

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CHURCH—PARISH—ANTI-BURGHES—FREE.

Forty years ago there were three churches in the village and party spirit was at fever heat. For many years the Parish Church had proved sufficient for the spiritual wants of the district, but when the wind of Secession arose it blew on Kennethcreek, and in due time other churches were raised to battle against the National Zion in the cause of religion. Some one has said that competition is the life of trade, and, if I am not applying a too commercial term to the sacred duties of the ministry, I am inclined to think that it is the life of religion. I found it so in Kennethcreek. Two-thirds of the Christian warfare was due to animosity. The Parish Church existed because it was necessary; the other ships of the Christian fleet were kept afloat by the ballast of self-sacrifice; were impelled by the winds of a somewhat questionable party spleen; and were borne on the waves of bigotry and unreason. And yet the flag of "peace on earth, goodwill to men" floated at every mast-head!

The Auld Kirk stood in the Main Street; the Anti-Burgher structure occupied a position at the junction of the Shirra's Brae and Loom Lane, and the Free Church was erected just at

the north end of the village, on the road leading into Rockburgh. Thus it was that a considerable distance lay between the houses of prayer. If the three churches had owned the one authority their positions might have been seen to more advantage in the Christian work of the parish. The day may come, however, when the little differences of opinion may be righted, and then the villagers will be able to say "all things work in the end for good."

Although the Parish Church was known as "St Mary's," you are not to suppose that the villagers were Papists. Nothing was further from their idea of religion than Roman Catholicism. Once the officiating priest at St Cuthbert's, in Rockburgh, was seen in Kennethcrook. That event is on record. It lingers among the incidents of unwritten history, and is enshrined in the romance of oral tradition. He had come to visit the relic of the departed glory of his once proud church. Mistaking his ground, or desirous of seeing how great the beadle's knowledge was of the saints of his communion, he enquired in his kindest tones whether that official would show him the church of the blessed Virgin.

If the beadle was anything he was a Covenanter, and his reply is indicative of the man—

"Papistry, na! there's nae Papistry here, nor nae room for priests. Ye'd better gang yer gate, an' bide in yer ain toon-end, ense fire'll come doon frae heaven and burn us up, as it did Sodom o' auld."

The priest (good soul that he was) did not deem himself worthy of being mistaken for his

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 75

most Satanic majesty, and quietly withdrew from the home of his fathers.

There are many pleasing memories hovering around St Mary's. It figures prominently in the annals of the Scottish Church, and plays a noteworthy part in civil history. If its walls could speak, much they could tell to interest and amuse of days and manners that have passed unnoted. I cannot say that I have any decided leanings towards the Church of Rome, but I have a kindly interest in this link of the once mighty chain that bound Scotland to the Papedom. Once a year—at the mid-winter communion—there is an evening service in the church, and I never see the lighted windows without my mind carrying me back in thought to the time immediately preceding the Reformation. In fancy's eye I see the lighted fane, its long windows shining far o'er the broad carse land. Within, I see the embroidered altar-cloth of rare design and richly wrought; the sacred candles shedding their holy sheen upon the sacred walls; and the costly statuettes keeping ward and watch like gods to save the church. With fancy's ear I listen to the weird and solemn chant that rises from the chancel steps, where kneel the devoted chorister boys. From the dusky wreaths of incense smoke, my mind returns to this hurrying nineteenth century, but as I am recalled from my fancy's flight, it is to realise that there was something sublimely grand, at least, in the gorgeous ritual of the pre-Reformation Church.

Knox preached at St Mary's on his march

from Perth to Edinburgh, and from that event Kennethcrook was Protestant. The pulpit from which the reformer preached may still be seen in the museum at Rockburgh. With every succeeding generation the kirk has become more remotely related, in semblance as in worship, to its first creed and ritual. Reaction is setting in, I am told, and already some of the members are speaking about an organ. These members are strangers to the village and its ways. Ah! what ignorance sometimes leads us to. If they only knew the people as I know them, they would think well before they spoke of instrumental music. The men who stormed the Kirk-session, protested in Presbytery, appealed to Synod, and threatened the General Assembly, over the introduction of "human hymns," are not the men to tolerate a "kist o' whistles." If all stories are true there are harps in heaven, and if any man has a desire to sweep the chords in the courts of Paradise, I charge him, by all that he hopes to attain to, never to attempt to graduate as an instrumentalist by encouraging the introduction of an organ in Kennethcrook. The villagers are pronounced Covenanters. Only a week ago I heard the beadle defending the position the congregation assumed on the introduction of hymns, and the position they are likely to assume if the proposal for instrumental music is pressed.

