or an hour with you, Miss Bessie, and with Robert, could

doubt your sisterly love, yet it would be hard to tell the little things that make it certain. If I go to Fanflare, I will tell you how I feel when I come back."

"I'll not wish to know," she pouted; "I have no fondness for great houses or great ways of doing. But *you* are ambitious."

"Ambitious! of what? I don't see what ambition has to do with accepting such an invitation as this, unless big friends, if I make them, may help me on in the world. I dare say that doesn't interest you, Miss Bessie."

She answered not; for although this was Wednesday, and not Sabbath, her brother was there, and she could not own an interest in the lad's life in the brother's presence. Yet the wilful, stupid lad must, of course, misinterpret her silence to his own disadvan-

tage, and it grew up in his heart to go to Fanflare Lodge.

So when at night he submitted the invitation for perusal by his father, he said he was minded to accept it.

"They may be of some use to me in after-life," he said, consciously concealing that his motive was pique at the little girl who made nought of the invitation.

The minister said, "I do not like Sir James's talkative way, but it is different with youth. Go, my son, I trust you will enjoy it. You are dull here."

Thus the matter was settled, and next morning Blake wrote his acceptance on the daintiest of note-paper, the selection of which, as well as his reply, gave him infinite concern; and as nothing of importance occurred in the interval, we will follow up the visit.

Fanflare Lodge was twelve miles from the Manse, and, of course, Blake must drive thither. The old horse and John must go with him. Then came the serious question, at what hour should he time his arrival? He was well-nigh totally ignorant of the modes of life of such people as the Fanflares, and in his difficulty he consulted Nicolson, who frankly said he knew nothing about it, but that the mention of the dinner-hour looked as if he would be in time shortly before seven o'clock. This view of the matter was adopted. Then came the question, in what dress he should present himself there. Should he arrive dressed for dinner or in his walking dress? This was matter of anxious consideration, during which the young man repeatedly equipped himself in evening costume, and examined himself in every looking-glass in the house.

Nicolson was again consulted, and thought dinner costume the right thing, as he was to appear so close on the dinner hour.

At last his portmanteau was packed, and the momentous 14th arrived. Our friend was dressed betimes, and started about four o'clock. He would see his patients by the way. At Tighnagrein, he leaped from his conveyance, and threw off his paletot, and dashed into the cottage in all the glory of evening decoration, the silk lapels of his coat giving him special satisfaction.

"Just looked in in passing, Miss Bessie," he cried. "I am off for my grand visit!"

The resplendent costume, his great spirits, her glowing smothered affections, all struck her dumb as with one great overwhelming blow. She could only stammer her hope that he would be happy, and hurry from him. So

off he drove again, and just then it began to rain.

He drove steadily at first, John exhorting him to give two hours to the journey in the interest of the beast, as they had time enough and to spare. But as the rain descended, developing into a steady down-pouring, Benoni became impatient, and urged the steed to quicker paces. Down the rain poured and pelted, a fair and honest enemy, striking him full in the face. Benoni's collar and white cravat were speedily wetted, and all the excellence of Nannie's starch and ironing gone to shame. How thankfully he would have abandoned the visit before he was half way to the lodge, feeling all the misery of that confounded collar and cravat! Then his new dress-boots began to crush his feet at the instep, stopping the circulation

and giving him pain. Thus he got into a condition of much sin and misery, in which he cursed and swore at everything in general and himself in particular, and was in sorry plight withal.

To fill the cup of misfortune, the old horse fell lame, while still he was five miles from Fanflare, so lame that it was out of the question to urge him beyond a walk of three miles an hour, especially while John was there to uphold the cause of fair play to the steed. First John, thereafter Benoni, descended from the gig to inspect the disabled forefoot, and both got their nether garments wet with the drenching rain. They got into the gig again and painfully walked for two miles, when, finding it was six o'clock, Benoni abandoned the vehicle to John's care, and set forward on foot. Thus he arrived at

Fanflare about twenty minutes before the dinner-hour.

Did ever you know a young man so hardly treated in the outset of life? When he described to me his moist and bemired condition, his paletot clinging to his back, mud to his knees, and water running out at his boots, as he stood under the ancestral doorway of the Fanflares and rung the house-bell, I could not conceal my incredulity.

“You did not ring!” I said.

“I did though,” persisted he.

“To send an apology by the footman, then?” said I.

“Nothing of the sort,” answered he. “I was bound to dine at Fanflare Lodge, and dine I would. What signified dirty boots or wet clothes?”

In truth, where ordinary men would deem

the circumstances insuperable, and would succumb, Blake was all confidence and at ease. It was in matters of sentiment only that he was sensitive—sensitive, indeed, out of reason. So when the door opened and disclosed him, all forlorn and battered by the elements, to the eyes of Sir James's coachman, who enacted footman and butler to the establishment, and that well-dressed gentleman, holding the door ajar, seemed disposed not to admit such a guest to the baronial hall of his master, Benoni grinned broadly, and surveyed his poor feet in such a pleasant, serio-comic way, that the man threw open the door.

“Walked it, sir?” said he mildly, while admitting him.

“Too much of it!” said Dr. Blake. “Horse broke down five miles off. You must fit

me up for dinner somehow. Good for ten bob if you do.”

The man escorted him to a bed-room, where, to his infinite relief, he got off his new boots, although he knew he could not get them on again. He got a pair of slippers instead, and was washed and brushed up wonderfully. Lewis provided him with a shirt collar and tie from his personal wardrobe, those being the days when collars were a brilliant sheet of linen, approximating to nose and ears. Thereafter, the attentive Lewis ushered him into the drawing-room.

“Haw, Blake!” said Sir James, who was standing on the hearthrug; “we were about to give you up! Glad to see you at Fanflare Lodge. Lady Fanflare, Dr. Blake.”

Her ladyship, lounging in an easy-chair,

languidly extended her hand, which Benoni took, bowing very lowly over it.

“My daughters,” said the baronet. And Benoni bowed to the young ladies. Then he turned to the baronet.

“You were about to give me up, Sir James. I almost gave myself up. My horse fell lame at Crossquays, and I had to walk through mud and rain. I am scarcely presentable. You must excuse my costume, especially my slippers. I protest against wind and weather.”

“Fell lame at Crossquays, haw! How have you got dressed at all?”

“I happened to dress before starting. I assure you, I neither carried my portmanteau nor dressed by the highway. I left home, sir, a highly ornamental young man. I am punished for my vanity by the destruction of my patent leather boots.”

The ladies appeared to be unconscious of the apology or occasion for it.

Then the gong sounded.

“Take Lady Fanflare to dinner.”

And Benoni offered his arm and led off the great lady. In entering the dining-room door, his slipper got entangled in her ladyship's dress, and being loosely adjusted to the foot, it came off, of course. Disregarding his loss, he moved forward—“one shoe off and the other shoe on,” like the youth of nursery rhyme,—set her ladyship at the head of the table, and then returned to look after the missing slipper. He found it, put it on, and took his seat. The ladies stared at each other silently, and thought him very odd.

Benoni tried to engage her ladyship in conversation, but elicited merely monosyllabic responses. Of course, he was

ignorant of the subjects which occupied the thoughts of the circle to which he had been introduced. She only said "Indeed," when he had finished an account of how his horse fell lame; and she stared when from that he wandered to broken legs in general, as well she might. He made no attempt to interest Miss Minnie; I think he must have felt it useless. So gradually he fell into silence, and to realise how little of a hero he was; how little of importance from any point of view in this new world. The circumstances of his dinner involved loss of appetite as well as muteness, although the soup which initiated it was constituted on the principle that excessive tenuity could be compensated by excessive flavouring. Sir James took all the talk to himself, gossiping much, if not pleasantly, of the county families, even to

the third and fourth generation backwards, while the others decorously listened. It was with a sigh of relief that Benoni saw her ladyship's modicum of brandy and water disappear after a peach, and the signal given for the retirement of the bevy. He was at the door to bow them out. In the circumstances he had behaved admirably; but to this day he insists that his invitation was a mistake, and that he was mistaken in accepting it.

Sir James became personal on the instant of the ladies' retirement.

"Haw! important time of life yours, Blake. What are you to be about? What is your plan, haw?"

"I have planned nothing. I hope some day to hear of an engagement as assistant to somebody."

“Haw! you are dreaming! Take a glass of wine. Haw! with your prospects, your father’s command of money, you should fix on a plan of life and begin it. You don’t recollect my sons? Haw! one is a major in the Bengal army; heir to the title, haw! The other, Deputy Inspector-General of the Madras army, haw! I wish to tell you of him. I had barely money to pay his outfit; went out a poor lad, you see. Estates not worth £500 a year when I came to them, now worth £2,000, haw! Sons well established in life, you see, haw! A smart, likely lad you look; why not think of the army? Haw! assistants much wanted. The minister can provide for you nicely.”

Benoni said he knew nothing of his father’s means. He was prepared for a life of hard work, and he thanked the baronet

warmly, now understanding that in having him to his house his intention was to urge him to an honourable career. The old man, thus incited to talk, went on very garrulously about his own young life, his privations in consequence of his father's second marriage to somebody, on whom had been settled the best part of the estate in life-rent. He was "now seventy-two years of age, fresh and hale, you see." He talked ceaselessly until coffee was served. Then he proposed to join the ladies.

But then all the chilliness of the ladies came upon the young man, notwithstanding his gratitude to Sir James. He shrunk from going back to them. Might he plead his dilapidated costume as a reason for not appearing again in the drawing-room? He also very properly desired to look to his

horse. The latter argument was admitted, and the baronet undertook to transmit his apologies to the ladies. He bade Sir James "Good-night," and then, to his delight, his first day ended about half-past nine.

He found his portmanteau in his room, quickly changed his dress, and sallied forth in quest of old John and the horse. He found that they had been recommended to put up at the public-house, half a mile off, by which they were brought into the vicinity of the district farrier, by which also the baronet's provender was spared. Forward to the public-house he went in a drizzling rain; and as he drew near to it, while yet a good way off, he heard through the murky night certain nasal performances in the way of psalmody, which he readily recognised. He stayed without, to see what this

would grow to; and, verily, he heard John, forthwith, engage in powerful exhortation, taking for his text the words, "Be not deceived." So powerfully did he preach, and subsequently engage in prayer, that Blake could not be wrong in concluding that John had been trying the spirits familiar in such houses as he was in, and had himself been somewhat deceived. At length the old man was exhausted, and his young master, quitting the shelter of the adjacent cart-shed, ventured into his presence, to find him perspiring and in tears from the joint effects of his exercises and the whisky, of which he smelt powerfully. Benoni could not find it in his heart to hazard an observation on the old man. He had himself suffered sufficiently from lack of sympathy, and why should not John have his dram after his drenching of the day?

He contented himself with inquiries after the horse. The blacksmith had seen it and removed the shoe, and thought it might walk home after twenty-four hours' rest. So Benoni found his way back to the lodge and his bed-room, and concluded his first day among people of title. He was tired, but restless, not realising or appreciating the greatness of estate that he had come to in lying down there. He needs must think of Miss Minnie and of Bessie Thomson, and contrast them, largely to Bessie's advantage. And Bessie's query, "How will you know if they like you?" came pertinently to him, and was easy of answer. The baronet had asked him to his house to give him advice, which was kindly meant; to the household he was nothing. If the ladies thought of him at

all, they must consider him a blundering, inferior fellow; and a blundering fellow he owned himself to be, laying, however, the blame of that upon circumstances.

He became humbled in spirit, admitting that exalted positions did not accord with him. Better was the level of life from which he came than all this grandeur of plate and apartments and service. And upon this followed the bitterness of that lovelessness which had followed him through life, so strikingly instanced on this day. O Bessie Thomson! if he ever comes beside you again, he will not leave himself in any mistake about the state of your affections. At least, if he were beside you now, he would leave it in no mistake; and thus thinking, and far from mental comfort, he dropped asleep in the stately bed of the Fanflares. Sleep

on, poor lad! But from my soul I wish you would make up your mind to return to your unloved Manse by to-morrow's dawn. It would save you many a pang. That, of course, he will not do.

CHAPTER VIII.

BENONI awoke uncomfortably before daylight, so that I suppose stately beds in nowise conduce to the repose of people unaccustomed to them. He lay tossing, dreaming such odd dreams with his eyes wide open as I shall not attempt to disentangle or analyse, turning from side to side till he was feverish. At length it was seven o'clock, and he got up and dressed. It was still raining—one of those dark, heavy autumn mornings that proclaim the decay of the year so distinctly; telling that November is approaching; so like the dull depressions which beset men at times after forty. He did not venture

to leave his room. He sat feeling somewhat cold of feet and of heart; ill disposed to return to the circle of yesterday with its unsatisfactory impressions, yet smiling to himself as he adopted a whimsical view of his yesterday's fortunes. At nine the gong sounded for breakfast.

Then he descended to the lobby, where he found his friend the coachman, in linen jacket, who showed him into the breakfast-parlour—a nice little room, redolent of flowers. Sir James was there, and Miss Minnie was making tea, and, by-and-by, they three sat down to breakfast. After a while Lady Fanflare joined them. The baronet talked of the weather and its effects on grouse-shooting and on crops. Benoni tried to put his experiences of the previous afternoon in a ludicrous light for the benefit of the

ladies, but they were too well-mannered to be moved to the faintest smile.

He gave it up, and took to the bucolic subjects of Sir James, and got on well enough. They dawdled for an hour after breakfast, and then, the day having cleared up, the baronet took him out to see the garden and grounds. There was a considerable clump of hard wood near the house, in the tops of which a rookery was established; and the baronet was proud of his tenants, for rookeries are not common in those parts. With regard to this, Benoni could understand and share the old man's feelings. And under the old trees, amid the incessant cawing of the rooks, to which their numbers gave fulness of volume, there stole over him that dreamy disruption from himself and his individual cares that comes to each of us

by babbling stream or falling cascade, by the resounding sea, by the hoarse roar of machinery or hoarser roar of the multitude. He tarried long under the trees, smoking, not heeding, and in great part not hearing, the old man's voluble talk, chiefly a denunciation of smoking as a vile and ungentlemanly habit, in which, you, my masculine reader, and I will of course fully concur, replenishing our pipes all the same notwithstanding.

Sir James seemed anxious to impress his young friend with the merit and beauty of economy. His wire fences were put up more cheaply than any in the county. His establishment cost less than those of his brother lairds. He was full of sums of costs and items of saving, and gave his listener the benefit of the figures. He was full of kindness to the people about him, yet by

his own account he was also full of stintings which must have borne hardly on them. Thus, when they got into the garden and Benoni greatly admired the taste displayed in its cultivation, Sir James told him it was all done by a poor fellow, a dreadful drunkard he was, who had drunk himself out of every place he had ever held, but whom he had taken in and reclaimed, and now had had for ten or twelve years. "Lady Fanflare values him very highly," he said, "for he has great taste. I only pay him £12 a year and his bolls, and his wife keeps my gate. I wish he had a better temper," he added softly; "he'll allow no interference with his ways."

The greenhouse was really very fairly provided and kept; and while Benoni was inspecting it, the baronet parted from him, going off somewhere about the garden.

When Benoni had remained sufficiently long in the glass-house, expecting the old man's return, he left it, and, closing the door, began to think in which direction he should turn his steps. Suddenly he heard a startled cry, and instantly the baronet appeared from behind a hedge at some distance, bounding on to the main walk, with his coat tails tucked in, and with a buoyancy and speed which, however in harmony with his tenuity of figure, in no way befitted his years and vice-lieutenancy. The cause of his speed and alarm became instantly apparent, for close behind the holder of the Fanflare title came a coatless man, hotly pursuing him, with a garden-fork in threatening juxtaposition to the titled man's rear. "Stop!" shouted Benoni in a voice of thunder, and instantly he had the man in his grip

and was sternly demanding what the devil he was about. And by this time Sir James, having gained a safe distance, had halted and turned about, and was gesticulating wildly. Benoni shook the fellow, sternly repeating his interrogation. The man, disconcerted by the unexpected rescue, perhaps by fear of being brought to justice, answered not a word. Perhaps, the routing and pursuit of the baronet was an occasional exercise, and the astonishment came of the unexpected form of interruption, for when he did vouchsafe to speak, all he said was "Damn him, I'm the gairdener."

Sir James, in the distance, was shouting "I have you now! This time there are witnesses! I'll have you before the sheriff, my man!"

Benoni proposed to convey the fellow to

the offices and to send for a constable. But this proposal instantly calmed the excited proprietor of the garden.

“Oh, dear me! what will Lady Fanflare do? I must consult her ladyship! I’ll speak to her this very hour. Let him go—let him go—the villain!”

Benoni let him go, sternly ordering him to his work. The man doggedly turned away.

“What is to be done with that man? He is violent! He swore he would dig into me with the fork! My life is in danger, positive danger! He must be bound to keep the peace!” cried the baronet when Benoni came to him.

The young man quietly replied that the varlet ought not to be another half-hour on the estate.

“What would my lady do without him?”

We have him so cheap, and he has a poor wife and children."

"Cheapness," answered the youth, "is dearly purchased at the expense of indignity like this. As for his wife and children, I pity them, of course; but if he will not consult their welfare, are you to submit to his violence for their sakes?"

O Benoni, Benoni! Have you so ill read the lesson of your own life, that thus you would have the children's teeth set on edge because the father had tasted evil? But while they were speaking the gong resounded, and the baronet said it was for luncheon, and they broke off the subject and went together to the house. As he wiped his feet on the doormat, Blake nerved himself to meet the ladies so stiff and starched, so utterly distant from him, so unsympathetic. Who that knew the

circumstances of him thus re-entering the house, could have predicated that he was on the threshold of an event which was to colour his life ?

They went into the dining-room and found the four ladies of the house, and with them a fifth, younger than the youngest of them, whom Benoni had not seen before.

“Haw! Miss Shawe!” cried the baronet. “Delighted to see you! looking as charming as ever! Let me introduce Dr. Blake. Dr. Blake, Miss Shawe of Letterbee.”

The girl came forward from the Fanflare women with a sunny smile, and shook hands with Blake, saying :—

“I know Dr. Blake. I saw him last night and knew him, was sure of him, and, like a bad girl, laughed at him. I could not help it, Doctor!”

“I am delighted to have in any way contributed to your amusement, but I am unconscious, madam.”

“Look in my face and pretend ignorance, sir, if you can !”

Benoni did look. It was a frank, open face, cheery and bright, with boldness and outspoken freedom in the expression, with a lurking wildness in the eyes, which, however, only served to give an expression of daring archness to the countenance. Her hair was magnificent. Benoni bowed gallantly.

“I am unworthy to look upon such beauty, but incapable of forgetting it. Yet, madam, I do not recall you.”

At this compliment she broke into merry laughter.

“Well, I’ll tell you then. I was driving, last evening, at half past six, half a mile from

this, and you were pottering along in the rain. Now Minnie had written me that a young doctor was coming to bore them, and I was sure of you. You stared hard into my carriage, sir, you did! But I knew that you were lost in thought of Fanflare and did not see me at all. So I laughed at the thought of your muddy boots and wet pants in those stately rooms."

She looked around her with a mock air of awe and wonder. The Fanflares plainly were not amused by her. They, however, appeared to view her with much consideration.

"I have laughed at my yesterday's plight myself," said Benoni. "I presume the elements conspired to keep me humble on my elevation into the society at Fanflare Lodge."

"Humph! Dr. Blake; a special providence?"

“You must have admired me last night in the drawing-room, in the butler’s slippers and neckerchief. I combined dignity and ease.”

“You must tell me all about it during lunch, you creature!” she said commandingly. “You must sit beside me and pour your sorrows and troubles into my longing ears.”

Presently they were seated at table. Sir James asked Miss Shawe if she was to go to the county cattle-show next week.

“Cattle-show? certainly, Sir James. I am to have two sows there, and must see that justice is done to me. You are one of the judges? Well, my pigs—but really Miss Fanflare will be ill. She smells the beasts already. Come, Doctor, tell me your experiences.”

“Where shall I begin?”

“Well, there is a difficulty. I can’t tell, not knowing where the interest commences. Suppose you begin at the momentous instant when you received the call to this princely house.”

Benoni began to comprehend her; she was quizzing the Fanflares, no doubt. So he began:—

“It was on the 7th of August—a day memorable in my monotonous existence—at noon. The rain poured down in invidious torrents, and I was duly contemplating life with the composure of a philosopher and M.D., when a foaming steed galloped past me and stopped at the door of my ancestor.”

“Riderless?” interposed Miss Shawe.

“Nay, not riderless.”

“Then, sir, both as a philosopher and

M.D., you should have mentioned the rider at the same time as the horse; certainly before the foaming steed stopped short at your door. From your omission of the rider I thought the Fanflare horses had now attained sufficient intelligence to deliver messages. That would save grooms, you know."

"Haw!" said Sir James.

"Our horses are ordinary animals, like Miss Shawe's pigs," said Miss Minnie.

"It is the Doctor's blunder, Miss Minnie," cried Miss Shawe. "You must be more careful as you proceed, sir! You have already raised my highest expectation. I was on the point of congratulating Miss Fanflare that her sagacious steeds could carry her *billet-doux* and be incapable of telling her secrets. You have cruelly destroyed all that. Be careful, young man!"

And so on she gabbled all through lunch, compelling Benoni to speak too.

Benoni ingenuously went on with his narrative. Even the Fanflares were moved to smile at the lad's grotesque account of his consultation with Dr. Nicolson as to the apparel in which he should drive forth to present himself, and at that sage's advice. They all laughed heartily, too, at the stately butler doubting the guest's identity, and, Cerberus-like, blocking the way. Still more they laughed at the slipper lost in Lady Fanflare's skirt, and the hesitation he had in "hunting" for it; not less at John's performances at the public-house. The narrative was a great success, and appeared to amuse Miss Shawe immensely. Yet Blake did not get through it without some feeling of self-reproach, without a sense of degradation, in

thus making sport of himself and his own feelings in the house of the Philistines.

There was some ground for Lady Fanflare's opinion, as afterwards expressed, that she had never heard anything more rude and vulgar in her life ; that Miss Shawe was a wild girl, without a spark of ladylike feeling, "wilder than she thought she was." Be that as it may, Miss Shawe was a frank, blithe girl, and enjoyed the narration very much, helping Benoni here and there to bring out more strongly the comical elements of his story, showing that she was a clever girl as well as good-natured. And as Benoni was going to the public-house to look after his horse, she insisted on his going in her carriage with her.

On the way she told him that she had refused to stay to dinner at the Lodge.

"Who can dine with people like the Fan-

flares?" she said. "I could not count on you turning out a handsome fellow, full of excellent fun."

So she set him down and went her way. How I wish they had never met! Yet how unwise the wish!

Benoni set John to walk home with the horse and gig, and sent by him a note for Nicolson, requesting him to send his conveyance for him next day by noon. Then, in more contented mood, he went to walk about, having two hours to spare. There was nothing specially worth seeing that he knew of, and he returned to the rookery. While lounging under the trees, Miss Fan-flare and Miss Minnie came along. He took off his hat in his most courteous style, his heart being still gay in recollections of the lunch. They distantly acknowledged his

salutation and passed on; and forthwith all the pleasantness, in which he had rejoiced for an hour or two, died out in him. Again he felt himself alone among people to whose sympathies he could not reach, and from whom he would gladly depart.

The dinner, like that of the previous day, was stiff, formal, and silent, although Benoni, fully attired, looked a handsome lad, as he was. Miss Minnie was not captivated by his dark eyes in the least, Miss Fanflare was above observation of them. Miss Georgina would have needed her eye-glass to see them, and it would have honoured their possessor too much to have ogled him so. Thus the lad was left to talk to Sir James; that is, Sir James talked and sometimes asked a question, which the lad answered as curtly as he could. Of course everything

was good and well-ordered, if not over abundant, the attendance excellent, and the party extremely decorous. There was only wanting a little freedom and a great heart to have made the dinner a high feast for Benoni; but as sympathy was lacking, what was the merit of spices? Still as the dinner proceeded, and he got into the silent way or stupor of the party, a feeling of satisfaction began to grow within him. He was pleased that he had come there to see something of the ways of such people; and as, during the dull dessert, he sipped his wine and ate some grapes, he contemplated the table and his presence at it with something akin to enjoyment. The centre-piece of flowers, cunningly prepared, no doubt, by that ruffian gardener whose wife and children he was so ready to doom to the highway, was

exceedingly tasteful. Combined with it, the china fruit-dishes, the brilliant crystal, the coloured wines, the glittering candelabra, gave the table a truly gorgeous aspect, from which he derived a sense of luxury to which he was a stranger. No doubt sensations of this kind are alien to natures like his—the moods of a young man hardly nurtured. Still they are extremely pleasant when thus caught up in a passing hour.

But the ladies go, and Sir James resumes his serious advice and premonition, and gives the young man to understand that in the matter of money his father can do much to help him on; that it will be his own fault if he does not start in a career which will lead him to rank and affluence. But for him, as for the majority of young men who have not known money cares or been spoiled

by the possession of money, the prospect and tale of wealth have few attractions. Besides, the lad had made up his mind to a life of work. He asks no questions as to his father's means, thinks little about what the baronet says of that, but frankly owns he would like to enter the army; only if he did, he would prefer to go as a combatant—to kill rather than to cure.

“But don't you see that would be throwing away your education?” cried Sir James.

“I do not,” said the young man stoutly. “Education can't be thrown away. If I found a suitable mode of life outside the profession, the professional training would in no sense be thrown away. It might be laid aside, given up as the means of earning a livelihood, but in many ways it would turn up to aid my passage through life. What a blessing a medical man as a commander

must be to his soldiers! Education can never be thrown away, Sir James!"

The youth was so animated that the baronet gave up the argument, and rang for coffee, and presently they went into the drawing-room.

Miss Minnie was at the piano when they entered. She instantly left it and went to preside at the tea-table. Blake stood near her as he sipped his tea.

"May I take leave to say that I am ardently fond of music?" he said.

"Indeed!" was the reply.

Sir James came. "Haw! you fond of music, Blake? All the young men now have taken to flutes and fiddles; which do you profess, haw? But all the good old melodies are gone."

"I wish I had been taught any instrument,

Sir James. I sometimes sing a little, old-fashioned airs mostly, but I think some of the modern airs charming. What say you, Miss Minnie?"

"I don't know what airs papa alludes to," said she; and she took up her cup and went to her sisters.

I think Sir James saw the chagrined look of the young man's face. He instantly said in a cheery way, "Come, Blake, you'll sing me an old song! Now, Dr. Blake will sing us a song, Lady Fanflare."

And Blake, knowing his own vocal powers, said he would be delighted if one of the young ladies condescended to accompany him.

"That requires the music of your pieces," said Miss Fanflare. "What do you sing?"

"I hope you may know some one of my songs. 'Will you come to my Mountain-

home?’” Nobody knew such a piece. “Well, ‘The Woodpecker!’”

Sir James knew that. He recollected it in his young days. “Come, Blake, you must sing that.” Of course, the ladies had never heard of such a thing. “You must sing it without an accompaniment,” said the baronet. “I’ll like the old song all the better.”

Thus urged, Benoni began,

“I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled.”

Miss Minnie and Miss Fanflare talked together in whispers as he went on, and this indication of non-appreciation, as he construed it, unnerved him. By the end of the third line, he found his heart beating and his voice tremulous beyond control. He became conscious that there he was, standing in the centre of the Fanflare circle,

on their rich carpets, doing a profoundly silly thing without the sympathy of his audience. A chill perspiration broke over him and stood in beads on his forehead. He struggled on to the end of the fourth line, and then ignominiously gave it up, saying quite frankly, although tremulously, that he was not used to warble in lordly halls or to ladies fair.

"It is so nice!" said Lady Fanflare. "Pray, go on, Mr. Blake."

"So sorry!" said Miss Minnie.

But Benoni said "Good-night" to Lady Fanflare and her husband, abruptly, and took himself off.

He had urgent need of a pipe, and went off to the rookery to smoke, and he listened to the night voices of that city in the trees. Every household of it seemed to have its

own little cause of disquiet; and Benoni, somewhat chafed and sore, tried to comfort himself by the reflection, that if he had causes of unhappiness, misery was pretty equally distributed among mankind as well as rooks. Even the Fanflare ladies had, no doubt, their own share of it, and bore their burdens stiffly and in bad temper. And there arose before him that loving little home at Tighnagrein, where each vied with the other in effort to lighten one another's burden with love. And that little Bessie! Dear, good little girl! How good! Would he have her flirt on the Sunday? Would he have her other than she was? True to God in her lights of Him, she must also be true to man. What although she could not play on the piano? Had he ever suffered such discomfiture as to-night from people who could play? "Bless

the little girl, and confound them all! I'll be quit of them to-morrow," he said aloud, to the further disquiet of the rooks, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and strode back to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

BENONI had quite a dread of the breakfast which he was still bound to partake of and seem more or less to enjoy. Besides, he was hungry and weak; for after the manner of sentimental young men, he had eaten very sparingly of the viands which had been presented to him with so much state and formality—not because it was any part of his creed in manners that it was rude to eat plentifully, but from a feeling which young men of sensibility often have, that “all those earthly joys are immaterial.” Being early awake, he awaited the breakfast gong somewhat in the patient spirit of

martyrdom, without the martyr's hope that the suffering would culminate in the crown. Yet, as it was to be his last meal, his approaching freedom seemed, indeed, an approaching happiness.

At last the gong did sound, and he was again ushered into the breakfast-room, and again found Sir James and his youngest daughter, and Lady Fanflare joined them before they were seated. What had come to her ladyship? She shook hands with the young man, and was quite open and pleasant. In her hand she had two little books, and she told him that she had been all the morning horridly puzzled by them, these being the account-books of her two charitable schemes.

"These things get about one's heart so, and interest one so much. It is quite a trial to one's faith to engage in such work. But

you can help me. You will add up those horrid figures for me."

Benoni said he was but a bad arithmetician, but he would endeavour to do the sums.

"The world is full of sad objects," he said. "My profession aims at mitigating distress; I can therefore appreciate your goodness."

"Yes, the world is generally wretched," said her ladyship. "I am happy to see a young man like you touched with sympathy. It is charming! Perhaps you will give us your mite too. It will be acceptable. He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to—whom you know."

Benoni blushing said he would have pleasure in contributing; and the matter dropped till he had his second cup of tea.

He had in his pockets just two £1 notes, and as much silver as he reckoned would handsomely tip the servants, for with lads like

him tips are debts of honour. Lady Fanflare got his two pounds for her "schemes;" and, regarding this, Blake used to speak very bitterly; perhaps in after years attaching an importance to the money which he did not at the time. "I never could make out what the deuce the schemes were. One of them, I think, she said was for the conversion of Mahommedans, perhaps from polygamy, as she said the young ladies were interested in it. So I put down my name and forked out, and could have sworn at myself while I did it, for we had plenty poor folk between the Manse and Fanflare, God knows. But I gulped down my anger, and was not asked to do the figures."

With true pleasure he saw the doctor's gig arrive in charge of the doctor's boy immediately after breakfast. Sir James insisted

that he should remain to lunch, but the lad declined in the most peremptory way, "I must see my patients to-day, and must start at once."

"The horse must bait, however. Send him round to the offices."

