

MUCKLE JOCK.

CHAPTER I.

HE is passing my window now, walking down the village street, a great hulking, gnarled lout, bent by many a day of hard labour, no doubt, too, by his own share of sorrow. He is tawny with sun and dirt. Tramp, tramp, go his heavy-gaitered limbs as he shambles homewards. He is six feet one in his stockings, but looks three inches less. He is only thirty-two, but his hair is iron-grey. A most ungainly stupid seems this plodding, heavy, knotted, lump of humanity, as he goes splash, splash, through the rain-pools—making no nice distinction of dry places, appearing even to favour wet ones, as he walks on, cold, hungry, tired, and patient withal. Well, what of him? Why, nothing very special; but that is Muckle Jock, and I am interested in him. When we chance to meet I greet him warmly, and extract from him as many grunts as possible, for so he articulates chiefly. When opportunity presents itself, I do him kindly turns, too; but he is shy both of conversation and kindness, and to shirk either would tramp a mile or two of miry lanes. I frankly confess that my friend is not sweet-smelling; but there are

things other than lavender that make humanity gracious and fragrant, and, his uncouth exterior notwithstanding, Muckle Jock is a true man.

You wish to know why I like "the monster." I am not standing up for his intelligence, but the term is misapplied. Encased in much stolidity and grossness, Muckle Jock is human-hearted; therefore it is that I like him. I will tell his story. But mark, there is little of a story to tell, and when told it signifies little—that is, to you or me, although it has frosted Jock's hair and bent him more to the earth. No doubt it has touched his heart too. A child comes to meet him; and the rough man takes the child in his brawny arms and kisses it, and goes tramping with his burden through the rain and down the lane in which his thatch-roofed cottage stands.

Jock's parentage was nothing to speak of. Indeed few of the villagers would recollect his surname if you asked it. He has always been "Muckle Jock." Gaffer Thomas, who died five years ago, was his father; and I believe Gaffer Thomas's surname was Watson. Whence the prefix "Gaffer" I do not know. Twelve years ago Gaffer Thomas was an old and frail man, broken down by rheumatism and asthma caught in the same fields in which his only son "Muckle Jock" was then earning laborious wages and bolls of meal, by which the sick and toil-worn Gaffer was kept from the poors'-roll. With them lived Betty, only sister of Jock, and daughter of the Gaffer, older than Jock by four years.

She also worked afield at harvest times, but was mostly detained within doors by the father's infirmities and the exigencies of housekeeping. Goodness knows, the "housekeeping" was of the slenderest, seeing that to boil water for Jock's daily messes of brose, and to sweep the clay floor of the cottage, comprised its gravest duties at ordinary times.

Jock lives in that cottage still. He was born there. I do not need to tell you of his school-days. They were few, short, and evil, as all our days are said to be. Few they were undoubtedly; short, for it was only in dead winter, when the kye were in the fold and the fowls of heaven could not wrong the farmer, that, his time being valueless as money's worth, Jock was driven to school; and evil, for the truth is, Jock was a dull boy, and got painfully whipped. But returning spring called him out to the green fields and to work again—to feed swine, to job about the steading, to lead the spare horse with the emptied cart; mayhap, in nobler moments, to tend the hoggets in the home-park. Thus he earned his twopence a-day and his diet of sweet milk and potatoes, at which modest wage his labour was appreciated. And as the season advanced, and when the corn was in that stage fully described in the solemn book of Newton as "in the blade," the wages were advanced to fourpence and two meals *per diem*. Then, before the landrail had ceased its nocturnal creaking, Jock appeared by the hedgerows of the green fields, and saw the gorgeous-tinted dawn, and welcomed

it by continuous revolutions of the harshly sounding "creak." Not that he had the least design to herald or welcome the rising sun. Sure I am that the weary child would rather have been in bed. But he did his duty faithfully, and that was to scare the rooks from breakfasting on the corn-lands. Thus spring, and summer, and autumn, found each its duty and labour, and consequent food for Jock. No doubt he was then merely "Jockie," or "Wee Jockie," perhaps. But he ate and grew, as by the law of nature in that case specially made and provided; and the fields which saw him a sleepy, weary scarecrow at seven, saw him successively promoted to the rank of cow-herd, hafflin', and hind. And a proud lad was Muckle Jock, when, being turned of twenty, and the tall, broad-shouldered animal you have seen, he engaged at a ploughman's full wages and bolls with Mr. Morris, the new tenant of the farm. His father's pair of horses was handed over to him, for the new tenant had rejected the Gaffer's offer of his service. Poor tired-out old man! Thenceforth for him there was but to creep into the ingle-nook, there to rub his old aching limbs, and to pipe and pine until death's gentle, if not welcome, coming, while he thanked God at each humble meal for the strong, enduring, honest son he had given to provide shelter and food when age had gnawed away the old man's strength, and rheumatism bound him to the hearth.

It was two years after this that the Gaffer had a time of sore illness, and Betty's power of endurance was

sorely tried in nursing him through it. Many nights she sat up, nights of cold and mornings of drowsiness and hunger; for Jock and she stinted themselves that the old man might have medicine and cordials such as the doctor ordered. Jock, wet and weary, offered to relieve her one night.

"Betty, lass," he said, "ye hae sat up a week on end; ye maun lat me watch the nicht."

"Na, Jock, lad; ye're wat an' cauld; ye're nae fit for watchin'; gang awa till yer bed."

"Ne'er a fut o' me will gang tae bed the nicht, Betty. If I'm wat, it'll keep me waukin'. Gang ye tae bed, lass; an' I'll gie faither his draps an' his drink a' correc', ye'll see."

And poor drowsy Betty, nearly dead with fatigue, was fain to lie down; and so Jock sat up, and sat staring at the fire. In the smouldering peats, he saw fiery fields, and cattle, and castles, and trees; and he thought of the flaming sword in the Book; and was lost in wondering, wandering fancies, until he caught himself nodding; and then he got up. Gaffer Thomas was sleeping uneasily, and moaning in his sleep. "Eich me!" thought Jock, "what if he dee?" And then it came across his heavy mind, that if the old man should die, he, Jock, had no money wherewithal to bury his parent. He had not learned that credit is the life-blood of commerce. Man and boy, he had never owed aught to any man; and the thought shocked him that he must go into debt in discharging the last duties to his parent.

Unhappy, he wandered round the room on his stocking-soles, until drowsily he sat down, vowing that if the Lord spared him and his, he should pinch himself until he saved up a whole pound; and his mind being thus somewhat composed, he set himself again to gaze at the fire. Again he saw forms of rampageous horses, and oxen winged with flame. Suddenly Jock thought that he was suppering his horses, and started up, upsetting the skillet with the old man's gruel, and sending it clattering along the floor.

"What is it? what is it?" feebly asked the awakened Gaffer.

"What hae ye dune, Jock, ye gouk?" sharply said Betty, tying on a petticoat as she hurried into the room.

Jock did look foolish. He was sent to bed ignominiously, and Betty resumed her weary watching.

As soon as the neighbours made sure that the Gaffer was not ill of a fever, or anything "catching" some of them came inquiring concerning him, and of these was May Johnston, daughter of old James Johnston, who lived next door. May was in the full flush of sweet nineteen. I daresay some word less saccharine than "sweet" would better describe her. Strong-limbed, full-chested, dark-haired, brown-eyed, cherry crimson dimples glowing through sunburnt cheeks, red pouting lips, white teeth. She was a charming village lass, just such a rustic maiden as painters place beside their mountain rills, but sadly lacking in that ideality which they give to their pictures. How could it be otherwise?

May was a "bondager," or field-worker, toiling through summer's heat and winter's cold. At the snow-clad compost-heap, in the turnip field or reaping the golden grain, "contented she earned and ate her brown bread." May came asking for the Gaffer, and seeing the almost prostrate condition of Betty, the willing lass said she would watch the old man one night; and she did it. Home she came in the gloaming, walking two long miles from her day's work, got her supper of porridge in her father's, washed herself thereafter, and came to the sick-bed. She learned from Betty how and when the medicines were to be administered; she packed that weary woman to her bed in the closet, and promised attention to her last request—"Mind tae gie Jock his parritch het." So when Muckle Jock came in past eight, there was the strange girl sitting on Betty's stool, while Betty was snoring in the closet. Jock sat down shyly, feeling strangely unprotected, and was speechless. But May told him in a whisper that his father was not worse, and had fallen asleep after drinking his gruel with "some o' yon wine in't," on which Jock had expended a day's wages. Then Jock said "That's guid."