"We care naething at a' for hymns," said John, "naething at a'. Sae lang's we've got the Psaulms of Dauvid and the Paraphrases, we manage fine."

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 77*

“Ay,” said John’s opponent, “that’s a’ right enough, but ye ken ye’re Bible as weel’s me, and ye mau ken that it speaks about praising God wi’ psalms, and hymns, and speeritual sangs; and foreby, it says that there’s to be harps in heaven.”

“Juist so,” returned the worthy beadle, quite disposed to admit the relevancy of the argument; “juist so, the folk in heaven can dae what they like on thae points, but we’ll no hae it here on ony account.”

John’s position is the position of very many. The Kennethcrook folks like the simple ways in which their fathers worshipped.

The interior of the Parish Kirk was nothing very attractive. Its fine features of architectural beauty were marred to a great extent by the rigid Presbyterianism that took possession of the building after the Reformation. A gallery—the “laft” as the Kennethcrook folks termed it—went right round the structure, providing accommodation for several hundred of worshippers. The place was essentially the Parish Kirk, and Kennethcrook Parish had a somewhat extended area. It was a fine sight to see the church on a summer Sabbath—every pew filled. Even the secessions did not take from it a continual decrease in attendance. They hurt it for a time, but the church soon regained its feet. It is seldom that you will see the church filled now, but that is owing to the decrease in the inhabitants of the village. There is little that calls for description in St Mary’s; indeed, there is little that calls for description in any of the churches.

Plain folks the villagers were, and they liked plain kirks. It was not a beautiful service that the earnest Christians of Kennethcrook cared for, and I sometimes think that, if they had those who now-a-days cry for beautiful worship, they would make short work of them. It was a long sermon that the villager of long ago was anxious for, and I shall tell you more of long sermons some other time.

The Anti-Burgher Kirk was built about a hundred years ago. For some time after the religious dispute the Seceders attended the original Secession Church at Rockburgh, but when the disruption worthies parted asunder and formed themselves into Burghers and Anti-Burghers, it was found that the Burghers were in the majority, and they, consequently, retained the church at Rockburgh. For various reasons, but chiefly from a desire to be as distantly separated from their brother seceders as was conveniently possible, the Anti-Burghers built their kirk in Kennethcrook.

It is an unpretentious building, and the features of its architecture are suited to the opinions of its people. Its whitewashed walls are relieved by four windows. These windows are the only adornments of the structure, if adornments they can be called. They are filled with frosted glass, and a border of red-and-yellow relieves their otherwise sombre appearance. You may say that it is scarcely necessary for me to be so minute, but I mention the coloured border because it figures prominently in a miniature secession in which one woman

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 79*

was the seceder. Jean Wilkie, for such was her name, died a staunch member of the Parish Kirk.

Jean was among those who left the mother church, and with them she walked into Rookburgh every Sabbath morning. When the Original Seceders disagreed, Jean was on the side of the Anti-Burghers, and, as their numbers were not many, had some voice in the erection of a church. She was plain to an extreme in regard to church embellishment, and objected on principle to stained glass. She protested against the coloured borders for the windows, and as her idea of propriety was not entertained, made application for her lines of membership. The minister tried to persuade her against her extreme views, but all influence availed not. She took her lines to the minister of the Parish Church, and laid them before him with the plea to be admitted to membership, emphasizing her action with the words, "They can say what they like, but I'd rather hae the gless as God made it."

Despite her action she had still a liking for the Church of the Secession, and, although she never returned to its communion, gave orders for interment in the Anti-Burgher kirkyard. And there she sleeps the sleep of the just, with the irreligious windows frowning upon her grave.

After 1843 the village received another ecclesiastical structure. The Free Churchmen had to build a place of worship for themselves. Taking the Burghers' and Anti-Burghers' seces-

sion as a precedent, they, on the grounds that they were in the majority, protested against their brethren remaining in possession of St Mary's. The protest was lodged in and debated by the various church courts, but, being unsettled by the church judicatories, found its way to the Court of Session, and, ultimately, to the House of Lords, with the result that the building was retained as a State Church. From the House of Lords there was no appeal, and, dissatisfied and disheartened, the Seceders were forced to face the task of erecting a new church. With the protracted litigation they had an empty exchequer, but a bold effort on the part of every member swelled the fund to a respectable extent. During the collection of the money, they met in the hall which belonged to the Anti-Burghers. In due time they set themselves to the erection of a church. A site was obtained at the north end of the Main Street, on the road leading into Rockburgh, and thereon was raised the monument to the martyrdom of 1843. The most modern of the three churches, it forms the one outstanding feature of the village. It surpasses in appearance the unpretending form of its Anti-Burgher sister, and the ageing ruin of its mother. The Parish Church had a clock. When the Free Church was erected its style of architecture included a spire, and its sagacious upholders left a place for a recorder of time. But that place is empty still, and the hours fly unchallenged by the Free Kirk spire.