But no. "I must call at the public-house to settle the servant's bill. I will bait there." Off he would go. At parting, however, when he had said his adieux to her ladyship, now as stiff and formal as yesterday, he thanked the baronet warmly for his kindness, and promised to consider well his advice regarding the future of his life.

He had all the pleasant feeling of a captive set free from a long captivity when he leaped into the gig. "I was as gay as a bird from the cage," he said, "when the doctor's boy spoke to me, 'Master bade me tell you that

you lost a patient yesterday morning. Robert Thomson is dead.' ”

“Dead!” was all that Blake could answer, for the tidings quite knocked the gaiety out of him, so that he spoke not again till he reached the public-house. Here he had the mortification, always serious to a young man, of being unable to pay his bill, and having to apologise for it. He would send payment on getting home, which was quite satisfactory to the innkeeper, but galling enough to the youth.

It was quite natural that the first death of a patient should concern him; but he felt for and thought more of the living than of the dead. How was Bessie to bear the load of grief which must beset her? He did not know how well the mind usually sustains blows even the most poignant, and, of course,

his sympathy would have been excited all the same, if he had known it. As they drove along, his fancy draped the girl in mourning apparel, weighted to the earth with sorrow. Be sure that, in forming this picture, he would not leave her without a comforter. He never thought of warping the sad affliction of the girl to the purposes or advantage of his love-making. He had no thought save of solacing the weeping girl, of trying tenderly to bind up her wounds, to compensate for her bereavement. He was too unselfish for otherwise viewing the matter. But if she had been committed to him in her grief, he certainly would have exhibited an extravagance of tenderness and sympathy beyond reason and measure, but which you and I, who know him, would recognise as simply the natural

unpremeditated outcome of that sentimental nature of his. Essentially truthful and real, as sentiment, it would have been, no doubt; but very gaseous and unsubstantial, uncom-pressed by that hard realisation of life which experience alone gives to men like him. When they reached Tighnagrein, he spoke for the first time since they left the public-house. "I'll get down here and walk home. Please to leave my portmanteau at the Manse." Then he went into the cottage, so changed since he last was there.

The little court was very cheerless. It seemed blank and dark and damp, to smell heavily of earth, to be void and tenantless, although the only change upon it was that the blinds were down. He went into the parlour, and there found Mr. Thomson and Miss Robison, the former in his Sunday

clothes, seated on the sofa with lengthened, vacant visage, the latter wiping glasses at the side-board, her face rigidly composed, but her prompt eyes indicative that her heart was not greatly touched. He shook hands with them in a subdued way.

Mr. Thomson said, "Well, Doctor, the change has come. God's will be done. We can but submit." Miss Robison went on arranging the glasses on the sideboard and set forth decanters with wine,—an unwonted exhibition, for Benoni had not seen wine in the house before, save as a medicine. She whisked her glass-cloth about quite in a business way.

"Did he suffer much?" Benoni asked.

He suffered very little, and the end came very rapidly, they told him. "You were scarcely away when he complained of his

breathing and began to wish you were back; and before evening it was quite clear he was to leave us. We sent for Dr. Nicolson, and he came, but could do nothing." And Miss Robison, having completed her work, asked the doctor to have a glass of wine. He declined, but Mr. Thomson, with a grim smile, bade him "taste" with them. "It is not every day we have death in the house." Benoni took some wine in silence. He asked when "the change" had taken place. At four o'clock of Thursday morning, it was; just about the time when Benoni first awoke from unrefreshing sleep at Fanflare Lodge. Well, well! So things go! He luxuriating in stately bed in earth's high places, chafing because the luxury was not wholly to his mind—his friend, a corpse on the lowly old bed that had held him from boyhood! Where

was the good of fretting and fuming greatly at the petty annoyances of time? Why torture one's self for fantastic things like the opinions or the sympathies or the lack of the sympathies of others, when a short time, a few brief years at most, would put him beyond them all, insensitive to them all. The lad sat full of gloomy thought, speechless, watching Miss Robison setting forth plates and cakes, and all the time only death was in his thoughts. Such thinking is all very good; but the mere fact of living, the instinct of life, as it were, is immensely more potent within us than the strongest realisation of the certainty of death.

The door opened, and in came Miss Bessie, bleared and weeping, and at sight of Benoni, she broke out weeping afresh, unable to speak, yet indicating in broken tones, "It

you had been here, my brother had not died."

"Nay, dear Miss Thomson, I told you truly I could not cure him, that the end was coming."

"No, no! I am sure you could have saved him! How he wished you had not left him, counting the hours you were to be away, fixing the hour you would come back, and now he is gone for ever!"

She broke into a paroxysm of grief. Benoni would fain have consoled her, but Miss Robison interposed, chiding her for her sorrowing in such wise, saying it was vain and excessive. I dare say chiding is better than indulgence in such a case. They sat silently for a while, until Bessie asked the lad to go to see her dead one, and he followed her from the room. They met neighbours in the lobby,

entering, whom for a moment they greeted. Then she led him to the body of her brother.

She folded down the sheet which covered it. She kissed the cold lips. She broke out into sobs and weeping. The lad put his arm around her, seeking to comfort her, to soothe her great affliction, by which he was much moved. "How changed!" he sighed out. And he held the sobbing girl, I don't know how long, while they stood gazing on that face. At last, he replaced the covering, and led her to the window, sat down on the sill, and drawing her towards him, let her sob and weep away.

After a time he spoke, "Bessie, dear, he was very happy with you, yet he is happier away, at rest and resting." She replied not. "Death is no enemy, but the sweet friend of the weary. How calmly, nay, oftentimes

gladly, the sick and the weary sink into its repose; not longing for it perhaps, but at the last not shrinking from it. Why will we grudge and grieve because the sufferer has found God's appointed rest—the resting that awaits us all?"

He was speaking in that under-tone in which strong sympathy is strongest and speaks most directly to the heart.

She slowly raised her eyes to his grave face, so full of feeling. She said, "I dare say I am weeping mostly for myself."

"Why for yourself?"

"Because he is gone from me!"

"Poor little one!" said he. "There must indeed be a void in your heart, since the object of so much affection is torn from you. But he has gone to the infinitude of love!"

"We all loved him! He was so good!"

she moaned. "We only loved him as he deserved. Sometimes I got tired," she went on sobbing again, "and cross when he was ailing most, and, oh, how gently he bore it!"

"He is now where love will never fail him, Bessie, dearest." And the lad, with choking utterance, went on, "In this poor sorrowing world, love alone gives a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven. Robert had much of it here. Now he is where all is love and joy. Ah, Bessie! think how my poor soul goes hungered and pained through life!"

She answered him only with a new outburst of sobbing; but her head sunk on his shoulder, and he pressed her more closely to him. And thus they sat in silence, silence broken by her sighs, and they noted not that for an hour they twain had been alone in the chamber of death.

The door opened, and Miss Robison entered, Martha-like, as usual.

“Still here, children?” she said quietly, as she shut the door. She came to them, and dropped on her knees beside them and rested her arms on Bessie’s lap. “Death is very solemn,” she said, in an audible whisper. “I wish to tell you that life is solemn also, and may be much more sad. Doctor, this girl loves you! I conjure you to be true to her as the death that lies before us all.”

“I shall love her evermore,” said Blake; but as he said it he was conscious that his soul within him did not respond to the expression, that there was a hollowness within him somewhere, as if, however the foreground of his affections was filled up, there was a vacuum behind. Still he answered, “I will love her evermore.”

“O merciful God! who in Thy gracious dealing hast called away a brother and given thus a lover, a husband, look down on us in continuing mercy,” prayed Miss Robison, on her knees. “Keep these two hearts as one, without shadow of difference or estrangement. Fill them with Thy love and blessing. Mark them together as Thy own!”

There was silence for a time. At length Miss Robison rose, saying dinner must be seen to. And, standing by the bed-side again, Benoni kissed the sobbing girl, kissed also her friend, and went his way.

I am not surprised that when he got into the orchard he had to pause and strive to compose himself, finding himself bewildered by events which he could scarcely realise. Even standing five minutes against that apple-tree does not suffice to clear up the

matter and let him see definitely what he has been about. So down to the stream he goes, and plunges into it, and thinks not until he finds himself thigh-deep in a heavy current, which threatens to carry him off his feet, and sweep him, God knows where. He had not noticed, or had forgot, that the recent rains had swollen the river, and that it was running with flooded vehemence, until thus he was struggling with it. His first thought was to turn back—the safer and better way; but he went on, planting his steps warily, using all his care and strength to keep his footing, and to maintain himself in the line of the ford. Even thus he lost some ground, and he had grave thoughts of the deep pools under the western bank, only a little way down. He struggled on and reached the bank, wet and exhausted, a good

deal startled too. The emergency, which had for the moment cleared his brain, when past left him more mazed and bewildered than before.

What was this he had been about? A boy still, he was pledged as a husband, bound to marry. Why, the next stage-house of life was the grave! It was very extraordinary. Yet was it a delight to have had that loving girl, his espoused, sobbing on his breast in that solemn chamber. And, somehow, the whole thing seemed very unreal, very dream-like, no more substantial than those reveries that used to come to him every day. He was, however, quite able to separate the facts from the fantasies, and to realise this, that he was pledged for life to the girl. And here his self-esteem, his vanity, if you choose to put it plainly, came in. He, a hero, fitted for

so many and so high achievements, was anchored for life to a farm-girl! It was only natural that he should suffer from reaction after so great a crisis. And I suspect, indeed he has owed to me, that without designing to be other than true to her, he had a heavy consciousness that he had acted foolishly, had, in fact, thrown himself away, while still his life was green. Even his ignorance of life helped this conviction. He did not know how much of life's true happiness abides with self-negation and assured affection, however lowly the objects of the affection may be. Such knowledge only comes to men like him when life's stern realities have dissipated the reveries and illusions of youth, compelled the recognition of life's duties, and forced the man to confess that the world is full of better men. It is much to discover that the

truest good is in repose ; but that is found out late in life only, as final repose draws near.

He got home and changed his dress. He found his father awaiting his return with ill-concealed anxiety, desiring to ascertain whether the youth had found out the secret of his wealth and despised him for it, yet shyly afraid to approach the subject. Thus it was that he welcomed Benoni with some degree of excitement, which was responded to with more than the usual embarrassment and constraint. The visit had not been pleasant, Benoni said. It was no doubt kindly meant by Sir James, but the ladies were out of Benoni's range of thought and feeling. It was a mistake altogether to have gone. The lad was plainly disquieted. He spoke vehemently, unconnectedly, unreasonably, of want of sympathy in households, of miserable

penuriousness like Sir James's; and the father concluded that the evil had been done, that now his son, although he did not speak it, regarded him as a poor selfish wretch, and was exasperated because a love of hoarded wealth had deprived him of paternal affection.

The minister, dejected, sought his study, to indulge in those sad musings which come to man in reviewing the past. The lad, too, sat alone, already mingling, not altogether happily, the past with his dreams of the future. Oddly, and yet naturally, now that he was alone, the figure of Miss Shawe came into his affairs. Benoni distinctly heard her voice, "Ha! You're caught, doctor!" and her crispy, ringing, musical laugh. Well, he was caught, he told her; but what of it? He had reason

to be both proud and thankful. He could not joke about this even with the vision of Miss Shawe. The affair was serious.

I wonder whether many men succeed in winning the objects of their suits, and in the hour of success recognise that the wisdom of their pursuit has been doubtful? I suspect that more men do so than would at all willingly acknowledge it—that is to you, my reader, or any one else; many more, a larger percentage, as men say, than you or I or the world wots of. As to Blake, look how his case must have appeared in the eyes of the public—that is, the parish. The minister's only son, a handsome lad, a doctor, a gentleman and all that, with goodness knows how much money, had fallen in love with this simple daisy of a girl, and would have none but her. Why, he was visiting at Fanflare

Lodge, and left the ladies there, young and old of them, and came and pledged himself right away. Was there ever a case of purer love? Yet, O my reader! and O my critic! behold the truth! Benoni Blake suspects himself for a fool, and I dare not gainsay him. Perhaps the matter, after all, is easy of explanation. Young men attach inordinate value to themselves, and when they, as Blake had now done, speak the irrevocable words, under the influence of sentiment, not of reason, the thing being done for "evermore," they naturally doubt its wisdom. Its very importance makes them doubt of it. What odd results there would be if the next Marriage Act provided a "rueing time," say of twenty-four hours, within which either of the parties might declare off before a magistrate, on forfeit of

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a guinea or two, and white gloves all round to intermeddlers like Miss Robison! I doubt whether half of our marriages would ever have been solemnised if such had been the law.

I cannot conclude this chapter without a reflection upon Miss Robison's part in it. We readily understand her motives, but I cannot approve them. I think something else would better have consorted with her character for wisdom than that mixing up of God and match-making, that solemn way of riveting the fetters of these two young people. Had they been left alone, many things might have happened. While certainly the scene was tender and affecting, and our young friends had, almost without words, admitted their mutual love, yet their relationship had not put on that irrevocable and "evermore"

character until Miss Robison came in with her theatrical solemnizing of the pledges of this lad and girl. Their love-making might have ripened into a serious engagement. I am disposed to think that it would not have done so, that it would have ended, in much sentimental suffering, no doubt, on the girl's part. Miss Robison it was, who, for good or evil, sealed their lives to each other. All match-making I hold in the utmost abhorrence, as an interference with destiny. Miss Robison was here clearly guilty of this offence; and it may be questioned how far such offences should not, on public grounds, be made penal by statute.

CHAPTER X.

MISS BESSIE THOMSON'S prayers had been answered, but in a special and solemn way, so that the assurance of the lad's love, his open promise and pledge to her did not afford her such consolation as you might have expected. Indeed, if you regard the matter from her point of view, you will see that there was some ground for unrest. Miss Robison struck a chord which vibrated through her—soul and body of her, poor thing!—when she said that God, who had taken away her brother, had given her a lover, a husband. That *was* God's answer to her prayers; was it an answer sent in

peace? When alone, beside her dead brother, she could not so regard it. So instead of her heart being filled with peace and joy, this love-making, this inopportune engagement of her life, racked her brain and made her heart ache somewhat, certainly disquieted her soul within her.

For she had had two petitions before God for a month past; the first, that her brother should be spared to her; the second, that this young man's heart should be turned towards her, that his assured affection should be hers. She had mixed up and confounded these two petitions in her heart so that the distinct interest and importance of each was greatly lost to her. Was that confusion quite right? Was it to be forgiven, that while she was praying for her brother's life with her lips, her selfish heart was crying out for the

gratification of its longings? She was answered as she deserved, with a denial of her brother's life—a denial somewhat hastily and angrily given, as seemed to her, and in the hour of that denial her selfishness was satisfied. Could this be construed into a message of peace, think ye?

And when thinking in such wise beset the girl, the circumstances, the time, the place of that gratification of heart vouchsafed to her added in no small degree to her sore distress. Was not the whole thing a sacrilegious outrage? Poor thing! She could have broken those scarcely-formed engagements, and wrenched her heart and person free from them, putting lover and husband from her, if she could, if any mental resolve of hers could, have purged away the love which looked so like to sin. She was

weeping bitterly, pained and weary, when Miss Robison found her alone at bed-time, for Miss Robison slept with her that night. The young girl poured out all her fears, all her sense of the wrong she had done, also all her love. The wise woman was confounded, for she was weary with the things of the day, and satisfied in particular with the one thing about which her friend was so remorseful. She had no patience to reason with the sensitive conscience of the girl, so she took to scolding, called her wicked and stupid, a murmurer against Providence, a sinful thing thus to quarrel with the blessing that had been sent to her. Yet as they lay down and she took the girl in her arms, she prophesied that a time was coming when she would esteem her blessings better. Thus overruled, if not soothed, poor Bessie fell

asleep. It were folly to allege that all her fears were phantasms.

“You must call him ‘Benoni,’ and be frank and loving with him, as you are with Jamie,” was Miss Robison’s morning admonition to her friend. And it was very pleasant for the young man when he came early in the day to be so treated, to be received by these two women with kisses, and called “Benoni, dear,” which he was often enough by the elder, who, I fancy, abused her privilege in this particular.

The funeral was on this day, and the Rev. Mr. Blake was present, engaging in exercises befitting the occasion.

“Have you told him of your engagement, Benoni, dear?” asked Miss Robison in presence of Bessie.

The question, I can tell you, was somewha-

like an unexpected shower-bath for our friend, who, I fear, had as yet very inadequately realised the whole course of events which ought properly to follow upon his engagement. Tell his father! Good Heavens! he had never thought of such a thing, nor of anything much beyond the rapture of silently loving and being beloved, with the faintest spectre of public proclamation and notour matrimony in the dim distance of futurity. He had no thought that he was expected to proclaim his little private talk and understanding of yesterday from the house-tops. Yet here was this most sensible woman inquiring, "Have you told your father?"

It really took some minutes to recover from the question, but when he found power to reply, he said he had not, had not thought of it yet.

“Tell him soon, my dear Doctor,” said Miss Robison. “Secresy in love breeds no end of mischief; and you’ll be happier when he knows it.”

“I make no secret of it,” said the youth tartly, “I intend no secresy; but I must be left to manage my matters in my own way.”

And Miss Marjory became instantly conscious, that however much he might be in love, the lad had a will of his own, and was not to be pushed on. On the other hand, Benoni was led to appreciate more correctly the position he had got into. He had finished the chief transaction, the great matter, of his life; and as he followed the coffin, he reflected that his doings of yesterday must follow him, abide with him, till his own turn came to be borne thus. He had been precipitate in this great matter.

How on earth was he to communicate his folly to his father? He resolved to make everybody aware, that, notwithstanding the engagement, matters must remain as they were until he got into a settled practice.

The condition of things was materially improved on the Monday following, when he found Miss Robison gone and Bessie at her churn, as of old. He sat beside her and smoked his pipe, and, silly dog! had many kisses and embraces, and said many loving things according to the nature of him, and had no let or hindrance or worldly-wise comment. He was in great part restored to a normal and healthy state of feeling; and this morning did Bessie good too, much more good than many scoldings, unquestionably more good than much rigid self-examination. "Young men and young women meet not

apart to say prayers," insinuated the wicked old monks of wicked old times. Why should they? say I. When a modicum of right feeling, of increased contentment and satisfaction in the love you have chosen, can be got from private dalliance with your lover, go in for it by all means, my dear boy and girl. Let a wicked, censorious, over-wise world grin at you from a distance, if it will. What matters that, if you grow in each other's good graces, tasting somewhat of the blessing you are sacrificing your magnanimous self to acquire? There is nothing like kissing to stifle the feeling that you are a fool.

The pre-occupation of the lad's mind and his too evident embarrassment in the presence of his father did not escape the paternal eye. For the father—with his heavy consciousness of having come short of what was

the tenderness due to the lad; conscious too that for years he had thought much of earthly treasure, neglecting somewhat on this account both the things that were of Heaven and his household; sensitive also in his suspicious jealousy lest his son's affections should be forever alienated from him—was not slow to discern conditions of mind such as oppressed Benoni. But he entirely misconstrued their cause, which, indeed, was not strange.

“I know it, I know it!” he cried to Nicolson; “he has found out that I have been hoarding, giving my heart to this miserable money all the time I was neglecting God and him. His face and heart are turned against me. My punishment has begun!”

Nicolson said this was nonsense; that the possession of a thousand pounds or two was a grievance which most young men must

think a trivial one, however they came to it; that Benoni was too sensible a fellow to lay it to heart.

“I know him better! His is just the nature to magnify the offence against his affections, to spurn the dirty dross. He has not looked me in the face since his return from Fanflare; has not once smiled to me. How could he smile to me who took my bank-book to my heart and shut him out from it? Sir James has told him of the money and magnified it, of course! What a miserable, miserly, hypocritical soul he must think me!”

“Nonsense!” said Nicolson; “there is nothing the matter with him but that lad’s death. The loss of a first patient always distresses one; and I am sure the Fanflare visit was no pleasure. If there was more on his mind he would speak of it.”

Yet the father would have it that the matter was as he said.

Benoni spoke not to his father of the thing that weighted his own mind. Yet it was not all weight and care, but attended with not a little of pleasure, as we have seen, although even his pleasant moments had a trick of looking to a dark future. And how was he to get out of his present inactivity into that anxious future? He asked himself the question on the evening of that same Monday which gave him to taste how sweet love is, and he made up his mind to write to his professors, to some of his college friends also, to the few Edinburgh people he knew, asking if they could suggest some chance for him to seize, grasping which he might be led to life and to work. He would do so at once, and he got out his desk and

writing materials, and dating the first note, there stuck fast. He sat staring at the paper, lost in a mist of vague feeling rather than in thought. The note was unwritten when the tea came, and never was written at all. He was too full of sentiment to form definite thoughts; but, indeed, the first thought stopped him. What ground could he state of urgency for hurrying into life? That the country was dull? Nay, that but ill accorded with the facts. The country was delightful; and it was only on account of that which made it delightful that there was any urgency at all. He would not misrepresent the case; seriously, he could not present it. To tell the truth, he shrunk from it, still dimly feeling its foolishness.

Next day he met his love at Betty's, ministering to that sufferer with much angelic

grace, looking very charming and piquant in her mourning. He admired the angel very much, thinking all the while that it was her charity that touched him, while only it was her new clothes. He was such a demonstrative lover, that he was in much danger of getting into trouble. All these demonstrative young men are most odious. He would catch hold of her behind the door, out of range of Betty's vision, and give her inaudible kisses, all she did to restrain him notwithstanding. He went home with her, too, along the same path which on Sunday shortly before they had traversed. He would have joked her for repulsing him then; he would have taken compensation for the repulse now, but she disarmed him, by avowing how much she had suffered that day, and hinting the secret of her conduct. He could not tease her

when she had so told her feelings. Her motive and her suffering touched him, proof at once of her purity, her sensitive nature, and the sincerity of her love of him.

That night great peace filled both their hearts. The girl, unquestioningly accepting Blake's love, deemed her lover's affection in perfect accord with her own. Indeed, so far as human eye could see, she had ample cause for the great joy that filled her. For him, too, now that the sense of urgency was past, now that he felt it was possible to rest in his love without rushing into life encumbered with matrimony, there was delight in the thought of all those endearments suffered or bestowed. If his fancies of felicity must centre in this girl, be bounded by her, did not the realities amply compensate for the restriction?

Blake never referred to this point in his

life without an expression of regret, profound regret that he did not frankly confide to his father the engagement he had formed. The events of a time not distant showed that want of confidence was a mistake. It is sufficiently apparent that his relations to his father in nowise invited, much less demanded confidence, and that his silence was natural. At the same time, it is most certain that if a sense of filial duty had induced disclosure to his father, it would have been a happiness to both. I cannot, however, blame him.

He smoked his pipe that night with an increased appreciation of his manhood, with considerable sense of his virile dignity. I suppose his experiences had routed out the feeling of boyhood quite—that feeling which clings to men like him until some

great event quickens them into men, forces on them the conviction that they are engaged in playing the part of men, and nerves them to enact it. He slept soundly, which he had not done for a week. You know of his unrest at Fanflare, and will not be surprised that he had wakefully tossed in bed of nights since his return. Now, at length he found rest in his love. How much of it came from the fact that his mind was being habituated to the situation?

“SAVILLE ROW, LONDON,

“20th August, 1844.

“MY DEAR BLAKE,

“I think I may be of use to your son, and will be delighted to serve him for ‘auld lang syne’ and your sake. Has he resolved on or thought of any special walk in the

profession? An army appointment can be easily procured if he chooses to have it, but it is right that you should know that to keep him comfortable and like his brother officers, you would need to contribute something by way of allowance. I am glad to gather from your note that you can do this. When I hear from you what his views are, I will 'take action,' as your northern ministers say. Meantime, send me a certificate of his age.

"Happy to hear of you well and vigorous, and believe me, my dear Blake,

"Yours faithfully,

(Signed) "JO. WHATMORE."

Such was the reply to Mr. Blake's letter. And when the father got it, and read it eagerly, what think you was his first emo-

tion? A strong feeling of relief, for he deemed his valued investment safe. The lad would leap into the army, and he should have a liberal allowance. This feeling came to him mechanically, and he had to set his reason and his better self to work to crush it and cast it out. He gave the letter to his son at breakfast. The son read it carefully and, folding it up, put it into his pocket. After the taciturn manner of their communications, all he said, as he got up to go out, was, "I will think about this, father."

Now, this letter moved the youth very much. In his youthful dreams, the pomp and circumstance of war had formed an important feature, connecting him, the hero, with the acclaim of peoples. But the other day, if this offer had been in his hands, it would have sufficed for his every

aspiration, and he would have girt on his sabre, or other weapon, and gone forth proudly to conquer fame. Even now, he could fancy himself a dashing, gallant fellow, looked upon and admired; and, in the vagaries of his thoughts, Miss Shawe of Letterbee admired him greatly. But he was chained and bound down. Without arguing the matter, his reason told him, that his path in life must be consistent not only with his aspirations, but with his engagements. Reason left fancy to do the argument; and fancy transplanted poor dear Bessie with her butter-churn to a barracks, of which fancy had only vaguest ideas, made up of rolling drums and thrilling fifes, the blare of trumpets and the clash of arms, of brilliant uniforms and caparisoned steeds, of gallant officers and noble ladies. What were his Bessie

and her churn to do there? Good God! if his love brought him much pleasure, must so much be sacrificed for it? In foregoing so much he thought the career he was giving up all the dearer for the sacrifice of it.

He set off for Tighnagrein, no doubt the more hurried to get there because of a spicing of pain in this matter, not less for his affianced than for him. And as soon as they had greeted each other, cried he, "Bessie! I am going to be an army surgeon. What do you say?" And he pulled out the letter and read it to her, and "Don't you think I'll look well in uniform? Won't you be proud of me in scarlet and gold?"

But she had seen just one soldier in her life, and he was an invalid, so that her main conception of a soldier was that of a man in a frieze coat and with a wan face, both

much the worse for wear. She had also that knowledge which came of the county newspaper that officers and gentlemen spent their days in horse-racing, gambling, and fighting, their nights in sinning. So her little heart quaked within her.

“O do not go from me to the soldiers!” she cried. “Please don’t, dearest! God and that kind gentleman will, no doubt, find you another way of life. Do not, my own love, and I shall be very grateful!”

She left her milk vessels and came to him wistfully, very entreatingly, and put her hands on his shoulders, urging, “Don’t, dear one!” And to all this he answered that it was very hard to be shut out from the career he should have specially chosen, and he pouted, and set the thought very plainly before her, although he did not put it in words,

that it was his engagement to her, his love of her, that blocked the way. She accepted it without murmur. She promised him the devotion of her life, saying this in such little words as might well have made up for his loss.

“I suppose I must give it up,” he said, “although my heart is in it. All on your account, you minx! How am I to be made up for it?”

He had some distant idea of distraining satisfaction. He caught her and kissed her as much as he would.

So he was not to go a soldiering, could not go. He told his father so that night. And again the father saw his investments jeopardised. But if the son knew of the value of the investments, he had no desire to interfere with them. All he wished for was

work to give him meantime a living, with a prospect of improvement in the future. He was not ambitious of great things. How could he be, he who saw his life hampered with that burden of love? In truth, now first fully recognising that he had chosen his wife in somewhat humble lines, he was rather hard on himself, being ignorant that the outside world concerns itself but little with the wives of its heroes, if they only keep quiet—that he might have been Surgeon-general to the forces, and had a blackamoor to wife, without exciting either commiseration or disgust.

Accordingly the answer to Dr. Whatmore, when written, must reject the suggestion of the army. Blake resolved to go to Fyfeburgh next day or the day after to get from the presbytery clerk the certificate of his age

which Dr. Whatmore had asked for. He was reckless of his lot, so that it provided him with a living. And again and again was the father on the point of saying, "You need not haste in this way. I have a reasonable living in store for you. All that I have is thine." But the words died in heart-thoughts, which remained unspoken.

CHAPTER XI.

BENONI had resolved to give up the army. He had said so to his father and to his affianced, but he found it a hard thing to modify his thoughts to harmony with his resolution. His fancy would still go after drums and trumpets and swords, notwithstanding his resolve. He went to Fyfeburgh on the fourth day after the receipt of Dr. Whatmore's letter. John insisted that the old horse should have till then to recover fully. The object of the journey was to visit the presbytery clerk, and to procure the certificate asked for by Dr. Whatmore, and Benoni was not to return that night. He

saw no necessity for travelling by night, and it was probable that he should have the hospitality either of the reverend clerk, Dr. Dunbar, or of the sheriff, at whose house he must call, of course, in recognition of his former kind reception there. He received a pound from his father to defray his expenses. He had still a pound and some shillings of his own. And he hied him away fairly in spirits, for he felt assured that the secret of his engagement was not known save by those whom I have named as knowing it.

It is not to be denied that part of his light-heartedness came from leaving the spot where this serious engagement was left behind him; and his cheerfulness increased with each mile-stone he passed by. This was quite consistent with the fact that

he was loyal in his love, such as his love was, and harboured no treasonable thought of desertion, formed no fancy of emancipation from his bond. You can imagine a poor man struggling with debts and difficulties, having great joy in an excursion of a day or two beyond reach of duns and postal letters, though resolved to return and abide whatever may betide. Somewhat similar was our young man's feelings, for, as we have seen, his engagement was for ever before him, in a hampering, oppressive way, barring the path to a life of greatness or pleasure. And by this time he was surfeited of kissing. Kisses, you know, after all, are very immaterial things, having their substance and force in sentiment only.

He had no recollection of ever having been at the Manse of Fyfeburgh, although Nannie

told him that once, when he was a very small boy, he had been there for a period of weeks, when his father was gone away to the marriage of a sister, and while still the recollection of Mrs. Blake's untimely end made women very sympathetic towards her child. Dr. Dunbar and his wife were very kind to him then, Nannie said, and to her, as nurse of the boy. But Mr. Blake's seclusion from all intercourse even with his brethren of the presbytery had cut short the lad's chances of enjoying either the hospitality or the close knowledge of such friends. Long before Benoni became a lad, it was an ascertained thing that the Rev. Mr. Blake refused all invitations from his co-presbyters, and desired not the social visits of any of them. The Rev. James M'Vicar was, year after year, his sole assistant at

the celebration of the Sacramental Supper ; and M^rVicar was a bachelor as morose and taciturn as Mr. Blake. In the clerical circle, it was generally believed that our minister grudged the cost of entertaining strangers quite as much as he shrank from the nervous distress occasioned to him by their presence and converse.

Benoni, unconscious, as youth will be, of the stigma of stinginess attached to the name he bore, presented himself to Dr. Dunbar at the Fyfeburgh Manse, craving a certificate of his birth. Wherefore was it wanted ? That was a natural topic of conversation while it was being written out. Well, he had thoughts of entering the army as a surgeon. An old friend of his father had offered to procure an appointment for him. It gave some chance of a career ; at

any rate, it was as eligible a life as that of a country doctor; and the lad professed himself anxious to begin his life's work. A manly, sensible fellow the lad appeared in the eyes of the reverend doctor; and notwithstanding the hopelessness of requital by hospitality at the manse paternal, Dr. Dunbar invited him into his dining-room, and introduced him to his wife.

