

## CHAPTER XIII.

## KEEP TRYST: EVR BETTER LATE THAN NEVER.

Bind fast, and find fast,  
 Keep ye tryst ever ;  
 Strive weel, and thrive weel,  
 Better late than never.

Rin miles, and loup styles,  
 Keep ye tryst ever ;  
 The last whiles are first whiles,  
 Better late than never.

*Scotch Proverb.*



IN the spring time of life, when we look forward to twenty years, what an expanse of time it appears, what a vast deal do we expect to accomplish, what paragons of perfection do we expect to become, what towering monuments do we propose to rear in that time ! Alas ! when the twenty years have passed away, and we look back to the point from which we started, what a little way do we find ourselves advanced, what a poor twenty years' work have we performed ! We feel that the anticipated improvement has not been realized, we perceive that we have gained but little in the race, and would fain persuade ourselves that time has been arrested, and stands waiting on our company. This illusion is soon dispelled, however, when some full-grown man, whom you recollect a little golden-headed, chubby-cheeked urchin, and whom you used to dandle on your knee, shakes you by the hand, and in a gruff voice says, "How d'ye do, old fellow ?" Then, indeed, you begin to discover that you have been slumbering and dreaming in quiet inaction, while age has been twisting and twining his dry and withered tendrils

around you ! Then you are reminded that time and the world have been moving on, and that it is you who have been standing still !

Neither the most indefatigable individual exertion, nor the best regulated united enterprise, can at all times command success. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Man is not omnipotent, and accordingly

“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men  
Gang aft agley.”

At the conclusion of the last chapter we left our three old friends, Nairn, Walter, and the Gaberlunzie, full of spirits, and somewhat sanguine in their expectations. These expectations were from time to time disappointed, yet the friends continued with unabated and most disinterested zeal to urge their claims by repeated applications to government. They, however, still kept all their movements in search of the document connected with the heirs of Hepburn a profound secret, under the conviction that such secrecy would facilitate their recovery, if recovery was at all possible. They thought it best, also, to avoid making their application to government the subject of general gossip, knowing well that if they were unsuccessful the world would laugh at their dreamy expectations, and sagely remark, “That the auld fools<sup>o</sup> could expect nae better.”

Time rolled on, and the veterans became every day older. The Gaberlunzie, who, notwithstanding all his exertions, could discover no traces of Champfleur, or of the documents necessary to prove the marriage of Hepburn, still felt a conviction, which he could not account for, that one day or other both would be secured. Accordingly, he wandered about, now at Kelpie Cleugh, now at Edinburgh, now keeping the country villages alive with droll anecdote and tale, now bringing relief to the sorrowful and the needy in the quiet and retired places, where unobtrusive misery always seeks a home. During all his wanderings his eye was almost unconsciously open to the slightest dawn of light that promised, however faintly, to lead to the discovery of the villain Champfleur, and the much desiderated papers. Many a wild goose chase had he thus been led ; many a place had he idly visited ; many a repertory of musty parchments and old papers had he ransacked ; and many antiquarian friends, who were in the habit of collecting

and preserving such commodities, had he bored for leave to examine their collections of MS. A thousand strange vagaries, in short, very uncommon in a sedate person of his grave years, did he commit; clinging to the belief that, notwithstanding the repeated disappointments he met with, he would ultimately be successful.

My uncle's friends, the Whigs, were in office but a very short time, when they were displaced by the party to which Nairn belonged, these being again in turn ousted by the former. My uncle had, as we have seen, promises from his party that they would lend him their assistance; but even supposing they had been serious in their intentions (which was much questioned by Nairn), they were not given time to fulfil them; while the first act of their successors was to throw aside all the half-formed measures of the previous cabinet which they could lay their hands on; so that, what between the expensive war in which the country was at that time involved, and the squabbles of opposing parties, the claims of Nairn, though backed by the energy of my uncle, were never brought prominently forward.