I have already told you how church connection and family names marked the villagers out.



## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 81

Church connection was always a knotty point in Kennethcreek. In our local parliament and court of higher criticism men of all shades of religious opinion blended, and very often their arguments were toned by their adherency to State Church, Anti-Burgher, or Free. So long as anything said did not encroach upon the sacred rights of any church there was a voice of unanimity in the proceedings. But the moment the line was crossed, and the connection with the State of the Parish Church, or the soundness of doctrine in the Anti-Burgher Kirk, or the unbending creed of the Free Church was imperilled, the upholders of the sect assailed came down upon the speaker. I used to be of opinion that whenever words failed any of our Parliamentarians in discussing the subject under immediate consideration, they lost no time in getting into position for an attack on one of the two churches to which they did not belong. There was some diplomacy in their speech, and they generally managed to cover their digression with success. I have heard an argument begun on the repeal of the Corn Laws, and, after a few minutes' explanation as to the iniquities of the existing measures, a simile drawn between these and the civil encroachments upon the Parish Church. Once into the perennial subject, the speaker could hold the meeting for an hour.

Narrowness of spirit has always been characteristic of our village folk. I believe the ministers were in some measure accountable for this. Not so very long ago I was present at a

public celebration held in connection with the Free Church on the occasion of its having reached some special year in its existence, and the opening psalm seemed to say that a narrow-mindedness can still claim existence. The psalm sung was the second version of the one-hundred-and-twenty-fourth. This is exactly how matters stood four decades ago. When the case of church retention was finally settled in the House of Lords some hard things were said by the '43 seceders. At the time when the Anti-Burghers agreed to enter the fold of the United Presbyterian Church, unfeeling things were said by the Parish Kirk folks, and these were ratified by the Frees. At the present day, of course, things do go more smoothly than they did long ago, and the one church looks upon the existence of the others as something to be suffered. And so the spiritual supervision of our parish is accomplished.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE VILLAGE MINISTERS.

OF the many villagers who went to college, not one was called to Kennethcrook. It may have been that no one was available when a vacancy occurred, or it may have been that no villager ever applied for a place. What was to blame for it I do not know, but there is one thing certain, and that is that never a son of Kennethcrook was placed in any of the village kirks.

The Reverend Thomas MacThomas was parish minister forty years ago. He was a typical Auld Kirk minister from two points of view: from that of Establishment and that of Dissent. No Anti-Burgher ever saw any good in a parish minister. There were Anti-Burghers in Kennethcrook: Mr MacThomas was a parish minister. The voice of unfriendly dissent was strengthened after the troublous times of 1843. Our parish minister stood by his church in the dark days of that great secession. When a deputation of non-Intrusionists waited on him, and asked him to defend their cause in the interests of the protestors against State interference, he met them kindly and said he would consider the matter. The Sabbath after Chalmers and Welsh marched from the Assembly

Hall with the other fathers of the Free Church behind them, Mr MacThomas made this intimation to his people—I give it as constant oral tradition has kept it alive, and in the best English that John MacDiarmid, the beadle, could command :—

“ We have come to a critical time. We have now to decide upon one of two courses. Throughout this conflict I have never attempted to persuade you either the one way or the other, nor do I intend to do so now. The case before us is the liberty of conscience, and whilst the war is being waged I pray that you may never lose sight of the point at issue. It is the liberty of conscience. A mysterious Providence has seen fit to divide our church, and He alone kens to what end that division is a means. I commend you all to His keeping. Choose the path your conscience directs. As for me and my house we abide by the Kirk.”

“ Weel dune,” said a voice in the front of the laft after the minister had spoken, but only an unsympathetic moan rose from the body of the church.