You have sometimes seen a lady, a matron of forty-five, brown-haired, blue-eyed, with fresh complexion and laughing mouth, simply dressed, who looks lustrously happy-hearted, making glad the hearts of all around her through her own innate goodness and cheerfulness. Thus you may have some notion of Mrs. Dr. Dunbar, to whom Dr. Blake was now introduced. She looked quite a girl, so fresh and sunny-smiled she was.

She received him so brightly, so pleasantly, that our ever-susceptible youth would right away have fallen in love with her, I am sure, if the circumstances had been different. She chatted with him about all sorts of things; and, in particular, with feminine tact, about that most pleasant of subjects—himself. She had heard of him and of the party at the sheriff's, and delighted him by saying that the sheriff's ladies thought he had greatly contributed to the pleasure of it. He got into high spirits, and was in the best of humours with himself and the world, and as much at his ease as if he had known Mrs. Dunbar all his life. She was indeed very pleasant.

“I must parade my children for you,” said she with her silvery laugh, and she sent for them to the school-room, where Miss Dunbar

was superintending the lessons of the younger children.

They came in, four large girls, happy and bright as their mother, but larger of stature, and two or three smaller people. They came with that frank, open way which goes so far with young men, and shook hands with him, saying "How do you do?" and the room was certainly full of beauty, as they all sat about in it, the mother looking as pretty, at least, and quite as young as any of them.

There was no difficulty in regard to conversation, for they talked sense or nonsense, as happened. Thus in a momentary lull, Miss Maggie, the second girl, who looked as if she could romp a little, asked him if he could crochet, with a view to making him laugh, no doubt; and she offered to

teach him the stitch she was then working. Miss Dunbar rebuked her. She should not be silly. Dr. Blake had other accomplishments. Crochet was for idle girls only, and she, Maggie, was but an indifferent worker at best.

Miss Maggie pouted, asking, "Shall I tell, Miss Ikkle Ebbes?" They all laughed, and Miss Dunbar blushed; and Dr. Blake, without knowing what was meant, laughed too, but was somewhat perplexed. Mrs. Dunbar explained.

"Our laughing concerns you, Doctor. You were here for a fortnight when a child, and our Bella was only a month or two older than you. You used to call her 'Ikkle Ebbes,' and it long remained her family name. When the newspapers a short time ago mentioned that you were a doctor, papa

called up the old, old name at dinner, and ever since the minxes have teased her about it."

"Yes, ma, and Ikkle Ebbeb used to say she was his sweetheart," said Miss Jessie, the third girl; and they all laughed like a bevy of romps, as I dare say they were, after all. Only Miss Dunbar was blushing, and looked, in her confusion, very charming.

"Ah! we are all grown older and wiser, Doctor," said Mrs. Dunbar. "You are a tall man, going to the army. And Ebbeb is a tall girl, doing woman's work as governess to her sisters, and I am an old woman. That is what twenty-two years have brought us!"

Blake was sad at heart, thinking of what all those long years had brought him to—that solemn engagement, which was weighting his heart even as he sat there smiling so that

the group around him never guessed at his trouble. He dimly saw, in that happy group of laughing faces and in the tasteful room, that there was in the world a happiness different from that which he had chosen, refined and elevated, from which he felt that somehow he was for ever cut off; and internal, indefinite qualms were striking him acutely, although vaguely. So he got up to go. But they would be glad if he would dine with them. Mrs. Dunbar pressed him to share their family dinner, with much cordiality; and so it was arranged that he should dine with them at five o'clock. Meantime he left them, feeling much hollowness of heart, as he joked Ikkle Ebbeb about their early friendship when he said good-bye.

Out in the open air, his spirits rose again, although there was no doubt that that

engagement of his lay heavy upon him, constraining, restraining, and hampering him at every movement. Still for the time he felt lightly; and he had spoken and thought so much of the army surgeoncy that, unconsciously, he thought himself destined to it; and he straightened his shoulders and drew himself up and put on a grand air, quite a military swagger in fact, and thus he stalked forward to the sheriff's house. It happened that, as he went, his eye lighted on a sword, an old sword, exposed for sale in a shop devoted to the sale of miscellaneous goods, and his heart went with his eye. He would like to have the glittering weapon, and yet he felt it to be an odd thing to purchase. He hesitated to enter the shop.

He passed on to the sheriff's. That official was out; but Dr. Blake was shown into the

drawing-room—scene of that happy evening of a month before. There he found the ladies, or they came to him, and he had a long chat, bantering gaily of many things for full half an hour. He was not asked to return in the evening, but he had mentioned that he was to dine at the Manse. Of course, he also said he had thoughts of joining the army. And with his talking, and what not, he was a good deal excited, so that he took his leave with a lingering regret, foolishly dawdling on the floor, after he got up to say good-bye. Why? No doubt because the girls were very pleasant with the handsome young surgeon, pleasant as amiable and sensible people always are; but also because our susceptible friend would accept the pleasantness for much more than it meant. He was flushed with high spirits when at length he went forth.

On the way back to his hotel, he passed that shop again. It was not a shop of reputable appearance, but dingy and dirty. I am not sure that it was not a pawn-shop. Yet in he went, quite in a brisk business way. When he got inside, however, he found it awkward to disclose his belligerent tastes by proposing to purchase the sword. To purchase a sword from an armourer may be a matter of course. Men must buy swords, else swords would not be made for sale. But to buy an old sword, a common old sword, that our hero felt was a silly, unworthy thing, which brought down his heroic aspirations to a sneaking, vulgar level. I suppose that this feeling saved him a number of shillings, for, when it came suddenly upon him, he could not so much as look at the object of his desire, but walked up to a daub of a painting in

oil which hung on the wall in a massive gilt frame. Presently the shop-keeper was beside him, praising the painting. "First class copy of an original by an old master. Dead cheap at £5, sir. Rare chance of having a beauty. Not price of the frame, sir," and so on. But Dr. Blake, who had no thought of acquiring any such vile thing, was able, quite disinterestedly, to chaff the man and to poke fun at him and his "old master," which he did so effectively that he was mistaken for a knowing one, and had the offer of the picture for "thirty bob." But he pooh-poohed the offer, and while they were conversing, his eye seemed casually to fall upon the old sword. What was the price of it? It might hang in an odd corner if it was to be had cheap. He bought it, a non-commissioned officer's sword, at 7s. 6d. He saw it rolled up

carefully, so that no one might discern what it was, and despatched it to his inn.

When he got to his inn, it was time to think of dressing, and in his bed-room he found the newly-purchased weapon. So what must he do but open up its packings, of course, unsheath the glittering steel, then button up his surtout, and set himself to flourish the blade in all sorts of belligerent attitudes. And his surtout being well buttoned, and he feeling very handsome, he must needs see himself in the mirror performing his original cuts and passes and general exercise. He straightened up the looking-glass, a pier glass it was, which showed him full length in its brilliant surface, and set to performing his feats of swordsmanship, to his great satisfaction. At length he shut up the weapon in his portmanteau, and commenced to dress.

In course of his toilet he was speedily in that condition, graphically and best depicted by the few words, "in his shirt and drawers." Had he not read somewhere that such was the state of approximate nudity in which dreadful sword duels were fought? He must have out the sword again, and see how terrible he looked in this style; and he fell to cutting and lunging about most ferociously, until he was quite warm with the impetuosity of his onsets. And as he dashed about, lo! he stumbled over his unlucky boots, which he had cast off in the centre of the floor. He was repeating quite a formidable thrust, in which he fancied that the movement of his arm had been ungraceful. He stumbled over his boots, I say, and, obedient to natural law, forward he went with the ruthless sword straight against the mirror, smashing it,

sending it down to the floor—broken, although not bleeding—with such noise and uproar that presently he was surrounded by chambermaid, waiter, and boots. Sword in hand and semi-nude, he stood the centre of the group, gazing on the prostrate and mutilated glass.

Here was a predicament as mortifying as absurd and disastrous. He felt all this, but he dismissed the attendants without explanation. “I will see the landlord about it when I dress,” he said. They raised the broken glass and left him to complete his toilet as he might. Then he got up the landlord. “Confound it!” he said in his loud way, “I bought an old sword and set to trying it to my arm, and stumbled over my boots like a fool, and have smashed your glass.” He further mentioned that he was going into the army,

as if that in anywise excused the grotesque folly. The damage to the mirror would cost £3, which penalty he must of course send after his return home.

He went to dine at the Manse, and it required all the pleasant ways of the family to restore him to equanimity. They did suffice to do it. How could he resist that story of "Ikkle Ebbeb?" How charming the privilege of calling by such a diminutive so fine a girl, who sung and played so nicely! The young ladies sung and played together, and Benoni joined them with his sound tenor voice, and they had quite a concert, so that his self-complacency was greatly restored by the time he bade his entertainers "Good night!" Yet the restoration availed him but little, was far from giving him inward peace; for the evening had disclosed to him more

distinctly the prospect of a happiness very consonant to his nature, but away from which he was bound to travel, never to catch a glimpse of it save by stealth, and never to enjoy. He was quite loyal to his vows, indeed conscious that to be other than loyal was useless and worse. But he began to look upon himself as a victim of love, as one who was sacrificing a very great deal for his love, and to pity himself in consequence. Nor did the broken pier-glass, which confronted him on his return, contribute to his mental peace. Worried and vexed, he lay down, and was for long unable to sleep, and altogether unable to weave his thoughts of the past and present into happy fancies of the future.

When he left home, he had intended to purchase for his sweetheart some little token—a ring or other trinket—the first material

offering of his regard. But his bill was fifteen shillings, and he tipped the servants handsomely, in the hope that they would hold their tongues about the mirror. So of his two pounds only a few insufficient shillings remained. A very moderate ring would cost more than a pound. A brass ornament he would not have. Thus the claims of affection, and his own feeling of what was proper had to be stifled, for he would not incur a debt. His sense of what was proper was too delicate for that.

He returned home, and, as he drove along, all the vivacity of the day before died out of him. Truth and soberness prevailed, telling him again that he must not go to the army with that little Bessie as his wife. Could he not go without her at the first? Nay, he began to see there was great danger

that in the whirl of a military life, if he was distant from her, he should be drawn from his allegiance, and there would be a row, and that he dreaded. He was conscious that he had enjoyed—enjoyed too much indeed—the society of those ladies at Fyfeburgh, their refined and cheerful ways. How could he resist the fascinations that awaited him when developed into an officer and a gentleman? Therefore, notwithstanding his vagaries of fancy and his talk of the previous day, when he did not doubt he was to go into “the service,” he now deemed his doing so a thing impracticable. He was anchored to a civil life, to quiet, like ordinary men; and this all along of his engagement with Miss Thomson. Was it not unhappy?

Accordingly the Rev. Mr. Blake, in reply to Dr. Whatmore, said his son would not enter

the army, that he was devoted to no special branch of the profession, and simply was fairly trained to that profession in a general way. He offered thanks, of course, and besought further kindly remembrance. Then all that remained to Blake of his visions of military glory and parade was the pitiful old sword. In how many cases have the grand dreams of youth left no more with us? How many of us still have by us, concealed and unspoken of, the old, old weapons with which we were to astonish the universe?

END OF VOL. I.



BENONI BLAKE, M.D.



BENONI BLAKE, M.D.

Surgeon at Glenaldie

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"PEASANT LIFE IN THE NORTH."

TWO VOLUMES.—II.



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CHAPTER XII.

PROTRACTED engagements to marry are not to be recommended. If people are in love, a week or two of privileged flirtation has undoubted charms. Yet will flirtation, however privileged, when protracted for months after the end of all flirtation has been attained, and the loving couple are bound by solemn covenant to each other, become vacuous and a bore. There is in this case much of the endurance of matrimony without its compensations. Indeed, more attention is demanded and exacted in this probationary stage than when the knot matrimonial has been tied. In Blake's case

there was much monotony too; nothing beyond kissing in the milk-room and the music of the butter-churn; and he must daily undergo both, although both had lost much of their charm for him. If he stayed away for a day, there were tearful eyes and neglected hair to await his return; and none of us take kindly to such exhibitions of distressed affection.

Miss Robison had acquainted Mr. Thomson of his daughter's engagement, and, of course, the thing seemed excellent and eligible in his eyes. Benoni was, therefore, free to come and go at his pleasure. There was no unpleasant scrutiny of his conduct, no inquiry as to his intentions.— The father knew that the lad must get to work before he married Bessie, and therein lay no small recommendation of the match—

for he was somewhat dependent on the service and superintendence of his daughter, and saw not how her place was to be supplied.

And although both sentiment and savour were abated, still Benoni was fairly dutiful, kindly considerate, seeing the girl every day on which his absence was not absolutely necessary, most days staying long hours beside her. One day he found her quite idle, and "not knowing of anything to do." He was going to fish, would she not go with him? He would enjoy his walk so much the more, and fish so much more gaily with her at his side. But she would not. She asked how could she go pleasuring within a month of her brother's death. "Pleasuring!" said he. "What wrong in that, since it only is to bear your husband com-

pany?" He was not her husband yet, she answered; and if he were, she would grudge herself such a pleasure as this, an excursion to a lake, which she could reasonably decline even with a husband, while her brother's death was so recent. Upon this our young man got angry and sour of heart. He would not go alone. He would not stay with her. He straightway went home.

Dr. Blake and I have often speculated on the probability of coming evil foreshadowing itself to the human mind when there is no knowledge of circumstances whence the evil may spring. Many people aver that they have had a presentiment of disaster, but I doubt whether they could justly aver ignorance of the source or cause of the apprehended evil. I am utterly opposed to belief in presentiments, yet Blake has frequently

told me the following as an actual experience of his own.

He was out of temper when Bessie refused to go fishing with him, and he shouldered his rod in high dudgeon, and then flung it down on the milk-house floor. "It may lie there till I want it," he said, as he stalked off without his accustomed farewell of love. Presently he was on the eastern bank of the river, and then there fell on him a vague dread of something which he could not define, a dire anticipation of evil, a terrible sinking of the heart, such as he could only associate with the thought that approaching death might be like it. He says too that he knew that this concerned his father; though why his father was thus in his thoughts he could not tell, for he remembered that he had not seen him that morning. His dread

made him hurry homewards, anxious to see his parent, while the heavy, death-like feeling almost took away his power to walk. Dr. Blake further states that on two or three occasions in his life besides this one, the same feeling beset him, and that evil always followed. The day of this occurrence he describes as fine, which certainly adds to the difficulty of a solution.

Yet I am not disposed to regard this as a real presentiment, and think that the matter admits of easy explanation. He had lost his temper, and in this, according to his own idea, the foreboding had its origin. And he had lost his temper because the girl's answer had indirectly charged him with forgetfulness of what was due to her feelings in mourning for her brother, and because his sweet will was not her supreme motive. This very naturally

begot a gloomy view of the future in a mind like his ; and, unconsciously, there was within him the latent admission of the foolishness of his engagement, which he had already once and again owned to himself was not likely to conduce to a brilliant career, whatever happiness it might bring him otherwise. Now it brought him only displeasure. I see ample foundation for gloomy forebodings regarding the future, even supposing that he shut out from himself all admission of their groundwork. But how mix up his father with them ? I say the fact that he had not seen his father that morning may sufficiently account for this. Can any one tell that, in a vague way, that fact was not in his mind when he resolved to go home so hastily ? At any rate, going home, he recalled the fact ; and when his father got fixed in his thoughts, I do not

think that their character would thereby be enlivened. Something, too, must be assigned to the strong imagination of the lad, which, although he was, of course, thoroughly desirous of speaking the truth, must in its retrospection have somewhat qualified and distorted his recollection through association with the events which followed.

In this wretched frame of mind, however, he found his way to the Manse door, where he was met by Nannie, with white face and quivering lips.

“I was longing for you,” she said, “fearin’ ye wadna be back, for something awfu’ is wrang wi’ the minister. Puir man! He’s groanin’ and moanin’ fearfu’!” And, indeed, Benoni, in the lobby, could hear the long-drawn sobs of his father come at intervals from him in his study.

“Do you know what is the matter?” asked Benoni, half the vague feeling which oppressed him driven off by the reality of evil.

“I ken naething,” she answered. “He was well enuch when he got up, for I seed him come gaily doun stairs, and gang intil the study, and he haesna come oot o’ ’t since.”

“Have you gone to see him?”

“I gaed intil him, tae tell him o’ the breakfast, an’ he was walkin’ up and doun the floor wi’ a letter in his han’, readin’ ’t lik’, an’ he ne’er lat on till me. Syne, I gied ye yer tea. Syn I gaed till him again, an’ he was sittin’ in his chayre, groanin’ an’ moanin’, and he didna speak, an’ I’m a’ trimlin’.”

Benoni listened for a minute or two at the study door, hearing his father’s breathing go hard and short; after which came a long-drawn groan or sob or stifled cry, it was

hard to say which. Then the lad entered the room.

His father was sitting at the writing-table, and on it lay a letter. His eyes were vague and staring, his face suffused, the veins of his forehead swollen like cords, his arms hanging loosely down. He seemed not to notice the entrance of his son. "You are unwell, father." At the voice the man turned in his chair, made an effort to raise the feeble arms, then sunk down helplessly, falling forward on the desk.

Benoni undid the shirt collar and neckerchief, shouting to the housekeeper to run for old John.

"The Lord be about us," said Nannie, entering with the old man-servant, "he' = stricken down!"

"The pair auld maister!" said John. "It = s

o' his preachin' sae hard last day agin the lik' o' puir Betty! I was certain sure he cudna but be grippit himsel' whan he cam' tae think o't. Wae's me! it's a awfu' dwam though!" said he, as the minister's breath went thick and stertorous. "Lord! he's deein'!" cried John.

"Silence!" said Benoni, who by this time had taken out a lancet, and was ripping up the sleeve of the old coat till it was slit up to the shoulder. Then he rolled up the under-clothing, and bidding them bring a basin, bound the arm, and opened a vein. The blood flowed dully at first, but, by-and-by, more freely, and the relief afforded was apparent in the moderated breathing of the patient. "Nannie, run for Dr. Nicolson."

John held the bleeding arm over the

basin, in an admiring stupor. He often, in after days, recounted the circumstances, with the comment, "Thae doctors are fearsome creaturs! They'd butcher their vera faither gif they thocht it wad dae guid!"

Good the bleeding did do; and, with the aid of John, Benoni carried his father to his bed-room, undressed him and put him to bed. Although very distinctly relieved, the minister lay still in a state of semi-conscious somnolence.

And now, as Benoni sat by the bed-side anxiously noting each breathing and pulse of his sire, speculating on the cause of this sudden seizure, he fell into a new and specially becoming and natural phase of feeling. The father, who now seemed about to leave him, appeared not only as the author of his being, to whom he owed natural reve-

rence, but to be closely bound up with all the associations and affections of his life, a centre round which his whole existence hitherto had revolved. And hitherto that centre had, sun-like, been the source of all the warmth and comfort and regular progression of his life. He glowed with gratitude as he thought of this. The unvarying gentleness of the man, in the lad's retrospect, came as a thing for love and reverence and imitation. Even that shy reticence, that concealment of thought and feeling, of which Benoni had so often complained, were now converted into tender peculiarities of a father, loving and beloved. All these things were in his busy head and heart as he sat by the bed-side of his father and his stay, feeling that stay yielding, crumbling away from him, leaving him to isolation in the world in

which he must henceforth wander unaided, uncontrolled.

“My father! my dear father!” he spoke out passionately.

From the bed there came a feebly whispered response, “My boy! my boy!”

Dr. Nicolson came about an hour after this, and the surgeons consulted together. The proximate cause of the attack was certainly congestion of the brain, which would have quickly put on all the graver symptoms of apoplexy, if Benoni's prompt treatment had not arrested the evil. Even as it was, there must be blistering of the head, and other active treatment. When all this had been attended to, there arose the question where the malady had originated. They were in the study, and Benoni was telling the few facts which Nannie had given to him concerning

his father's conduct of the morning, when Nicolson exclaimed "Here it is! This is the letter. It has wrought the mischief!" and he handed to Benoni a printed circular, of the following tenor :—

“BANK OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND,

“ *London, 30th August, 1844.*

“SIR,

“I regret to acquaint you that in consequence of the disappearance and supposed death of the late Manager having aroused suspicion, an investigation of the affairs of the bank became necessary, and the worst fears of the Directors have been realised. The whole capital appears to have been lost, together with large sums with which the bank was otherwise entrusted. In the circumstances, we have closed our doors,

and pending judicial proceedings in bankruptcy, we beg to give you the earliest information of our unfortunate position.

“I am respectfully, sir,

“Your most obedient servant,

(Signed) “PHILIP GNOMEN,

“Chairman.”

“And what does that mean?” asked Benoni. “What had my father to do with foreign banks?”

“It means,” said Nicolson, “that he has lost £4,000, and is beggared, perhaps.”

Benoni walked up and down for a few minutes in thought. When he spoke, he said, “Doctor, I dare say when I advance in life I shall esteem money more than I do now. I care not for the money, and it is well to know the disturbing cause in thi

case. My duty is plain — to strive to soothe the old man, to try to compensate him with active love for his material loss.”

“Do that like a good fellow!” was all that old Nicolson could say, for his heart was full, and he could not tell of the long-concealed but tender love of the father for his son. “Do that like a good fellow, and God will bless the issue.”

So the father lingered in illness, and the son sat from night to day and from day to night, gently, carefully nursing him; speaking not at all of the blow which had stunned him; showing much of the sympathy and tender regard which filled his own heart. And this I am sure of, that natures like my friend's, notwithstanding all the folly which his caused him to enact, are really the best for sick-bed attendance—more womanly than

a woman's. Nor was all insight into his father's breast denied the lad, for going into the study to smoke his pipes, so that he might be within hearing of sound in the sick man's room, he stumbled there on the first letter of the minister to Dr. Whatmore, written in the cramped characters he knew so well, yet neatly written too. The paper itself explained why this copy had not been forwarded to the post, by the dried-up marks of two large round tears, which still may be traced on its surface. This revelation of his father's secreted love was all that was needed to fan the youth's affection into lasting ardour.

On the evening of the day on which the father was struck down, Benoni found time to send a letter to his love, stating the sad illness of his father, who he feared w

dying, that this must interrupt his visits to her in the meantime, and asking her to come to him, that his heart might be satisfied with her presence, even for ever so brief a moment; and John duly delivered the letter. If you recollect Master Benoni's bad temper of the forenoon, still you will not wonder that the note made no reference to it, offered no apology for it, for all remembrance of the bad temper and its occasion had been swept away by the more serious events of the day—nay, in this narrative of the day, I might well have forgotten the paltry incident myself. But not so with Bessie Thomson. She had exercised her poor little heart on the subject, greatly to her heart's distress of course, deeming this first little aberration evidence that Benoni loved her not—that they never

could be happy; in fact, that God himself was showing her that their engagement was not of Him. Wherefore, instead of rushing to his neck and bosom, to share his trouble and to lighten it, she wrote him as follows :—

“DEAREST ONE,

“You know how I love you, and that without you my life will be cheerless indeed. But my duty to God, and my love of you, which is very sensitive, and makes me fear lest you have tied yourself to me, a poor thing, unworthy of you, thoughtlessly and in forgetfulness of your own happiness, prompt me to bring it before you, for I fear, I fear that you do not love me as I wish. O Benoni! dearest one! look into your own heart before God, and see if you love me; and, if you do not, oh! leave

me to God's mercy, and my own loving thoughts of you, and seek your happiness in another, although then I shall not be long in following poor Robert.

"Your ever loving

"BESSIE THOMSON."

It was about ten at night when Blake got this wonderful letter, and you may be sure that it astonished him, and perplexed him not a little. At first, he could assign no reason or motive for it; and even when he recalled that little tantrum, he could not believe that the secret of it was there. It was altogether inexplicable, and jarred sadly upon his feelings of the hour, for his prevailing sentiment was that love was the supreme good, that every heart was bound to gush out to every heart that drew near to it,

and that earth and time and all things else than this benevolence and love were only vanity of vanities; all which sprang just then from the tenderness of his feelings toward his parent. If his parent's critical condition had not made his attendance on him an absolute necessity, he would have dashed away to Tighnagrein for an explanation forthwith. As it was, he was well-nigh crazy.

Did you ever know a youth so put upon? Yet you will remark that the peculiar situation arose from his own peculiarities rather than from singularities of anybody near him. He could lose his temper, and fling down his fishing-rod with petulant words, and stalk away without loving adieu, sorely wounding the poor heart of the girl to whom he had pledged himself; and forthwith he could forget it all, resume his sweetness

and universal lovingness as well as his special love for the girl, and then be perplexed and perhaps offended when he found that she was still feeling her recently-inflicted injuries. Knowing both his nature and the girl's, I am nowise surprised at this critical outcome of this day's events.

If Bessie's letter had come to him in the mood which had prevailed with him for some time before, it certainly might have produced disastrous results. Very probably he would have repudiated all thoughts of hastening her death, and have taken his liberty all the same, driven off by her sanctimony and by her irritating, heart-searching scruples. Fortunately or unfortunately, as may be, he was in very tender frame when it reached him, so that he was only pained, only stung to more distinct acts of love. He wrote her then and there.

“MY LOVED GIRL,

“By the bed-side of my dying father I learn that life is too short even for lovers’ quarrels. Forgive me—love and trust me—and, as I cannot leave him, come to me—

“Ever, dearest, your own

“BENONI.”

He desired John to deliver this the first thing next morning.

Thus, after he had learned to doubt the wisdom and the reality of the love he had pledged to Bessie Thomson, had seen distinctly how it was to trammel and hamper him, without any increase of the reality of the affection or increased sense of its reasonableness, he added a fresh rivet to his bond—wilfully did it. I expect all my lady reads to cry out that it was the correct thing, right, so admirable.

CHAPTER XIII.

MY friend, as you know, had actually lost his fortune, and well-nigh lost his father, also well-nigh lost his sweetheart. Yet for years he had never been so contented, so much at peace with himself and mankind, and for this reason. He had found that his father loved him, and he was prepared to reckon a great many other things as of no account in the gain and happiness of such knowledge. The fortune he never had reckoned on, his sweetheart he never dreamed of as really deserting him, and he knew that her love was stronger than his. Thus, in the midst of misfortune, he had great peace—nay, great and luxuriant warmth of heart.

He ministered to his father very lovingly, not scrimping the measure of tender words and other medicaments of affection. The old man, in his weakness, and on his bed, recognised the love which inspired his son, and wept like a child, not caring that this manifestation of mental weakness should be concealed, for deep in his heart lay the feeling that he, *he* had injured his son in the matter of that money. This checked the chances of his speedy return to health. Nay, preying much on him, it increased his malady so that he at times wandered in his head and speech. He spoke out of countless treasure which should have been Benoni's, and which he had greedily hoped to double, giving it to some weird spirit which seemed near to him who carried it all away; whereupon on his bed he howl

out. When this had happened once and again, the son, distressed, held consultation with the elder doctor as to the best remedy for this soul disease.

Said Nicolson, "I don't think treatment will do good here. He is very weak."

And Benoni replied, "Treatment here, as elsewhere, must avail! It is the kind of treatment that I doubt of."

"He may sink under further blood-letting."

"Do you think he can stand a plain, common-sense reference by me to this confounded money? If he could, and his mind were eased, I should hope for him."

"God knows! I do not. I have no skill in minds or hearts like his and, perhaps, yours. Judging by what he has suffered, to talk right out to him might kill him."

"Still this secret weighing on him must

gradually sink him quite as surely. Stand by me, doctor, and if he is calm to-morrow morning, let us have it out."

When the morrow came, the minister was but little better, for the fiend had again been carrying off his money-bags and flashing away his bank-book. He lay weak and weary. The son standing by the bed, the father held his hand in both his own with feeble grasp, as if he dreaded that some fiend might snatch his son away also. Nicolson was sitting, silent as usual. Benoni bent over his father and kissed his cheek, saying, "Father, I never was so contented with God's ways, never was so happy—as now that I know you love me—loved me always."

"I—I—ruined you!" feebly said the old man in a hoarse whisper—"ruined you!"

“No, no, my father! I am a thousand times richer than before. I don't want money, my father; I am happy in finding your love, and rich in it!” and he kissed the old man again—and he stood by him silently thereafter for a long time, till the father dropped asleep still holding the hand of his son.

That is what scoffers may call “a scene.” Well, I grant it is; and a scene, I say, disclosing much of the peculiarity of nonsense and goodness of which my dear friend is compounded. All his life, since I have known him, he has gone about venting this peculiarity of his on all possible occasions, oftentimes absurdly enough, yet ever so happily, that every one, who knows him, loves him.

At any rate, the medicine thus administered

acted like a charm, was better than many opiates or sedatives to the father's mind; soothing and strengthening it, stimulating it with warmth till the man's frame pulsed as it had not done for all the long, long years since the son was born, pulsed with ardent love again, for now he knew Benoni, misnamed son of his sorrow, now son of his soul.

Within a week after that he began slowly to amend, and was able to pour out something of his heart fulness, his vanished visions of stored-up wealth and consequent happiness for his lad; to confess that he had through long years mistaken, utterly mistaken, the sources of happiness, looking for them in silver and gold and things corruptible, failing to see that true joy in life can only come of God-made hearts. He was deeply humbled, reduced to a child-like dependence

on the God whom now he could bless anew and on his son. His son he scarce could bear to leave him for a moment; still when his eyes were closed, and he about to slumber, asking, "Are you there, my son?" so that the youth was stinted of his pipes, his old dream-fits banished from him, and his love-making quite broken off.

For many long days he only saw Miss Thomson once — on the Monday following his father's attack of illness. In answer to his loving little note, she had replied to him that she would trust him as she loved him, entirely, but that she thought it would be "bold" of her, a girl, to go to him. Yet I presume that her ardent love of him was restless and made her fain to look upon him once again, to get by seeing him the assurance that all the ill temper of

their last meeting had passed away and that all his love had come back again. For on that Monday forenoon, she found herself lingering, hesitating on the road near the head of the avenue of the Manse, thinking of calling there, "to ask for the minister" ostensibly, really to see her lover. Consciously, she hesitated, and hesitating lost her courage and turned away, with sunken heart and feeble steps. When near the bridge, she met Miss Robison. "Had she been to the Manse? Had she seen Dr. Blake?" She had not, you know; whereupon her older friend called her "goose" and "girl," and goodness knows what names beside, and made her return, and brought her to the Manse door and to confront old Nannie. Miss Robison asked boldly for the minister, and for Dr. Blake, and said she

should like to see the doctor. He was in his father's bed-room, of course. "Well, tell him that Miss Robison wishes to consult him, please."

"Na, I winna; he's nay tae be consulted the noo, by nane. The minister needs a' his wit and guiding. Ye see they'll hae nane of mine meantime, though I hae tended baith ane and tither o' them thae twenty years."

"You must tell the doctor that I wish to see him," said Miss Robison.

"Oo, ay! I must, must I?" said Nannie, warmly. "I hae na been in the minister's chawmber since he fell ill this time, but I spose ye'll no object tae gang til't yersel' if ye want the doctar, mem!" And Nannie turned away in no small dudgeon, the cause of which was rather the slight consideration

shown for her nursing powers in this illness than any special offence which the message gave her.