The two friends continued notwithstanding to live in hope. They wished to be successful, and we soon learn to hope what we wish. They still continued to ply their respective parties with memorials and petitions as they came alternately into office; and as now the Whigs displaced the Tories, and now the Tories turned out the Whigs, a perpetual war of jibing, jeering, and bickering was carried on between the two companions. Nairn beat up for his party, Walter canvassed for his, and each thus neutralized, to a certain extent, the exertions of the other. When Nairn's friends went out, Nairn's petitions were pitched down the backstairs by Walter's party, simply because they had been brought up by their predecessors; and when Walter's friends were turned out, they carried Walter's petitions along with them; so that, although the companions kept plying both sides of the House, they made but small progress towards their object, being jostled aside by each party in turn with very little ceremony. Every new disappointment, however, had the effect only of increasing their assiduity; every additional obstacle that was thrown in their way, they endeavoured to surmount by renewed exertions. At an early hour every morning, when his friends were in power, did my uncle call at the post-office, expecting with every post to re-

## THE GABERLUNZIE'S WALLET.

ceive intelligence that the much hoped for bill was to be introduced. When Nairn's party again was in power, Nanny was to be seen making her way to the same quarter in the cold winter mornings ; for the Laird had now got old and stiff, and his ancient handmaiden, whose influence over him was daily increasing, would on no account allow him to go abroad before breakfast. Corporation dinners and council feasts were still occasionally given, and although the old men were not so fond of attending them as they had been, they were still occasionally to be seen, on these great occasions, seated among their younger fellow-townsmen, by all of whom they were looked on as models worthy of imitation, as ancient citizens whose excellent character was sufficient passport to universal respect and veneration. At all these meetings, of course, Nairn's claims formed a topic of conversation ; and could the matter have been decided by the local authorities of Edinburgh, instead of the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain, Nairn would very speedily have been Laird of Keith. Unfortunately, however, for the parties interested, the fiat of the local dignitaries was here of no avail, and matters rested still on the same footing, although the mere habit of thinking and talking about the business at these social meetings, as well as between themselves, still kept up a dreamy hope in the breasts of the two friends, that, on some day or other, and in some way hidden from them at present, they were destined to be entirely successful.

In this manner had matters gone on for the long period of twenty years which had elapsed between the Gaberlunzie's first call at my uncle's shop in the Parliament Square, and his visit to Kelpie Cleugh in company with myself, as already described in the early chapters of this story. Conceiving this a favourable opportunity, I shall here take the liberty of obtruding such circumstances of my personal history as will show my connection with the incidents and parties who figure in this narrative, and how I had become so intimately associated, and on such friendly and familiar terms, with the Gaberlunzie.

In an early part of this narrative, I stated that I had been left an orphan, and had been brought up by my uncle and aunt. A confession will also be found there, that, while yet very young, I had become attached to Mary, the eldest daughter of the farmer of Kelpie Cleugh. How this came about will be best explained by the following brief autobiographical sketch.

Mary, then a child, had been in Edinburgh with her mother, when they were first introduced to Nairn and my uncle by the Gaberlunzie. At that time Nairn had been so much amused and delighted with the child, that he besought her mother to allow her, when old enough, to come and attend the schools in Edinburgh and reside with him. The former readily agreeing to the proposal, Mary was sent into town on attaining her tenth year. I was two years older, and at that time resided with my uncle, Walter Hepburn, and his sister, my aunt. Nairn being then on intimate terms with the former, Mary and I frequently went to school together, and being a regular Edinburgh gutter-blood, and moreover well acquainted with all the choicest walks about the city, I was wont, on the Saturday afternoons, when the school was closed, to roam with her about the skirts of the town, now breaking into some forbidden enclosure to procure her some tempting flower; now plunging into some stream to catch for her some little glittering specimen of the finny tribe, and generally performing such gallant exploits as spirited young gentlemen of twelve delight in achieving for fair-haired, blue-eyed damsels of ten. Mary left the city while she was yet a girl, and I had not seen her from that time till my arrival at Kelpie Cleugh, when, as will be remembered, I was so much struck by her matured charms, and had my jealousy so much excited by the sly bantering of my old friend the Gaberlunzie. At that time I had just entered on my twenty-first year, and had newly completed an apprenticeship as a lawyer's clerk, with an old friend of my uncle's, who resided in Ramsay Gardens, Castle Hill, then the most aristocratic portion of the Old Town. My master, who was an experienced man of the world, and a shrewd lawyer, had instructed me as far as he could into the mysteries of the profession. But as I could take no interest in the dull technicalities of the law, I was by no means an anxious student, and gave promise of turning out but a poor lawyer. The enthusiastic outpourings of the Gaberlunzie's poetical spirit had far more attractions for me than anything I could find in Erskine's Institutes; while the old stories and old songs of the old man, and the rhapsodies of patriotism which he poured out, all tended to inspire me with feelings of the deepest veneration for his character.