Now Jock "kent" the lass May. She had lived next door to him for three years, but Jock in his silent way, had never spoken to her; unless, perhaps, that as he strode into his cottage on a summer evening, he might have said "Ou ay," in reply to her "It's a braw nicht." Even the sunshine, and warmth, and brilliance of

summer could not warm Jock into conversation. Certainly, at that time, he wot not of the importance of woman's mission on the earth he so dully laboured. Fancy, then, the great dullard as he watched the strange girl deftly pour out his porridge, and scrape the pan and heap up his plate. Jock stared silently, ate his supper, and again sat at the hearth and spake not. May asked him when the cows would calve. Milk, she said, was "gey scarce." "Ou ay, the coos'll calve," said inarticulate Jock. So they remained in almost unbroken silence till the Gaffer's old watch on the nail above the mantelpiece pointed to ten of the night. Then said May—"Gang tae bed, Jock."

Now the truth was that for an hour past Jock had been well-nigh distraught by the thought of that going to bed. The accommodation of the cottage consisted of the kitchen and closet; and the closet had always been Betty's sleeping place. There she was heavily sleeping now, oblivious of her brother's distress. Since the Gaffer's illness had become serious, Jock had slept on a "shake-down" in the corner of the kitchen; and he perspired at the thought of undressing and lying down there in the presence of the "bondager." Again and again he made up his mind to go out and wander through the dark night, till it should be time to feed the horses before dawn. Possibly he might find the stable-door unlocked, and thus be permitted to share the stalled comforts of his four-footed fellow-labourers. But he had put off his boots, and they were lying at the fire-

side, drying their mud-covered "uppers," and half covered by the girl's skirts and to resume them required effort and conversation. So Jock sat and groaned internally, and wished that his father were quite well again, and that for considerations instant and purely personal to him, Jock. The watch now in silence pointed to half past ten; and May again urged her companion. "Come, Jock, ye maun gang tae bed;" and, as Jock groaned aloud in his mental distress, the maiden guessed at his difficulty, and said, "Ye needna mind me, man. Gae an' lie down. Ye needna pit aff yer breeks unless ye like, lad; but dinna mind me." And she got up and started Jock to his feet, and divested him of his fustian coat and waistcoat, and turned down his blankets; and anon Jock lay down on his straw, keeping on his lower integuments—the subjects of his so great concern.

Jock lay down, but not to sleep. The equal balance of his mind was disturbed, and his slow nature startled by a new and uneasy emotion. He said inwardly, "I cauna sleep wi' that lass there." The jerky click of her knitting-wires went through his brain. He was still wide awake, but with his eyes fast closed, when, after midnight, the old man moved, and the kindly May attended to him; and Jock heard him say that he felt better, and that the gruel was "guid."

And he asked for Jock, "Did Jock come hame be-times?"

And May said, "Yes, puir chiel, an' he's soond sleepin' the noo."

Then Jock was more disturbed than before, and was fain to start up and rush into the cold air of night. And hours drearily passed, until at length there came to him pleasant dreams of harvest-times and of corn-fields, and of lowing cattle, and of a lass straying among golden stooks; and he, poor Jock, alone was unhappy, for he had neglected his horses, and was hurrying to them over the stubble fields, when he stumbled and awoke. There were Betty and the friend stooping over him, tickling his capacious nostrils with a straw.

Betty said, "It's five, Jock."

The "bondager" said, "Get up, Jock, or I'll get in ahint ye."

And Jock arose and resumed his garments in dazed bewilderment; and, having eaten some bread and milk that nearly choked him, he went out into the gray, chill morning, not daring to say "Good-bye" to May. Yet, somehow, the fading, twinkling stars shone that morning with a lurking merriment that Jock had never been conscious of before; and, for some undefined reason, Jock quickened his pace and trotted, not tramped, over his mile of road.

That was how it began. A hole in Jock's jerkin of stolidity had been found and penetrated; and something had got into that heart of his, and quickened it and made it thump; and for long, I fear, gnawed at it too. "O, love will venture in where it daurna weel be seen;" and Jock had begun to love May Johnston, but he did

not know it. The passion must grow and batten in that heavy nature of his.

It was on the Sunday after that restless night that Jock next saw May Johnston. She had ever since that dreamy morning indistinctly buzzed in his brain and weighted his chest. So when on the Sunday she stood at the door, congratulating Betty on the Gaffer's convalescence, Muckle Jock felt prompted to speak to her. He got up and went out, but his heart failed him. He did not so much as look at her. He walked straight into the middle of the lane, anxiously gazed all round the sky, and, feeling his heart go thudding against his ribs, walked hurriedly into the house again.

May said, "Jock, man, hoo are ye?"

But Jock went incontinently into the kitchen, and sat down near the door, unable to still that foolish heart of his while he listened to her voice talking with Betty. Thus, in secrecy and concealment, it grew on him. As the flower-slip in the dark strikes its roots and spreads out its leaves, all sickly though they be, yearning and searching for the sunshine, which is not for it, yet roots itself and grows for certain; so with our poor friend's love. Silently it struck into his soul; secretly his passion fed and grew; and not all in darkness either. Were not those moments of sunshine and radiance, when, on Sunday afternoons, he watched her from Betty's closet window, stretched on the grass in idle blessedness, or disporting herself with her youngest sister, who was quite a baby? One such Sunday Jock

resolved to speak to her. "I wull, I wull," he said to himself; "I canna bide langer wi'oot speech o' her." So, after dinner, he posted himself in the doorway of the cottage to await the nymph's appearance. It came on to rain. It poured heavily, but he was partly screened by the projecting eaves. Betty, within, cried out, asking what he meant by getting his Sunday coat wet, and received the unreasonable answer, "I wull dae it;" and Jock finched not. But when the sought-for vision appeared, nay, even before it appeared, at the sound of her light footstep in her father's "passage," Jock betook himself into the house. Often, too, thereafter did he wander down the lane, following on the recent footprints of his heart's idol, knowing them to be hers mostly by the patched sole-mark. Poor Muckle Jock! he could have knelt down and kissed them, miry as the lane was, but he feared detection.

Yet Jock, although he was being consumed by this silent passion, was not diverted from his work or drawn into folly. Indeed, prudence had much to do with his reticence, for he said to himself: "It will na dae. I canna, maunna mairry. I hae three mouths tae fill, an' can feed nae mair." So, with internal groanings, he concealed his ever-growing passion. He worked resolutely. He hoarded his weekly shilling to make up the pound which he thought so necessary when the Gaffer lay ill; but as the Gaffer died not, but lived on and ate, the pound-note was by Betty cunningly introduced into the spout of the old china teapot, which stood

in brilliant prominence in the three-cornered cupboard at the angle of the kitchen-walls. And the pound had come more easily than Jock looked for. Ten shillings of it formed a prize awarded to him for the best-groomed horses at the agricultural show; where also a bronze medal was conferred on him as the second-best ploughman of the district. Had the lassie aroused Jock's latent powers that morning when she called him to awake, and sent him trotting along his road to labour? It may have been so; for he worked as he had never done before. But all around the dull horizon of his life there appeared no cloud from which Jock could expect a larger share of blessing to descend to him than the wages equal to five shillings weekly and "his bolls," of which Betty was the careful administrator.

For upwards of a year Jock concealed his love, not only from the maiden whom it concerned, but also from his own household. Its discovery was on this wise—The Gaffer often lay awake at night, as old men do; and as poor Jock lay dreaming at his side, the old man heard him speak, "May, May, dawtie!" and a pang, somewhat of jealousy and much of selfish fear, went through the old man's heart.