The ladies stood at the door, not a little abashed, and were preparing to turn away, when up drove the great Fanflare carriage, and down sprang the coachman, and, while they were somehow unable to get out of the way, Sir James Fanflare alighted. At the same time, Benoni, attracted by the sound of the carriage-wheels, came down-stairs, to confront this strange combination of his sweetheart and the Fanflare baronet. What was he to do, how act? He went up to his sweetheart and shook her hand in a grave yet cheerful well-bred way, then similarly addressed Miss Robison—and thereafter greeted the baronet, whom he quite properly detained. He

showed them all into the dining-room, and left them, to instruct the coachman to put up his horses.

They being thus left together, the polite baronet began conversation.

“Haw, called for your minister, ladies? Quite right and proper, very proper! Haw! Sad business though. That bank has completely smashed, and the lad will be penniless—very sad, haw!”

Miss Robison said they had not heard that any loss had happened. They only knew that the minister was unwell.

“Haw!” said Sir James, “there is loss, ruinous loss, both for the minister and his son. Haw! I am sure it is that has struck down the minister, quite sure of it. Very sad, haw! And I am told the young fellow is to be married. Very foolish, haw!”

At this point Benoni entered. He thanked them all very politely for their courtesy in calling, and was happy to say his father was slightly better, although still in a critical condition, which needed his anxious care. Immediately after this, the ladies got up to leave, and Benoni saw them to the house door.

In the lobby he said in a whisper, "A single kiss, dear Bessie!" and she allowed him to salute her, but coldly, reciprocating not his haste or warmth. "Come back, dears, to-morrow. I am sorry for this interruption," said Blake, as he hurriedly left and returned to the baronet. Bessie Thomson went home sadly discomposed and unhappy.

Benoni was shocked by receiving in the dining-room the baronet's well-meant com-

dolence for the terrible bank failure and the loss of the minister's life-savings.

"Haw! haw! dreadful, dreadful! It must have knocked down the strongest and most active man; and Blake was so quiet, so stinting, and so retired, haw!"

"I knew nothing about his savings or his money," said Benoni. "I do not value the loss at all, and I don't think that the loss of the money has much to do with my father's trouble."

"Haw! Just like you, to despise what is really valuable! But it will be felt in your after-life, young man, haw! I never despised money. Your father loved it."

"It is quite untrue!" said Benoni warmly. "My father did not love money; but he loved me, and was saving money for *me*, not for himself. He did not love money, Sir James."

“Haw, haw! Very well! As you please, Dr. Blake! But I am sorry for your sake that it is gone. You must work now and have no backing from wealth. Haw! How are you to do? You are to get married too, I hear, haw!”

Had Benoni received a stunning blow on the head, it would not have overpowered him more than those simple words of his titled friend. His heart grew feeble and his stomach sick, but it was only for a moment. For our youth was strong of nerve, although so irritably sentimental, wherefore he was soon able to reply,

“You have been misinformed, Sir James. I am not to get married. But I have engaged to marry a very excellent young lady when I am able to keep a wife in comfort. I see nothing wrong or unwise in that!”

He said this so peremptorily, so decisively, that Sir James dared not comment further on it, and uttered only a few haw-haws, until he found some other topic of conversation. After his horses had been rested, he went away, and I believe that he was in no small degree disappointed to find the lad so regardless of the loss of wealth, so little disposed to feel the need of great friends like himself to forward him in life; for the old man had come prepared both to condole with the young doctor and to ask if he could help him. The youth had felt no grief, and dreamed not of asking for aid.

But when he was left alone, there came over him a sick and weary feeling, that chilled him and dulled his pulses; for then the discovery that his marriage engagement was known forced him to recognise that

his life was pledged to humble things and humble work, and that all the high dreams of his ambition were ended for ever. There was no little bitterness in the perception of this; even though the frame of mind which came from the circumstances of his father's illness had begot in him much readiness to embrace even humility with his love.

And just at the same time when he sat thus, Bessie Thomson was quite as much troubled, for she had heard of loss and ruin from a stranger; and her lover, whom they most concerned, had not told her of them. Nay, she had heard her lover's love called folly, and denounced as sad folly. These things were grievous enough to her; yet they were less so than the fact that her lover had not been the warm, all-loving lad he used to be, when she had met him in the presence of a man

of title. No doubt he had been polite and agreeable, but he had shown himself in no-wise lover-like. Did he himself see the folly of his love-making, as his titled friend saw it? Thus she vexed and tormented herself; as if Benoni had failed in his duty to her, because when he saw her at the door, he had not rushed to her and fallen upon her neck before Sir James and the coachman, and whoever else was there, crying aloud, "Behold my beloved!" She was very silly, and very unhappy in her recollection of and thoughts about the interview. In her self-commiseration she never once thought of the position of the young man, ruined and undone, she knew not how. If she had been able to take this into account, I have no doubt that she would have melted, seen his difficulty in reconciling his love with propriety before strangers, and

yearned to see him again and to tell him of her sympathy.

The minister feebly began to raise his head again, nursed and nurtured through his son's love, while dully, although made pleasant by the love of the father, the days passed for the son.

One day there came a little note from Dr. Whatmore, offering the son a situation as a hospital surgeon at Melbourne, with a salary of £150 and his living, all found. "It is not much," said the London doctor, "but an excellent opening for an energetic man, who may carve for himself a high path in that rising colony."

The minister did not rise from his bed that day. He scarcely dared to look at his son, for whom it was to decide on the acceptance or rejection of the offer. In the struggle

between his love for the lad, through which he desired that he should stay with him, and his regard for his welfare, through which he saw it right that he should go, the old shyness, which had so long beset him, surrounded him again. The son, sitting by the bed-side, began to weave new visions of a busy, prosperous life in the far-off land—a new land, where his wife, Bessie, would be undoubtedly recognised as a help-meet for him, where neither Fanfares nor uniformed gallants could cross his path with sneers. But, chancing to look at the pale face on the pillow, with the tears bursting from the half-closed eyes, he stooped over and kissed the cheek.

“I will stay with you, my father.”

“No, no!” moaned the parent. “I shall soon be well, or soon I shall be beyond all change and sorrow. You must go to the

world that you must traverse. Take my blessing, and go. I have nothing but my blessing to bestow."

The son would not. What was his father talking of? "Go to the world he must traverse!" To be sure he would do that, but the offer of a situation at £150 a year did not mean a call from heaven, necessitating that he must travel to Australia! There might be something in it like a call if the place had been at home, but to go six months' sailing to the Antipodes, running all that time dire risk of drowning, and to accept exile for perishing bread and butter, and a small stipend like that! Indeed he would refuse this offer. He got bread and butter from his father, and meantime he would stay with him. So that vision also disappeared.

The father was at length convalescent; but

the fields were yellow and bare, and the whirling winds of October were strewing the ground with leaves ere the son could leave him, even for so short a walk as to Tighnagrein. A little note or two contained all the nutriment on which the loves of our young people had fed during the long month gone by; and, as you may suppose, their love was thus a starved and wasted and irritable thing, fed mainly, as human frames subjected to privation of food are said to be fed, from its own superfluous fulness, laid up in prior days. That, you know, was not much. You may be sure that, however dutifully inclined, both our hero and his heroine felt somewhat strangely when first they met again after a separation which seemed to have aged them both.

And not only did each to the other seem changed and old, but also cold. The senti-

ment of love in young people has not the strength and substance, as it were, of the affection of maturer life, requires continuous fanning to support its flame, and quickly assumes a dull and cold look if unattended to. There was a slight, yet quite perceptible, hesitation in their greeting. Indeed, when the lad entered the little court on the windy and wet October day, it looked weird and strange, stripped of its foliage and strewn with leaves, so that it seemed not the place he knew at all. With a sunken heart, therefore, he had gone into the milk-house, in quest of Bessie. She was not there. But standing in the corner was his fishing-rod, which looked like a toy of boyhood, dropped by him long ago. The idle churn was in the middle of the floor, coldly reminding him of much pleasure and folly, past long ago, yet not ended now,

clinging to him, and to cling to him all life long. Then he had sought her in the little parlour.

He could not put any heartiness into his salutation; and she, being coy and girt about with decorous propriety, was self-repressed enough to chill rather than to incite him. Each felt the coldness and hesitation of the other, and, feeling it, shrunk from the exhibition of such warmth as was within him and her. She had longed to ask what was the misfortune which had befallen his father, and which affected him, as the baronet had said; but now she could not make free to inquire. He desired to tell of his father's love, long concealed and now discovered; to speak of the providences which had brought that love to light; to be happy in discoursing of all this. But he saw no

interest in her downcast eye, no emotion in the half-averted and grave face to induce him to talk of himself and his affairs. In fact, as he did not begin by blurting out his feelings, he lost the advantage of starting the interview in a warm and pleasurable way; and as the minutes passed, and he thought her uninterested, and she deemed him cold and changed, it became impossible for him to unbosom himself. Saddened and disappointed, therefore, he left her. She remained to weep.

As he went homewards, near to Betty's cottage, he met Miss Robison, who in her sensible way said he had done rightly in visiting his lady-love, inasmuch as she had great need of his visiting, being a foolish, sensitive thing, who let her love of him distort all her feelings, all her thoughts, so

that she was never happy, dreading that he loved her not. "The stupid thing! I went for her a dozen times to go to the Manse, and could not prevail on her. She cried, and cried for you, and yet she could not go to you. Those young lasses are always silly and stupid!" Thereupon Benoni melted, as he was ever ready to do at the thought that he was the object of the young girl's tenderness, and he would have returned straightway to the cottage to fume and fuss away the heat within him. He did not spare himself hard names. He was an insensate beast, an ass, and so forth, he said, who could not recognise the diffidence and delicacy of a maiden's love, but would confound it with bad temper and coldness. "Well, I'll tell her all that, you young blockhead!" said Miss Robison. "Come back to see her to-morrow. I am

going to her now, and she might fancy I was schooling or scolding you into better behaviour."

He stepped into Betty Murchison's cottage as he went along, to inquire how she was getting on. There he found the minister's man demurely seated on a creepie stool at the fire-side, smoking his pipe. On the other side of the ingle was Betty, now able to hop about with the aid of a stick.

"Anything wrong, John, that you're here?"

"Ou ay, things are a' wrang! The minister's near deid, there's been nae preach-in' for twa Lord's days, an' Nannie's lik' the vera deevil! A' thing's wrang, an' I hae jist fled awa' tae win peace for twa three minutes wi' ma neebar."

"What ails Nannie?"

"Gude kens what ails her! Her tongue

gaes scould, scouldin' hour aifter hour, till I canna bide under ane roof wi' her, and I winna! The term's comin', I'm thinkin'!"

Dr. Blake stayed only to make inquiries regarding the progress of the woman's recovery, and when he went out, John accompanied him. On the way to the Manse, the old fellow kept up a running growl about Nannie and her evil temper, so that his companion was both amused and perplexed, for he began to fear lest this old servitor of his father should add to their misfortunes by quitting their service. Therefore he tried to soothe him.

"She is only an old woman, John: why should you heed her barking? I am sure it is only one of the old turns she has been having any time these twenty years past."

"I ken she's no but an auld wife, Doctor;

but auld wifes, like auld colley dogs, aye keep a gey sharp tooth, and bite as weel as bark. Nae doot, nae all o' them. There's Betty Murchison at a' times Christian-like; but it's nae lee o' maist o' them, an' Nannie's an exemplar! But noo, tell me, Doctor, will Betty's leig be as soond as t'ither ane?"

"Which leg is t'ither ane?"

"Hoots! Ye ken weel enuch! I'm speirin' about her broken leig."

Dr. Blake carelessly stated his opinion, and noted not the interest taken by John.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day's post brought to Dr. Blake a letter from the Rev. Dr. Dunbar, acquainting him that he had secured the services of the Rev. Gabriel Bowie as assistant to his father during his illness. Mr. Bowie was to be at Fyfeburgh next day, and would have to be conveyed thence to the Manse. There was enclosed a pretty little note from Mrs. Dunbar, setting forth her great sympathy with Dr. Blake in this sad illness of his father, and hinting no knowledge at all of the sad cause of the illness. Very prettily and gracefully it was written, so that the young man, as usual, grew all aflame, and again enjoyed

in recollection much of the pleasure of his reception at the Fyfeburgh Manse. He thought of going to meet Mr. Bowie, that he might have the pleasure of seeing that charming group again; and he really had great need of a short change of scene and occupation. But he could not go. You remember that he had three pounds to pay to the hotel-keeper for the broken mirror. They remained unpaid, the sudden illness of his father having cut off all opportunity of getting money from him. Even now, when his father was convalescent, being still very feeble, and his money having been so largely lost, Benoni could not say to him, "Give me three pounds." Without the money, he could not go to Fyfeburgh. For the first time he felt the unhappiness of a debt unpaid.

John then must go for "the helper;" and when Benoni went into the kitchen, to look for him, he found Nannie, fiercely scolding.

"Get oot o' here, ye fu'some creatar," she cried, "get oot! Here's nae plaiice for the lik' o' ye, ye sinner that ye are!"

The irate old woman was threatening old John with uplifted besom, and to John were the angry words addressed.

"What's all this? What's the matter?" asked Dr. Blake.

"Maiter!" said she. "Maiter enuch, I think, whan the lik' o' him daur tae file ony decent fireside, let be the fireside o' a godly minister that's at deth's door! Get oot, ye brute an' beast!"

"Come, come, Nannie! You must not rail and noise at this rate. What's it about, John?"

“Sorra’ a bit o’ me can tell! The Lord kens a’ things!” said John in a deprecating way. “She flytes sae ilka wauken hoor o’ the twinty-fowr.”

“You must tell me your reason for this, Nannie. It is too bad that two of you by the fireside can’t keep at peace.”

“Gif he keepit his ain plaiice, or oot o’ ma sicht, the auld sinnar, I’d hae noucht agin him. It’s naething tae me, gin he bidit awa; naething tae me, though something for the Session, I’s’e warrand, aince the minister’s on’s feet again!”

“What can you mean, woman?” asked the young master.

Here the little kitchen-maid, a girl not eighteen years old, broke out with a giggle, “I’ll tell ye what it is, Doctor. Nannie haes an’ oot that auld John aye spen’s his by-hours

wi' Betty Murchison, an' Nannie kens what Betty was, an' ye see she thinks John kens as weel's hersel', an' she'll delate him till the Session for 't nae doot." And the girl laughed so merrily, that Benoni for the first time looked hard at her, and noted her keen eye and lip and fresh complexion.

"I don't see any reason, Nannie, why you should meddle with John's leisure time. As for evil thinking, I thought better of you. You can't be serious, woman," said he.

"Serious! I'm a' that, an' mair nor serious! There's nae fule lik' an auld ane; an' I'm jaloosin' John's baith rogue an' fule! Why for will he be for ever an' ever haikin' till that auld limmer's? Ay, ay! Speiran' for her broke leig! What business haes he wi' her leigs? I'm serious sure o't that she's no better than o' ould, an' he's little

fitted for the sacrament. The fu'some carl!"

Benoni sternly enjoined her to hold her tongue. Such scandalous talk and evil thoughts were shameful.

"God knows," said she, "I ne'er thought, aifter twenty-four years' service, till quit the Manse till I was carried frae it; but I'll no bide at ane fireside wi' siccan a wratch."

Here again the girl interposed, "If ye gang awa', Nannie, maybe John'll neist time be speiran' aifter ye an' yer leigs. Wha kens? Tak' thocht o' the chances, Nannie."

But now Benoni led away John, who during all this time had sat mute.

"A shut mooth" said he, "is great peace— Doctor. It's aifter a' the only chance o' peace— wi' sic a railin' deevil."

The Rev. Gabriel Bowie was a man o—

forty-five years, fully six feet high, spare of figure, somewhat bent, with a long nose, provided with spectacles, and a bald head. He was a man whom patrons and people had hitherto conspired not to honour. In fact, he was a disappointed man, who, notwithstanding some good qualities, was still only a probationer. When probationers attain the age of forty-five, as in the case of maidens of that mature age, the bloom and hope of earlier life is apt to have departed, and the wonder is how pleasantly they settle down into the condition of life which Providence has appointed. Perhaps, every condition of life has its compensations. And the life of a probationer of the kirk may not be without its pleasures of hope; such faint hope as may sometimes stir the foresaid maidens. Who knows but the new pulpit he is to occupy

next Sabbath may yet be his own. —
body may discover his excellence. Thus
it may have been that Mr. Bowie stood in his
brown top-coat at the inn door, with his black
carpet bag and umbrella in his hand, looking
as cheerful as his length of nose permitted,
when John brought round the gig to carry
him to the Manse. He was, however, an ex-
perienced traveller, having visited Nova Scotia
in the service of the Church, and being newly
returned from it. The act of getting into the
conveyance showed that his movements were
awkward, and that he was very much a man
of elbows and knees, and, in general and to
no small extent, angular. He had not the
way of helping himself or acting for himself to
good purpose, and John had no small trouble
in stowing him and his bag, and more
particularly his umbrella, into the little trap—

However, he got seated, and they drove away.

When they were fairly clear of the town, said John, "Ye're tae be the helper." And it is to be admitted that, in the appearance of the man, John had some ground for the slight indication of contempt that might be discerned in his tone.

"Ay, thou hast said it, man, thou hast said it," was the reply, uttered in a sonorous bass voice, which startled John, unprepared for any exhibition of strength in his companion. It fairly silenced him for a time.

But John was in high spirits through the unwonted liberty of a day from home, perhaps, too, through an unwonted dram. By-and-by, therefore, he again addressed his companion.

"Will ye be a man o' grace or ane o'

them that boo down tae warks? I'm win-
nering which ane. By yer vice I'd say y-
war o' grace."

"And you are not mistaken, my man —
Yet do I esteem works properly done as done
to the Lord, whom I am bound to serve —
Now, tell me what is your own belief —
I do not think you lean much on works."

"What for no?" asked John, piqued b-
the sonorous tones and decided utterance o-
"the helper."

"Because if you had trust in work-
I do not think you would have had a-
extra dram to-day, nor would you put im-
pertinent questions, my man. A right hear-
in the sight of God keeps each man, wh-
has it, from offending against his neighbour."

Hereupon John was not silent, but angry.

"Wha tel't ye that I haed ony extra dram — ?"

Ay, I ken a hantel 'boot baith man an' minister! I haena serv'd Maister Blake a score o' year wi'ooten ken o' hoo little is in minister by man. Ay, ye said a extra dram, did ye?"

"My man," said Mr. Bowie, "you do ill to be angry. That comes neither of grace nor good works. I meant not to offend you, but to point out wherein you were offending. But who am I that judgeth? To your own master you stand or fall," and he said this in tones less sonorous than those of his former utterances.

John was willing to put the best construction on it, for he replied, "Weel, it tak's a good deal frae the lik' o' you till offend the lik' o' me, whan nae offence is meanit. An' ye're quite true, Mr. Blake's ma maister, an' it's nae for ye tae be spyin' ferlies o' me. Ye're

correc' there, for I hae been ower the score o' years wi' him, ye see, an' he's tae me lik' masel." So the discussion ended.

"Are there many poor and needy in the parish?" asked Mr. Bowie, when they had driven a mile in silence.

"Puir an' needy! Why wad ye speir? Tae fin' oot the nakitness o' the land maybe! Ye ken, I 'spose, the puir 'll ne'er cease oot o' ony land. For the needy, naebodys speirin' at ye yet, I daur say." John had an habitual perversity in viewing things.

"I wish to judge of the work before me, my man; to learn what God has set me to do. While the poor are always with us, some places have more distress than others."

"Ilka heart kens its ain bitterness," said John. "Afttimes they're maist distressed that canna speak o' their need. Ye'll be

a wonderfu' man, if ye fin' them a' oot in oor parish."

"I'll be content if I reach some, and can do even a little good."

"Weel, that's decent-lik', an' I hope ye'll dae't. Oor parish is jist lik' the lave."

After this they were silent till fully half the road was passed over, when John resumed conversation.

"Ye'll no be a paiper minister, I'll wager?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Ye're sax fut lang and ye wire specs!" was the naïve reply.

"I always use a paper," said Mr. Bowie imperiously.

"Weel, I'll mak' ma dawvy ye're a twa-hoor man."

"You are wrong, my friend. I do not believe that good comes of too much of

man's preaching. As much of God's grace as we can gain from Him, and as little of human wit as maybe, is the best for sinners, as we are all."

"Och!" said John emphatically, "ye winna dae for oor folk at a'."

They again drove a long way in silence, before John said in a subdued way, "If ye wadna speak o't, noo, I'd pit a case till ye."

The minister said he would observe the condition.

"Weel then," said John, "a friend o' ma ain, a decent, beean' boddy, haes savi' sax score o' notes, an' he's gettin' auld, an' 's no mairried. Weel, he's thinkin' o' som'ane tae be canny an' canty wi' him, wha' he gets a croft an' a coo; but ne'er a an' can he see but an auld lass that's fau through, an' ha'es a dochter o' ten yea

She's the only ãne tae shoot him. Noo, what dae ye say till that case?"

"If he thinks he will be happy with the woman, let him marry her, to be sure. It is no one's matter but his own. No one has right to interfere. That is my opinion." And Mr. Bowie said this in his gravest tones, which sounded, at least, as if they might be greatly wise.

"Aweel," said John dryly. "'Am o' yer opinion mase! A' the warld 'll nae think sae, maybe, but ye're a sensible, 'sponsible man, I tak' it."

The road from Fyfeburgh crosses the river by the bridge we have so often mentioned. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived there, and on the bridge stood Dr. Blake with his two lady friends, Miss Thomson and Miss Robison

who had accompanied him so far on his way home. They were about to part when the Manse gig drove up, and Benoni stopped the horse, asking the ladies to stay while he spoke to the new-comer. Briefly he introduced himself as the minister's son, and bade Mr. Bowie welcome.


"Thanks, thanks," said the man of the deep voice. "Are you going home? If so, I shall walk with you; for that, I suppose, is the Manse."

The preacher disengaged himself from the vehicle and descended, with movements and jerks uncouth, and stood before the little group with his umbrella grasped by the middle and held obliquely across his chest.

Benoni said, "Allow me, ladies, to introduce to you the Rev. Mr. Bowie;" and Mr. Bowie bent his stiff body awkwardly over the um

rella, saying solemnly, "It is a satisfaction to meet you." Then, the ladies said "Good afternoon;" and the gentlemen proceeded to the Manse.

Miss Robison had been present at the interview of the lovers that day; and from the fact that the ladies walked from Tighnagrein to the bridge with the young man, and actually stood there to bid him good-bye, notwithstanding the manifold risk of publicity, you will be prepared to learn that the interview had been far from unpleasant. To this the common sense of Miss Robison had greatly contributed. The pair were still coldly and distantly regarding each other when she came in. "O, children!" she said. "How mum and quiet you are! Come here, Benoni dear, take off my bonnet." And when the lad came to untie the string, she tempted



him, I am ashamed to say it, to kiss her, and kiss her he did; whereby no doubt something or other within him was roused, and he became fairly disposed for love-making with the world at large, if that had been possible, but undoubtedly with those near him. There never was a lad so easily excited as this our friend. Anybody, who chose to show that she had regard for him, might gird him and guide him as she listed.

They talked and reviewed the past and the present, and spoke a little of the future. Benoni now had full opportunity to tell, and did tell, with tears in his eyes, how his father had loved him for so long, silently, secretly, and how happy they, father and son, were now in the discovery of their mutual love. The lad was deeply affected by the recital of his story; and his emotion

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must have been infectious, for, lo, that undemonstrative Bessie Thomson went to him across the room, and put her arms about him ever so charmingly, and said how happy she was in the happiness of her dear Benoni.

Miss Robison forthwith improved the occasion. "Don't you two see how happy or unhappy you can be? Yesterday you were both heart-broken and grieved about your lack of love, and why was it? Just the same 'why' did it that left Benoni's home uncomfortable for so long. You would not speak to each other, heart to heart, and, of course, you don't see each other's hearts, and so you stood aside in the cold, and grew colder."

"I see it," said Benoni. "Since we are bound by love for life, we should be open-voiced, that we may be open-hearted."

“Quite right!” said the philosophic maiden. “And to complete your happiness, you must make your new friend, your father, partaker of it. In no other way can your peace and pleasure be secure.”

Thus Benoni, who had hitherto shrunk from disclosing this secret to his ailing parent, was led to promise to do so. The resolution to do this, once formed, gave him much satisfaction, for he began dimly to group pleasant parties at tea in the Manse dining-room, and his father smiling benignantly from his easy-chair at the fireside. It was his promise, of course, that emboldened the ladies to wander out with him in the daylight. He was openly to avow his love at his home. What was the world outside?

In the midst of this becoming condition of things and minds it was that the Rev.

Gabriel Bowie made his advent, with his stiff ways and resonant voice. Benoni had difficulty in keeping up conversation with him as they walked towards the Manse.

“Beautiful landscape,” said the preacher.

“Pretty, but in the summer morning sun our crag looks best. Indeed, I feel you will find us very dull, and the country dreary,” said Benoni.

“No country can be dull for the man of duty. I intend to work hard at all the work which God may set before me; but that beautiful crag is a satisfawction!”

“I am glad you think so. To me it seems sombre and heavy. But the grandest and most impressive things of life become tame and uninteresting through familiarity.”

“It never will so be when the mind seeks to rise from nature up to nature’s God,”

said the preacher. "Familiarity then only enhances the beauty, giving to each well known cliff and peak and stone its sacred association with thoughts pointed heavenward."

Benoni was silent, for this style of conversation was new to him. He lit his pipe, and they approached the Manse and entered the avenue.

"Verily, your lines are in pleasant places," the preacher continued. "This manse and glebe are a goodly heritage. Are the heretics many?"

Benoni told him that although many had left the church in the previous year, there was still a considerable congregation.

"A remnant shall be saved in the day of power," said the preacher. "The fences of our Sion shall not be wholly torn up, and

shall the wild boar wholly trample down her vineyard."

Benoni began to see that this man was pretentious, and might possibly be a humbug; and he resolved not to trouble himself about him very greatly.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE Rev. Mr. Blake had lain down for the night, and his son, his constant bedroom attendant, sat by his bed-side. The father had, with his usual reticence, offered no remark on the newly-arrived assistant; and, as usual, there were but few words spoken by either father or son. This evening the son sat resolved to disclose his secret, yet shrinking from the first step towards it; for now that occasion arose for calmly talking of his engagement, it was, even in his own eyes, a very reckless and unnecessary and foolish engagement indeed, made doubly foolish by the fact that the

father's money was lost—that money which, so much despised, would have helped so much to clear away all the difficulties of the situation.

The reader will say that if the lad was really in love, he never could view the matter in this light, and that may be true. Yet it is to be borne in mind that when, under any circumstances, it becomes necessary to put into formal words our most ardent sentiments, so that an unimpassioned auditor may comprehend them, a feeling of the falsity or exaggeration of the sentiments will arise. Much more will a perception of folly strike home when it is not an impassioned avowal of sentiment that is to be made, but the simple statement of a fact done.

Benoni sat, as has been said, very miserable, shrinking from the plunge, yet bound to

make it. In truth, he was not greatly in love ; perhaps not in love at all after the manner of the poets and reviewers. With all his fanciful, excitable temperament, he was clear-headed and cool enough to perceive that, prompted by human tendencies not of a very lasting sort, and under special circumstances, he had come to be pledged to his affianced ; that on full consideration and by comparison with other girls, she was not what his fancy had painted her, was not indeed what he could have desired ; certainly inferior to the least of the goddess ideals of his young dreams. Yet there she was ; and here was he, bound to her for better or worse ; and he was entirely disposed to anticipate that it would be for the better. But, however this might be and whatever she was, he must do his duty. A sad descent, no doubt, from

the inflamed sentiment of the poetic lover. How often, I wonder, does the true poetic lover appear on earth? As rarely, I believe, as a comet in heaven.

"Father, I have done something of which I ought to have told you sooner," at length he said tremulously.

"What is that, my son?" feebly asked the invalid.

"A foolish thing, I fear. I have chosen a wife, and promised to marry her when I can."

The father lay still and silent for a long time; for through his enfeebled brain, slowly and painfully, there were passing sad and weary reminiscences of times gone by, of weary waiting years, of departed hopes, of the dead Mona, mother of his son. Of other things, too, he must have thought; for when he spoke, the single word upon his lips


was "Money!" hoarsely whispered. It **was** forced out by inward pangs. His **ruined** fortune entailed the postponement of **happi-**ness for his son. Therefore his **hoarse** whisper, "Money!"

It was quite natural that Benoni should misinterpret this, and, **misunderstanding**, should be vexed by it.

"She has no money, father; I did not **seek** her for money, but for love." And **again** Benoni felt the void and hollowness **within** him as when at first he bound himself.

"My money! My lost money!" **weakly** cried the father, and **painfully**; and **the** son perceived the true state of the **father's** feelings, the true direction of his thoughts.

"Why should we grieve?" he **calmly** asked. "The loss of fortune is but a **light** thing, when the misfortune has given me



the assurance of my father's love, and touches not the affection of this girl, nor my hope of happiness. I am young. If you were ever so rich, I would not marry just now; but it is right to tell you of it."

"God bless you!" said the invalid.

The father lay in silent thought, of his years of youthful waiting, of his oft-deceived hopes, of early struggles. Was his son to trace over again his old, old footsteps? Would the end be like his—broken idols, sickness like unto death? I do not wonder that he asked not who was the object of his son's affection.

But after a time, Benoni told him; and the father blessed the pair, while still in his heart he was pained and wondered. For Bessie Thomson was a simple country girl, very unlike his stalwart, dashing

son ; very unlike, too, the regal Mona whom he, the father, had loved and waited for so long.

“Well, well! God bless you both. May He join you together speedily!”

That night the father was sleepless and feverish. The emotion, or the effort of thought consequent on this conversation, threatened him with a serious relapse, so that he lay in bed for several days.

Yet even in this renewed illness, he showed his thoughtful regard for his son, whom he would have to leave him each day to visit his affianced, to carry to her each day his, the father's, blessing and promise of love. He desired his son also to tell Mr. Thomson that when he, the minister, was able, he would receive him and his daughter at the Manse. After this the girl's heart rested securely in

her love. As for Benoni, he was at peace, and peace, you know, is oftentimes not to be distinguished from felicity.

In the meantime, Mr. Bowie had appeared in the pulpit, and uttered his sentiments sonorously. His powerful voice was joined to some hardness of head and capacity of argumentation, but he was essentially devoid of emotion. His sermons being short, however, and their delivery vigorous, he certainly ought to have been a popular preacher. Perhaps it was the hardness and harshness of tone and the baldness of statement and the barrenness of emotion that marred him. At any rate, the people did not appraise him at much; yet he made two notable adherents in the congregation, who were loud in his praises. These were Sir James Fanflare and Miss Robison.

And while Mr. Blake's recovery was delayed by the mingled emotion which sprang from the story of his son's engagement—whereby the evils of his pecuniary loss were greatly increased in his eyes—and by the arrival of this stranger, Mr. Bowie, within his gates, his son, ever prone to reduce his fancies of pleasure to reality, where that was possible, invited his sweetheart and Miss Robison to tea. They could not be introduced at this time to his father, but they should meet the assistant, and he, Benoni, should have the pleasure of walking home with his love in the moonlight. The father, of course, being duly consulted, had sanctioned the invitation.