Entertaining such sentiments, it was not to be wondered at, that, although I did not disgrace myself by any very repre-

hensible negligence, I gave but little satisfaction to my employer. I was fonder of imitating the Gaberlunzie in song writing than of copying the law-papers of my master. The old man had often, even when praising my poetical attempts, warned me against trusting to my literary efforts for a subsistence, and advised me to apply myself with all diligence to the profession by which I was to earn my livelihood. Notwithstanding this advice, however, I found my legal knowledge miserably deficient at the termination of my apprenticeship, and I was sore dispirited and cast down. Neither my uncle nor aunt had ever held out any hope that they would leave me any part of their fortune; but, on the contrary, had been always counselling me to rely on my own exertions for my success in life. They said, "We hae done a' we can for you; we hae gien ye a gude education, wi' a money-makin' trade on your finger ends; and as we hae a number of puir relations, wha hae neither the tane nor the tither, we think they hae mair need than you o' ony little thing we may hae to leave ahint us."

This was disheartening enough, and had the effect of making me very melancholy, so that at times, after being favoured with one of these long lectures, which my uncle and aunt used to read me, and contemplating the probability of being a briefless barrister, I used to indulge in long gloomy reveries. The form of Mary had never been absent from my mind, and her image was mingled more or less with all my hopes and anticipations for the future. That my passion was pure and disinterested was evinced by the fact, that I had not the most distant idea that her family had any expectations, or that she was any other than the daughter of a poor, but honest, moorland farmer. When on my arrival at Kelpie Cleugh I found my charmer so much improved in appearance, and surrounded by so many kind friends, my future prospects rose before me in a darker and more appalling form. I felt for the first time truly miserable, that I could not look forward with certainty to any likelihood of being able to support a wife comfortably; and I could not expect that Mary would leave her happy home, and accept as a husband one who could only provide her with some attic room in a pent-up city. But I digress, as I always do, when I think or talk on this dear but dangerous topic.

One day when the Courts were up, and my apprenticeship out, and while uncertain whether or not I was to be retained

in my late master's employment, as I was sitting in the chimney corner in my uncle's house, poring over some new novel, the Gaberlunzie entered. The old man was about to set out on one of his journeys, and had called to bid us good-by, and to inquire whether my relatives had any commands for Kelpie Cleugh, which he intended visiting.

"No, I think not," replied my aunt; "unless it be just to gie them my best respects and best thanks for that last delightfu' cheese they sent us. Od, Walter, I think," she continued, as a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and looking first at my uncle and then at me, "od, I think that callant," meaning me, "is looking unco dowie an' dwining like, an' I think ye might do waur, gudeman, than tak him out wi' ye to Kelpie Cleugh, gin ye are gaun that way. The air o' the muirs will refresh him, and our friend Mr Braxholme will maybe gie him a' gun, an' let him try his skill among the moorfowl, they're unco plenty there awa, an' I haena seen ony for an age. He hasna a bad ee in his head, and he might maybe send us a brace or twa to keep us in mind o' him. What say ye, Watty?"

"Indeed," said my uncle, "I think it's no a bad move, Matty, gin it's no saddling our friend here wi' ower troublesome a companion, although I fear the bit silly spindle-shankit callant wad ne'er be able to keep up wi' our sturdy lang-legged friend. He wad be lost in the muirs, or drowned maybe in some bog-hole or anither."

"Feint a fear o' him," said the Gaberlunzie; "he's willing, I see, and we'll mak him able. So start ye up, youngster, throw off thae thin trash o' shoon, put on a pair o' gude thick double-soled anes on your feet, and hap your legs wi' a pair o' gude rig-and-fur stockings. Tak your uncle's staff there, gin ye haena anither at hand, an' I'll lead ye safe to Kelpie Cleugh, ower muirs, through mosses, and by bog-holes deep enough to droon a kirk steeple."