"Och! he's sure tae mairry an' leave his auld faither! I did it masel'; I did it masel'," he thought, and groaned; and next day he told it to Betty. To her he told also of his fear that his son would desert him. "But it's nat'ral," he said; "I did it masel', an' left ma faither an' mither tae want. I canna complain. He

has dune his duty better than I did mine by ma ain auld folk. An' for this cause will a man leave faither an' mither; ay, an' sister as weel, Betty."

But Betty bade the old man "Wheesht! I ken Jock better. While there's breath in ye, faither, Jock'll no leave ye."

But this information as to Jock's sleeping whispers was to Betty an explanation of many odd things in Jock's behaviour of late that till now she could not account for; and as she sat knitting that afternoon, and thought back, she satisfied herself that Jock—her great silent, solid Jock—was in love with May Johnston. No jealousy or selfishness marred her thoughts of this; for she loved her brother, not tenderly perhaps—for tenderness and emotional love pertain but rarely to the horny-handed sons and daughters of toil—but with a reasoning love that spoke to her of how much she and her parent owed to this hard-toiling man, and that rejoiced to foresee for him happiness, however humble, and a little brightness to lighten the future of his life of labour. She knew that Jock's sluggish nature could only reach that modicum of happiness and brightness through a woman's love. But she thought, "I ocht tae hae kent o' it sooner. It's nae like Jock tae conceal aucht frae me."

So while Jock was sitting at the hearth that night, Betty plumply asked him: "Jock, are ye courtin' May Johnston?"

The effect of this on Jock was peculiar. His eyes got fixed on Betty until they grew round, his face

flushed till the swollen veins seemed starting from his temples, and his mouth stood agape. At length he gasped: "Wha tell't ye, Betty?"

"Yer ainsell," said she. "Yer faither canna get sleepit wi' yer haverings about her—aye crying oot 'May, May!'"

Jock saw that his secret was discovered. His statement was honest and piteous too: "Na, Betty, I'm nae courtin' her; I wish I was."

"She's a brave lass an' a gude ane," said Betty.

"I ken it, I ken it, Betty, lass," answered Jock, with unnatural vigour; "an' I cud speak tae her the morn, but no while faither's wi' us."

That was how Jock's love found voice for the first time; and before the sun rose twice thereafter, Betty had taken May aside and told her how her brother was "bewitched" with her love; how Jock was a good "bread-winner;"—"he may e'en some day be a grieve;" and then how good a brother and son he was! Betty could not tell how good. "An' May, lass," pleaded the woman, "he is awkward about the like o' womankind; but do, May, do be kind till him, an' speak him fair, the puir chiel!"

"Nane o' yer havers," said May. "Jock is na sic a gouk as tae fash me."

But Betty's earnestness, and perhaps, too, a consciousness of her own charms (for what woman is unconscious of these?), made the matter probable in the eyes of May.

CHAPTER II.

It has been written—I do think it is of modern invention—that love is selfless, begot of heavenly impulse ; and, of course, as heaven-born, so also eternal. This is gratifying to our self-complacency, as tending to dignify human sentiment and to excuse human caprice. But, in truth, it is a silly conception of love, and has done much evil in the world. I conceive love to be a natural and naturally indiscriminating affection in man towards woman, and in woman towards man, mostly selfish and self-deceiving ; too often an affection purely natural and carnal, and then always shortlived when the strong arm of law does not perpetuate its obligations. Certainly mainly thus, thank God not always, it is with the sons and daughters of toil, who do their wooings by the dung-heaps, with filthy fists and sweaty foreheads, and sustain affection on knotty kail-brose. Reason and social opinion influence the natural emotion, and mould it into shapes consistent with social relations, staying it, and making it calculate the burdens of woman's life and the chances of bread and kail. The dormant natural affection is easily aroused into emotional activity. Tell a woman that you love her, and the chances are that reciprocal affection will be generated. Thus do words take root and germinate, and, like the mustard-seed in

the parable, being least of all seeds, spring up into the greatest of all herbs.

So at least it was with May Johnston when Betty had sowed the seed by telling her of Jock's love. First, she thought it very funny that Jock should "tak' sic a craze intil his heid." Then she thought how big and strong, how sober and honest, how home-loving and faithful Jock was; and, again, his earnings were as much as her father's and might hereafter be more, as Betty had insinuated. As for his uncouthness, his shyness, and silence, she disposed of them all in Betty's words—"Puir chiel!" Thus May received intimation of the man's love with no unwilling ear, and thought of it thereafter with no oppugnant heart. But while tickled and flattered by the knowledge that she had bewitched the big man without any effort on her part, and had filled him with love of her, still, after the manner of women, she thought—"I'm nae gain' tae bather; I hae ither corn tae mill;" and the seed, although skilfully sown, had the chance of dying like more material seeds. Indeed, if Jock had just then pressed his suit in person, he would undoubtedly have trodden out its vitality. But when day after day and week after week had gone by, and Jock passed in and out as usual, but looking, as she thought, more silent and more sad than theretofore, while Betty, time after time, repeated the story of his love, May often said—"Puir chiel! an' him takin' it sae quate!" Was this sedulous cultivation of the seeds of love in the girl's heart right and fair on the part of

Betty? Who can say?—but what true woman will omit an opportunity of advancing an honest love?

And now Jock had something whereon to feed the flame of love. Nightly he heard from Betty some trifling matter concerning May; and in the summer evenings and on Sundays Betty used to drag him to the closet window to watch the damsel in her mother's kail-yard. Jock's first direct and personal advance to May was in this wise:—The well from which the household water was drawn was at the distant end of the lane, a hundred yards from the cottage-door, and the water was usually fetched by Mrs. Johnston and Betty for their respective needs. But at the well Jock one evening came upon May who had just filled her pails, and he silently stepped into the hoop and walked away with the "fraught," nor spilled a drop, nor slacked his pace, as he walked more erect than usual, till he set down the pails at her cottage-door. All he said then was "Noo," with a self-satisfied laugh, while, blushing red, he hurried in to Betty, to whom, however, he did not mention the incident. Privately he was of opinion that in it he had made an open, even daring, advance to the maiden.

It was in the first days of April that Betty startled Jock at dinner-time, and put him past eating by the statement, "May will be oot o' a place at the term."

"Hoo, what way that?" gasped Jock, as his spoon fell down among his brose.

Then Betty told him that May's master had given up his farm, and that the Earl was taking it into his own hands and laying it down in grass; so that the field women would not be required.

"I was speakin' wi' her last nicht," she said. "May has fan' oot that there's unco few changes this term a' roun' about. She can see ne'er a door at a' for hirin', and she's sair thocht for it."

Jock sat in deep musing for a little. Then he muttered: "I wonder if the tailor will mairry Peggy at our farm?"

Betty had heard of this gossiped alliance, but "Indeed she didna ken."

"Ony gait," said Jock, "Peggy hasna gien up her place yet."

Jock made a pretence of resuming his meal, but he could not eat. The news had affected his stomach, and filled it with something doubtless unsubstantial and unsatisfactory, and, I daresay, flatulent. He trudged away to his afternoon yoking with a vague and hazy sensation of having been dreaming (as, indeed, he too often had) that May was hired at the Lowes, where he, Jock, was "first horseman," and that there he had wooed and won her for his bride. He could not get rid of a belief that his dreams were coming true already; and whereas at first in his reverie he had walked with doubtful step and slow, he became excited by visions which almost seemed realities, and he ended in a round trot, at which unusual pace he entered the stable.

But when the grieve asked, "What's the haste, Jock?" the dissembler said, "I maun hae thocht I was late."

But during all that yoking the question buzzed in Jock's head, "Will the tailor tak' her?" squeezing out the other question, what he should do if Peggy's place became vacant.

Now it happened that as Jock was unloosing his plough that evening, Mr. Morris, his master, came into the field—a pleasant, bluff man, who looked more than usually pleasant as he then came up to Jock.

"Jock," said he, "I count on you to be A 1. at the Burnside ploughing-match this day fortnight. Robert (the grieve) is going, and I have waghered that you'll both take prizes."

"I dinna ken aboot it," said Jock. "Wha's a' tae be there?" And while Jock was asking this question, the tailor and Peggy were still uppermost in his thoughts.