Two-thirds of the people joined the ranks of the Dissenting army, but the minister stood firm. In a moment of religious devotion, when their souls were wrapped in the sweetness of the liberty of conscience, and when their lives seemed to be touched to the issue of the prayer, “ Help us to love our neighbours as ourselves,” I have heard Free Churchmen sneeringly remark — “ Ay! MacThomas stood by his kirk for its stipen’.” The charge

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 85

is a base one. No purer soul ever spoke the eternal truths to the purest dissenting congregation, than the parish minister of Kennethcrook. His *Alma Mater* crowned his age with the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity, and his Church recognised his worth by calling him to fill the moderator's chair in its General Assembly. It is nearly thirty years since he was laid to sleep beneath the shadow of the church he loved so well. There is a story told of a Highlander who, when asked at dinner where the head of the table was, replied, "Whereffer ta MacGregor is, tat is ta head of ta table." In like manner I would write wherever saintly Dr MacThomas is, there is heaven.

Although Dr MacThomas was an object of evil to the Anti-Burghers, he enjoyed the friendly intercourse of their minister. The Reverend Robert Turnbull was called to Kennethcrook shortly after receiving license at the hands of the Glasgow Presbytery. He was bordering on sixty when I came to know him, and thirty-five years of that life had been passed in the village. He was adored by his people. The worst fault they had against him was that he spoke to the parish minister. He was familiarly known as "Trummell" (Turnbull was an unknown name in Kennethcrook), and got along fairly well in his work, He was not eloquent as a preacher, but he had one virtue which appealed to the sympathies of his congregation;—he was a Covenanter in every sense of the term. Indeed, I sometimes think that his flock pastured more on the fields of the Scottish Covenants than in

Bible lands. He had a list of days which he held in veneration—the anniversaries of the battles of Drumclog and Airdsmoss, and of the martyrdoms of Guthrie and the Wigton martyrs. Year after year as these days came round, he preached appropriate sermons and exhorted his hearers to be steadfast even as their fathers had been steadfast. And they were. If one of the three churches was more than the other closely allied to the traditions of the Covenant, that one was the Anti-Burgher kirk. The congregation watched for the different anniversaries, and joined heartily in the different observances. Yet, in that congregation were the men who would have deposed any divine who would have dared to speak of Good Friday, Easter, or Christmas in any other than depreciatory terms.

As a man, Mr Turnbull was not what you would have expected. Few Anti-Burgher ministers ever spoke to anyone outside their own congregation. Mr Turnbull had a word for everybody. Around the Parish Minister and the Free Kirk Divine there were cloaks of austerity that repelled the young people of the village. Rather than meet the minister they would turn up wynds and back roads, or else turn and traverse the way they had come. Perhaps Mr Turnbull was cognizant of this. He made himself as free as he could with the children, and they used to run to him when they saw him. But the company of an Anti-Burgher minister may not always be the best. I have known of children having been severely scolded for having gone after Mr Turnbull. It may

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 87*

have been reverence rather than displeasure that incited the reprimand.

Mr Turnbull was of a benevolent disposition, and whenever charity was required his donation was forthcoming. Nor in this did he confine his doings to his own church. Many a time has his name appeared in lists that had no connection with the Anti-Burghers.

During his term of ministry he had one or two eruptions, but the greatest blow he sustained was the action which led to his resignation. The Anti-Burgher flock, perhaps more than any other, denied its minister absolute sovereignty.

For some time the idea of merging with the United Presbyterian body had been debated by the Kennethcreek Anti-Burghers. At the first re-union, when the United Presbyterian Church assumed its position, our villagers took no part and for some time Kennethcreek, in common with one or two other places, was loyal to the Anti-Burgher Synod. But one of those events which overtake folks almost unconsciously happened to the members of the Anti-Burgher Kirk. They began to discuss among themselves the probable good that might be derived from a connection with a greater church, and soon the occasional conversation resolved itself into a question under consideration by the Session. The minister assumed a position in common with that taken up by his friend, Dr MacThomas, in the great secession of 1843. He never tried to persuade his people either to one course or to another, evidently thinking that their own choice

would prove the better way. An overture made to the Presbytery of Rockburgh was cordially entertained, and a message of welcome by that reverend court was sent to the Anti-Burgher Session. Nor did Mr Turnbull say a word. All things were ready for the transference of the congregation from the one Synod to the other, and then Mr Turnbull tendered his resignation. It startled the congregation to the reality of the action they were taking. He had appeared thoroughly indifferent to the whole proceedings, and many of the worshippers had concluded that he was in full favour with the movement in every respect. His action caused the congregation to halt. Was the step they were about to make worthy the sacrifice? The Session asked the minister to reconsider his decision, and the answer he gave decided which course the congregation was to pursue.