The little party having assembled, after much demurring on her part, Bessie presided at the tea-table, and administered

the tea, and there was such small-talk as might be looked for—the potato harvest, the state of the congregation, the character of the winter now at hand, the assistant's experiences of rigorous winters in Nova Scotia. It was noticeable that Mr. Bowie partook liberally of the cakes and scones and cranberry jam which constituted the substantial part of the repast, quite like a sensible man, who had endured much and travelled far and been disappointed enough to know that it behoved man to cull the enjoyments of the moment, whatever these might be. He had left the boyish way of eating sparingly in presence of strangers far behind him; and, indeed, it was evident that sentiment of any kind had been rubbed out of him, if it ever had formed part of his share of humanity.

On this account it was, no doubt, that Miss Robison was attracted towards him. Seeing that Miss Bessie did not press him to eat, she took that gracious task upon herself, and helped him repeatedly and plentifully; while Benoni, at the foot of the table, regaled himself with the smallest of biscuits, being fully satisfied with watching the downcast eyes, screened from his audacious view by the bronze hot-water urn near the head of the table. Yet he scarcely got a reciprocating glance of those eyes; for as often as they timidly were raised to his, so often were they instantly cast down again, with a mantling blush which to him was very charming. Not a word of love did he utter from the time he had stealthily kissed Bessie and her friend in the lobby when they first came in. Of course, he spoke not

of love; he was on his good behaviour, you know, in presence of the assistant preacher, who fancied that the little meeting was on his account, and already began to form visions of "a presentation" of something valuable from the ladies of the flock, if Providence thought fit to remove him from them.

Mr. Bowie was in a sledge, in the midst of a dreadful Nova Scotian snow-storm, when Benoni slipped away to his father with a cup of tea and a bit of toasted bread. The old man was in his bed-room, seated in his study-chair at the fireside, partly dressed, with an old crimson quilt over his shoulders, a relic of his long-lost Mona. While he sipped his tea, the son said,

"Father, she is here."

And after a while the father said,

“Bring her to me, my son, that I may see you both.”

So, when Benoni returned with the cup, he called Miss Thomson out of the room, and she, with a demurring “Why?” went with him.

“My father wishes to see you, Bessie,” he told her in the lobby. Her heart leaped into her little mouth, and she was sadly fluttered, but she went with him up-stairs, his arm around her waist very lovingly.

Thus they entered the bed-room. “Father, my promised wife.”

“Come hither, my child, that I may bless you,” feebly said the father, holding out his shrivelled hand.

Benoni led her to him, and she took his hand in hers. I do not know how it was, whether nature prompts such acts or no;

certainly I find no such thing mentioned in the Bible, and Bessie knew no other literature wherein to learn the appropriateness of it; perhaps the easy-chair was low, and her upright position before it awkward; but down she dropped on her knees before the minister, and bent her head upon his knee. He put his hand on her clustering hair, and prayed God to bless her and his son beloved, and to join them soon together. At that moment, Benoni felt all his heart full of tenderness for the maiden.

She was in quiet tears when she rose up. She kissed the bony hand, and then her lover led her away. When out of the room, she could not contain herself, but broke out in copious weeping, that came, I think, from pleasant sources, while she said she was not worthy of such great love and blessing.

Benoni wiped away her tears with a white cambric handkerchief—scented, I believe, it was—and stopped her words with kisses. Well, there is some pleasure in being an amorous young fellow, after all, I daresay.

When they, quite demurely, entered the dining-room again, Mr. Bowie was still involved in Nova Scotia, and Miss Robison was helping him to more tea, and asking questions showing her great thirst for the sort of knowledge which the minister possessed.

“Dear, where have you been?” she asked. “I did not think it many minutes, being interested in Mr. Bowie’s conversation, but it must be quite a while, since you went away.”

“We were seeing my father,” said Benoni, while Mr. Bowie went on,

"I was up to my waist in water, you see, madam, and the coast was quite precipitous, but they threw me a rope and I was saved. The codfish were all lost. Just like St. Paul, madam, I may say 'thrice I suffered shipwreck.' No doubt, twice it was in boats, madam."

"Poor, dear man!" said Miss Robison. "Quite apostolic! The codfish were excellent, I am sure."

"I think I will take one cup more," said the preacher.

"How many is that?" asked Benoni.

"I generally take the half dozen, when I find pleasant conversation like this evening. It is a great satisfawction!"

And so on the preacher, with his loud voice, talked, until the ladies proposed to return home.

The preacher did not offer to accompany them, when they set out; so, with a lady on each arm, our hero stalked off into the moonlight. It was quite natural that both ladies should have much extra favour and affection for him in respect of the interview of the younger one with his sire; but really, he was bedeared and good-fellowed and his arms were pressed to such an extravagant extent that he was in high spirits, and forgot altogether that wretched bank failure, and the difficulties that beset his start in life. Nay, he was sure, he told them, that something suitable would soon turn up, and then, would not he punish that minx, Miss Bessie, for all her coyness? At length he was dismissed not without kisses many.

Whether it was the sight of the young girl, or the prospect of his son's happi-

ness, or reminiscence of his own early days, I know not, but Mr. Blake was greatly calmed by the interview which I have told you of. I daresay this came mainly of his son's calm bearing and the pleasure of sharing his son's full confidence. Besides, the girl was gentle and fair to look upon, and the way in which she had accepted his blessing was very winning. He was calmed, however, and cheered, although his loss of wealth still lay heavy at his heart. So he weakly smiled when his son returned to him, smiled as invalids do; and their smiles, you know, are painful.

“You have seen her home, my son?” he asked.

Benoni said he had.

“I am sure I shall come to love her as my daughter. You must bring her back to me soon.”

At which words the lad glowed with filial gratitude, and something more.

Mr. Bowie had intimated that his constitution found strength and refreshment in a modicum of strong liquors taken before he retired to rest. Hitherto Benoni had contented himself with supplying the materials for the preacher's potation; but, this evening, he found a great craving for conversation, a desire to learn what was the man's opinion of his love; and therefore when, after worship, he told Nannie to take the whisky into the study, he offered to bear Mr. Bowie company after he should have bid his father good night. The preacher expressed his "satisfawction" with this.

Thus Dr. Blake, by-and-by, was smoking his pipe at the study fireside with a tumbler of toddy beside him, while opposite him Mr.

Bowie was sipping whisky and cold water—the form in which the stimulant is usually taken in Northern America, he said, as being safer in a cold climate than hot drinks; but custom was everything in such matters, he admitted. Blake said that he believed the palate and stomach more readily contracted partialities than the mind prejudices, and it was equally difficult to correct them. The preacher thought the doctor was wrong. Was it not the moral part of man that imbibed the love of drink, not his corporeal parts, which merely held the liquid? Benoni explained that it was the physical craving which, reacting on the mind, constituted the moral disease called intemperate love of drink. But the explanation seemed only to darken the argument to the preacher, who obstinately opposed what Benoni thought

must be metaphysics to his material views. Not caring to press the matter, the young man let the preacher have it his own way, and smoked his pipe in silence — perhaps with some contempt too.

Mr. Bowie mixed himself a second glass of grog, and then became confidential, speaking frankly of himself. Oddly enough, his confidences took the form least likely to occur with a casual acquaintance. He had had much experience of womanhood, and, as it would seem, had been, quietly you know, an object of general admiration to the opposite sex.

Dr. Blake said he could quite understand that. With his charming, deep-toned voice and sufficient figure, no doubt the preacher could be dangerous, if he had a mind; and the youth pulled hard at his pipe, to keep down his smiles.

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“O man,” said the preacher, “it’s not in that. My voice and figure are very well, but it’s the eye that does it. It’s the eye, sir!” And he took off his spectacles and set to rubbing up the glasses with his handkerchief.

Benoni professed himself ignorant of the fact that human eyes in general possessed much fascination.

“Well, I don’t know,” said the minister, “that it is eyes in general, but the special application of them. Ha! set me down beside a lady for half-an-hour, and I’ll be bound she’ll not forget me in a hurry!”

Benoni was mightily amused.

“You must be cautious how you exercise your fatal power,” said he.

“Pshaw! no woman is ever married, I believe, without having had her soul hooked

on to the lines of twenty men. I beg pardon, that is a simile borrowed from American cod-fishing, but it is quite a truth. They are seldom much hurt by such nibbling, and it is excellent sport. I could have married scores and scores of American girls."

"Indeed! Esquimaux generally, I suppose?" said Benoni, shocked.

"Beg your pardon. The best of the Blue-noses, I tell you; as pretty girls as any in the north here in the old country."

Benoni shrugged his shoulders, and made no other reply, and the preacher went on.

"But I am not to throw myself away under a few thousand dollars. Girls are plentiful, even nice ones are, all over the world too, while currency is scarce. A nice round sum in dollars is the best nest egg, and makes a very common hen look home-like and

comfortable. I tell you that I know what's what about woman, and, some time, I know, my eye will do it."

The helper applied him to his grog, and then resumed the subject.

"You are a young man, and without experience. You introduced me to two ladies to-night. Did you see how one of them cottoned to me, the elder one? The little one was not worth noticing. I tell you what, I had my eye on that lady, and if she has some money, I don't know what may happen. She is a sensible woman, I say, sir; very sensible. I had my eye on her."

Here Benoni, tolerably well disgusted with a mind so unlike his own, so unlike any mind he had ever encountered, bade him good night.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEXT day, John came awkwardly to Benoni in the Manse garden, with hesitating, shuffling step. Benoni said, "Good morning, John."

"Guid morn till yersel', Maister Doctar," said John, and the man stood stock-still in front of the youth.

"Anything to say to me?" asked Benoni carelessly.

"Naething muckle warth; but I was mindit tae speir at yersel' gin yon was true at a'—" answered John, with many stammers.

"If what was true?" asked Benoni, blushing and hesitating in his turn.

“What Nannie’s sayin’, that the minister haes tint a’ his money i’ the Sooth. I’m clean daft since I heerd o’t.”

This reference to the pecuniary disaster of his parent greatly pained Benoni, and he certainly would have been gravely angered had it not been for the tone in which the old man concluded his inquiry.

“Well, John, Nannie and you have been long with my father, and have some right to know more of his matters than the world outside. He has lost money, I fear; how bad the loss may be I do not know yet. We must hope that things will turn out better than they look.”

“I ken it’s the Lord giveth. I’m no thinkin’ it’s Him wha tak’s awa, for why at a’ wad He gie it then? It’s o’ the deil, Doctar maister, I’m certain shure o’t. Ye

ken hoo he plagit puir Job afore-time. But I was mindit tae speir mair at ye," stammered out John, hanging his head.

"Well, John, what may that be?"

"Wad a hunder notes be o' ony use tae ye—no till the minister—but yersel'?"

"What do you mean, old fellow?"

"Och! — Nannie says ye're tae be weddit, and whan yer faither haes tint his bawbees, it'll be sair woin' and waur weddin' wi' a toun purse. Noo, I hae yon much, a hunder notes, gin ye tak' em."

"Dear old chap!" said Benoni, taking his hand. "I did not look for so much kindness in the world. I don't want money as yet, but I thank you, old fellow, from my soul."

"O, but ye wull tak' it though! Ye maun tak' it!"

"Not just now, my dear fellow. We

are not needing money just now. If ever I do, I will tell you, and will frankly ask your help, but not just now."

"Weel, then, I'm doun-haired for that same. But the Lord's wull be dune. Ye'll nae tell nane o't, Doctar. Nane kens oucht o't."

"I'll never tell any but one, John. I will tell my father. He must know of your kindness."

"Na, na!" cried John, actually jumping about in excitement. "Ye'll no tell the minister, promise me! nor Nannie! They wad be jalousin' mony things nae true about the winnin' o't. An' 'aith, nae man need pit himsel' in the mou's o' folk wi'oot raison. Ye'll no tell ony—onybody!"

Benoni promised entire silence. Then John went on,

"Och, och! The puir maister! He wasna

cute enuch for this pervarse generation. He haed ower muckle faith, trustin' till banks an' sic lik' soople folk. He aye thought me a havral, but he's lost his bawbees the day, an' I hae mine. Wha's the havral, Doctar?"

"And where does your wisdom keep your money, pray?" asked Benoni, half-amused, half-indignant.

But John drew up his eyebrows and looked very wise indeed.

"Na, na," he said, "I wad tell ye ready enuch, but I wadna speak it oot for the world! Wha kens wha's listenin'? A little bird might cairry the tale, an' ma puir nest be hairried! I winna say it."

Thereupon Benoni passed on.

"Hech, lassie!" said Nannie to her young companion in the kitchen, "Hech, lassie!

he haes a gran' vice the helper, an' he's a godly man, nae doot! It was quite muvin' the way he said tae me, 'My dear woman, how is your soul?' I'd gang lang enuch afore the maister wad speir for ony soul o' mine! But some men hae sic winnin' ways, an' sic hairts for their wark. I wunner though at him takin' 's drap of speerits 'yon way in cauld watter, jist lik a haythen or a plewman."

She was going to offer some lunch to Mr. Bowie, and was putting on her best cap, and making herself smarter than usual. The kitchen-maid looked amused at this manifestation of desire to please the assistant, for Nannie was unmistakably past the meridian of life; but the girl said nothing. Nannie was at length equipped, and went into Mr. Bowie's presence.

“Wull I bring you some lunch, sir?”

“We always lust, my dear woman, for the bread that perisheth; our sinful bodies crave for it. How shall we become partakers of the bread that perisheth not?”

“Och!” said Nannie, “it’s sair warstlin’ in the speerit whan the stomack’s faimished. Ye’ll be the better for ’t, minister.”

“Well, well, I will eat some, although alone, for I am to go forth to visit the poor and needy in the afternoon with that lady who was here last night, Miss—Miss—”

“Robison,” said Nannie. “Ay, faix! she wasna lang in clapping her blinkers on the helper. Miss Robison, indeed! an’ she haes trysted tae meet ye and bring ye oot among the puir! Weel, that’s oncooman guid for *her!*”

“I do not know her, of course,” said Mr.

Bowie. "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing. What is your opinion of the lady, Mrs. Ann?"

"Dinna misca' me oot o' ma name, please, sir. I'm nae Mrs. Ann nor naebody's mistress; but I ken somethin' o' Miss Robison. She's maybe lik' her neighbours, wi' a guid lot o' whims and wiles in her heid for tae catch a man, if may be. But certies! I didna think she wus sic a blister as tae stick a' at aince lik'!"

"I do not understand you, Ann. You must tell me what you know of Miss Robison. Is she not an excellent person whom I may know, and who may help me to do my duty by the people to whom God has sent me in the meantime?"

"Ou ay, jist a' that! She'll lat ye see yer duty tae the folk nae doot, an' maybe,

if ye lippen muckle till her, she may lat ye see what's yer duty tae hersel'. I'm no sayin' ony word agin' her, mind. I ken naething ill or guid o' her!"

"Is she rich?"

"Guid kens wha's rich i' thae days! I thought ma auld maister wus rollin' i' walth, an' it's a' turned tae dust an' ashes! I dinna ken o' her pourtith or walth ony hoo."

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Ann, for your advice. You're a prudent, discreet woman. I will guide myself wisely with Miss Robison, and I can trust myself in her company without fear, thank God! But what of God's mercies have you to give me, Ann?" And thereupon the preacher addressed himself to his lunch, when he had solemnly and with loud voice said "grace,"—a speech which Nannie declared was as "guid as

mony ministers' first prayers and by han' as lang."

Miss Robison had, in fact, promised to bring Mr. Bowie to the houses of some of the poorer sort of people, on his expressing great desire to set about the active duties of his sacred office, and had told him that he would find her in the cottage next the bridge at two o'clock that afternoon. There he did find her accordingly. She led him straightway to the dwelling-place of Betty Murchison,—not because Betty lived in the odour of sanctity certainly; but it is not necessary to probe her reasons. They found Betty at the hearth, with her leg extended on a stool and her crutch and staff beside her. She so welcomed Miss Robison as to show that that lady was a welcome and frequent visitor.

“I have brought Mr. Blake's assistant to

see you, Betty. He wishes to get acquainted with people he may be useful to."

"The Lord kens there's muckle need o' mony lik' him!" said Betty. "Will ye no sit doon, sir? Ma bit hoosie is but bare o' furnitur', but there's a chayre. An' hoo are ye, Miss Robson? An' hoo 're they a' at the Knowe?"

Miss Robison replied to these inquiries, and then Mr. Bowie took up the conversation in his deepest bass.

"You have had a bodily affliction, my poor woman?"

"It pleased the Lord that I brak' ma leigs, sir."

"Ah, poor woman! See that you had not displeased Him first. Affliction may be sent for punishment. It is our faults if its ends are not for good."

“Och, sir, we’re a’ sinfu’, an’ maybe am waur nor ordinair’; but it was hard on me, and I dinna see whaur’s the guid o’t at all. But the Lord’s ways are nae oor ways, an’ we maun content oorsels. I’m sinfu’, an’ puir an’ needy o’ a’ guid things, I ken.”

“That is quite right, my woman. If you feel your need, you perhaps will come to see that His grace is sufficient for you. It is a good frame of mind to feel your need.”

“Maybe, maybe! But it is ill to feel an empty stomack an’ that it’s charity fills it for ye, an’ that it’s no yersel’ but yer neebars that keeps ye alive. Yet ane canna wark while the leig’s brok’; an’ if it wasna for Miss Robson and Miss Tamson, I beet tae stairve or gang on the Session.”

“I fear that your hunger and thirst is fter the flesh more than of the spirit, poor

woman," said Mr. Bowie, his left hand uplifted; and with that, into the circle ran a fair-haired girl, about eleven years of age, offspring of Betty's misadventure. She came in with cheeks freshly-blooming from the autumn breeze, crying "Mither, mither, the wild dukes hae come tae the river, a gey, great lock o' them!" but when she saw the visitors, her voice stilled, and her head, rather than her countenance, fell, and she stood silent on the floor.

"Come to me, Ina," said Miss Robison, and the child went to her. "Have you been taking good care of mother?"

"Ay; but sometimes she's gey cankered, an' winna ait a' I can dae," said the child. "An' she's aye waur whan the mail's near about dune."

Now, here Mr. Bowie beginning to perceive

how Betty had specially sinned, thought proper to air his views on this matter.

“Always this bread that perisheth! Are you making any provision for the soul of this little creature—the child of your iniquity?” asked he, looking sternly at the poor mother.

Betty humbly said, “Ay, ay; I aye commend her tae the Lord.”

“So far well,” said the bass voice. “But with that monument of your sin before you, can you fail to see reason why affliction should be sent you?” The preacher spoke hardly and harshly, and looked with what he thought was a stern eye indeed.

Miss Robison’s kindly heart fluttered within her, although, like all Scotchwomen, she thought the preacher could not be wrong. In truth, she was not criticising him. But Betty,

perhaps accustomed to coarse and hard comments on her sins, and wont to resent them, replied dourly, "Mony a ane haed a bairn an' didna brak' their leig."

"Ah, woman! I fear you are still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Shall we briefly engage, ma'am?" said he, looking at Miss Robison and raising his right hand; and thereupon he and Miss Robison stood up, and he engaged in prayer. Miss Robison held the little girl close to her the while.

The preacher was softer of temper by the time he had concluded, perhaps through the soothing which such men get out of the exercise of their talents. So he began to ask, when he sat down, whether the elders and church people came often to see poor Betty. The elders never did, but the ladies were kind to her in her misfortune, and the

minister and his son were very kind and mindful indeed. Betty spoke feelingly of young Dr. Blake; more feelingly than the preacher liked. He therefore asked in his hard tones,

“But did the minister ever come to see you, woman?”

“Ou ay, that he did. He cam’ twa three times an’ mair afore he wus struck doun himsel’, an’ indeed it’s me is sorry for him frae the hairt o’ me!”

“But, woman, did he use to exhort and to pray with you as I have done?” asked he, meanly hoping to educe an advantage over his principal.

“Ay, ay, ay!” said Betty, “it’s himsel’ that did, an’ kindly forbye. He aye gied me a lang prayer an’ a guid saxpence, for he kent what I needit.”

This last testimony to the minister's goodness may have been given out of pure gratitude, but Mr. Bowie interpreted it as an appeal to him personally for a donation; and having recently expended many of his sixpences in his journey from America, the appeal was unpleasant to him, and he brought the interview to an end. The visit is cited by me as a simple example of the career of usefulness in which Miss Robison engaged the preacher in her sincere admiration of him. In course of it he was introduced to many families, and not only to adherents to the Establishment, but to many who had broken away from it; for although zeal ran high at this time, the will to visit "the widow and the fatherless" has ever been well-esteemed in Scotland. Not even the fact that he had come across the sea to hunt

for a parish sufficed to cut off his good deeds in this wise from general sympathy.

Bessie came to the Manse again at Mr. Blake's special request, but not without the guardianship of her friend, who sought the society of Mr. Bowie while the girl was in the minister's room. The father was resolved to be pleased with his dear son's choice and to show his pleasure. The best of feeling therefore sprung up between the two; so that, by-and-by, the maiden waxed respectfully familiar with her future father-in-law, and rendered him petty services, such as a daughter might render, tidying up his room, arranging its furniture, and speaking those kindly, thoughtful words that were natural to her, words genuine and cheerful and tender, as the reader, who has apprehended her nature, may guess. If she was not the girl whom

he would have chosen for his son, still, the choice having been made independently of him, he saw nothing in it but what commanded his approval. He never guessed, how could he? that at times the mind of his son grew faint and failing in its love of her, and that the choice had come quite as much of fortuitous causes as of love for the girl.

It happened that on one of these visits Mr. Bowie was out of doors, and Miss Robison was consequently left alone in the parlour, and to her entered Nannie, as I suspect, with hostile designs. The house-keeper was provided with a floor-brush, and seemed intending to sweep the floor, when, as if surprised, she acknowledged the presence of the stranger.

“Heich, mem!” said she, “ye’ll be cauld

be yersel' alane, an' Maister Booie's nae in for ye tae claver wi'."

"It does not matter, Nannie. He is no doubt in the way of graver duty than talking with me."

"Duty! duty tae tawk wi' ye! Ladies are no tae be kent noo-a-days frae diffrant kind o' folk! The Word says it will be bad times whan three women shall lay hold o' wan man, but ye think tae come afore that time. Ye'll grip him for yersel', if ye can! That's the truth for ye, mem!"

"What are you raving about?" asked Miss Robison, in no small trepidation.

"Am jist raivin' aboot what a' the pairish kens. Ye hae set yer cap at Maister Booie, puir chiel! an' ye'll nae leave him, if ye can, till ye'll be Mistress Booie, an' it's gey brazen wark i' my simple opinion!"

As she was speaking in came the reverend gentleman so often named. Nannie fled away, and left him with Miss Robison.

Miss Robison burst into tears, quite naturally, I think; and Mr. Bowie, equally naturally, sought explanations. The interview was both interesting and painful; for the whole matter turned on this, that Miss Robison, in her desire to promote his usefulness and the good of the Church, had exposed herself to calumnious misconstruction. It is to be feared that the gentleman's belief in the power of those wonderful eyes of his was nowise abated by the statement of these facts or by the lady's tears.

It is time we should speak more distinctly of the terrible bankruptcy that had brought such grave distress to the Manse, gloomy enough before. The first circular intimating

the disaster was confirmed by subsequent letters. The bank was hopelessly involved, but, at first, it was expected that the loss might not exceed the amount of paid-up capital. For some time the matter slumbered, and as weeks rolled by without any new memento of the evil, the old man got accustomed to the thought of it, and it ceased to pain and gall him as at first. Then the treasure of his son's affection, discovered through this sad calamity, was a large and soul-gladdening compensation for the distress of it. He bore loss of self quite lightly for the gain which his soul reckoned as infinitely more precious.

Thereafter came the confidence of his son in the matter of Bessie Thomson, and then came the freshness of the maiden to cheer him, while his son most dutifully watched his every emotion. It was no

wonder that he should begin to pick up strength, to feel better and lighter of head and heart than for many a day. Yet strength and health do not return at fifty with the swift pace of convalescence at half the age. Perhaps one thing, as much as any other, retarded his restoration. You know that he had a sum of money in bank at Fyfeburgh. There brooded over him the fear that this also should be swept away, forfeit of the profitable investment which his soul had prized so much. Pitifully miserable is the regard for wealth when it comes between the soul and peace; and the Rev. Mr. Blake had not yet been wholly cured of the love of money.

“I telt ye a lee, I telt ye a lee, Doctar maister!” one day whimpered John to

Benoni. "I'm no gaun till hae the sin o' Ananias an' Saphias, wha Maister Booie was lectrin' o' yestreen, langer on ma saul!"

"What's the matter, John?" asked the doctor; "what is Ananias to you?"

"A fearsome exemplar o' leein'," said John, in no small trepidation. "I telt ye I haed a hunner pounds, an' I keepit back a pairt! I hae eight score notes an' five mair. Will you hae them, maister?"

But again Benoni thanked the man, in grateful, kindly words, and refused the proffered gift.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT was now November, and it happened that while, notwithstanding the gloomy, mirky weather, the minister was slowly improving in health, and while his son was beginning to feel that weariness which will come to youth through the even tenor of life's dulness even in love, the assignees in bankruptcy of that wretched bank made a demand of £25 per share on the shareholders. The minister had to remit £450, which well-nigh drained his beloved bank account. It is easy thus, in prosaic language, to tell the fact. How shall I portray the spirit-anguish, the heart-faintness, the palsied hands, with

which the fact was accomplished. Clinging, still clinging to the wealth that had so much deceived him, Mr. Blake yielded up so much of what remained to him of it with bitterness of soul. What alleviation was it that Benoni should say, "Father, the money is really useless for our happiness; send it away, and think not of it?" The father could not so view the matter, would not so view it, even while he protested that the money was valuable to him only for his son's sake.

I do not doubt that in this he spoke truly, but it was not all the truth; for money had grown dear to him for its own sake. He had, through many long and patient years, while his life was lonely, watched the growth of his wealth with keen pleasure—the only immediate pleasure of his life. Do not wonder, therefore, that he grieved when unexpectedly

the heap melted away from him, dissipated like the early dreams of happiness in the love of his Mona. For the poignancy of his first great grief he had found consolation in a bank account, miserable refuge of lies as now to him it was. How could he calmly bear this second loss? What other cistern of comfort could he hew out for himself, now that the old one was broken and empty, and the strength of his life was decayed?

Benoni strove to comfort and solace him. Was not life more than meat? Had not his dear father, in his son's strong arm and love, more than any amount of treasure? Bessie also joined faintly in the work of soothing. Her earnest, simple mind felt, not thought, that the minister's soul was in darkness, groping in the thick mists of worldly-heartedness for that comfort which

alone could be found in nearness to God. She felt this, or something like this, rather than thought it. How could she, a child beside this minister of God, think, much less say, that his heart was not right with God? After her nature and her way, the minister was largely in her petitions, nightly remembered by her, his weakness needing strength, his cheerlessness needing comfort, his ailments the true physician.

Time again worked as of old and as ever. Whereas at first that sickening "call" had sent the minister cold and shivering to his bed, the spring of natural life within him again flowed on, gathering strength and volume as it flowed. Again he sat by the fire-side, and feebly was satisfied with the presence of his son; never querulous, never cheerful; ever in that still, undemonstrative way that

had come to him in his long, solitary years.

You will not be surprised to hear that ennui was gnawing at the son's heart. It could not be otherwise. Ardent of temperament, eager for action, here he sat, day after day, in his father's chamber, without occupation, without prospect of the life he desired to rush into, brooding in the blankness of an idle, disappointed mind. You will say that he had surely ample love to fill his mind and heart. (You do not know what man and love are if you think that love can compensate life for lack of activity. The love that fills men's souls and engrosses their beings is the love uncertain of its issues, which still has to strive and woo that it may win. When your lady fair has held out her hand for your eager kiss, saying

“Take that is thine;” when the victory is accomplished, half the interest of love is ended; and you have, in your every-day and commercial spirit, to go about and provide clothes and garnishing against your wedding-day, ascertaining how expensive and inconvenient a thing it is to be about to wed. But what and if the pledges have been exchanged and there is never a prospect of approaching marriage? If the hand beloved is daily and every day held out to you to kiss, if daily and every day you are expected to kiss it with eager appetite as at the first? Why, I say, the man must be other than human, and the love less than man’s love, if the soul is not sickened after a time with the certainty and the sweetness. *Booh!*

But something more than sweetness and satiety were at work to disturb my friend.

There is no denying it, he was rapidly becoming irritable. His day-dreams had departed from him, those dreams which had so largely compensated for inactivity, which had been to him realisations and experiences. He could form no fanciful view of his future; no more in imagination lead nations enthralled by his song, no more in fantastic beauty win maiden hearts, no more confound the wise with oratory transcending human speech. He was doomed to prosaic labour. He felt and owned it, and why? Why? The answer came daily to his father's bed-room, with quiet earnestness to utter monosyllables, to dust and arrange the furniture, just in the same earnest work-a-day mode in which she was wont to ply the butter-churn of other days. He used to admire it? No doubt he did, but not

the less had it become commonplace and monotonous—nay, worse than monotonous. His Bessie used to tuck up her sable frock when thus at work, thereby displaying a white petticoat of recondite needlework underneath. The pattern of that needlework was so stamped on the lad's brain as sometimes to make him feel pained and aching as if cerebral congestion might come of it. Yet his consciousness told him that this girl was his life's partner and portion. He had no other thought than that so it should be, but I do not blame him if sometimes he faltered, asking himself, Can this be love? if sometimes, nay often, he quarrelled with himself, blamed and despised himself in secret, scarcely repressed irritability. He was essentially dutiful, however, and, notwithstanding all the monotony and tedium of it, he sat by

his father, and was as tender of him and to him as when he first discovered that his father's heart was full of love for him. Dutiful, too, to his affianced, she, ever calm and quiet in her own love, never could guess at the doubts and mists that enshrouded him. So well, indeed, did he behave, that no one could have guessed, much less have gauged, the true state of his affections and mind.

Do not blame him or think hardly of him, and, least of all, call him deceitful. His peculiar mental condition came of his circumstances. If he forthwith had gone off to the battle of life, to conquer and acquire a home to which to carry his betrothed, let us not doubt that during all the period of such achievement, however long, he would have borne her image on his heart and fancy lovingly, tenderly; that in the struggle of life she would have been

his oriflamme, her name his war-cry. But you see he had no outward and real struggle, and therefore he set to tearing and vexing his own soul; and all I can say is that when men take to that they usually succeed fairly.

But was he not deceitful? Bless your true heart, my reader, not a bit of it. I deny that he was in anywise deceitful. The essence of deceit consists in cloaking or disguising the conclusions of the will; and the will of Benoni Blake never, at this time, swerved for a moment from his promise to love the girl for evermore. He was not responsible for the varied phases of feeling which he experienced. These will come to and depart from men and women, like the wind blowing where it listeth; and a pretty world we should have of it, if, like automatic weather gauges, we all ran about with our hearts on our

sleeves, with every variation registered and proclaimed by our tongues. Nay, nay ; there was no deceit in his reticence regarding his feelings, only half conscious as they were, while he was acting honestly and resolved so to act.