Happy was I to find myself on the eve of leaving behind me the town, the law, and all connected with them for a time, and I had almost forgot to give a parting salute to my dear aunt, so eager was I to get away with my friend of the staff and the wallet. In a twinkling I was ready for the march, and having been admonished and advised in the usual manner by my respected relatives, the Gaberlunzie and I started for the moors, and had reached the middle of the Lang Whang, where, as

described in the first chapter, we were overtaken by and exposed to a violent storm, till we found shelter beneath the hospitable roof of Kelpie Cleugh.

On the fourth morning after we had left home, as my aunt was busy toasting some bread for my uncle's breakfast, a task she would entrust to no other hands than her own; and as my uncle, just after having completed his toilet, had sat down to read his favourite paper, the *Caledonian Mercury*, Nanny, Nairn's housekeeper, burst in upon them in her morning cap and wrapper, breathless with haste, and for some time unable to say what had brought her in such a tremendous hurry, and in such a state of wild excitement. After some time she recovered breath and composure enough to say, "Come awa doun, baith o' ye; come awa doun to the Laird; leave your breakfast an' a'thing else. Heaven kens what's the matter wi' him, but I think he has gaen demented. He was busy shaving hissel' this morning when the postman came to the door wi' a great muckle letter wi' a seal on't as braid as the croon o' your hat, Mr Hepburn, an' when I took it to him he threw doun his razor, coupit his shaving water, an' tore open the letter, an' after glintin' ower't, startit to his feet, exclaimin', 'God be praised, he's caught at last! Whaur's the Gaberlunzie? Whaur is Walter Hepburn? Rin, Nanny, as fast as your feet'll carry you, and tell him and his sister to come doun to me instanter. Quick, quick, rin for your life, and tell them to come here immediately; tell them I have great news for them;' and wi' that he shot me out at the door, and here I am, a bonny fright to be seen, so ye maun come awa directly; ne'er heed your breakfast, you'll get share o' his when ye come doun; sae come awa for gudesake, or he'll be out o' his judgment, an' I'll rin doun afore ye an' keep him right or ye come."

The brother and sister followed as fast after as they could; and when they reached the door of the Mint, the Laird stood ready to receive them, seized each of them by a hand, and hurrying them into his parlour, thrust a letter into my aunt's hands, saying, "Read, madam, read for our edification, for I am so flurried I know not what I am doing or saying." My aunt, adjusting her spectacles, opened the letter, which was from —, the late member for the city, and now one of the Cabinet Council, and read aloud:—



*“ Downing Street.*

“ WILLIAM NAIRN, Esq.

“ SIR,—I have the pleasure of informing you that, along with several others similarly circumstanced, your petition, as heir to James Hepburn of Keith, for restoration of the estate of Keith, forfeited in the Rebellion of 1745, has been for some time under the consideration of the Cabinet Council, and that, with consent of his Most Gracious Majesty, it is the intention of his Majesty's ministers to bring immediately before Parliament a measure, which, if carried, will be favourable to the prayer of your petition. In some cases, and yours appears to be one of these, the estates have been disposed of. But in such events equivalent properties in some other quarter will be granted. This generosity will be extended to all those who can prove themselves the heirs-at-law of the expatriated rebels, and who are willing to swear allegiance to his present Most Gracious Majesty. This information has not as yet been sent to any of the other applicants; but as the Government feel confident, from the present disposition of the country generally, and from the large majorities which ministers can command in both Houses, that the measure will become the law of the land, it has been considered becoming to show how the present administration appreciate the valuable services of so long and tried a friend as yourself, by giving you this early intelligence regarding a subject in which you are so deeply interested.—I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

“ Private and Confidential.”