Mr. Morris then went on to tell him that forty ploughs were expected at the match—from the Haugh and Braemore, from Mains of Howe and the Bught, from near and far, and the Beauville teams, with Jamie Mowat, who a year before stood first in the field before Jock. Jock was apparently listening, but he was thinking of the tailor and Peggy, and Peggy's place, and he did not hear half of what his master said.

"I sippose Jim Mowat will be there," was what he said when his master's silence recalled his wits.

"Tut, Jock," said Morris, "have I not just said so? What are you thinking of?"

"Naething ava," said Jock.

"Tut, man," said Morris. "If that rig was not so well lined, and every furr and every foot of it so equal, I would think you were a gomeril; but mind what I say, I will give you a crown if you take a prize."

But by this time Jock had brought himself to think that he should speak to his master, and, if possible, pre-engage Peg's place; and now not only was his master moving away, but his horses were also on the move to their stable in the opposite direction.

"Whoa!" cried Jock to his beasts. "Maister," he shouted after the farmer. "Whoa, Tam; whoa, Jenny. Maister!" And when Morris returned, asking what it was, Jock could not get words, and stood gaping.

"What is it, Jock?" again asked Mr. Morris stiffly.

Then Jock muttered something, of which the farmer could only catch the words "Peggy," "the tailor," and "the term." Morris repeated these words, and asked Jock what he meant.

"She's leavin'," at length said Jock.

"I'm not sure; but what of that?"

"Naething, be—be—but I ken a lass."

Then the farmer whistled, "Wheugh! Jock, ye ken a lass! Do you want her to the Lowes?"

"Jist that, maister."

"A sweetheart, Jock?"

"Na; naething but a neebour."

“Well, well, Jock, sweetheart or neighbour, take the first prize, man, and we’ll have her at the Lowes if she’s a likely lass at all. I believe Peg is going.”

Then Jock’s face brightened as he chirruped to his horses : “Ye maun stan’ by me, Tam, auld lad ; Jenny, lass, ye maun be in guid fettle, and we’ll show Jim Mowat what we can dae noo.”

When Betty heard all this from Jock, she made up her mind to tell May nothing about Jock’s intervention, and certainly nothing about the condition that Jock should take a prize. When she did go to her that night, her statement simply was, that Jock had ascertained that Peggy was leaving. She thought that May should go to Mr. Morris next day, and, if possible, secure the place. Thus was the statement limited, because Betty feared to touch the girl’s pride and susceptibility : and, if May saw Mr. Morris, she thought an engagement might be made without reference to Jock. So next evening, in the gloaming, May, instead of coming straight home, went to the Lowes and saw Mr. Morris.

“I com’ speirin about a place, sir. I’m telt ye need a han’ at the term,” she said.

“Well, I don’t know, my girl. One of the women is leaving at the term certainly, but I fear the place is engaged.”

The girl’s bright face was instantly downcast ; and the change of expression was so marked, that Mrs. Morris, who was present, and whose province it was to engage the women-servants, saw it and interfered.

"Robert, it is not half-an-hour ago since Peg said she was going for certain. You can't have another already engaged."

"It's a fact," said Morris ; "I promised the place to Muckle Jock for his sweetheart."

"Sweetheart ! Nonsense ; Jock have a sweetheart !" said the lady.

"It's true though," said the husband, as he turned to speak to the girl. She was blushing blood-red through her sunburnt cheeks ; and the farmer, seeing it, said, "Ye may be our Jock's sweetheart for all I know."

"I'm no come askin' wark or service for the sake o' onybody, man or sweethairt ; and if the place is engaged my message is dune."

Mrs. Morris thought the girl's tone somewhat insolent, and rejoined, "Well, well, let it be so ; but you should keep your temper when you come on such an errand."

And May went away. She had no doubt she was the sweetheart for whom the place was engaged, but she was hurt by the aspect of the affair. She was angry at Betty, who, she thought, must have known it all, and have deceived her ; and "how cud that big fule, Jock, gang about saying I'm his sweethairt, all through the country-side ?" She was greatly annoyed, indeed, and indignant ; and when Betty went to learn how she had succeeded, she did not thank her for having sent her "on sic a gouk's errand," and hoped she would mind her own business from that time forth.

But the fortnight passed, and April was drawing to a close, and May was not engaged. The great ploughing-match at Burnside came off. Poets and historians write of bloody tournaments, and crashing steeds, and clanging armour, and wounded knights bravely suffering for famous beauties of yore. Beauty now demands less costly sacrifices, yet chivalry is not all extinct. What was the power that braced our humble friend Jock that day, steadying his grasp of the plough-stilts, guiding his reins, and hand, and eye? It looks absurd to say so; yet a pure, though lowly, chivalry nerved him for the day's work. It may have animated others, too, in that field of peaceful rivalry, for the work was so nearly of equal merit as executed by two or three of the ploughmen, that there were dire wrangling and controversy between the judges, and Morris almost fought for fair play for his men, as yard by yard the furrows were scrutinised and measured. At length it was all over, and Jock stood the winner of two first prizes, a silver medal and blue ribbon for the best ploughing, and ten shillings for the grooming of his steeds. It was seven o'clock of the evening as they passed through the village on their way to the Lowes, surrounded by a crowd of boys, whooping and harooing, for already all the villagers knew of Jock's great victories. Betty and many women were at the head of the lane. To them Jock ran in passing, shaking Betty's hand, and shaking May's too, for she was there. And there was no denying it, that, dressed in his best,

and elated with his triumph, he looked a smart fellow enough, as, having received the congratulations of the women, he hurried after the carts amid the shoutings of the boys.

Later that evening Mr. Morris of the Lowes rode into the lane. He had ascertained who it was that Jock wished to bring to the farm, and there he was to see her. Mrs. Johnston sent the girl to the door. She went, with a heart rebellious against the chance of earning her bread, for the galling visit to the Lowes was still sore to her.

"My lass," he said, "if you come to the Lowes you are welcome."

"My wages," she said, "will be four pound ten an' my cost," which sum was ten shillings in the half-year more than she had ever earned before.

"That's ten shillings above the usual rate," said Morris. "I can't put up the wages of the farm, but I'll make it up to you, for I want to please Jock."

"Sir," she said, "I wark wi' my ain han's. There's naething atween that lad an' me, an' if I got service elsewhere, I'd no' gang tae the Lowes for yer words."

"Tut, tut, lass; you're as fiery as an unbroke colt. Will you take four pounds?"

"Tak' the arles, Maysie," said the mother from the doorway; "tak' the arles, Maysie, if ye be wise."

"Depend on it, I'll make it up to you," said the farmer; and it was no small matter to be seen of all the town that Mr. Morris had come on horseback for her.

She held out her hand, into which he put half-a-crown. A shilling is the usual earnest-money, but the farmer was after dinner, and elated by the events of the day.

"I'm yer servant frae the term, sir," said the girl.

"All right," said Morris, as he trotted off.

The term came, and May went to work at the Lowes, and Jock saw her daily in the fields, which now in his eyes had new interest and beauty. But as he had to attend to his horses both before and after the hours of field-work, he had little opportunity of love-making; for the maiden arrived at the hour of labour, and went home when the farm-bell rang. But there never was such a month of May in Jock's experience. The lark sang out more sweetly, with a volume of love in his song. The fresh greenness of the sprouting grass and braird, and the genial sunshine, were greener and brighter than Jock remembered them in other years. The very hours of labour seemed shortened since May was in the fields. But the first days of June brought a change. The sun was overcast. The fierce, chill north-east wind blew. Sleety showers fell in fitful torrents; and the women, and the men too, were chilled and pinched as they spread the manure on the fallow land, and slowly formed the turnip-drills. One of the girls had her father's top-coat buttoned round her; all happed themselves as they could, yet all were drenched and cold. But Jock had eyes and sympathy for one only, and she had just ever so small a shawlet on her shoulders. It was only a step from Jock's

plough at the head-rigg to the stable, and Jock has gone from his plough, and presently is rushing over the soaked land to the women, carrying his top-coat, and is gone up to May, who heard her comrades titter, and saw them exchange glances and smiles.

"Hae," said Jock; "pit it roun' ye," as he held out the coat.