“I cannot go back on what I have said,” he replied. “I rejoice with you in your entering the communion of the greater Church, and as a member of that Church I shall worship with you; but you must make some allowance for my feelings. I was ordained to the ministry of the Anti-Burgher Kirk, and an Anti-Burgher minister I shall die.”

Nor did he ever take holy orders in the United Presbyterian Church. He attended the church and worshipped under his successor Sabbath after Sabbath. At times his true nature manifested itself. He always attended the meetings of the Anti-Burgher Synod. Yes, and though



## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 89*

he never preached from the pulpit of a United Presbyterian Church, he hesitated not to take the service for an Anti-Burgher brother.

“An Anti-Burgher minister I shall die.” Over yonder in the little churchyard sacred to the Anti-Burghers you will find Mr Turnbull’s grave. The congregation erected a stone to mark the spot. I do not know that they have ever regretted the step they took, but they had an undying respect for their minister that evidenced itself on the stone. The monument tells the simple tale, “for sixty years a faithful minister of the Anti-Burgher Kirk—1810-1870.” There was no Anti-Burgher kirk in Kennethcreek in 1870. It was “allowance for his feelings” that prompted the inscription. Yes, and he deserved it. The house in which he lived was his own. It was sometimes referred to as the Anti-Burgher Manse. He bequeathed it to the Anti-Burgher Synod for behoof of the Anti-Burgher poor.

The other minister of whom I have to speak is the one who occupied the pulpit of the Free Church. It is scarcely fair to say he filled the pulpit of the Free Church, because in reality his term of ministry was at an end before the Free Kirk structure was designed. He was the shepherd of the Free Kirk flock when their only church was the churchyard of St Mary’s, and later, when they worshipped in the Anti-Burgher hall.

At 1843, when the seceders formed themselves into a body and found that Mr MacThomas had decided to remain by the State, they busied themselves to find a minister. A great many

of the probationers of the church were fired by the spirit of secession, and very many joined themselves to the seceding body. One of these probationers was chosen for Kennethcrook. Late on the Saturday night he drove into the village in order to conduct worship on the Sabbath. That was one week after Mr MacThomas expressed himself on the subject of secession. He was a young man of twenty-two years, and only a few months before had received licence at the hands of the Presbytery of Perth. He had had a brilliant University career, and so came to the village with good credentials. In the choice of ministers the Free Kirk folk have had their work. They seldom keep their ministers long. They always choose from a large leet, but on the occasion of their first call they made it without so much as suggesting a hearing. The minister did not disappoint them.

On that Sabbath morning the bells rang as usual, but the bell of St Mary's called two congregations to prayer. Far away from Rockburgh came the tinkle of the Sabbath bells, but the spirit of the Free Church ran high there, and three Parish Kirk pulpits were filled by three stranger ministers. Kennethcrook was looked upon as a stronghold of the State Church. Mr MacThomas felt his position keenly, for he was never a man to give offence. As he passed through the churchyard and saw so many waiting outside with their minister, his face wore a sad expression. He nodded recognition to many, but only a few acknowledged the bow. Ah! if they had known what that meant to him. He

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 91*

had little heart to preach that day. Their failing to recognise him was due to ignorance. He little deserved such treatment at their hands. Even their minister recognised the bow.

When the bells ceased and John MacDiarmid put forward the door of the Parish Kirk, the young man took up his position and began service. The stone from which he preached is still known to many, but I, who am a member of the Parish Kirk, have little interest in it. I do not exactly know which of the many monuments did service as a pulpit.

But there is one thing of which I am cognisant. I know the text from which the minister preached. Unwavering local tradition has kept it alive. He read in Genesis and in Acts, and took his sermon from Exodus thirty - third and fifteen. The words of his text were apt in the circumstances — “If Thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence.” He preached long and earnestly. The Parish Kirk was scaling while yet he was at his thirdly, and Mr MacThomas listened earnestly to his “conclusion.” You may think it was bad taste on the part of Mr MacThomas. I do not think so. I knew the man. The sermon was something to talk of for a week. It was not a thing to be thrashed out in the kirkyaird. On the following Sabbath he sustained his reputation. Many of the seceders in Rockburgh had heard the glowing tidings of the young divine, and a few were present at the kirkyaird on the next Sabbath. Again he preached from Exodus. He gave point to his

previous discourse. He took as his text the thirty-third chapter of Exodus at the fourteenth verse, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Those who came from Rockburgh were not disappointed. His name was made. From that time the Free Kirk was recognised in Kennethcrook as an institution. I have already told you something of the church that was afterwards erected. The seceders had another minister by that time. They did not keep their first one long. He did good service in the village, however, and was respected highly by all. His talents were curbed in Kennethcrook. He himself hoped for better things, and after two years he was called to a city church. There he is labouring faithfully and doing good work. He has made many contributions to literature, and if I were to name but one of the many books he has written, you would recognise him at once. I do not care to do so. I am not aware that he has any reason to be ashamed of our village; certainly our village has no reason to be ashamed of him. I may tell you his name some other day; for the present he is nameless.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE VILLAGE SABBATH.