He attended to his father, as has been said, rarely going abroad, and thus the days drifted into December. Once more the father was able, on his son's arm, to visit the old dining-room and to sit in the old chair. Still, sad to say, dusty pictures of old grief and lurid gravings of recent misfortunes were for him the hangings of the walls. More shy of mankind than ever, he would only go to the dining-room when he knew that Mr. Bowie had gone forth from the Manse for a time, for which, indeed, Benoni had, not seldom, to arrange with Miss Robison, to whom Nannie had been forced to apologise. The feeble man

would sit silently in the old room, thinking with sad heart of the past ; unable, and little trying, to realise the painful present ; shutting his eyes against the future, save and excepting the hope of his son's marriage, to come about he knew not how. And the son, sitting opposite to his father on these occasions, was as silent and well-nigh as cheerless and hopeless as he.

At this time it was that Benoni, encouraged by the improvement of his father's health, wrote to the Professor of Surgery, with whom he had been a favourite pupil, requesting his good offices in procuring employment for him. He had, months before, acquainted Dr. Whatmore of the reverse of fortune that had overtaken him, and that now he could not purchase a practice, and since that time the doctor had been silent. It is plain that the best thing that could now befall our

friend was this, that he should go somewhere where work would be hard and continuous, and where he should have some prospect of that reward which so strengthens the hand of the diligent.

At this time, too, came a note from the innkeeper at Fyfeburgh, reminding Dr. Blake that he owed him £3 for a broken mirror. How long ago it seemed since this debt was incurred! How helpless the life he was leading, that for so many months had not yielded him so much money as this paltry sum! Yet, worse than all was the ignominy of being asked for payment. With burning cheeks he had resort to John.

“John, old fellow! I am come to borrow money of you. I need £3 to pay a bill at Fyfeburgh, and I can’t disturb my father for it. Will you kindly lend me?”

“Na,” said John deliberately, “I winna.” Benoni was filling with shame and anger. And John repeated, “Na, I winna; but if ye tak’ the hunner an’ a score mair, ye’re welcome tae the nots.”

With difficulty Benoni got off with a loan of the amount which he needed.

On this occasion John revealed a secret grudge against Mr. Bowie.

“I ne’er meet Booie, the helper-chiel,” said he, “but he’s aye speir-speirin’ at me, ‘Is this ane rich, an’ is yon ane rich?’ as if warlly wealth was the croun o’ the sinner. Aince I thocht him a gracefu’ man, but was sair mista’en, I fear. What think ye he speired at me twa nicht syne?” Benoni could not guess, of course. “Weel,” said John, “says he, ‘Maister John, I hope ye’re tae procure some beef for us at the Christmas.’ Says I,

‘What for shud I gang till Fyfebro’ for beef, whan we hae the best o’ turnip-fed mutton, as is wholesomer?’ Whan, dang the greishun boddy! says he, ‘Maister John, ma saul’s fair weary o’ their mutton and neeps. Ay, roast and bile, and bile and roast,’ says he. As if the Lord cudna be servit as weel an’ better on guid hielan’ mutton as on the fat bulls o’ Bashan. ‘Aith I telt him as muckle. He’s langin’ aifter the flesh-pots of Egyp’ mair nor the grace frae abune.”

Benoni did not like the man, but he offered no comment.

Wearily passed the days, and Benoni began to lose his appetite for food, and to be restless and heated by night; and this he knew very well came from the monotony of his life, the dreary blankness before him, the negative, unsatisfactory past. Aware of

the origin of this irritability, he resolved to shake it off by exercise. He told his father that he must walk out every day. So dutifully was he disposed, that he would go after breakfast daily to Tighnagrein, and return with Miss Bessie each day she was disposed to call at the Manse. But what do you think of this most demure of virgins? When in the listless way that was now becoming habitual to him, Benoni proposed this to her, she refused to agree to it. Her visits, she said, must be dependent on Miss Robison's companionship. She could not go to her lover's home, although that home was a manse, without the companionship of a friend of her own sex. She was very young, no doubt, and her notions were religiously severe; but really this was less than kind. Benoni, at first, was disposed to resent it as such; but

he suppressed his rising choler. What was the use of quarrelling? he asked himself, in the spirit of indifference that was fixed upon him. Perhaps she was right. At any rate, if she did not choose to humour him, was he to take advantage of her love of him, to cause her pain? But, indeed, her refusal vexed him only for a moment.

So alone he took his walks, whither chance guided his steps, calling at Tighnagrein, only now and then when he took that way. Purposeless walks, however, do no good in cases like his, for his mind was ever recounting its own stock of cares. He found matter to suggest gloomy reflections in everything his eye lighted on. It was winter, of course, when nature harmonises with blighted expectations and bleak prospects of the future. He has told me that at this time he was in so

wretched a frame of mind, as to sit for an hour watching a one-horse thrashing mill at a small steading which he chanced to pass. Round and round went the solitary horse, aimlessly, hopelessly, and so on it would go during its hours of yoke; and his heart was full of pity and tenderness for it. He thought the poor horse must feel somewhat as he did, seeing not whither he tended. Yet somewhat he envied it also, for in its humble way the beast was doing its life work; while he, shut out from life, stood with idly-folded arms.

Sir James Fanflare called again, coming both to shew regard for the ailing incumbent and appreciation of Mr. Bowie. Again he met Miss Thomson and Miss Robison at the Manse. Benoni was not at home. The loquacious old baronet did not hesitate to con-

gratulate Bessie on her interesting relation to the young man, while at the same time he said he was sorry for it, because early marriages always destroyed the chance of a distinguished career, and for such career he thought Dr. Blake had materials in him. He invited Mr. Bowie to visit him; but that worthy man declared he was so thirled to his duties, so earnestly bent on making his sacred office serviceable to the poor and the afflicted, that he could spare no time for pleasure, not even when the pleasure was that of being elevated into so high an honour as entertainment by so distinguished a host as the baronet, to whom, nevertheless, he owed a profundity of gratitude.

Christmas Day came dull and cheerless. Bowie dined with Mr. Robison at the Knowe, and was to stay over night there. Bessie

held a day of extra mourning for her dead brother ; and the Manse was lonely, cheerless, deserted, save by the invalid and his son. Even Dr. Nicolson, having duties that detained him elsewhere, did not visit it. Perhaps the being once more alone with his son in the old house strengthened Mr. Blake for the renewal of old habits. At any rate, as if new strength had come to him, he once more passed the day in the old study. Once more he came to his son for tea in the dining-room ; and sitting up later, he gathered his household—his son, old John, Nannie, and the maiden, and feebly presided at evening prayer, as he was wont to do before his affliction befell him.

Benoni had not gone out of doors all day, and, notwithstanding the evidence of his father's improved condition, the evening found him very gloomy and downcast. He

began to fancy that his heart, that main organ of life in him, was weak and flaccid, beating unequally and feebly. Looking into the dark future, he began to think of death, and thought that he could not live beyond forty. I never could make out how he came to fix upon that age as the term of his lease of life, but, however oddly, he did it. He says that for years and years he always thought that he should die at that age, and that he was somewhat surprised when his fortieth year came and went and left him still among the living. No doubt, at twenty-four to look forward to forty is a long prevision. No doubt, too, if the spirit of a man is troubled and gloomy at the former age, the thought may quite naturally arise that death shall be welcome at two score.

But light was to arise with hope and heal-

ing for him. Next day's post brought him an offer of an engagement as assistant to Dr. Stirling, of Duddingston. The office thus offered was but a modest one, rewarded by £40 per annum and board and lodging in the Doctor's house. Yet was it very welcome and eagerly accepted. On the 1st of February he was to enter on his duties.

Has misfortune, or fortune of any kind, ever sent you in the chill and dreary hour before daybreak into the open air? Have you seen how the black clouds roll and pile themselves, as if resolute to maintain their supremacy and to shut out the day? The stars are obscured. If the night has had aught of Aurora, it has died away. Majestic night has laid aside its spangles; its aspect is simply funereal. Its blackness never looks

more firmly established, never so hopeless. Heavily the minutes pass ; but lo ! what has come to the darkness ? The orient sun tips the clouds with silvery fringes, and at last, in erubescence light, the dawn laughs into the freshest, cheeriest hour of the day. So with my friend Benoni. The sun had fairly dawned on him, turning all his thick clouds into mere media of light scarcely affecting his day. His heart was no more flaccid and unequal of beat. His life was no longer a pack-horse burden to be laid down gladly at some definite time. His love—why, he could laugh again, even when that demure damsel of his choice was for raising up her thank-offering. By-and-by, he would study and practise thankfulness, when she was given to him to be a light to his feet in matters of that sort. Meantime, he would laugh and furbish up his

neglected instruments, for the work of life was about to begin.

Now he could flirt, just a little, with his betrothed, could saucily say that "her holiness" must be glad he was getting out of the way. He made no secret of his gladness in going forth to the world. To be sure, it was what he and all of them desired; and although the stipend was small, the neighbourhood of Edinburgh had charms and hopes for the recent student and the young practitioner, such as few places could present.

"Shall I ask Mr. Bowie to take charge of you, Bessie?" asked he.

Bessie pouted. Miss Robison said she knew which of their two hearts would be most exposed to temptation, and wished that Bessie could guard her lover's heart as surely as her own. Benoni felt the words shoot

faithfully home through the mail of his indifference. *He* must watch his heart, because his word was pledged; and he felt, too, that he should need to guard it, for now, in his preparation to go away, his love sat lightly upon him. Stammering, he answered that in Edinburgh his heart had ever been free. His love of natural beauty was so satisfied there, that he had no place for love more vulgar. It was only in country neuks that hearts were apt to stray.

Bessie, too, disliked that home-thrust of Miss Robison, which she saw had pained her lover; and she said she thought Benoni was right. In country neuks hearts *were* apt to stray, as Marjory *knew*. Marjory should watch and pray, and the less she doubted others, the better it might be with herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARTING with friends, even in the happiest circumstances, is by no means pleasant. Even if you do not feel the severance, propriety, or consciousness of what is appropriate, compels you to own some pain in parting, and owning it, of course, your heart being right and honest, a tear comes becomingly to your eye, and your breast is oppressed. Perhaps all the time you are reasonably glad to get away. I do not say that such feeling or manifestation of feeling is a sham: far from it; for I believe that much if not most of our emotion arises from our consciousness of its fitness to occasions. The exhibition of

feeling is more dependent on reason than philosophers are disposed to admit.

Benoni has kissed them all and said good-bye; and, notwithstanding all the heaviness of those eight months at home, he *was* sorry at the parting. Yet his was a calm and hopeful sorrow. It was necessary that he should go. He was going to make his way in the world, thereby to gladden the heart of his father and ulteriorly to provide a home for the girl-wife who was truly sad to be parted from him. Of course, he was to be a frequent letter-writer, and he enjoined Bessie for a time at least to come daily to see his father. They would mutually comfort one another, and make up to each other for the absence of their common dear one. Tears, quite genuine, were in his eyes when they each separately in kissing

him prayed God to bless him ; and his throat was still hoarse when, having got into the gig, he called to the old horse to go on.

The crisp, frosty January day drove the outward symptoms of emotion quickly from him, but it could not rid his mind of the feeling that his father was very feeble, gravely exposed to the risk of a relapse if any fresh disaster should befall. He was not at all sure that the mere parting with his son would not of itself produce serious indisposition, for he was deeply sensible how much the father loved him. On the other hand, he had some faith in Bessie's visits. "Poor little Bessie!" was his utterance as he thought of her.

His father had been very considerate. He had given him a cheque for £25, and sent him away in time to have a week

of holiday in his old student lodgings before he began work. You can understand how he felt. He had a mixed feeling of hope and sadness, perhaps the best feeling that a young man can be filled with when first he embarks on the voyage of active life.

When he shook the reins and called to old Bob to go on, and turned up the avenue, his father in the door-way turned away his face that his tears might not be seen. Mr. Bowie walked off into the study, thinking there was much ado about nothing; that, indeed, it was a "great satisfawction" that Blake was going. Miss Robison went into the parlour. Bessie put her hand on Mr. Blake's arm and whispered in his ear, and they went up-stairs together. What was it she said? "Let us pray for our dear one," and together, on their knees, they

anxiously besought God's blessing on him who had gone from them.

Benoni cashed his draft, and repaid John what he owed him, and sent him back. He was in no mood for visiting at the Manse or anywhere else. What could any "Ikkle Ebbes" be to him now? So contenting himself with a chop, he lighted his pipe and sat down to smoke in the piazza at the door of the hotel, to while away an hour till the gas was lit within. Then he would write home. Although he had only just left his loved ones, he knew that a little note in token of his love would be medicinal and strengthening on the morrow.

And while he sat there a carriage arrived, with all the trappings of the travelling of the wealthy. A livery servant opened the carriage door, and a lady and gentleman passed

from it into the house. As the lady passed she paused an instant before Benoni, but walked on, and he thought not so much as who she might be. She was muffled up in furs so that he could not have seen her face if he had desired.

He had written a note to his father, very tender, very hopeful. He was inditing a few lines to his Bessie, which were also tender, although, perhaps, they lacked fervour, when the waiter brought him a card, on which was engraved

“MR. PEPPLOE,

“*Letterbee Castle.*”

Mr. Pepploe, the waiter said, was in the adjoining sitting-room, with his niece. He sent his compliments to Dr. Blake and would be happy to see him. Benoni's heart flut-

tered, his face flushed, and why? Miss Shawe of Letterbee was in the next room. This was her uncle's card; and no doubt he was invited at her suggestion, for he was unknown to the uncle. He could scarcely fold up and address his letter to Bessie, his fingers twitched so nervously, and he was in such haste to get it done. The waiter must see the letters posted, of course. Five minutes before, he was anxious to shun society, desiring to be alone with his own thoughts. Why should he have been thus changed? Why thus eager to meet Miss Shawe? Indeed, he did not ask himself, and I am not going analytically to search out the answer.

The footman stood at the sitting-room door, and when Benoni said he had been asked to call on Mr. Pepploe, he swung the door open and announced "Dr. Blake."

A wiry old gentleman, with keen grey eyes and cat-like face and step, who was walking up and down the room with his hands under his coat tails, stopped in his walk and turned to Benoni at the door.

“Ah, Dr. Blake, I am Mr. Pepploe. You are acquainted with my niece; met her at Fanflare, I believe. She has inquired for you, hearing you are in the house.”

By this time, Benoni found his eyes accustomed to the glaring gas-light and saw that Miss Shawe was not in the room. He therefore expressed a hope that she was well. Mr. Pepploe, talking in an alto voice, replied,

“Very well, I thank you. But, as usual, extremely restless, very restless indeed; I am quite worried by her. She was here only this minute. She said she would like to have you to dinner with us. I don't know.

She left the room instantly. I am bound to please her in all such matters, God knows! Won't you sit down till she comes? Have a chair, please." The old gentleman seemed both weak and cunning, and Dr. Blake did not at all like his voice. He sat down, however, and silently listened to Mr. Pepploe complaining of his niece in many things, of her caprice, of her wastefulness, of her want of regard for his feelings, and the complaint was all poured out in that high key which wearies and gives head-aches to the listener. When Dr. Blake had sat for fully a quarter of an hour and no lady had appeared, he got weary of the old man, and got up, saying he should do himself the honour of calling at nine. He was bowing himself out of the room, when a door in the opposite wall was opened, and Miss Shawe stood before him. She

was in evening dress, and looked very aerial and graceful, different from all Benoni's recollection of her, immensely superior to what she had seemed to him. Womanly, graceful, simple yet queen-like, he never would have identified her with the lady of whom he thought as "Miss Shawe."


He stood, with the knob of the door in his hand, as the apparition of the lady came upon him.

She held out her hand and came to him most winningly, saying, "Dr. Blake, I am glad to meet you again. Do not go now. Let me present you to my uncle, Mr. Pepploe." She led him again into the room, to the hearth where Mr. Pepploe was standing.

"Dr. Blake has been here this half hour, my dear," said the uncle. "He was just departing when you entered."

“That I did not look for! I thought Dr. Blake was the style of man to wait a lady’s time without impatience. Ah! I see how this is. Dr. Blake is committed to matrimony, Mr. Pepploe. He has engaged himself to a young beauty down in the country. You see, Doctor, I have heard something of your career. I might have guessed it.”

Plainly she was not quizzing him. Her voice was gentle and sympathetic. Benoni felt it so, and frankly said her information was correct. He was to marry his country girl when he could. He was now going to begin life as a doctor’s assistant. She was sure his choice was worthy of him, and wished him happiness in such sweet, sincere tones, that the lad doubted inwardly whether this could really be the same woman he had met before, the lady of the ringing,



mocking laugh and sharp, incisive speech whom he remembered.

Would he dine with them at seven? He begged to be excused. Indeed, he had already had such dinner as sufficed for him. Then he must come later, and this he gladly promised to do. Miss Shawe was so gentle and womanly, so winningly fair, even beautiful to look upon, that Benoni could not but yield to the invitation, although after the manner of him, not one feature of her, not one particular of her dress had he noted. He saw her dreamily, indistinctly, felt the tones of her voice, her sympathy and her womanhood, noted and knew no more.

So, like a young fool, he went away and opened up his portmanteau, and finding his evening-coat somewhat crushed and creased, had a fire put on in his bed-room, and

toasted his clothing to remove the creases. At nine, fully attired and done up carefully, he marched with all his manhood into the private parlour, No. 9. Ah me! At that very hour, his father was moanfully, on his bed, thinking of his son. At that very hour too, Bessie in her little cottage room was kneeling, with her face low down on her little crib-chair, and the tears were streaming from her eyes, and her voiceless cry to God was pleading for the well-being and happiness of this same youth, so manly, so self-engrossed, at this moment so self-sufficient.

He had a glass of wine and an orange with the uncle, and found that his companions were to be his fellow-travellers on the following day by the coach to Edinburgh, whither they were going to spend the spring months.

The conversation was entirely upon trifles. By-and-by Miss Shawe went to a piano which stood in the room, and began to play. She was a skilful player. After a time, she wandered to that canzonet of the *Sonnambula*, then a favourite popular air, "Still so gently o'er me stealing;" and Dr. Blake, as we know, being very fond of that air, went to her side and began to hum it.

"You must sing it for me, Doctor," and he did sing it to her. And being in the vein, he sang it with so much of languishing tenderness in his voice, that any defect in his execution was more than compensated by the feeling which he threw into it. He felt he had done well, and you know how satisfactory that is. Miss Shawe complimented him warmly, without banter

or nonsense. She was fond of singing; and she promised that sometime after they were settled at Edinburgh, she should send for him and sing to him.

“It is so long,” said he, “since I learned any new song.” Well, she should take care to have something new for him. She was very kind and wonderfully gentle; and when, at half-past ten, Benoni thought it was time to retire, he found that he had passed a most delightful evening.

Thus it happened that while certain people were lying sleepless thinking of him, poor dear fellow, of whom they were bereft, our hero went to bed with his head full only of Miss Shawe of Letterbee. Of course, his thoughts were in nowise disloyal to other people, being in nowise amatory towards her. He was simply delighted with the evening.

And, indeed, it is not surprising that he was so, for the change was great, from the sad silence of his father's bedroom to this well-appointed, brilliantly-lighted room; from the constant oppression of Nannie's stinted housekeeping, to the wine and service with which he had been entertained; from all his cares, to that gentle lady and the appreciated melody of his own song. Then, too, the change had all the heightening influence which was derivable from the fact, that his entertainers were people above his own sphere, really people of rank and position in the county. I, at least, do not wonder, that when he lay down, he went over in thought every incident of the night, and, though in bed, hummed again his favourite air. Quite natural it was, but also very silly, I own.

And quite naturally, too, when he got up next morning, his thoughts were of the same matters. Yet, as soon as he was dressed, he most dutifully went off to the commercial-room, and getting writing materials, despatched short letters to his father and Miss Thomson. He told them very briefly of his unexpected but kindly entertainment by Mr. Pepploe and Miss Shawe; also how he had slept but indifferently well, owing, he thought, to the change of bed. He would write from Edinburgh next day. While he wrote, every time the door opened, he expected that some one was coming to summon him to Miss Shawe. His expectation was disappointed; and at length he ordered and ate his breakfast at half-past eight, the coach being to start at nine.

Nor did he see the lady till, the coach being at the door, she came forth to take her seat. He was standing at the hotel door. Mr. Pepploe nodded to him, saying:—

“Good morning, Doctor.”

Miss Shawe held out to him a hand enveloped in a glove of fur, which he took with his profoundest bow, and he led her to the coach and showed her into it. Then the guard's horn rang shrilly down the scarce awakened street, and Benoni and other passengers climbed to the coach roof, where he had secured the box seat. He filled and lighted his pipe, while the coachman gathered up his reins and stiffly clambered to the box. “Let them go!” cried John, shaking “the ribands” and touching the off leader with his cracking

whip. They tore along the streets, rolled over the bridge, and were lost to sight. Our hero is off to Edinburgh.

It was raw and cold as they rattled out of Fyfeburgh, but by-and-by the sun came out over hill-tops cloud-burdened, and the drive became pleasant as winter day drives may be. Hour after hour the coach rolled on. Benoni smoked many pipes, and between his pipes he conversed with the coachman, who, in right of his office, is a sage and wise man, whose opinions you are bound to receive with deference on every subject to which you may direct his thoughts. Of course, on horses he is perfect wisdom; knowing every horse worthy of notice for miles on either side of his drives. Of people, too, his knowledge is extensive, and a few brief, blunt words from

him will usually portray a character, roughly it may be, but intelligibly. Having seen Blake speak to "the insides" while the horses were being changed, John, in driving on, commented on the lady.

"Ticklish jaud that miss, Doctor! Hard work for that old fellow to drive her, I think. Her mother died in the madhouse, as accounts for it, you know, and they tells me she takes mostly after the mother."

Blake modestly said that he had met her when staying at Sir James Fanflare's; that she seemed a frank and kindly girl, and that was all he knew of her.

"Oh yes, she's all that when she likes," said John. "But I should not like to have her wheeler in my team every day. She has a good bit of the devil in her, they tells me as ought to know;" indicating by a motion

of his hand, the man-servant and maid at the back of the coach. He added, "She's not bad on the road, though. She's always good to one for half a sov."

Dr. Blake made no comment.

They dined at a country inn by the roadside at four in the afternoon. Dr. Blake had the honour of taking Miss Shawe from the coach to the inn. And he sat beside her during the dinner. He was attentive to her, of course, and talked a deal of commonplace talk to her. She accepted his little services with very marked thanks, seeming girlishly to depend upon him; which confirmed Blake in his notion that he had somehow misapprehended her character at Fanflare. But on rolled the coach again with a new coachman; and the day waned, and animation left our youth. It was now simply dreary,

cold, dark, wintry travelling. He was wearied and tired enough when the coach rolled into the gaslit streets of the city; and cold almost to numbness he let himself down stiffly after the coach pulled up at "The Black Bull." A dozen touts and waiters from various hotels were struggling for his portmanteau and other traps. He had to rescue his goods and to rout these assailants, and when he turned about he saw Miss Shawe and Mr. Pepploe entering a cab. To his annoyance they had gone away without "good-bye."

CHAPTER XIX.

BESSIE THOMSON had her lover's note while yet he had scarcely taken his seat on the coach, while yet he was thrilling from the gentle pressure of that fur-gloved hand. I have said that the note was but a few lines, which, perhaps, lacked ardour. But she, you know, was not a very ardent girl, and the performance of duty was more to her than much display of feeling in the doing of it. So the little note, token as it was of her lover's loving remembrance of her, was a very happiness to her, a most gratifying assurance of his abiding affection, and moreover, of his thoughtful-

ness. Her little heart was set all aglow. Benoni was the dearest and best of lads, so truly kind. She did not expect the note, and therefore it was prized the more.

She read it again and again. She told her father, in her gladness of soul, how loving her Dr. Blake was, and how happy she. She needs must hurry with her morning's work, that she might the earlier hasten to the Manse and show her love-token, and therewith make glad the lonely minister.

She found him in bed with his letter on his pillow. The lonely night and the sad companionship of his thoughts had brought him great unrest, which even the morning's evidence of his son's affection had not allayed. Poor soul! fretting and wearying and wearing itself by endless thoughts of what might have been, but now could never be! He must

tell of his unrest ; must raise his feeble hands from the coverlet and make lamentation over blessings that had vanished for ever. He told the young girl of Mona, his Mona, who had lighted with love the path of his young years, and whose lamp had gone out, leaving him in the blackness of darkness. And as he spoke of her and of his misery, he sat upright in his bed, with his white hair dishevelled, falling on his scarcely whiter bed-dress ; with his keen dry eyes, for he did not weep, wildly staring into the past, which strangely seemed to have all its horror, all its misery in the woe-begirt present. Then, when he clasped his hands and cried out for his son, " Benoni ! my boy ! my son ! " the girl, scarcely knowing what she did, dropped on her knees at the bed-side, half in fear but all to pray.

This action checked the minister, and his

arid soul also tried to vent itself in words of entreaty to God, which sounded much like reproach, and were truly words of discontent. Interrupted thus in her petitions, Bessie arose, and while the minister was recounting his griefs and saying, "All these things are against me," she stopped him almost sternly.

"What, father, so far from the spirit that can kiss the rod? We, who have such abounding blessings,—our dear Benoni; and oh! more, infinitely more! the love of God and His Son! shall we not, joyous, bear every cross so that we may win Christ? There is nothing abiding, nothing real save God and Christ."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks in her great and tremulous emotion. Her hand was on the old man's shoulder. He crouched

down again among the bed-clothes, taking her hand in his; and he knew that the spirit which filled him was akin to that wretched spirit which would curse God and die. She sat down and hid her face upon his pillow, while long he held her hand and spoke not. The voice of the girl, the first voice that for a quarter of a century, since his Mona's voice was hushed in death, had addressed him in words of loving admonition, had reached his soul and filled him with new thoughts. His mind went whirling through the mazes of his past life, perhaps now seen in a new light, for when he spoke, his words were the echo of her last trembling speech:—"Nothing abiding, nothing real, save the love of God in Christ."

She spoke not, and for an hour and more, he held her at the bed-side in silence.

Perhaps his soul was busy elsewhere, and thought not of her at all. But at length, he said :—

“ My child, even though He slay me, I shall trust and praise Him.”

Still the girl did not reply. Thereafter he uttered many broken words, all in humility of spirit, in bruised and broken submission. It almost seemed as if he, who long had hovered on the threshold of the great discovery that in God alone, the supreme, the ever-loving, there are rest and peace, had at length perceived that peace could only come through filial acquiescence, and that all things are ordered by a spirit of love that is fatherly as eternal and divine.

At any rate, thenceforth he took a different view of the changes and sorrows which life had brought him, no longer viewing himself

and *his* pleasure as the end of his being. Once the right view was grasped, a mind toned like his was not slow to advance into fuller light and into firmer footing. And here I wish to say that I do not mean to represent what now took place in the heart of the minister as a first awakening of his heart, as a first apprehension and reception of God. But Miss Thomson, whose confidence I acquired in after years, and from whom I have the facts, being a lady of approved religious modes of thought, always maintains that a great and notable revolution was at this time effected in the soul of the old minister. "His heart had not been wholly purified," she has said to me. "Self-love and love of the creature had not been cast out wholly, nay, remained in him an active belligerent principle, warring against the love of God. And when God first

put forth His hand and touched him in that very sensitive earthly affection of his, he had, though not consciously, gone over greatly to the enemy, had let the foe that warred against God's grace strengthen itself within him. He would not submissively accept the dispensation, would not look behind 'a frowning Providence' for the tender Father, who deemed his chastening necessary. So he went bemoaning himself in each new sorrow, multiplying and magnifying his griefs and cares. At the time we have been speaking of he became enabled to discern a gracious, loving motive in God's dealing with him. Thenceforth he could humbly, thankfully, although feebly, say, 'It was good for me to be afflicted.'"

Such was Miss Thomson's way of stating the matter. Dr. Blake and I, given to more

rationalistic views of mental changes, were disposed to construct another theory of the phenomenon, but we never dared to pain her good heart by so much as mooting it to her.

Mr. Blake did not leave his bed that day, and Bessie stayed with him until late in the afternoon, comforting him feebly with little words. She gave him beef-tea, as Benoni used to do; and she spoke of his son, and of the loving nature that prompted him to write on his first night from home. But she could not win, she was not trying to win, the father out of his new frame of mind. And when he answered her speaking of human love, it was only to cry out of a higher and wiser, even a divine love, that had bruised him for his good, but had also greatly spared him, leaving him much cause for humble gratitude, as in the

love of his son, in that God had given him a son to love him.

This phase of mind abode with him, softening his views of the past, cheering him in the present, giving him strength and some little pleasure in life. And when, by-and-by, another call of £12 10s. per share came upon him on account of that wretched bank, and his much-loved bank account was thereby not only exhausted but overdrawn, he did not feel it as any serious affliction. He had been very graciously and bountifully provided for, he said. Was it not of Providence that his stipend became payable in a week, and was larger than all his needs? His mind being thus at peace, his strength grew apace. He could look forward to a coming spring, when he should be able again to go out and in before his people, and he was resolved to proclaim

to them somewhat of all that God had done for his soul.

The girl became very dear to him; for she was with him much in those first days, when his soul was drawing near to this peace; never speaking of the light which she knew was dawning on him, never appearing to notice his change of feeling, yet helpful of it in little ways, which let him see both her love and reverence for him. By-and-by he received her friend, Miss Robison, kindly for her sake, but Miss Robison he could not accept warmly. To Mr. Bowie he could not draw near, the harsh loud voice of that preacher grating on his weak nerves, and leaving him unable to find pleasure in the evening devotions, which, when at first he was able to come to them, the helper conducted. It was noted by both Nannie

and John, when their old master again began to pray in the old parlour at the old chair, that a change had come to him in his illness; that whereas he had in former days been cold and formal and skin-bound in his devotions, now he was full of warmth and gratitude and love, that were poured out in gushing words that were really from his heart. His son had been away for six weeks before the happy change was thus evidenced.

And, as this is the biography of Dr. Blake, I must in reason go back to him, whom I left standing amid contending hotel men in front of "The Black Bull," with no small feeling of disappointment at seeing the cab drive off with the lady. In explanation of the expedition with which she left the scene, I have to state that the footman had had very special instructions to provide the carriage

instantly on the arrival of the coach, and to follow with the luggage; and for this haste, and the expense of two cabs, the sagacious Mr. Pepploe no doubt had his reasons. It was, at least, a consequence of this haste that Dr. Blake had no invitation again to present himself to the lady.

He got to his old lodgings, and next day attended the lecture of his friend, the Professor, and offered him thanks after his class was dismissed. The Professor told him that the situation he was going to was not unexceptionable. Dr. Stirling was a bachelor, and somewhat eccentric; and he had his practice mainly in the middle and lower ranks, chiefly in the latter, so that the work, being suburban, was at times somewhat severe. Dr. Blake was ready to encounter any amount of hard work, and held that as no objection.

“You’ll see nobody at Stirling’s,” said the Professor ; “and the thing that he hates above all things is that his assistant should go anywhere. In fact, he would have him for ever tied up to his duties or at home ready for duty. He carries this to an extreme, and through it solely has quarrelled with his present assistant.”