May was very angry. "What business hae I wi' yer coat, man? Haud awa, ye an' it."

"Oh, May, May," said he, "ye're wat an' cauld."

"I bare wat and cauld afore I seed ye. Ye're no the man tae warm me."

And as Jock was pressing the coat against her, and she heard the half-smothered laughter of the women, she continued—

"Get awa', ye fule, I say; or I'll hairm ye wi' my graip."

Jock saw that instead of love, his stupid display of concern for her had only kindled anger.

"Gie me the coat," said Bell Fraser, a strapping woman of twenty-eight years, who would gladly have welcomed the first horseman to woo her. "Gie me the coat, Jock; I wunna deny ye."

But Jock said, "Na, na; it's only for May—only for May. Wunna ye hae it, May?" he asked humbly.

She made him no reply, and with lengthened strides and drooping head, he slunk back over the furrows to his plough. In that hour the woman *knew* he loved her.

Mrs. Morris heard of this love-passage, and she got to May about the farm, and spoke to her kindly, and made occasions for her coming to the kitchen; and having thus founded a good feeling, she spoke of Jock, and why did the girl repulse him? The maiden, thus taken in gracious mood, frankly owned, "It wasna wise; but Scotch love is fechtin', ye ken, mem." And matters thereafter went on more smoothly, although Bell Fraser, believing that Jock meditated matrimony, made a decided attack on his heart and person. She played pranks on him at the steading, assailing him and tussling him at unawares,⁷ nor heeded his gruff grunting, "Be aff, ye baggage!" Once she waylaid him on his way home to the village at night, and seized him round the waist, and the strong man had to use his strength to rid himself of her; and then he fairly fled homewards. Now it happened that the grieve's little daughter saw this struggle on the road, and the story got out among the workers in various editions, amended and enlarged. It marked a great improvement in May's state of mind, that when a friend—and how spiteful friends can sometimes be—came telling her, "Jock has Bell Fraser noo aye tae meet him gaun hame, an' he toozles her bravely."

"It's a *lee*," she said. "It's a' fause. I ken Jock. He'll neither meddle nor mak' wi' the like o' her."

"My certy! ye're gey croose an' sure o' him," was the friendly reply.

"Sure o' him, or no sure o' him, Jock's a honest

leal lad, an' winna wrang or pit han' on a mither's dochter amang ye; an' I wanna hear him fausely spoke o'."

And while on a hundred little occasions Jock made his love of her apparent to her, and she silently but pleasantly received it, he wisely abstained from the slightest repetition of its open display; and the months passed on in great comfort for Jock. Then harvest was ingathered, and during the September moon, and the corn-leading by its light, Jock, night after night, went home with May. She waited for him at the kitchen; because, as she told the lasses, "that scapegrace, Tam Fraser, wanted to convoy her; but she was safe wi' Jock."

This she also let Jock know; and Jock said, "Thank ye, May, for takin' me."

Then after harvest came the Hallowmas Fair. Now the Hallowmas Fair was the great holiday of the summer half-year, the one day of freedom and dressing, of gallanting and flirtation, of music and dancing, of drinking and shouting, and on it the labouring population of twelve miles round flocked to the village to gratify their several tastes. Jock went to the Lowes as usual, saw to the welfare of his horses, and jobbed about till his usual dinner-hour, when he went leisurely home. He met the Gaffer at the cottage-door.

"Betty wasna in. She gaed oot twa oors syne."

But the old man had "biled the pot," and Jock make his own brose, and ate it, while the hum and tumult of

the fair came to him from the distant end of the village, mingling with the fifes and drums of the recruiting party. Then he put on his Sunday clothes, hung his medals round his neck, and went out. He quickly purchased a whole pocketful of brilliantly-coloured sweetmeats, and then went round the outskirts of the crowd and through it. There was no doubt about it, he was looking for May. At last, in the weltering, pushing crowd in front of Mr. Merryman's booth he found her laughing at the capers of the clown. His gorgeous stock of "sweeties" was speedily tied up in her white handkerchief as "a fairin' ;" and they elbowed their way through the crowd to the Green. And Jock had another gift in his pocket, which burned while it was there.

"Will ye tak' it frae me?" he asked, as he put it into her hand.

It was only a crooked sixpence. She did take it, saying, "Ye're a silly chiel."

And "whee-whe-whee-who," and "raw-ra-ta-ta," came the fifes and drums, and louder shouted the crowd as it opened up a passage, and the soldiers marched past with glittering weapons and streaming ribands.

May cried out, "Losh me! there's Jamie wi' the sodgers."

And sure enough there was her brother James, a tall, overgrown lad of eighteen, walking very proudly and a little unsteadily beside the sergeant of the party. In an instant May had rushed to him and grasped him by the arm, and was dragging him away. But the sergeant

interfered and laid hold of James, and confronted May, saying, "My pretty girl, he is only going to walk to the Square. Come along with us and see him safe."

He spoke with winning smiles and easy gallantry, and sheathed his sword and offered May his arm.

"Come along, May," said Jamie. "I'm gain' whatever."

And in an instant they were gone arm in arm through the crowd into the village Square, whither Jock followed in wonder and displeasure. He saw the party break off amid loud cheering; and May and Jamie went with the sergeant and the soldiers into a drinking-booth; and then Jock was angry. He hung about the booth for a while, and then entered it, in some excitement, to see why May was staying there. As he entered, the corporal and Jamie passed out. There on a form sat the sergeant and May, his hand on her waist and his whiskers unduly near to her laughing face; while the whole of Jock's sweeties, white, yellow, and pink, lay scattered on the floor. Jock went quietly up to her—

"Come awa', May."

"Sit down, Jock, an' gaether yer goodies for me. The serjan' skailed them," said she.

"Na, na," said Jock. "Honest folk an' sober folk aye haud clear o' the sodgers. Come awa, lass."

But she did not move. The soldier offered Jock a dram; but Jock "never drank nane;" and then Jock left the booth sorely vexed and angry.

He walked along, caring little in his bitterness

where he went; but he had not gone far when he rubbed his eyes in astonishment. Was that really Betty coming out of the show "linket on a gentleman?" Jock's heart sadly misgave him. Betty in her best things looked well, but the man with her was too well dressed, as Jock thought, for keeping her company. Jock followed them, and saw Betty treated to cakes and ginger-beer, and other fine things, while he stood glowering at a distance. At last a man came by whom he knew.

"Wha's yon wi' Betty?" asked Jock.

"Oh, dinna ye ken? Yon's the gauger. He's been courtin' her this while sin syne."

"Dae ye ken him?" asked Jock.

"No me," replied the man. "I dinna ken him; but a'budy says he's a sportin' blade an' a sair han' amang the lasses;" and the man went on his way.

Jock was sorely troubled. He stood staring till Betty and her partner disappeared in the crowd. Then he went home, and sat moodily smoking his pipe. But he was restless, and soon got up and went out again, this time to the Lowes and his horses. When the animals neighed at his coming, he said to himself: "The puir beasts'll no gie me ony sair heart;" and he remained at the steading till night.

At supper he asked Betty about "yon man," saying he "didna like his looks at a'."

But Betty said, "Wheesht, Jock. Maybe I'll soon mak' room for May;" and Jock was silent.

Next morning the steam-mill at the Lowes was going, and all hands were busy thrashing out the grain. May was there, but Jock did not speak to her, although she loaded his cart with the pitch-forked sheaves. But about ten o'clock her mother came running to the steading with her apron to her eyes. She was crying. After a few words together, mother and daughter went hurriedly off to the village, desiring one of the women to tell the grievance "something haed gane wrang at hame, an' him no tae be angry."

Jock saw all this, the mother's weeping and the daughter's excitement, but he would not ask what was the matter; and his heart was hardened, and he "didna care." Now this was the matter. The soldiers had come claiming Jamie as a recruit, and had warned him to appear before the Justice, at two o'clock that afternoon. Jamie was a weakly lad and overgrown. He had sat all that morning at the fireside, with aching head and feverish pulse, from the unwonted dissipation of the previous day. His mother had fretted, and scolded, and called him ill-names, and warned him of evils that were in store for him. But when the soldiers came and said he was "listed," then she flung her arms about his neck, and called him "her puir, lost bairn."