SOMETIMES of an evening when the gloaming falls, and when the western sky is glowing with the livid gold from the setting sun, a dreamy silence pervades my room, its influence touching my soul to a finer issue. It is then that I take the album of my memory, and, with the eye of recollection, linger on the studies it contains. Among the many portraits that pass before me, there is one that ever charms—one on which I linger longingly. It is the memory of a Sabbath day—a Sabbath day of long ago. At the last communion season a young man preached at the thanksgiving service. Coming from a great city, and being one of the leaders in the new school of religious service, he had little in common with the quiet rusticity of Kennethcreek, and little sympathy for the old-fashioned ways of the villagers. He preached eloquently and sustained the reputation of the church from which he came, but (and it is my love for the simple ways that forces me to the admission), by an indiscriminate use of words, he forfeited any chance of making an impression. The great majority of the souls that moved in the world of unbending Presbytery of forty years ago, have long since entered the spirit-

land, but the one or two who linger with us still, sustain, as best they can, the traditions of their fathers. After the evening service to which I refer was over, Jeems Jamieson had a word with the minister. For many years Jeems had looked upon the church as his especial property, and hesitated not to speak plainly when, to his thinking, the circumstances demanded it. On the other hand, the minister regarded Jeems as one of those good souls who are easily moved if you take them the right way. The minister humoured Jeems.

“He’s an unco guid preacher,” said Jeems to the minister, when he went round to the vestry with the collection.

“One of the cleverest men of the church, Jeems,” replied the spiritual adviser.

“I believe that,” returned Jeems, “but the best men o’ the kirk never ca’d the Sabbath Sunday.”

“The old sore, Jeems,” answered the minister, adding, “we canna get everybody to think alike.”

Quite a number of the villagers were of the same mind as Jeems. Now-a-days, it is different, and I admit it, but I am of opinion that the Sabbath has changed the whole country over. If you would see Sabbath as I have seen it, come with me in thought to our village on such a day as that on which I introduced you to my old friend who first welcomed me to Kennethcrook. Then there was a Sabbath stillness.

With many of my village friends Sabbath began on Saturday night. There was no half-

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 95*

holiday in those days, and the weavers and nailers toiled till the eight o'clock bell rang. Then they laid aside their work for the week. A few of the young men looked upon Saturday after that hour as a time for amusement, but the majority of those who were married took a different view of things. They looked upon Saturday as a prelude to a sacred season. The village was quieter on a Saturday night than on any other night except Sabbath. Even the Parliament Close was deserted on that occasion. In these days Rockburgh has great attractions for the youth of Kennethcreek on a Saturday night, but forty years ago Rockburgh was never dreamt of. Luckie Jack was busy on that night; it was the time when she got her small change converted into more solid cash. Her collection of halfpennies for the week found its way to the coffers of the church by means of one or other or all of the three church door-plates. Occasionally a "threepenny" was wanted when, say, the collection was to be taken by the ladle.

A solemn stillness pervaded the village on the Sabbath morning. My linty, in common with other feathered songsters, piped lustily on the sacred morn, and if you had heard it you might have said it broke the stillness. To my thinking it only made the silence more significant.

Church worship was the main feature in Sabbath observance forty years ago. A quarter before twelve the beadle, John MacDiarmid, placed his hand on the rope. A few seconds later the sexton, who did service for the Free Kirk, did likewise. In ringing the bell, as in

everything else he did, John had a way of his own. Chime upon chime in dull monotony was all that came from the spire of St Mary's. The villagers heard something in its dull sound as in rickety-tick of the weavers' looms, and converted its chime into the words—"I—am—the—true—Church—I—am—the—true—Church." On the other hand the Free Kirk sexton rang his in quicker time, and made it to answer back—"No—ye're—no—no—ye're—no." Thus the war of bells went on. Now-a-days, as I have previously remarked, there is a kindlier feeling between the various sects, and the message of the bells is seldom referred to. Other sextons have taken up the posts vacated by John Mac-Diarmid and John Thomson, but they ring the bells pretty much as their predecessors did, and if you care to suit words to action, I do not think it would be very difficult for you to hear the battle of bells even yet.