Blake did not foresee cause of quarrel in this. He used not to be asked out when a student, and was really going in for work. But while he professed all this, he felt he should think it hard to be forced to deny himself an evening at Miss Shawe’s, if she should honour him with an invitation. However, he was ready for work.

He called on the same day on Dr. Stirling, who lived in a nice old house at Duddingston, with crow steps on the gables, and with

its gable to the road, while the front had a little patch of ground ornamented with vases and a rockery. The place looked cosy and pleasant, trim and smart as it was, even in January. Blake found the doctor and also Dr. Welsh, his assistant for the time being, at home. The parlour into which he was shown was low in the ceiling, but otherwise of fair dimensions. Dr. Stirling was there having some soup when Blake, with his great stalwart presence and commanding air, stalked in.

“Ha, you are Dr. Blake?” said Stirling, rising from his tray and offering two fingers for our friend’s acceptance.

“I am Dr. Blake, sir,” said Benoni, while Stirling’s eye ran over his whole figure.

Benoni returned the scrutiny, and examined the personnel of his future employer. He was

a wiry little man, with brown twinkling eyes, punctiliously neat in his attire ; but, although Blake looked at him, he noticed none of these particulars.

“ Sit down, pray.” And while Blake took a chair at the window, Dr. Stirling went on with his soup.

He finished his soup, used his table-napkin, folded that article up carefully, and set it in a ring. Then he directed himself to Benoni.

“ I say, I wish you wanted six inches of your height ; you would have pleased me better. You are too big ; you will always be getting into scrapes.”

“ I don't see that, Doctor ; I am a peaceable fellow. Large men are usually good-natured, and I am no exception.”

“ Possibly, but you will be awkward, and you will overshadow me. But I have to go

out at half-past two. I am always punctual. Great secret of success that. Let me see: you are to enter on the 1st, just this day week. Well, I hope you will get on pleasantly. Punctuality and attention are the great things. The want of it in young men is really astonishing. It has been a sore distress to me this year past."

Here the door opened, and a young man with spectacles, a high complexion, and somewhat reckless appearance entered, saying:—

"I am going out, sir. I have to call on Thompson again."

"I am going out," said Dr. Stirling. "You must leave your call till later. See, here is your successor, sir. You may as well show him the dispensing-room." Then he turned to Benoni. "I shall expect you on the 1st

at two. Good day ;” and he went out without further leave-taking.

“Come along,” said Welsh. “That is the greatest curmudgeon in the world! I wish you much joy of him. I have been with him three months, and am like to cut my throat. Hav’n’t had a comfortable smoke all that time. He won’t suffer it. I smoke at night though, blast him! with my head up my attic chimney; but I hav’n’t had a spree all the time.”

“There is plenty of work?” asked Blake.

“Work! Why, he’ll only give you pauper cases before six o’clock, you know; but after nine you must run your ten miles good to see his ordinary patients take their black-draught at midnight, and after that he expects you to bring up his day-book. You get to bed about two, and the chances are that you are rung up again at four. And if you don’t meet him at

breakfast at eight, he spoils the tea, and is as sulky as the devil all day."

"A very cheerful view you give me! But I am in for it and must try. I don't mind the work, if he is civil."

"If you can humour him he is civil enough; but I never could. You see 'I likes a drop of good beer,' and it's hard if a fellow can't turn in to a pump [Edinburgh slang for a beer-shop] when he runs about till midnight! The drink is not bad at the 'Abercorn' over the way."

"I drink very little," said Benoni. "I like my pipe, and don't see how I am to get on without it, but the beer doesn't trouble me."

"All I say is, that I wish you joy of it. I don't know what I am to be about next; but I'll have £10 to start with, and I'll begin with a moderate spree. I've had long enough of this water-cursed place."

Benoni felt no sympathy with his companion, and very quickly took his departure.

He went home, and very dutifully wrote to his father and to his betrothed, telling them a little of what he had learned of his employer, and of the things which seemed to affect his chances of comfort in his employment. And while he noted these down, they did not seem seriously adverse. He was prepared to work steadily and hard, and, except as regarded his propensity for pipes, he foresaw nothing which greatly threatened his comfort in the accounts which he had got.

At night he went to the theatre, and on his way home, in Great King Street, he saw a couple of ladies and a gentleman pass from a house there to a carriage. Although the gentleman was tall, it came into his head that possibly Miss Shawe was one of the ladies, and his heart began to flutter, and he

straightened himself up more than ordinary, and went up to the carriage and passed it with quite a grand gait, but no notice was taken of him. In fact, he was only under the influence of a wild imagining, that showed how the pleasure of two nights before still stuck in his brain.

His week of idleness in the metropolis quickly passed away. On the last day of it he received his second epistle from his Bessie, and his first from his father. Both these are among my friend's treasured things. Over Bessie's letter, as he read it, I have, more than once, seen the tears fill his eyes. I quote them both :—

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ For the first time, since you left me, I rose from my bed yesterday. I need not tell you that your loving recollection of me was

very grateful to me, and brought me great solace in my ailing. How full of gratitude I am to God who has given me a loving child! God is indeed gracious to me in all things. Even His dark dispensations ever show forth the rainbow of promised and operating mercy, telling of the great centre of light and goodness, which rules all things for the good of those who love Him.

“Your Bessie has been much with me—a lovable, real girl, with her heart assuredly God-ward. She is unto me even as a daughter and a friend.

“I am better to-day, stronger and more cheerful. Otherwise all things are as when you went away. May the good Lord keep you in His own peculiar care is the earnest prayer of,

“My dear boy, your loving father,

“THEO. BLAKE.”

“MY DEAREST BENONI,

“We were very happy to have news of your safe arrival at Edinburgh, and to hear that you think you will like your situation, although it may not be all you could wish.

“I have been seeing Mr. Blake every day since you went away. Most days Miss Robison went with me, who is always so kind and thoughtful for me. But once or twice I went alone, and, as the weather was frosty and the water low, I crossed on the stilts nicely.

“I told you father was very poorly after you went away. I think he is now a great deal better; and, dearest Benoni, I wish to tell you that he is much happier too, I think, for he sees that God is very good to him, as God is for ever, although this view of God's dealing has not been always before him. O

my dear Benoni, have we not always much to praise God for, if we were only humble enough and thankful enough? O me! how much have I to praise Him for! He remembered the low estate of his poor hand-maid, and gave me great treasure in giving me you. In everything else I have to thank and praise Him.

“We are all well. I have no other news. Miss Robison sends you her love, and I am,

“My ever dear Benoni,

“Your own loving little girl,

“BESSIE.”

“Who is the Miss Shawe that was so kind to you that night at Fyfeburgh? We have got two calves this week.

“BESSIE THOMSON.”

CHAPTER XX.

DR. BLAKE went duly to work, and found his work by no means unpleasant. Dr. Stirling took him the round of his patients, but the aid of the junior was wanted chiefly for night work, to save the senior from going out, as he had caught a severe neuralgic affection through doing so twelve months before. After seeing all the cases, and being formally installed as assistant, he found that the accounts, which had been greatly neglected by his predecessors, would occupy many hours for many days. He set to his work with a will, and with such excellent results, that on his frankly saying that he felt it

both uncomfortable and an interruption of his work to go off to the wash-house to smoke his pipes two or three times a day, Dr. Stirling, while he declaimed against smoking, caused a fire to be lighted in a vacant attic and sent the youth to work there. Moreover, he had sufficient professional employment, as by day he visited with his principal those cases which required, or were likely to require, treatment at night.

Thus he got on tolerably well, and found himself not uncomfortable in his newly formed relation. In the regular routine of his duties, the realities of pills and potions, and the scheduled charges per visit, romance and reveries had very little chance of disturbing him. In fact, by the end of a month, his leading reflection was that he was doing

a great deal of work for a very scanty salary ; and, when young men have such a thought as this strongly, depend upon it the poetry of youth is about to depart.

He was only twice in Edinburgh—that is, “beyond the Bridges”—during the whole month : once, when he treated himself to a concert, with the special permission of Dr. Stirling duly asked and obtained ; and again on a Sunday night, when he went to procure some special medicine. Such acquaintances as he had in the city were not disposed to interrupt the ordinary duties of the doctor’s assistant. And in fact, he was beginning to regard himself as a commonplace, everyday doctor’s assistant, who must look mainly to steady diligence as a possible source of future success.

To this lowliness of disposition I am

ashamed to say that Dr. Blake is conscious that the fact of Miss Shawe having apparently forgot him contributed in no small degree. During his week of idleness she had often been in his thoughts—in his thoughts, I mean, in ways quite compatible with his other engagements, as a most probable source of pleasant friendship, of musical and other enjoyments, and possibly of social advantage to him. He did not fail to regret that he had not informed her that it was at Duddingston he was to practise. And to tell the truth, which it is ever well to do, he went to that concert and paid his half-guinea for it mainly in the hope of meeting her. In this he was disappointed. So there came about by the end of a month a great change of view. What was the lady to him? what could she ever

be? There was he, set up in a garret to copy accounts, sometimes taken out to dispense castor-oil and other such medicines as a very tyro in his profession, and all for a paltry pittance. Had he any right to expect recollection of him from such as she? Would not any kindness she might be disposed to show him only be an interruption of that humble diligence on which he must rely? Was not the general course of his life already shaped out, although he could not see beyond the present? He must work on humbly, so that, sooner or later, he might have the right and power to take to himself the girl to whom he was pledged.

How dutiful he was in those days! He wrote to his father and to his Bessie each alternate day, having always some little thing, pathetic or droll, to tell about his

cases. How he made them laugh when his triumphant assiduity had elevated him, pipes and all, to Dr. Stirling's attic! He told them he had dim visions of a not distant partnership, and that Dr. Stirling's practice was a good thing. When such topics failed, he described grim old Arthur's Seat and other objects of interest visible from his attic windows, while his calm but explicit words of love made valuable each page he wrote. These were days in which the father's heart was glad with strong assurance that God was good to him.

The life he was now leading was far from devoid of incident. Indeed, no man can practise medicine in the quietest country corner, much less in a suburb of a great town, without finding much not only to test his head but to touch his heart also,

that is, if he has a head and a heart, which unfortunately many men seem to lack. I find that generally head and heart go together; at least, where one is lacking, the other is sadly defective. One little case Blake has often referred to, narrating it, when in the mood, with infinite pathos. I will try to reproduce it, although the lives of medical men must teem with similar tales. It lies somewhat in the way of my main story.

One day in the last week of February, when he was hard at work at his accounts, the housemaid told him that he was wanted in the consulting-room. There he found a slim, pale-faced, earnest-looking woman, whose age could not exceed thirty years. She was thinly but decently clothed in grey, and she wore a widow's cap. Dr. Blake asked the reason of her coming.

Would the doctor kindly see her little boy? she modestly asked. He had been ailing for two or three days, and she had thought nothing of it, but to-day he was "rambling in his talk."

Blake said that looked like fever, and he was not aware that there was fever in the neighbourhood.

"He must have ta'en it in the town," she said. "I was feared it was the fevvar. But will you come to see him, sir?"

He said he should call in half-an-hour, and took directions for finding her abode.

It was on the ground-floor of a cottage. There was simply the earthen-floor, but it was scrupulously clean. The little fellow was sitting up in bed, spinning and whipping an imaginary top, poor boy! crying out in the peculiar, earnest joy of the delirium of fever.

“There’s the giggie! She gangs brawly, mither!”

Blake asked the story of his illness, but spots on the skin and the delirium very distinctly marked the disease as typhus. The mother said that her boy was nine years old, her only child, and she had been for six years a widow, earning a scanty living by binding shoes. Her boy used to carry the “uppers” when bound by her to a shop in the High Street, and five days before, when he last did so, he had been sent with them from the shop to the cordwainer’s in St. Mary’s Wynd, “where the fevvar is always,” and thus their little bit of bread had brought about this trouble in its winning. The widow had a shoe-leather in her hand stitching at it.

“If I stop working we shall want alto-

gether," she said. "But do you think he'll get over it, Doctor?"

Dr. Blake could only hope he would. He saw no reason to think he would not. He gave him some simple febrifuge, and then he urged the widow not to sleep with her son, not to lie down on his bed, lest she also should be taken with the disease. To this she gently but firmly replied,

"Since the hoor o' his birth, he has lain i' my bosom. I am not gain' to put him frae me when God's hand is on the child. Leastwise we hae no ither bed."

"Yes, but if you are both laid down, it will be a bad business, not of God's sending, but of your own want of care."

"Oor lives are in the hands of a higher than oorselves. If it be His will, the pestilence shall pass me by. If not, I am in

the hand of God! I can't lie down asunder frae my boy."

Blake was very attentive to them, giving the widow a little money, so that her hands might be free to tend the boy, and night and day he visited and did all that his science could for them. His letters to Bessie narrated the story, and day after day he told of the child's progress. At last, he told that the worst was past with him, but the same letter stated that the widow was down of the fever by the side of her son.

Very hard oftentimes are the dealings of Providence and hard indeed to be understood. Perhaps, as Scotch theology will have it, they are not to be understood, simply to be suffered and accepted humbly, nay, which is harder, gratefully. In this case there is no

difficulty in understanding so much as this—to nurse and sleep with a fever patient, is a sure way to take the fever. But it was afflicting to the young doctor to see the disease fastening on the emaciated widow, whose love for her boy had excited his sympathy. He went off to the Rev. Mr. Thomson, and procured from him power to provide a nurse and what else might be needful, for which the Kirk Session would pay, and he set to work with tender zeal to do the woman good.

When delirium came upon her, it was very sad to witness. Her mind sometimes wandered back to the old days when her husband was the joy of her life. She spoke to him, calling to him to look at his boy. “It was so like him, so good!” But more frequently black spectres of want and terror beset her,

from which she shrank in agonising fear, clutching at the boy in nervous trepidation.

She had not strength for the great wasting fire of a fever like this. In a few days, she was quiet and somnolent, and on the 10th of March she was dead. And now, although somewhat more acquainted with death and misery than before, Benoni wept at hearing the poor boy wailing by the mother's corpse. Before she fell ill, he had heard from her the address of her only brother, somewhere in the city, and on the day of her death, he set off to seek him.

He was sad at heart as he went along, doubting greatly the goodness of God's ways. At Newington he found an omnibus, and getting on the top of it, felt somewhat bettered by the drive. He got off it at the Register House. As he did so a carriage

stopped beside him, and looking vacantly at it, for his thoughts were of other things, he saw Mr. Pepploe and Miss Shawe. The former was just then calling to him, "Dr. Blake."

Although glad to see them, Blake at that moment would hardly have desired the meeting. They were going home, would he go with them? Miss Shawe asked; but he would not. He must seek out the brother of his dead patient. Would he then dine with them, at 5, Forres Street, three days after? He could not, he said, be a whole evening away from duty; but he told them where he resided, and if they would allow him, he would endeavour to come to them for some time on the evening named. Thus it was arranged. His friends said they had without success asked after him wherever they could

hope to hear of him. Now chance had brought them to meet him again.

It was pleasant, no doubt, to have been remembered and thought of amid the gaities of the city. But a month or six weeks of steady work had greatly sobered him, not to mention the sedative influence of his home correspondence. Depend upon it, if men will go on filling their letters with loving thoughts, they will find their hearts and minds influenced by it, from whatever source the thoughts may originally have sprung. Still let us ever pray that we be not led into temptation. Of temptation to stray from love or rectitude Dr. Blake had no thought. If he had known himself better, he would have doubted himself more. Yet how doubt of one's own honour, where there is no thought of its being involved?

He could not go to Forres Street on the night which had been fixed ; not that he was specially occupied, but he was loath to break through the routine of his life. He had the feeling that music was but of little moment in life. So he wrote a note of apology to Mr. Pepploe. In reply there came to him a pretty note from Miss Shawe, saying that both she and her uncle were much disappointed. She had provided some new music, which she was longing to play to him, and she wished him to come to hear it on the Monday following. He must come and dine with them at seven. Let him give her love to that pretty girl of his in the country, and she was ever and very sincerely his, "Lotty Shawe."

What was he to do? He handed the letter to Stirling, and told how he had met the lady the week before and been asked to

dine and had sent an apology and so forth. She was a swell in her own county.

“What!” asked Stirling, when he had read the letter, “is this Miss Shawe of Letterbee, one of our regular subscribers to the infirmary? I am told she is an eccentric but good-hearted girl. I think you should go, Blake.”

“Well, may I accept the invitation?”

“I think you should, barring accidents, of course. You may be home by eleven, and, probably, there will be nothing to do for the night.”

Accordingly the invitation was accepted, and in due time, in the glorious sunlight of a March evening lighting up the grey old rocks and the green hill above him, he set out townward, carrying a patent leather boot in each pocket of his paletot. Again a bus from

Newington conveyed him to the west end of Princes Street, and presently he was in the lobby of the house at Forres Street.

I suppose all young men not accustomed to dining out, or visiting ladies, have more or less a quickening of the pulse when a drawing-room door is thrown open to them, and feel "put to their mettle" as they advance into the room. Such, at least, Dr. Blake now found to be his case. He was palpitating at heart a little as he advanced to the hearth-rug where Miss Shawe was standing to greet him. He was introduced to Mrs. Cromar, her aunt.

"It is just to be a family dinner, Doctor," said Mr. Pepploe, in a confidential way.

"Yes," said Miss Shawe, "I wish to have a whole evening of you for music, Doctor; and I would not have a lot of people to

interfere. But I must ask, how is that girl of yours? I suppose, because you are engaged to her, you must, forsooth, deny other people the pleasure of seeing you?"

"Not so, Miss Shawe; I am too humble-minded to fancy my presence of consequence. But a young doctor's life is a pretty hard one, and I have to please, not a pretty woman, but the tough old bachelor who employs me."

"Quite like the rest of mankind, sir! mercenary."

"I wish to give faithful service for my hire."

"Come, Doctor, take down Miss Shawe," said Mr. Pepploe, and the pair walked off.

The dining-table was tastefully adorned with flowers, and the dinner was all that man could desire. In course of dinner, Blake again noticed that Miss Shawe had, in conversation

and manner, none of the outspoken waywardness — even wildness — that was so marked in her behaviour at Fanflare. But it still lurked in her eye, in a subdued way. Her uncle and aunt were plainly under some restraint, somewhat distant with him. Miss Shawe talked much, but chiefly of music, and of the fact of his betrothal, which seemed to interest her greatly. Music led to the mention of the evening at Fyfeburgh. Dr. Blake had enjoyed it very much, he told her.

“So did I,” said Miss Shawe. “I have been longing for a repetition of it. I can’t make out how we parted without exchanging addresses.”

“It was my stupid blunder, my dear,” said Mr. Pepploe. “I should have seen to that.”

“Do you know, Doctor, I asked all my

acquaintances round if they could tell me of you, or had heard of you. Nobody ever does know anything to give one pleasure. At last I thought I had a cold, and sent for Dr. Begbie. He knew no such person as I asked after. He promised to inquire, but he never came back, and I gave you up for lost, till at last I saw you get off that stage coach."

Nothing affected Blake more than evidence of regard for him. Therefore, the words of thanks he offered her were really heartfelt. He was unworthy of such kindly recollection, he said, but he esteemed it sincerely.

Thus incited, he went at his music after dinner in great spirits, frankly, gaily, in the spirit of his companion. She made him sing "Still so gently" again to her. She had learned it since coming to Edinburgh,

and they sang it together. Then he told her of his singing at Fanflare, and breaking down, and they laughed over that. Then she sang and played some of Handel's exquisite hymns. She sang with considerable power and great sweetness; and Benoni found himself listening to her dreamily, when Mr. Pepploe came to him, asking him worldly questions, regarding the health of Dr. Stirling, and his chances of succeeding to the practice.

"Go away, uncle," said Miss Shawe. "Don't interrupt our pleasure, please."

She said it in tones that showed she really thought she was having a pleasure.

"Please let me tell Mr. Pepploe, and I'll sing you something nice," said Blake.

"Be quick then, sir," said she, in mingled imperiousness and tenderness.

And when he had spoken, he sang her "Tom Bowling," singing it very pathetically. He had to repeat it for her. And so on they sang and played till ten, when he had to set out for home.

You know that Dr. Blake had gone to this dinner reluctantly. But when he left Forres Street, he was full of delight with the evening and with himself. He had had so rare a pleasure, one so free from drawback of any kind. He was under promise to return that day week, a promise given under friendly pressure. The day was of his own appointment. He could not resist the pressure. Why should he? Yet the effect of such pleasure on hearts unsubjected, and on minds untrained, must ever be the same. In Blake's circumstances, it was dangerous.

CHAPTER XXI.

LET me now offer for your perusal a copy of a letter from Mr. Pepploe to Sir James Fanflare.

“ Forres Street, Edinburgh, March 31, 1845.

“ MY DEAR SIR JAMES,

“ You know a young medical man of the name of Blake, from your part of the country, whom my niece chanced to meet at your house. I fear I am going to have some trouble through him. It is on this account I trouble you now.

“ My sister recollects that two or three times during the last harvest Miss Shawe referred to ‘ a handsome young doctor ’

whom she met at the Lodge, and who seemed to have caught her fancy. For myself, I heard nothing of the matter, until, on my way up here, my niece and I met him at the 'Queen's,' in Fyfeburgh. She insisted on seeing him, and I could not prevent it.

"She had been flighty, and contradictory, and unequal for a month, and especially that day; but she put on her prettiest behaviour with him, and was as gentle as a lamb, quite a sweet young lady, and I instantly detected that she was playing a part, and that she took a deep interest in her game. We travelled by the mail coach together, but I managed on reaching Edinburgh to get clear away without an exchange of addresses, and was in hopes that the affair would end there. But she went about asking everybody for 'Dr. Blake,' and even pretended to be un-

well that she might ask after him. But I cautioned our old friend Begbie.

“We were out, three weeks ago, calling, and she spied the young man on the top of an omnibus, smoking a pipe, and, to my disgust, she ordered Beatson to follow and hail the lad, and asked him to dinner, and was so good and amiable, you never saw anything like it, and now he passes two or three nights a week here, with her—I cannot say with us. I fear that he is somewhat smitten, although, from the first, she charged him with being engaged to a country girl.

“I fain would stop this. You know it would be extremely unfortunate that our family arrangements should be thwarted for a lad like this, and therefore I mention the matter. I have seen Dr. Stirling, with whom he is engaged, and he has promised

to aid, if he can. Can you help in this?
When is the major to arrive?

“My dear Sir James,

“Yours, very truly,

“J. PEPPLOE.”

It was an April day. The Edinburgh garden-trees were beginning to put forth buds, and, in sheltered corners, the buds were bursting into tiny leaves. The sun was shining with that peculiar molten metal heat that he sends down in those parts, when the air is frosty where the sun does not fall, and when the east wind is blowing with dry and parching breath, biting keenly when you get into the streets exposed to it. It shone cheerily into the drawing-room of 5, Forres Street, through the open venetian blinds, giving pleasant light, as if of summer, to

the warm and richly-furnished room, where the embroidered parterres of the carpets were eclipsed by the real exotics which filled spacious flower-stands. Miss Shawe was sitting alone, with some fancy-work on her lap, dreamily staring at a parrot on a gilded stand, which screamed from time to time, "Go along and get married, pretty Poll—poor Polly."

The door opened. "Dr. Blake," said the servant; and Blake entered, followed by the man, who set a chair for him beside Poll's stand, at the fireside opposite to the lady. It was Dr. Blake who entered, but he was greatly changed. You know that he had luminous dark eyes, which were wont to be pensive and tender in their light, tender like the heart of him. To-day you would have been struck by a perturbed and

reckless stare which had come to them. His face, usually so honest and so fresh, was now darkened and slightly swollen, as if unrest and dissipation had disordered his liver. Something was wrong with the lady, too, for when she got up to greet her visitor she was visibly excited, and the wildness of her eyes was more marked than usual, although Blake noticed it not.

When he had shaken her hand in silence, he sat down abstracted and drowsy, holding his hat awkwardly on his knee, keeping his eyes fixed on his hat, speaking not. Loud screamed the parrot at his side, "Go along and get married, pretty Poll, poor Polly," and he started and stared at the bird, while Miss Shawe laughed.

"Is it the fiend?" he asked; and his voice was hoarse and hollow.

“No,” she answered. “It is a very wise bird. I bought it yesterday. Does it not speak well and wisely?”

Blake sat moodily looking at the bird and answered not.

She laid down her work and came to him, and laying her hand upon his hand, she asked:—

“What ails you, Doctor? Has anything happened?”

“I am ill, my whole life is wrong! I have quarrelled with Dr. Stirling. I was wrong, of course, but I would not have his way, and I must leave him.”

“Go along and get married,” screamed the bird.

“Hush, Poll!” said the lady, threatening it with her handkerchief.

“I don’t know,” said Blake, “but I ought

to take Poll's advice." He was speaking absently. "O God! what am I to do?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" she wildly laughed, "I see what is the matter, Doctor! you are in love!"

"I dare say I am." He was speaking listlessly as if half asleep, but he roused himself to say, "I am come to thank you for all your kindness and to say good-bye."

"What can you mean?"

He struggled to keep calm, to keep from tears, for he was in great emotion.

"Dear Miss Shawe, I have lost myself in your great kindness, and have neglected my duties, forgotten myself, and perilled my honour. I am come to thank you and to bid you farewell."

"Farewell! nonsense, sir! I'll take no farewell now. Come here and hold this hank

of silk for me. I have waited for you for nearly an hour to do it."

She sat down and pushed out her footstool, holding the silk in her hands. He did not move.

"Come, Dr. Blake!" and he laid down his hat, and she put the silk upon his hands, and he stood wearily and dejected before her.

The silk was mixed up and ravelled.

"Your awkwardness, Doctor," she said.

"Just like my life," he muttered in tones which showed he spoke rather to himself than to her.

"Can't you ask me to extricate it, poor young man?" she said, blushing and going on with her winding. He threw the silk from him and took her hands in his. The tears were rolling down his cheeks, and dull despair was in his face and voice, while he answered her.

“I fear I have made a sad mess of my life, but I never can ask that, fain as I would do it, if I had not bound myself before. My only extrication lies, I think, at the chain pier. God forgive me! I am not sure what I do. But God bless you and farewell!”

And before she could speak he had kissed her forehead and was gone, striding wildly up the street. It was an outbreak of deep feeling, which surprised and overpowered her. With Blake it had even come to that pass that he was reckless of his life.

And what was all the pother?

It was the old story, dear reader, the solution of which lay in his humanity. He had been so delighted with this wealthy girl, with her culture and her music and what not, that his blood had been pulsing as it had never throbbled before; and he felt a mesmeric

attraction, as it were, for that house in Forres Street, so that his mind was always wandering to it, and never was at rest save when he was there. Then Miss Shawe had showed such thorough appreciation of him. If this was art it must have been very good art, so good that I take it to have been real. He was the chief singer; to his rich tones she sat in happy listening, begging for a repetition of his "Lucy's Flittin'," or other touching ballad. He was the wit, at whose converse she sparkled into laughter. Thus, he was insensibly, yet thoroughly, engaged on her side of the game, if she had the design of winning his affection. His own deceiver, his own betrayer, while he thought it was only the music and kindness, and the exchange of repartee or friendly thought that engaged him, it was really the woman.

Of course, his duties had been neglected. He could not be twice or thrice a week to dine or for the evening in Forres Street, and call there the day after, without neglecting his duty to Dr. Stirling and his patients. The old gentleman, however, took it good-naturedly. The young doctor used to come home to him about eleven, in such glee, recounting the minute things of the evening, so full of his songs, and apparently so innocent and *insouciant*, that he was interested and amused, while he thought, "If the young fellow has a chance of a rich wife, why let him have it. It doesn't often come in the way of young surgeons."

And other duties had been neglected also, duties to the performance of which he was more heavily bound. He had been forgetting, almost wholly neglecting, his home and its

affections. His letters from his father and his betrothed had first lost their savour; at length, becoming a matter of pain or reproach to him, I suppose, he could not read them. They lay for days unanswered, weighting his heart nevertheless and marring his pleasure in those visits in which alone he now found joy.


And this consciousness of wrong-doing had troubled him much more than you might think, considering how much he was engrossed by these visits—so much, indeed, that often he went along the lonely suburban streets at night and along the lonelier road on his way homeward beyond the suburb, cursing himself with muttered, inarticulate words as he went. That was when he awoke from the simple feeling of pleasure in the woman's presence to the perception that she

had touched within him a chord which till then had remained without vibration—had awakened within him a new, a deep, even an intense feeling such as life had not yielded him before. To do him justice, Miss Shawe's wealth had nothing to do with this. Her riches and her fine house or estate were nothing in his heart or brain. He was powerless to think of or calculate about such things. This only he recognised, that something like a fever beset him, which was allayed when his eyes beheld her and when their voices mingled, but which beat through his blood and head till all his body tingled when he was away from her. In fact, I suspect he was in for a fit of orthodox love, very unreasonable, most reprehensible in his special circumstances, you know; the only fit of orthodox love I ever encountered.

Of course, a great disease like that must swallow up all minor affections, as tiny brooks are swallowed up by turbid rivers, which surge against and sweep away the banks which bind them. The great flood of passion rolled and beat within him, flowing out over the level things of life, till nought could be seen but this turbid, outspread passion. Reason held sway over him still, but only to this extent, that, conscious of his aberration, it had held his voice from uttering one single word of the love that engrossed him.

This sort of thing could not go on for ever—indeed, could not go on for even a brief time without evil results to those within reach of it. For Blake himself, first of all, there was the wild affection, the disturbance of its conflict with his prior life and reason, and con-

sequent mental unrest. Then there was his father, to whom the filial love and letters had become of high value, rendered uneasy and disquieted by the unexpected irregularity of the letters and their incoherence when they did come. And, lastly, for I don't take Miss Shawe into account, there was that poor little Bessie, who was reduced to great misery indeed; and, according to the nature and ways of her, to manifold prayers; guessing every evil thing; that Blake had taken the fever of which the widow had died, or some other sickness, and that he was concealing it, that he was oppressed with hard work, or the like; never guessing at the real malady, but gravely discomposed by his conduct, so erratic, so untender, so changed and unexplained. When the postman passed and came not with the expected missive, she went pained and



unhappy to her butter-making, unable to eat breakfast of course; and when a week had passed, during which he wrote not, she was wholly in tears and well-nigh in despair. In truth, it was altogether a bad business.

You see how Blake came to be in this sorry position. But how came that sensation scene about, which has been described, in which he cried "Farewell!" and tore himself away?

Reason and conscience, however they had been clouded and stifled, had never been wholly dethroned in poor Blake, so that he went about with a sorely-troubled sense of the wrong which beset him. His sense of the wrong stopped his speech from the words that would have converted his dishonest passion into avowed and, probably, lasting love of Miss Shawe; made him tremble and shrink from the avowal, even when his passion prompted

him to it in her presence. The secret of that farewell scene lay in the fact that his reason and conscience had been quickened, so that they obtained the mastery of him, although in the struggle poor reason well-nigh came to grievous injury.

And the first fillip that reason and conscience got to rouse them to the struggle was from Dr. Stirling, who, after Mr. Pepploe had seen him, bluffly said :—

“Blake, by the way, I am told that Miss Shawe, of whom you make so much, is sometimes touched in her head. Her mother died at Morningside, you know.”