"He'll dee, he'll dee, if ye tak' him tae the sodgers," she said to the corporal, "an' his bluid 'll be demandit at yer han's. He's ne'er a day richt weel wi' me, his mither nursin' him, an' he's sure no tae live."

The corporal said he would make an excellent servant to her Majesty, and would soon become strong. She wrung her hands, and sobbed, and cried; and the Gaffer, who had come to the door on seeing the soldiers, now hearing Mrs. Johnston's piteous complainings, went to her, urging her "No tae tak' on that gait, wumman; ye maybe can manage to pay the smairt." One of the children was then sent for the head of the family, and old Johnston came and heard it all. He looked very grim as he said—

"I hae na twa shillings i' the warld this day. I wanna tak' on debt. Wha wad len' me, ony wise? But I wanna tak' the bread, which is scant enow already, frae ma bairns' mous, and squanner it on this prodigal. He has made his bed, an' maun lie on it."

But inwardly the old man's heart was bleeding, and his spirit was in bitterness for his only son, and he was praying to the Lord for light and relief. And what was all the difficulty, since the smart-money is only twenty-one shillings? A trifle, no doubt, to you, reader, or to me, but a serious sum to this poor head of a large family, with its many mouths, and many wants. Indeed, in this poor village, years pass after years, and the great bulk of the people never see a pound note; and of the whole inhabitants perhaps a dozen only, including "the merchant" and the innkeeper, could conveniently have lent the sum.

It was when old Johnston had thus expressed himself that his wife ran off to the Lowes to seek strength

and aid from her strong-minded daughter. By the time they got home May saw the full difficulty. One shilling and Jock's sixpence was all her store. How she blamed herself now. If she had not listened to the sergeant. If she had held on by Jamie, and taken him by force. If she even had that half-crown that went in ribbons. How senseless she had been! How humble she was now, while within her heart's cry was—"Oh for a pound afore two o'clock!" "Wud her faither gang oot wi' her tae seek it?" No, he would neither borrow nor beg, nor tell his sad sorrow and disgrace; and he sat down and covered his face with his trembling hands. May must go out herself. To whom should she go? She resolved to try the village merchant. He was an elder of the church, and a very civil and polite person. May knew him only by having invested part of her wages in dress in his shop. So to him she went and told her tale. Would he kindly lend her a pound? She would be sure to pay it back. But he forthwith preached of vice and sin, at first in the abstract, but soon with direct personal reference to May, charging her with keeping company with the soldiers, which he had seen her do openly yesterday, and which, he warned her, was the broad road to shame and sorrow. Could she expect other results than that her brother would enlist? Finally, winding up with a pious exhortation, he declined to lend the pound. May's heart was too full and too humble to do battle for herself with the village magnate, even had she been disposed to quarrel with

his facts or conclusions. Indeed, his highly respectable black dress and shining bald head put his sentiments beyond discussion. His view of her conduct frightened May, disposed as she was to blame herself; and his peremptory refusal of the loan crushed all hope within her heart. She could not ask elsewhere. It was difficult for her to refrain from crying in the shop, and she must hurry home to have her cry out. So home she went, and shut herself up in her closet, and wept alone. Betty went to her, but she would not admit her, and she was offended, too, because Betty seemed so calm and so unsympathising. Betty went away to prepare Jock's dinner.

When Jock came home shortly after one, the soldier was there at the top of the lane, trim and bright, and he gaily whistled and poised himself and twirled his cane, and Jock felt a strong inclination to knock him down. But as he entered his cottage, Jock heard the sobs and ejaculations of Mrs. Johnston, "Jist ae oor an' they'll tak' him frae me; jist ae oor! O Lord." Then Betty explained the affair and told of the great distress of the Johnstons, and of May's effort and failure to get the loan of a pound. Jock sat down and supped his brose without a word. In a little, the corporal stepped lightly to the Johnstons' door and said, "The recruit must be getting ready," which was followed by a louder burst of grief.

Then said Jock, "Gie them faither's pound."

This was what Betty had been waiting for, and she

executed the commission speedily. What she did or said is not material, but the results certainly were. May walked into the Gaffer's kitchen, with her face bleared, and the tears in her eyes. Jock was sitting at the deal table at the window still supping his dinner.

"Jock," she said, holding out her hand, "Ye're the true man. I ken ye luve me, an' I'm no worth it; but if ye'll tak' me, here's ma han', an' I'll be true tae ye till deth."

Jock had started to his feet in the progress of this speech, and was facing the maiden, spoon in hand, and with staring eyes.

"I ca-ca-canna," he said.

"But I'll bide yer ain time, Jock; an' I'll aye be true."

"Kiss her, man, wanna ye?" said Betty; and in an instant Jock had flung the spoon on the table, and his arms round May's neck, and had tasted the first kiss of love.

CHAPTER III.

WHETHER or not the great and beautiful gourd of love has oft-times its root in tiny words, sometimes like the prophet's gourd springing up in a night, it seems altogether certain that loving words and acts, like heaven's gentle dew to material plants, give it nutriment and verdure. Love may be a sickly, parched, even perishing plant, but if the lover, in whose soul it is rooted, will drop but one loving word, then, refreshed and greenly it buds and blossoms as into gracious flowers and fruits of love, fragrant and delightful, thus resulting like all spiritual exercises.

When Jock came home that night, Jamie Johnston met him at the door and thanked him for his deliverance; and Jock had hardly finished his supper when May came in and stood behind his chair, and laid her hand on his shoulder. The Gaffer, instinctively feeling that he was not wanted, slipped out to smoke a pipe with old Johnston; and then, when the maiden was alone with Jock and Betty, she kissed him and thanked him, and he drew her silently on his knee, and her arms were round his neck and her face on his breast. A few, only a few, little words were spoken by her, while the great silent man held her there in his abashed and speechless way. This was the consummation of Jock's love visions

for two years past. But mark how alloyed are all earthly pleasures, and how material things will vindicate a supremacy over mental. While thus she sat with him in all lovingness, Jock found himself oppressed and full of stupidity and uneasiness. The maiden was of ample size and heavy, and Jock was unaccustomed to nursing; and thus when the weight of love had crushed his limbs for a little, during which he was lost in delight, he awoke to a sense of numbness and embarrassment. He knew that it could be cured by shifting his position; but the position was altogether so novel and so delightful, that in his stupid way he dared not shift it, and thus the numbness increased. Then, after a slight movement on the part of his lovely burden, came those tingling sensations, just on the border-land of pleasure and pain. Jock wished she would get up, not in words—he could not then have uttered as many words—but inwardly; and he bore the tingling heroically for a time. But he suddenly succumbed. Almost frantically he shoved away May, wildly started up to the alarm of the girls, almost tumbled over Betty, and began to stamp about. It was some time before he explained that his “leg was sleepin’.” Then the lasses, with loud laughter, seized him and rubbed his limbs, and compelled him to promise that henceforth his personal discomforts should be told without hesitation; and thereafter Jock went to bed to dream of a future of light and joy with that maiden in visionary corn-fields.

Next morning May was waiting for her Jock when

he set off to his work, and side by side they went together. And there was no concealment, but every one knew that she had taken the silent man for "her lad," and that by-and-by they were to be man and wife.

"When?"

"Why, when it'll suit him, tae be sure. I can bide his ain time an' ne'er fret," said she.

Now there was no more frowning, no more misunderstanding, no more rejection of offered kindnesses, no more flinching from the tittering or jibes of the women.

"Wha o' ye wadna be prood tae tak' him?" she said to them. "Leastways I'm a pleased woman, an' I'll be a true wife in God's time."

And the days and weeks of toil flew by, and Jock lost much of his taciturnity and unreadiness through his intercourse with the sprightly girl, and was clothed and crowned with love and blessedness as he drove his plough and ate his frugal fare.

