

JUSTICE.

POLICE Constable Donald Grant was not happy. He walked along the shore road deep in thought. Even when the cook at Fernbank threw him a surreptitious kiss from the kitchen window, he barely looked up.

What was the use of going on? he thought. Every day was the same. No home life at all. His wife eternally scrubbing and scolding, never dressed except on Sundays, and then—well, the less said about that the better.

A trollop! "Might as well be in the black hole of Calcutta" he kept on saying. To add to his misery there were promotions going, and he was not one of the lucky ones. "Always the same," he said. Why he married the woman he did not know. She was Ayrshire and he was Skye. It served him right. He should have married someone who understood the Gaelic. And still she was trig and pretty in those far-off courting days. What had happened to make her lose taste in herself he did not know. Work! Work! Work! Never a smile.

There had been rows, but he always came off second best. His English was good but slow. Her's was bad but it flowed like a river in spate. He might give her a good row in Gaelic, but what would be the use? She would never understand a word.

To go home!—even the thought of it made his heart like lead. He knew what it would be: "Clean your

boots on the mat, mind! Don't put your cap on the lobby table; it's just newly polished! There y'are, the tab o' your jacket broken again; I don't know hoo often I've mended it. An' me wi' a fine nicht's darnin' in front o' me, holes, holes, holes; I never kent a man wi' sic feet; you would need six women to look efter you. No! the tea's no' ready; you'll jist hae to sit doon an' wait; I'm no' exactly a machine; orderin' me about as if I was a galley slave."

The thought of it all made him bitter. He clenched his fist and unconsciously quickened his pace. "I'll finish it this very night," he kept saying. "I'll be master in my own house. I've heard my father say that women were just like nettles; you had to take a grip of them."

It was not too late yet. He was not going to lie down to it. His courage grew. The things he was going to say kept racing through his head. He was astonished at his own eloquence. If he could only remember them all!

At the end of the road he turned. He would go straight home now and finish it. His jaw was set. He stepped out rapidly. He would speak to no one lest the mood should go off him. She would know this very night the kind of man he was.

At the bend of the road he noticed a little crowd on the shore. Joining it, he found a tramp lying drunk and helpless, the head of a hen protruding from his jacket lining. "Here, you!" Donald shouted, giving him a shake. Not a muscle moved, no response of any kind.

At first he thought of leaving him and going on home before his temper had had time to cool. But it was

a clear case, no getting out of it. Besides, it was his first arrest for over a year, and would be a feather in his cap.

He sent for the pier barrow. The tramp was hoisted up. Donald planned it all out as the little crowd moved towards his house, which was also the police station. He would back the barrow in, and up-end it. It would be an easy matter then to trail the tramp into the cell. While proceeding to put the plan into execution, someone appeared in the door, suddenly and dramatically.

“What’s this you’re up to?” she asked.

He replied with commendable restraint. “A prisoner—a tramp—drunk and incapable—likewise in possession of stolen property.”

“And whaur ye gan to pit him?” she queried further.

“In the cell, of course,” he said sternly.

“In the cell!” she screeched, “I’ll cell ye, I will; ye’ll pit nae dirty tramp in ma clean cell, efter me washin’ an’ scourin’ at it for a hale ’oor! D’ye think I’m a galley slave? Ma clean cell! I like that. Awa’ ye go—tak’ yer dirty tramp oot o’ this an’ pit him whaur ye got him.”

She steamed with rage.

There was a crowd gathering. “Ma clean cell,” she kept repeating, “ma clean cell!”

It was a flowing tide against which Donald was helpless. Without protest he turned the barrow slowly and made for the shore. There they up-ended it. The tramp slid gently on to a bed of dry seatangle, where he lay, serene, oblivious. Not a word was spoken.

Donald went home—quietly.