The bells rang for ten minutes before there was much sign of church attendance. "An anterin' body," as the villagers would say, was all that was abroad. The officiating elders left before the bells began, and were at the plate on the first tinkle of the call. Five minutes before the hour, the Main Street was busy. I may be telling tales, and treating my friends unkindly when I say it, but somehow I always thought that the most of folks liked to pass through the Main Street on their way to church. I know a goodly number who could have reached church easier, and for that matter sooner, by treading the by-paths they trod throughout the week.



## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 97*

That, however, is of little moment to me. You to whom the villagers are strangers can criticise as seemeth to you best. I have to respect the rights of friendship, and, respecting these, it would ill become me to give any untoward reason for the action of the pious, God-fearing folks of Kennethcrook.

After the last echo of the bells had died away Kennethcrook assumed its air of solitude. Most of the villagers were regular attendants at church, and if the church had any law to enforce attendance at service, I have no doubt that Kennethcrook was in some measure responsible for such a law falling into abeyance. So far as I can learn the Kennethcrook Kirk Session Records are clean on that point.

Unless on Sacrament Sabbath, there was but one service in the different churches. The spirit of brotherly love is making itself manifest in many ways, and we have now a joint evening service. The Free Kirk minister preaches in the Anti-Burgher kirk, and the Anti-Burgher minister preaches in the Parish Kirk. But these things are young yet, and in the days I am trying to recall, there was no such service. The churches held on their several ways, and each deemed her way the best.

Kennethcrook, like many other of the rural villages, was famous for its long sermons. Indeed, it was by the quantity rather than by the quality, that many took the measure of a minister. If his discourse fell within the hour, Jeems looked at Saunders and heads were nodded ominously. If the sermon did not last

three quarters of an hour, the minister was pronounced to be lacking in grace. It was seldom, however, that anything in the way of short sermons caused the villagers to speak. Occasionally, when a stranger was in the pulpit, such a thing might trouble the consciences of the congregation, but with the resident ministry long sermons were the order.

It was always after two o'clock before the kirks skailed. I have seen it three before the Anti-Burghers' service was over, but the Anti-Burghers were zealous even to a fault. The Parish Church took the lead; its service was over shortly after two. The Free Kirk concluded its devotions about half-past two. Once I think the Free Kirk was out first. The Free Kirkers hung their heads in shame for a week. After that occasion their minister nearly overtook the Anti-Burgher and left the Parish Kirk hopelessly in the distance. When the time came for sermons to be shortened, the Parish Kirk, as in all matters of importance, was the first to move. By degrees the time of worship was lessened until the hour of service in St Mary's did not extend beyond a quarter past one. It will be a long time before theseceders overtake it.

I remember on one occasion calling for old Jenny MacPherson, who was bed-ridden for years. Jenny was one of these sweet souls in whose simplicity there is a charm, and she never had a word to say against anybody, unless it had reference to church connection. She was a staunch supporter of the Free Church. Her bed stood near the window, and from it she

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 99

could see the congregation dispersing. While I was sitting beside her one afternoon, the Main Street suddenly became busy, and led to a remark that the kirk was scaling.

"Aye," she said, "MacThomas only keepit them till a quarter after ane, and only preached for half-an-hoor, and mind ye," she added impressively, "he *read* it."

When the church service was over the back of the Sabbath was broken. Quite a number of the villagers took a walk round the churchyard before going home. The older men gathered in knots as is the custom all over the country to discuss the various points of the sermon, and to taste each other's snuff. Mr MacThamas waved the different groups a wave of kindly recognition as he passed out, and the beadle, after locking the door of the church, joined one of the gatherings in discussion. By-and-bye the various critics went home, and the Sabbath out-of-doors was at an end for many. Few of the villagers were abroad after dusk. A father or a mother would come to the door and look out, nod over in a friendly way to some one at some other door, and then go back to the fireside. Missions of mercy, and visits of sympathy, were generally undertaken on a Sabbath. If anyone was ill, the kindly disposed neighbours called to see the ailing one on Sabbath evening. The neighbours, too, by some instinct seemed to learn when each intended to call, and, having acquired this knowledge, instinctively arranged that too many might not call at the one time.