But to one poor heart time did not bring pleasure. Betty was unhappy. Jock, bound up in his own love, had concerned himself but little with the gauger. Indeed, when he missed Betty night after night from the fire-side, while he rejoiced in the presence of May darning stockings or clouting old clothes, and whiles love-making on his knee, he thought her absence was to be ascribed to the desire to give May and him quiet opportunity. Unhappily, it was not so. She had fallen into the way

of meeting the gauger outside, and of wandering with him in darkness and alone. Oh, sad darkness and solitude! Does true and honest love ever seek them? Did Betty ever ask herself whether the well-dressed gauger, who enticed her to meet him thus, was really shrinking from open acknowledgment of interest in the working girl? Perhaps she did; and no doubt, too, she quieted her fears by repeating his vows and recounting his social difficulties so frankly spoken of. Undoubtedly she believed that he would one day own her in the sunlight and before the world. Dear girls! If any man, the most God-like, sue you in love's court, and will not take its arbitrament at your father's hearth, distrust and avoid him. Honest love, whence happiness springs, has no disguises, no concealment; and there is no more slippery pavement hellwards than hidden love and hidden opportunity.

One night Betty came home, and her eyes were red with weeping; and she silently passed into her closet, passed May and Jock by the fire, and they saw not that she sorrowed. She had parted from her sweetheart, who was removing next day to a distant station, to which he had been appointed. They had parted with many kisses and promises on his part—with many kisses and tears on hers. She did not then know it; but she was never to see him again—never to hear from him, perjured and faithless; and her heart that night was full of love and hope, even while she wept, for she trusted him. But when week after week passed and brough

her no message, then her heart began to fail her, and her cheek grew pale. She did not, she could not conceal her great grief from May; and as she told it they wept together in sisterly embrace. Artlessly Betty told how she had hoped to have been "out o' the road o' Jock and May," and had dreams of two weddings on one day—hopes blighted, dreams vanished in the hard and cruel sense of forsakenness which now surrounded her. May told it to Jock, and the news made him sad too, though he said nothing.

"Ye, too, wad leave me, Jock, gin ye cud," said May. "It's jist the way o' a' you men."

But Jock replied, "The lan' 'll no grow corn when I'll leave ye;" and plainly the cases were not at all parallel.

As Betty's love-meetings had not been altogether unobserved by the village community, so her lover's faithlessness and her own grief did not escape notice. The women all voted that she deserved her fate, and might have foreseen it. "What better could have been expeckit? Her setting her cap at ane aboon her equals!" Others said, "War she as honest a lass as she preten's, the like o' him wad na hae gien her sae muckle o' his company. It wasna a wife he wanted—we kent that fine." What signified their ill-natured gossip? But poor Betty must blench and pine, and sadly wander by the lonely paths so often traversed with her false lover—with a sad and bitter pleasure in the memory of each spot. Each morning found her with weighted and

desolate heart, awaking to new bitterness without tincture of pleasure. She was restless by day, often sleepless by night, and ever unhappy. Then when the days began to lengthen in March, she ceased to go out excepting of necessity. Suddenly she announced to May that she was resolved to go to service at Whitsunday, and that she, May, must "get ready tae come hame tae Jock." She did not tell that her thoughts were of flight from her home and kindred, and that shame was the motive; nor that last time she was down the village, Luckie Balders had "spiered for the gauger;" and said, "Weel, weel, lass, if ye wanna hae a weddin', maybe we'll hae a chirsnen' (christening) whatever." May guessed not the whole of poor Betty's sorrow, and opposed Betty's proposal stoutly.

"Jock an' me are in nae hurry at a'; an' ye maunna think o' service the noo."

But Betty was resolved. She would go to Inverwick to seek service and a change, she said, at Whitsunday; and they were compelled to submit. Thus it was arranged that Jock and May should be married at that term, and that Betty should go forth to the world; ostensibly seeking change and peace—but really concealment, and she knew not what.

Betty's too evident suffering did not make itself felt by Jock as might have been expected of one so thoughtful of the material comforts of those dear to him. He was not an intelligent observer of things in general, much less of facial changes, or of the emotions of others.

Besides, he was now absorbed in the anticipation of his approaching marriage, which was ever present, in a stupid way, to his slowly-working mind. And Betty's desertion made him very dear to May, who did not conceal from all around her how fortunate she thought herself in the poor fellow's love. "What's goud or dimans (diamonds) or onything by his luvin' hairt?" she said; "I wudna change him for a king. Gran' things are aye deceitfu'." Little did she think, in the flush of love, how deceitful and unstable are all human life and affairs; and not at all did she anticipate the coming evils that were to mar her happiness and the happiness of the man she loved. Meantime she hung upon him and hugged him, "Her ain fond lover, her ain true love;" while he, with silent caresses and violent and expressive squeezes, assured her of his unchangeable affection.

It was a pleasant evening in April, and Jock and May were going homewards, his arm round her waist, she carrying his pitcher of milk. The setting sun was tinging the distant hills with golden light, and bathing the village in soft effulgence. As they walked in silent pleasure, a quarter of a mile from their homes, they heard the feeble cries of a child from the ditch by the roadside. May gave the pitcher to Jock, and hastened to the spot. It was a little child, three years old, "a love bairn" of Bell Lowe, the rag-gatherer. It had wandered in the glorious sunlight so far from the village, and had stumbled and fallen into the ditch, and had there lain screaming and unable to extricate itself, until

May picked it up. She took it gently in her arms, telling Jock whose it was, and she soothed it; and they gave it of their milk to drink. The child was rolled up in a curiously-fashioned old pelisse; and May, as she carried it, wondered at the strange piece of dress, and how and where the rag-gatherer had got it. And slyly looking at Jock, she asked if he would like to own a boy like that, and made game of him when he said he did not know. She carried the child to its mother's door, and there set it down, wondering at the unwonted tenderness of its casual nurse; for, God knows, Bell, its mother, had little love or tenderness in her ways.

In all womanly goodness, May had raised up and carried this waif of humanity; and you and I looking on and seeing her take pleasure in such tenderness after her day of toil, would have thought that before Heaven the act would have appeared with much sweetness and acceptability, commended with blessing and increased grace by the Highest. How inscrutable is Providence! Who can read it? Two days thereafter May was seized with headache and vomiting, and the early chills and heat of incipient fever. It came on her in the field about noon, and she was so unwell that Jock asked the grieve to look after his horses, while he went straight home with his ailing lass. With difficulty she got home, weary, languid, sick at stomach, and with aching head, "whiles shiverin', whiles burnin'," as she described her state to Jock, she who had "never been a day unweel since she had the measles, aught year syne."

She was laid down in her bed in the cramped little closet, where Jock went to see her before he started for his afternoon yoking. Her eyes were viscid, her skin hot and dry, her whole appearance changed. With forced gaiety she said to him, "Wunna ye bide, man, an' lie doun wi' me?"

Poor Jock shuddered at her husky, hard, hollow voice, and it came to him that she was to be taken away. He could not speak, but he looked on her with tearful eyes. With another effort, she said, "Ye wud sooner pairt wi' me than frae yer horse beasts; but kiss me, Jock;" and then Jock went away with heavy heart to his work. At night she was worse; and Betty took the two little girls, May's sisters, who used to sleep with May, to share her bed, for May was clearly in for some bad trouble; and Betty, with white face, said to Jock, "I wish tae God it was me."

Next day she was still worse, sorely fevered, and her face grievously swollen; her voice faint and husky. Even in this her sore trouble she had a kind word and feeble smile for Jock when he came to see her. That evening Bell Lowe's love bairn was dead—the doctor said of suppressed small-pox. That strange piece of dress had done it all—Bell in her wanderings had picked it up in a rag-store at Inverwick, full of infection, and had dressed her child in it, and the child had gone forth in the pride of its fine rags, and May had found it. Now the child was dead. Dr. Blake came to May too, having heard that she was ill, and pronounced her case

one of small-pox also; and he resolved to isolate the case, if possible, hoping to prevent the much dreaded disease from spreading among the villagers, so ill suited to withstand its rage. So old Johnston and his family (his wife who had had small-pox alone excepted) were removed from the house and scattered where best they could find quarters. All and sundry the neighbours were warned, as they valued their lives and the lives of others, not to set foot within the infected dwelling. The doctor, too, who knew something of Jock and his love of the patient, specially forbade him to enter the house.

“Hoo can I bide awa’?” said Jock.