“ Since writing the above, the Secretary of State for the Home Department has informed me, that a criminal lately condemned to death for forgery, has made confession of a long catalogue of crimes, and, amongst these, of his having swindled an old Scottish gentleman of the name of Blackburn, to whose daughter he was to have been married, out of his estate. The criminal avers, that among several treasonable documents which he obtained on that occasion, and with which he terrified the old man into the consignment of the property to him, there was a certificate of the marriage of James Hepburn of Keith with Susan Forrester, in the year 1740; that he had long kept these papers, lest at any time any of Blackburn's friends should have accused him, when he could have threatened them with an

exposure of the old gentleman's treasonable communications. He also confesses that he has lived a most dissipated life on the Continent and elsewhere; that latterly he had visited Scotland, and that having been in very reduced circumstances, he had sold the certificate above alluded to for a trifle to a person whom he met in Carnwath, and whom he calls a Scottish Jew; that this person was induced to purchase it, by being told that it might prove of great value, if ever Government restored the confiscated estates to the descendants of those who had been engaged in the rebellion, when he might either extract a sum of money from Hepburn's nearest heir, to suppress this certificate, or advertise it and sell it at a high price to some one who might be able to prove descent from this marriage.

"Such is the substance of the criminal's confessions on this subject; and although it appears partly, if not altogether, an invention, yet as some documents connected with Blackburn were found on the unhappy criminal, there seems some reason to believe that there may be a portion of truth in what he so strongly avers. It will therefore be necessary for the Government, before proceeding farther with your claim, to advertise for this document, and have the circumstance of the marriage either confirmed or disproved.

"I have written thus freely to you, trusting you will take such steps as will enable you to meet this statement with contradictory proof sufficiently strong to substantiate your own claims; and although your business has been long in being arranged, be assured it has been through no lack of exertion nor good will on my part, nor on that of my colleagues, who entertain the highest respect for your character.

"Allow me again to subscribe myself yours very respectfully," &c. &c.

"Weel," said my aunt, after she had finished reading the letter, "what think ye o' that? Ye see the Nairn ball hasna been a'thegither thrown awa. 'Cast your bread on the waters, and in many days hence ye shall find it.' God bless our late member; he has a lang memory, and doesna forget auld freen's. Od, Watty, gin I were you I wad turn Tory yet. Now, what's to be done?"

"Ay, that's the question," said my uncle; "the villain, the

heartless and accursed villain's caught at last. Here is the Gaberlunzie's words verified, that vice wad one day meet its punishment, and virtue its reward. What can be done?"

"I feel so fluttered and excited," said Nairn, "that I am incapable just now of coming to any resolution; so advise me, my dear friends. Come, Miss Hepburn, your fertile brain will at once suggest a course, and I have no doubt a proper one."

"Weel, then, if ye will be guided by me," replied Miss Hepburn, "I wad advise that Walter gae wa' doun instantly, as there's no a moment to lose, to Luckie Birlie, at the Hole o' the Wa', and hire ane o' her new light twa-horse chaises; it'll haud us a' three brawly. We'll catch the Gaberlunzie at Kelpie Cleugh, and that's on the way to Carnwath, whaur the villain said he had sold the certificate to the Scotch Jew; deil be in his fause French heart to ca' ony Scot a Jew. Set ye awa, then, Walter; the roads will be maistly clear o' snaw noo, sae we'll get out some way; and naebody can do our business sae weel's oursel's. The Gaberlunzie's the man to find out the person wha bought the document frae the villain, though how the French ne'er-do-weel could be here in Scotland, and escape our freend's ee, passes my comprehension. The Town Guard, backed by three new shirra-officers, ken naething ava till him. So let's awa, Watty; ye'll gang and order the shay; tell them to gie the horses a gude feed o' corn. The Laird an' I will gang up-by, whaur breakfast's a' ready waiting us; and, Nanny, ye'll bring up after us your master's trotcozy an' hapwarm, and we'll be aff in a jiffy."

"Said I not truly, Willie," exclaimed my uncle, "when I said that our Matty was a match for us both?" and he gave his sister a gentle slap on the shoulder, as he hurried out of the apartment with great agility.

The Laird and Matty were following, when they were peremptorily stopt by Nanny, who, addressing her master, exclaimed, "Bide ye noo; what for wad ye gang out in a frosty morning like this wi' your thin shoon without clogs?" and she stooped down and put the articles she named on his feet, saying, "They'll keep ye frae sliding; mind auld banes are no easily mended."

In the course of another hour they were all three on their way to Kelpie Cleugh, snugly packed in one of Luckie Birlie's two-horse chaises.