“Miss Shawe is all right, Doctor. There never was a clearer head, nor a better heart.”

“Possibly, but if insanity runs in her race, then, as a medical, you should not be the man to continue it, that’s what I say.”

It was all he did say, but it brought forcibly to Blake's recollection his conversation with the coachman of the north mail.

“Her mother died in the mad-house, as accounts for it. She takes mostly after the mother.”

His special education made him feel the full weight of this, made him feel that he ought to subdue his passion for Miss Shawe. He could not help shuddering while he fain would clasp her to his breast, as still the words recurred to him, “Her mother died in the mad-house, as accounts for it.” Other considerations pointing to the same duty were, of course, stirred into action. A severe mental struggle ensued. Still he could not, would not quit her.

The second stimulus came in this wise. He had a letter from his much-neglected

Bessie, and he dared not open it, and for three days he had carried it, shrinking from its perusal. At length, in a moment either of desperate or of better feeling, he tore it open and read it. It was not written in a cultivated feminine hand, like Miss Shawe's, to be sure, but it was distinctly written, thus:—

“MY DARLING BENONI,

“Yesterday I wept and prayed because I heard not from you, and perhaps I slept not. To-day, God has sent me no answer, which still I seek with my tears.

“Oh, remember me,

“Your ever, ever loving

“BESSIE.”

The first effect of this epistle was to rouse his indignation. Was he so fettered

in life that unless he wrote every day there must be tears and prayers? But the words burned into his brain. And, by-and-by, he saw his father's pale face and white hair by the side of the praying girl, and heard him say, "She is very dear unto me—" and then his heart and soul were mightily convulsed. Then it was that he resolved to tear himself from the siren, who, all too sweetly, was wiling him to wrong.

Yet how much he suffered in stringing himself to do the necessary act was apparent in that he quarrelled with Dr. Stirling, when, at the renewed solicitation of Mr. Pepploe, the Doctor ventured to veto his waste of time in Forres Street. It is still more apparent in what followed his headlong flight along the streets after his interview with Miss Shawe.

As he went striding up South Charlotte Street, a man of grave aspect, of whom Blake remembers nothing but his aspect and his spectacles, stopped his course and offered him a printed document, which he impatiently took and found to be something headed "Sinner, art thou saved?" Irritated and excited as he was, he thrust the tract back upon the man with angry words for his insolence, whereupon the man rejoined with unctuous tones, "You poor sinner!" Then Benoni, vigorously applying his hand to the man's collar, sent him spinning out into the street, where he staggered and fell.

At the corner of Rose Street, contrary to rule in such cases as this, a constable was standing, who forthwith approached our irate friend, saying, "Come with me." But the young man would do no such thing; and,

when the policeman offered to lay hands on him, sad to say, he struck at that officer and then attempted to evade him, in doing which he stumbled and fell. Presently two or three constables were upon him, and they led him away to the station. He was beside himself, I am sure; incoherent in conduct, if not in language. He would not tell his name, but on searching him, the policemen found his card-case and learned his address at Dr. Stirling's. They locked him up in a vile cell—O shame and sorrow!—and they leisurely sent word to Dr. Stirling.

CHAPTER XXII.

DR. STIRLING came to his aid, and rescued him from captivity by signing a bond or giving a pledge for his appearance, or by some other such arrangement; and although the lad had spoken very unreasonably, even wildly, that morning, he would have taken him home to Duddingston. But Blake would not go. He would leave Edinburgh, he would “put an end to his trouble.”

“What do you mean?” asked Stirling sternly.

“I’ll list,” he answered dourly, not daring to say what he thought.

At his earnest insistence, Stirling took

him to his old student lodgings, and gave him in charge to the landlady, telling her to send for Dr. Begbie. Perhaps fortunately, under tension such as he had undergone, nature will break down; and Blake was, physically as well as mentally, ill.

I here insert a letter from Mr. Pepploe to Sir James Fanflare, written on the day after the interview above narrated.

MR. PEPPLOE TO SIR JAMES FANFLARE.

“MY DEAR SIR JAMES,

“We have had the devil’s own row in this house. That young man came here yesterday, and I can only guess at what passed between him and my niece; but she came out of it almost raving, reminding me sadly of her poor mother when Shawe

died. But it seemed that the lad being engaged otherwise, as you know, becoming awake to the danger of this flirtation, bade her good-bye, with tears and kissing, and left her in hysterics. I was really sorry for her.

“To-day she ordered the carriage, and, confiding in my sympathy, she took me with her to Duddingston, and we called on the doctor with whom this Mr. Blake was; but Blake had not come there when he left our house, having quarrelled with his employer in the morning. Privately, the doctor told me where the lad was lodged, that he had got into a row and had been taken to the police-office, and now was ill.

“For God sake, if you know his friends, see them and get him removed from this without delay. If she finds him, depend upon it,

marriage will come of it, or worse. His address is No. 20, Pitt Street.

“My dear Sir James, yours very truly,

“J. PEPPLOE.”

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when Sir James Fanflare received this letter, yet, having very properly consulted my Lady Fanflare, he ordered his carriage and set off for the Manse. Mr. Blake was a right-thinking man. He had always found him so, although he had been unfortunate. Mr. Blake would no doubt cause his son to return instantly, and Sir James must see him.

As he jogged along in the heavy family coach, his way, you know, led him past the cottage at Tighnagrein; and as he passed it, on that worst of all incitements, “the spur of the moment,” he resolved to call there and

urge the inmates to joint action with the minister. He knew just a little of Bessie, as you are aware. The farmer he had met at markets.

Into the cottage he went, asking for Mr. Thomson, who came to him from the fields.

“How do you do, Mr. Thomson?” cried the baronet, and, without waiting for reply, he went on. “I have come to you about an important matter, most important, haw!” and then he paused, for he had some difficulty in breaking ground.

“What is that, sir?” leisurely asked the farmer.

“Why, your daughter, a very nice young lady, haw! is engaged to the minister’s son, Dr. Blake, is she not?”

“Well, I believe so. What about it?”

“I have just had a letter from Edinburgh,

Mr. Thomson, haw! a very sad letter indeed. Young Blake is going wrong with another young lady, and I wish to get him taken away from Edinburgh; for your daughter's sake, and his, I am sure, haw! It would be pitiful if a fine lad like that should go astray, haw! and cause grief and trouble all round."

While he was speaking, Bessie had come into the room. She had been in grave distress for many days, and you could see it in her pale face and bleared eyes. Sir James, all unconscious of this, was going to greet her in his usual polite and garrulous way, but she stopped him.

"It is not true! I won't believe it to be true!" she cried passionately. "Some one is deceiving you, sir, or deceiving him. It is untrue!" Her colour was up and her voice distinct, and her indignation evident, while all the

time her poor heart was smiting her, saying, "This is the solution of his strange silence."

But so excited was her manner, so thoroughly earnest her indignation, that the baronet could only add in a subdued way, "My dear young lady, haw! I can only tell what is told to me, and recommend that you get him home as quickly as possible, or otherwise he will make a fool of himself with Miss Shawe." At the name of Miss Shawe, poor Bessie's strength deserted her. She felt sick and faint, and sat down in dazed bewilderment. "Get him home at once, I say, Mr. Thomson, haw! I am just going to urge the minister to it."

And bidding them good-day, Sir James returned to his carriage.

The father went to the daughter, saying, "My poor Bessie!" And she wept aloud,

and spoke not. Her heart was certain that a great evil had come upon her, that the love she prized so much was turned from her, and her pain and grief were great.

Sir James found the minister greatly restored in health, but very much agitated. He had had a letter from Dr. Stirling, telling him of his son's illness and present residence, and briefly stating the unhappy circumstances that had led to the illness. Of the young man's prior engagement Stirling was ignorant, so that he had failed to account to himself for the great mental perturbation which Blake exhibited. As soon as he was able to be removed, Stirling thought he should be taken home. Meantime he must remain under treatment and constant attendance. It was but poor comfort that the letter praised the genial, ingenuous character of the son.

When Sir James came, crying out, "He has disgraced his upbringing. He has been adventuring for a second wife. It must not be allowed to go on, Blake! You must have him home instantly, Blake!" the minister was in great perplexity and distress. It was some time before his good sense made head against the first impression that his son had behaved badly which the circumstances conveyed. By-and-by, however—

"Here is my letter, Sir James," he said. "It speaks of a great mental commotion, which must have come of a struggle against passion, I think. Will you show me yours, before we judge the poor lad as really bad?"

The letter being produced supported a favourable opinion of the son's conduct. He had, at least, resisted and fled from evil.

"You see," cried the minister, immensely

relieved, "the lad has acted uprightly, and torn himself from this lady. His is the true heart that was sure to act so, however it might suffer. Depend upon it he will see her no more."

"Yes, yes! But what if she sees him? There lies the greater evil and danger. What if she sees him? Haw, haw!"

"I have every confidence in his goodness and honesty of nature."

"Goodness, honesty, haw! If she finds him out and unwell, she'll become his nurse! He can't prevent her. That will be 'goodness,' I take it, and 'honesty' may then go hang itself, haw!"

"Well, Sir James, I will ask him to come as soon as he is recovered. Meantime we must trust in God. My son! My poor son!"

The letter from Stirling showed that nothing else could be done for the present.

So the baronet hied him away home. On his way he took to reading the county paper, received that morning with his letter, but unlooked at till now, through the pressure of other concerns. And, as often happens with elderly gentlemen, he first glanced at the obituary. The only noticeable death recorded there was that of the surgeon at Glenaldie in the adjoining county. And this set him musing. Was there not here an opportunity of benefiting his old friend's son, who, after all, seemed to be acting rightly, and of getting him away from Edinburgh at one stroke? He resolved to see about this instantly, and to use his influence with Lord Glenaldie to secure the vacant practice for Dr. Blake.

As he passed by Tighnagrein, he saw a very pretty rural picture:—a young girl crossing the river on stilts, and taking her way through the carse lands beyond, which were studded with mottle-coloured Ayrshire cows, eagerly biting at the early grass. Though an old and prosaic man, the picture pleased him.

But, ah! how little feeling of pleasure was in the central figure of his picture—Bessie Thomson, on her way to the Manse. Her poor head and heart were both aching sorely. It was a desperate energy that bore her across the water, for she was sick and faint and shivering; and, I dare say, she did not well know what she was about, what she was to do or to say at the Manse when she should get there. With stumbling feet she hastened on.

Arrived, she entered the study, where the

minister sat in his easy-chair, as in days less troubled. She did not greet him. She spoke not at all, but wearily she dropped down before him, heavily leaning her head on his old knees, and poured out her grief silently in a flood of tears. He let her weep without words, indeed, not knowing what he ought to say. What could he say to assuage this outburst of feeling? But he laid his hand very tenderly on her head.

She it was who first found words. Looking up through her tears, she asked, piteously,

“Father, what is it that has happened my Benoni? What has happened me?”

“Daughter, take courage and be comforted. You held up my feeble hands in my evil day. Seek grace and strength again for us both. Nothing very serious has happened. But it was not good for our Benoni to be away from us.”

“Yes, but if his heart is turned from me, whatever shall I do?”

“His heart has not been turned away from you, my child. He must have been sorely tempted and sharply tried for a brief while, for he is very ill.”

Then he read to her the doctor’s letter, and told her what he had read in the letter of Mr. Pepploe. She only wept and groaned the more, saying, “O miserable that I am, standing between him and happiness and prosperity! O that I were not!”

At this the minister very gently said, “Nay, daughter, this is not as you were wont to be with God and me. Still trust Him, still trust in God, who does wondrous things. Was not this boy become unto us an idol, who stood much between us and God? HE has sharply smitten and broken to pieces all

other idols that my soul loved. Come, let us entreat Him, that though He bruise this one, He shall not break it utterly."

And then and there, with the sobbing girl before him, he earnestly besought the Lord of His mercy to restore Benoni to them in peace.

Meantime, that poor Benoni lay in Pitt Street, passing days of pain and mental obscuration, and nights of feverish unrest. He was ill both in body and in mind, and the doctors had to be very watchful of him. I do not mean that his reason had given way. That was not at all the case. But there is a border-land of unreason, where the objects and ends of existence are distorted and confounded. The mind wanders in bewildering mazes, finding no holding-ground for faith and hope, those anchors of the soul; and therefore drifts in dark

mists amid perilous breakers, till total and immediate shipwreck seems preferable to the black suspense which it undergoes. In this region was Benoni; detained in it perhaps more hopelessly, because stomach and liver were disordered. A dismal, dangerous region it truly is. If the prayers of those two people could avail anything, he certainly needed them very much.

We saw the great lumbering Fanflare carriage roll through our quiet village of Glenaldie, and did not know what the phenomenon portended, beyond a visit to our Earl. I could not anticipate that its mission was to send me the dearest and tenderest friend, nay, friends of my life.

And Sir James's mission had its own difficulties. The vacant surgeoncy was valuable as such things went, and was about to become

more valuable through the institution of Parochial Boards under the Act of that year, so that already interest had been brought to bear upon the patrons. Sir James, however, secured a modified promise from the Earl, and a certain promise that he should have a definite reply as soon as all concerned had been consulted. He had made his application pressingly as for a favour to himself, and, no doubt, he had had satisfactory personal reasons for that. But, in truth, he was a kindly man, disposed to do friendly service where he was interested, although, apt to grudge the tolls for which he, on an expedition like this, could have no prospect of recouping himself.

“Cannot some friend come up from this young man’s house to nurse him?” asked the doctor in attendance upon Blake, who thought

that much good would result from a proper person coming.

The father was not strong enough to travel, and a recent change in the arrangements of the mail coach,—“an acceleration,” they called it,—which sent it out of Fyfeburgh about four in the morning, had cut off every possibility of his travelling by it. He showed the Doctor's letter to Bessie, who burst into tears.

She would not, could not, thrust herself upon him. It would be wrong and unloving to do it.

Then could and would Miss Robison go? She had ever been good to him.

Miss Bessie, faintly smiling through her tears, asked Mr. Blake if he had heard the latest news of Miss Robison. On his wearily saying he had heard no news, she told him that that lady was to become

Mrs. Bowie at the approaching Whitsunday, when Bowie's engagement at the Manse expired. In fact, she was about to marry the helper, and so she could not go. Thus the matter had to rest. You may guess the father's distress. Nothing but old Nicolson's sternest prohibition kept him from hazarding the journey.

"Don't fear for him," said the surgeon, with stout assurance. "Youth has great recuperative power. A day's fatigue would exhaust you beyond recovery. You must not risk your life."

So the minister stayed at home, solaced only by the assurance that his son had resisted himself, and had fled from the outward temptation which endangered his honour, his Bessie's happiness and life, and the father's pleasure in him. And Benoni

lay for many sleepless days and nights in the charge of strangers; indeed, at first caring little or not at all who were around him, scarcely capable of noting this amid his mental trouble. There weighed heavily upon him a belief that his life was in vain, that his future was hopeless, that in the past he had done some great deed of evil, what he could not define. The doctors treated him, in the first place, for his physical disorder. They treated him with I don't know what unpleasant things. Dr. Blake did not know himself. His whole account of the treatment is summed up in the single word "active," which, I suppose, infers much physic. The body once restored, rest and seclusion effect wonders with the mind, when the intellect and affections are healthily constituted. So out of the hopeless blackness which had

encompassed Blake, there came, after many days, a pale hard face with white hair, his father's, beckoning him to the fulfilment of duties, whispering of hopes which he was expected to realise. It came when, after having been forced to swallow a large dose of beef-tea, he had for the first time slept refreshingly. And from the hour that this vision of his father came to him, the lad was safe. All his trouble had come upon him, you know, because he had allowed that thin face and white head to slip out of his mind.

And his father had thus been restored to him for only a day when there came also to his mind the figure of a young girl, with earnest, constant face, and deep love in her eyes. He saw her kneeling at his father's knee for his father's blessing, and the picture was full of peace and goodness, and he fell

tranquilly asleep while beholding it. They had been feeding him just before then, and, perhaps, that had something to do with his sleeping. But the sleep was long and sound, like the sleep of childhood, and when he awoke his world had recovered its old familiar lines and hues; he saw things as other people did, and he was feebly prepared to act his part as of old.

Beside him he found two letters, One was from his father. "Come to my arms, to your old home, my beloved, as soon as God restores you, that there may be peace to your father," it said. And it said nothing more—no word of reproach, or doubt, or fear. The other letter, in a great envelope, with arms and crest and what not, was from Sir James Fanflare, offering him the district surgeoncy at Glendale—stated to be good for £300 a year.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BLAKE promptly accepted the appointment of course, viewing the offer of it as a special Providence in the position of his affairs. All thoughts of a distinguished career were gone out of him. He wrote his father, telling him of it. He would come to him forthwith, and would not leave the Manse till he went to Glenaldie with his wife, which was quite a laudable resolve. Then, too, he needs must write his little Bessie, his injured Bessie, and explain everything, and make her happy by arranging for an instant marriage.

I wish to impress upon all lovers the danger and evil of explanations. Avoid

them, my dear friends, by every reasonable means, and remember this, that kisses without words will explain away a great deal. This, however, is what Blake wrote :—

“MY DEAREST BESSIE,

“It is only fitting that I should account to you frankly and honestly for the interruption in my letters, now, as early as I have strength to do it. I am still weak, but, thank God! I am sound, and my brain quite clear. The doctors have left me.

“I am not going to conceal anything, neither do I wish to exaggerate the troubles I have come through. As I hope our lives are about to be united speedily, and I shall never have a secret from you, so I shall have none in this distressing affair.

“I told you that I met Miss Shawe of

Letterbee about six weeks ago, and two or three times after that I must have told you that I had spent evenings at her house very happily, but I did not tell you that my sense of pleasure in those meetings insensibly increased, so that in some sort they became indispensable to my peace. I fear that both my body and mind were going wrong at the time. At length I could think of nothing else, feel ease for my restlessness in nothing else than in meeting her and being with her. I will not deny, that at that time recollection of your sweet face was very distressing to me. It was then that my letters to you ceased, and my heart and ways were very bad.

“I am aware that I had a severe conflict after this between this wrongful pleasure and my love of you, which is, indeed, my

better self. It was a very serious conflict, in which I suffered much, and was brought to the verge of unreason; but my better self prevailed, and, after no small illness and suffering, I am now weak but well.

“I have been offered the appointment of district surgeon at Glenaldie village, thirty miles across country from our home, and I have accepted it, and am to settle there at the 1st of June. I am to be no more exposed to an evil world alone. It is not good for man to be alone, and therefore I am resolved to take my little spouse with me, when my father has once again blessed us both as one. Can she get ready for me by the 1st? My dear Bessie, do so, and believe me, ever and undoubtedly,

“Yours in love,

“BENONI.”

It often happens that when men are just recovered from a serious ailment, they have lost much of their tenderness, or else have lost the power of fairly judging how little things affect the minds of those around them. This, most probably, arises from the engrossment in self that always more or less attends disease. But surely Dr. Blake should have felt that in saying so very distinctly "I loved another more strongly than I loved you," he was saying something that would naturally pain and wound Miss Thomson, and which, moreover, might seriously touch and quicken her womanly feeling and pride. Then, too, how bumptious he was! "I am resolved to take my little spouse with me," said he, notwithstanding his confession of serious conflict on the point, whether he would have her at all. As if his lordship had but to

resolve, and his handmaiden would run at his call. And he had written that he had quite recovered his calm senses, forsooth!

On a bright May afternoon the mail-coach rattled into Fyfeburgh, bearing on its box seat the stalwart form of our doctor, to whose face there had come no small change of expression since the wintry day on which the coach had borne him thence. It was less young in appearance, calmer and sedater, thinner and more angular, than when the old town saw him last. Old John with the manse gig was waiting for him, and leaving his baggage to follow, he instantly set off for home. He had no elation of spirits in the turn which his life had taken, but certainly he had no feeling of failure. He was going to do honest work for an honest and honourable living, and he was setting to it calmly, as was right.

When John had "speired mony a thing" of the doctor,—“Wus he better an' a' richt noo?” “Hoo cam' he on in yon toun?” and so forth,—he at length was reduced to telling the news of the parish.

“Ye ken Bowie, the helper, left yestreen, an's tae be mairried the morn.”

Blake said he had not heard of this.

“Whar hae ye been that ye ken naething at a'? Weel, as I was telling you, the chiel is tae be mairried the morn upon Miss Robison. Ye ken she haes better nor a thousand in the stock o' the Knowes, and the helper fin' that oot, I suppose, wi' a' his speirin's. But they're saying it's a' tae be settled on hersel'. Leastwise a lawyer gaed wast twa days syn. But the produce'll stan' bread an' butter till him, an' maybe a bit o' the beef he lik's forbye.”

Dr. Blake made little comment on this piece of news. Many things had become indifferent to him which would have moved him a short time before. He had not interest enough in this marriage even to say it was a "satisfawction." And there was a pause, after which John asked—

"Dae ye ken am leavin' the minister?"

Again the doctor had to confess his ignorance, and he expressed his regret, for his father's sake, that the old servant was leaving him.

"It's no afore time," said John. "A man maunna be a' life i' the fraim. I hae got a bit o' a plaice oot awa' at the back o' Fan-flare. I'll hae twa score acre for saxteen pun' o' rent. Am tae tak' Betty Murchison wi' me. We're tae be mairried on the twanty-fourth."

So all the old people were running to ma-

trimony. Benoni, who esteemed the heart of this old man, wished for him all the humble happiness of which he was in quest.

“Any more marriages, John?” he then asked.

“Hech! weel, I dinna ken. Folk’ll hae their clavers. They’re sayin’ ye’re tae be neist yersel’.”

“I dare say no one will blame me for following so many good examples,” said the doctor.

“’Deed, no,” answered John. “Folk, am finnin’ oot, are aye gay reasonable about mairryin’ an’ bein’ gien in mairridge. For ye see it’s but natral.”

After a while John resumed his conversation.

“But ye’re sure tae ken, Doctor, that Miss Thamson’s nae ower weel. She’s nae gaein’ till the waddin’ the morn, though they war unco thrang, ye ken.”

No. Blake had heard nothing of this illness; and the news of it, coming to him thus suddenly, sent a cold thrill through him, for it gave a new meaning and significance to the fact that his letter was unanswered.

Presently they were at the old bridge, among the deep shadows of the Craig, and silently and anxiously Blake drove along the old familiar road and came to the avenue, where he met his father and Nicolson waiting for him. They were full of pleasure, you may be sure, at the arrangement which had been made for him. Nicolson wished him great happiness. The district was worth two of his own, and more pleasantly situated. He declared he was quite envious of the young fellow's luck.

“May our Heavenly Father give us grateful hearts and overrule all things for our good!”

the father said; and he was looking well, fresher, franker, and happier than Benoni had ever seen him. How is it that a prospective marriage such as this of Benoni's stirs up parental hearts very sensibly? But many other things, you know, had worked and were working to unseal the warm, loving nature of this father.

"But how is my Bessie, Dr. Nicolson, pray? John heard she was ailing."

"Oh, I think there is not much the matter with her. I called there to-day, but she would not see me. But so far as I could learn there is nothing very wrong. Rest to-night. It will be time enough to go to her to-morrow. Her father thinks so." And Nicolson went his way.

This piece of advice disturbed Benoni much, filling him with the fear that Bessie

was ill indeed. He could fancy many things, but he never guessed at the true state of the matter.

After all, the freshness and quiet of the country is a powerful tonic and restorative. When Benoni arose next morning, the larks were singing, and the cooing of the wood-pigeons was borne across the river from the wood at some distance on the further side. The sun was shining in the freshness of May, and the world was laughing and glad in its light. He felt himself stronger than for many months, fresher than for the whole year gone by, for it was just a year since he had come home freshly dubbed M.D. He could but look back and wonder at all the year had brought to him, all of pain, of sorrow, of pleasure, of suffering, and of welfare ; and, in truth, the upshot of all was this, that in no little humility of

mind, he was prepared to go out now to fight the fight of life.

But you know, he was not to go forth alone; and so the noontide found him at Tighnagrein once more,—once more within the walls of the cottage, as modest as pretty, with its early foliage and blossom and flower.

Miss Bessie had been at her old work of weeping and prayer, I suppose, for her eyes were more bleared than ever Benoni had seen them, and she was thin, and had evidently been suffering. He saw this the instant that he had kissed her, ere yet words had been spoken.

“I am come for my little wife,” he said gaily. She smiled not in response. “Will she be ready for me?” With that she broke out into weeping. He sat down and drew her sobbing to him. “What is the matter

with my dear?" but she only sobbed the more. Now, perhaps, beginning to perceive that her ailment was of the mind, his conscience began to prick him, and in some alarm he pressed her tenderly. "What ails you, my Bessie, my own?"

She turned full to him her tear-streamed face, and scarcely articulate with her sobbing, she said,

"You do not love—love me. I am a burden and a loss. It was a sad mistake, Let it go no further."

"Love you, Bessie! I love you better than myself! I will be all your own, and you, my love, shall be all my world!"

"I know, always knew, my Benoni was good and upright and tender. But it was a mistake! Oh, woe is me, a terrible mistake! He could not love a poor thing like me! I

am only bringing him grief, and stopping his way in life—not filling his heart at all!”

The conscience-stricken lad dared not deny it.

Indeed, here was a very perplexing affair. Even if he had been prepared for it, it would have been difficult to have eluded the charge and to have held to the truth. So what did my soft friend do, but also take to tears?

“I have suffered sorely, Bessie, for forgetting you for a moment. Won't you forgive it, love?”

But just as he became weak, she gained strength of purpose. She was always so resolute in duty! The more he became conscious of the gravity of his error in the past, the more she had her dim eyes fixed on what seemed right in the future.

“It is not a matter of forgiveness!” she

sobbed. "You have not wronged me. You were willing to bless me! . but God who disposes all things saw not that it was right. I do not complain of you. I will try to find comfort in Him! You have suffered; my suffering lies before me."

They shirked a calm consideration of the case and went in for the agony, you see, as if it was the only good for them.

Yet she loved him very dearly. Her sobs, her tears, her spirit-anguish proclaimed it. Then how put away the much prized, the much prayed for, blessing? No doubt you comprehend it all without my telling. In her eyes, marriage was a sacred union, a union of souls welded together in oneness of love, purpose, and feeling, so that even the eye of Omniscience should scarcely detect the point of amalgamation. In the union pro-

posed to her, the essential of this high and holy unity was wanting. Those two entities, their souls, were very distinct entities, and one of them at least needed much of qualifying grace for even approximating to the spiritual perfection which she desiderated, lacking it so much indeed that it had come to seek the union with self-conflict and difficulty. Much as she loved Benoni, much and earnestly as she had prayed for him, she would not have him thus. It was his love, his heart, his soul, she wanted, not the corporeal substance of him. A very foolish and inhuman view of the marriage relation this was, perhaps—undoubtedly an exceptional view of it. Unfortunately it was her view of it, and she was resolute to give it effect, how great soever the sacrifice to herself.

So they embraced and wept together like

two very silly people. She would not, and she could not, ever love any other than Benoni. Death alone would end her love of him, she said and promised, while he sat using his scented handkerchief to his eyes, over her shoulders, as he held her, like a big soft schoolboy, who had richly deserved a whipping and had got it. He was surprised and disarmed and incapable of resistance, so that when she spoke his doom, the doom of them both, he could only weakly kiss her and shed tears.

“I never heard anything like it,” said Nicolson. “Women always bring trouble. They did it from the first!”

“Courage, my son, be patient and constant, and your reward is sure! She is worthy to tarry for,” said the minister.

“A bedral body like me gat the first wife I

sought, but am jaloosin' they're camsteary craitar!" said old John.

Thus with tears and pain and kissing ended their twelve months of love-making, leaving our hero more bewildered, I think, than on that August day when he first pledged his love and life to Bessie. Indeed, life is a very disagreeable and unsatisfactory problem, given us each to solve as best he can, and Benoni Blake, M.D., was disposed to think, when he could think, that "the best to be made of it was bad."

Those who have read that little book, "The Lives of the Peasants of Glenaldie," among whom Blake now went alone, will know that in the noon of life he was still a bachelor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON an evening, two years ago, that is, in May, I was at tea at Dr. Blake's. I remember this evening well, because it was the evening of the day that brought us the *Saturday Review* with most gracious notice of that little book about the peasants, and I, as was natural, was in greatly elevated spirits. Mrs. Blake was sitting pensively beside her tea cosy, resting her head on her right hand, which is a favourite posture of hers. I had the youngest child, a fair girl of three years, on my knee, and we were waiting for the doctor, who had gone to the castle.

By-and-by Dr. Blake rode into the square

and presently was with us, and as he kissed his wife and "the bairns" (there are three of them), as he always does when he comes home, I thought he looked a trifle more thoughtful and tender even than he usually is. When he had offered me his congratulations, and sat down at the table,

"Bessie, love," he said, "I have been seeing a poor man."

"No uncommon object," said I.

"Who is he?" asked the ever direct Mrs. Blake.

"General Sir John Fanflare," answered the doctor quietly. "He is at the castle, and is ailing." Then there was a pause, which he broke, saying, "You know, Mr. Author, that he married that Miss Shawe in the first harvest I was here. The countess tells me he has led a most wretched life since

then. I have great reason for thankfulness, Bessie."

"Happiness is not of wealth or titles," said I sententiously.

"Most wisely observed," remarked Blake dryly.

"Happiness is of God's appointment," said Mrs. Blake decisively; "your truthful little book shows it, while it also shows how God operates through man himself. But I noticed one mistake in the book."

"My dear madam, what can that be?"

"You say my husband was forty-four that—that year we married. He was just forty."

"A most important error," said Blake, "and pertinent to our text of happiness, Bessie."

"How is that, sir?"

"Not only showing it is of divine appoint-

ment, but how mysteriously God acts through woman sometimes."

"You rogue, papa!"

"You only kept me waiting for happiness fifteen, not twenty years—a most material error, my dear," said he, laughing and stroking the fair hair of little Bessie, who had got upon his knee.

"I will correct it in the next edition, Mrs. Blake."

"You must, sir," said the doctor. "And I think you should explain to the world how a dear, good fellow like me remained a bachelor till that great age."

"Don't mind him," said Mrs. Blake thoughtfully. "It would never do. His character would not bear close inspection, you know."

Thereupon we all laughed, for we had

so often laughed and cried together over parts of their modest story, that Mrs. Bessie's criticism on the life of her lord came not amiss.

"You will show to all the more advantage by contrast with him," I remarked.

"Especially since those years of waiting were only fifteen," said Blake.

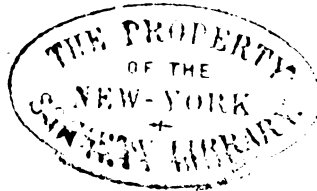
"Then tell—that both our fathers were lonely, and that I was bound to them," said the lady.

"Yes, yes, Bessie was always strong in duty. But it was no excuse. It is written, you know, that 'For this cause——'"

"Oh, that was written only of you selfish men."

"Count them happy that endure," said Blake gravely. "I love her the more for her faithfulness to the old folks. My life is loaded with blessings."

And thereupon he got up, with little Bessie in his arms, strode to the head of the table, and kissed his wife. I have seen him do this often on less provocation. He is as soft as ever, I declare.



THE END.