Then the doctor told him that the disease was of a very bad type, and that it would be nothing short of murder for him to go into the house and probably to spread infection. Jock promised obedience, and turned away from the door with a sad presentiment stamped into him that May was surely to die. He wandered about in the lane, or lingered near the door all through the night, and often he tapped at the window and asked, “Hoo is she noo?”

When morning broke, the business of life led him away to toil, but not before on his bended knees he had prayed aloud to God the prayer which all night had lain inarticulate at his heart—“Spare her, O Lord, spare her!”

All day, too, at his plough, the same unspoken prayer went up for his love; and day and night went round

with heavy, leaden pace; day unto day uttering sorrow, and night after night black with pain and fear. The case was a severe one of confluent small-pox. Jock was worn out by his love-imposed vigils, and his almost total abstinence from food, for Betty could scarcely get him to eat a mouthful.

"Hoo can I eat, an' May like tae dee?"

All his pleasant things seemed turning to grief and ashes. He could not rest; he could not work.

"He has no settlement nicht or day," the Gaffer said.

He could scarcely pray that one prayer for her for whom he was thus troubled.

"I'm unco stupid, an' kin' o' dazed like," he said to Mr. Morris; "an' whiles, wi' the weicht o' ma trouble, I'll no mind what's the maitter wi' me."

At length, on the eighth day, the doctor said to Jock, "If she does well to-morrow, the worst will be past."

That night when Jock came home, Mrs. Johnston told him "the lassie was very bad;" and Jock's distress increased as he walked up and down the lane in front of the cottages.

"This may be her last nicht o' life," he said to himself.

Near to midnight Betty came to him and walked by his side in the chill moonlight. When they came near the houses again, she said, "God help you, Jock, I fear she'll dee. I wish to God it was masel'."

Jock howled aloud like a stricken hound, and wept; and again she repeated, "I wish to God it was masel'."

Her face was very pinched and white, and her voice and words went through Jock with a shiver, that he remembers even now in hours of reflective pain. Then Betty left him, and he went and hung about the window. He heard the painful moaning and stifled voice of May, his dying May. What! was she speaking of him—"Jock?" He was sure he heard her say "Jock;" and he turned away and wept again. Now he was sure that she was dying. Did not Betty say it? She must have been told by Mrs. Johnston or the doctor, and desired to break the sad tidings to him. And far down the lane he threw himself on the ground and writhed in distress, saying, "Would God I could dee for her." Then he remembered that the Gaffer was dependent on him, and repeating, "Would God I could dee for her," he checked himself and got up, saying, "It maunna be; I hae ithers tae live for, God's will be dune." But again he was on his knees, praying the Lord to spare her—"Spare her, O Lord; I'll dae onything if ye'll spare her," he cried aloud to the night.

Then he went stealthily back to the window, and again heard her sounds of pain; and he crept off into the night, and sat down twenty yards away under the hedge, and fell fast asleep. When he awoke, stiff and cold, the stars were still shining, but the dawn was blushing in the distant east. He crept again to the window. All was still within the cottage, but he heard Mrs. Johnston snoring. He heard no sound from the closet.

“Can May be dead an’ her mither sleepin’?
O Lord!”

The thought was agony, and he sank down on the ground beneath the window-sill. There he sat till the day began to brighten; and, at length, within the cottage he heard Mrs. Johnston’s voice. He tapped lightly at the window, asking if God had preserved them. Did he hear aright? May had slept for two hours, and was easier. Mrs. Johnston came to the door, and standing at cautious distance, she told him that May had been very ill before she slept, and was raving about him—“Did I say that I wad hairm ma Jock? I cud wipe his feet wi’ ma hair;” and many such unreasonable things. But she had slept, and was calm again. Jock thanked God, and went and fed his horses. He was back within an hour. The doctor had said that this was the day of crisis, and Jock “cudna bide awa.”

The crisis was come, and May got over it, and got well; but slowly, slowly came returning health; and when, at the end of three or four weeks, Jock was permitted to see her again, he could scarcely recognise the idol of his affections in the lump of pinky red flesh that lay in the little bed. Of course, Whitsunday, now close at hand, must pass without their marriage. Indeed, the maiden’s severe indisposition, her narrow escape from the jaws of death, gave a seriousness to their feelings, which made the question of matrimony small and trivial, since their affection was unalienated. Indeed,

they had lost nothing of their mutual love. It was crushed, but the compression had strengthened it and bound them more closely together. Affliction had sanctified it. Now for the first time they thought of themselves not merely as living for themselves, but as actors in a changeful world—a world full of labour, care, pain, and serious things, with that solemn boundary of death. But another and still sadder trial awaited them; and it came while still the seams and scars of the last were fresh on May, and while all the strength she had acquired only enabled her with difficulty to creep into the sunshine.

Jock came home one day to dinner, and found the Gaffer awaiting him, but not Betty. The Gaffer was in great distress, for Betty had gone away early, before the old man had got out of bed, leaving a little note on the table, a very ill-scrawled note, blotted with tears, stating that she would be absent for ten days at least. This would have been enough to startle and distress the old man; but Mrs. Johnston, whom he had consulted, had confided to him her fear that Betty was about to become a mother. The old man cursed his neighbour when she said it; but next minute he was wringing his hands, believing that the fear was too truly founded. And the feeble old man and his strong rough son wept together. They were bewildered, not knowing whither she had gone. But May came in with a flood of love and light—"Tae be sure, Jock, she's gane tae Inverwick. Ye maun follow her straucht; an' whan ye

fin' her oot, speak her tenderly and bring her back. If ocht is wrang, we can bear it here wi' her for love's sake. She maunna deny ye. Tak' the road het fut, lad."

She stuffed his pockets with oat cakes. He stayed not for dinner, and with kisses she sped him on his errand of sadness and love.

It was six o'clock of the evening when Jock, fatigued with his walk, reached the town. What was he to do now that he had got there? He knew nobody, and wandered up and down the streets, staring around him, hoping to encounter his lost Betty at every corner. But he saw her not. He began to grow faint and sick. The bustling crowds, the hurrying vehicles, the unwonted cries and turmoil, and, perhaps chiefly, the want of food, all induced a feeling of weakness and despair, now that he had wandered long through the streets and seen nought of his sister. Evening, too, was growing into night, and he began to think of leaving the town and seeking shelter somewhere in the country round it. He had drawn himself feebly to the toll-bar on the Glendaldie road, when who should drive up but his master. Mr. Morris had been at the village that afternoon to enquire why Jock came not to his work, and having learned the facts, he had now come to look after and to aid his faithful ploughman. The world seemed changed by the presence of this one man. Jock instantly recovered tone both of body and mind. He told his unsuccessful wanderings. Morris communicated with

the police, and Jock was fed and put to bed ; and, I believe, now that his excitement was over, he cried himself to sleep. But in the early grey of morning he was aroused by Mr. Morris and a policeman. She of whom he was in quest had been found. Morris told him solemnly to prepare for the worst, and to set his strength in God.

“She canna hae hairmed the bairn,” Jock said, “Betty ne’er wud dae that.”

They said, “No ; but if the woman traced by the police was his sister, then she was dead.”

They brought him to a humble house in a lowly part of the old town. There was a woman at the fire-side feeding a baby with syrup. There was a low bed in the room covered with a white sheet, and under the sheet was the outline of a body. The policeman turned his bull’s-eye on the bed, and turned down the sheet ; and Jock recognised the pinched face and white cheek, more pinched and pallid now, of her, who, in her sisterly love of him, had wished to God before the midnight that she was even so—dead.

I have often wept while picturing that scene of sorrow ; but, now, will veil the sorrow with silence. The child that met Jock, and whom he took in his arms a little ago and bore to his cottage, was the baby of that morning ; and although Jock and May were married that summer, and although they have had several children, that one—“Little Betty”—is all that death has spared to them. She is the poor man’s ewe

lamb, so sorrowfully bought and nurtured, which has grown up together with him and his little ones that are gone. It eats of his meat and drinks of his cup, and lies in his bosom, and is unto him even as a daughter. Pray God that no rich man covet it.

Do you wonder that I like the rough man ?