Family worship was the closing feature in the



Sabbath-day of long ago. I do not think the "Cottar's Saturday Night" which has been so sympathetically drawn by our national poet, and which will go down to posterity as a rare illustration of a piety which is passing away, was ever observed by our villagers. But I know what family worship on a Sabbath evening meant. I, who was a stranger to the village, could walk as I chose, and act as I cared, with a certain impunity that was unknown to young men living under parental roofs. I had nobody to take the books and read a chapter, and then examine me on "What is Baptism?" or "What is the reason annexed?" unless I cared to join some of my friends in their devotions. This I occasionally did, but my holiest memories of Sabbath evening belong to hours I spent alone. Often, after gloaming fell, I used to lay aside my book and take what Saunders Denovan called "a daunder doon the street." It was then that the true reverence of Sabbath evening worship laid its influence upon me, and it was then that the stars seemed to speak with a grand eloquence of the glorious world of which they are the outposts. It was then that the careful nurture of my younger days came back to me, and I heard the voices of friends now passed into the spirit land. I saw the life of other days and the friends that had ministered to my comfort. The sweet scenes of a happy home and an unbroken circle were followed by the sad visions of friends passing within the vale. The panorama of my life glided in vivid realism before me, each scene defiling past, now pleas-

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 101

ant, now sorrowful, until in the end I found myself where I began, back from my fancy's flight with the stars still singing the glories of the infinite, and looking down in their singular grandeur on the sleeping towers of Kennethcrook.

Now-a-days there is less of that observance, and the memory of what Sabbath once was makes this the more significant. There was no idler at the street corner in those days. The village was at rest. The swelling notes of "French" or "Kilmarnock" seemed to hush every whisper to slumber. I remember distinctly that the favourite psalm with the Auld Kirk precentor was that which may be regarded as the war song of the Scottish kirk—

"I to the hills will lift mine eye."

It may have been that Robin Alison was no master singer, for he never graduated at any college of music, though he taught a singing class for many years at Merlestone, but he could sing with feeling that fine old hymn. I often listened at his door, for it was that psalm that carried me back through the years of my existence to the country home far, far from Kennethcrook.

There were many psalms to be heard of an evening, for very few families failed to have worship. Even Luckie Jack, with her old maidish ways, did not forget the lesson she had learned when she was young. She, too, in all her loneliness observed the custom. I have heard strange things said of Luckie, and have found it difficult at times to misdoubt them. But I think the folks who spoke loosely of the

methods of the postmistress must have been those who were too much engaged in their own devotions to be abroad on Sabbath night.

John MacDiarmid was over at the manse one evening (he married the manse housekeeper), and I met him at the head of the Shirra's Brae just as he was going home. We went down the Main Street together, and almost unconsciously I halted at Luckie Jack's window. Luckie was at her devotions. It was the old familiar psalm to the old familiar tune. It was "Kilmarnock." and the words were—

" My thirsty soul longs vehemently,  
Yea faints Thy courts to see."

When I turned round the beadle was looking strangely at me. He shook his head and then stood silent for a space. Placing his hand on my shoulder, as we turned to go, he said, in that manner in which I was accustomed to regard him as sincere—

"Them that says Luckie Jack gies licht wecht has a hantle mair to answer for than her."

That was my opinion of the postmistress. Sabbath after Sabbath she sang, "My thirsty soul longs vehemently," and always to the tune "Kilmarnock." Disappointed in love, according to the village gossips, and humbled through a long course of years by the constant drudgery of toil to keep her in existence, she settled down into an old maid for whom the young folks cared nothing and the children were frightened. But in that Sabbath evening worship the story of village chatter played no part, the toil of the week was cast into the shade, the ways and

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 103

manners of the disappointed maiden were thrown aside, and to me, standing at the window and listening as one who views not behind the scenes, I fancied nothing but a humble soul pleading at the feet of its Maker.

A day came when Luckie Jack failed to sing "Kilmarnock." That day was a Sabbath. Twice did she attempt the tune and twice she failed. In the silence of a Sabbath evening she was taken to see that for which she had sung time after time, and a Bible lay open on the bed, with her lifeless finger pointing to the lines—

" My thirty soul longs vehemently,  
Yea faints Thy courts to see."

I never found the villagers wrong in much that they said, but I think they misjudged Luckie, and I know if John MacDiarmid could speak he would say so too. That Sabbath evening changed his opinion entirely.

There are other memories of the olden Sabbath that I might give you if I cared, but I have no mind to say much more. The awakening of such incidents only makes me feel, as I have already told you, that the village life is changing. It would not be difficult for you to see Sabbath evening worship observed in these days, but ah! you would look in vain for the extensive devotional exercise of four decades ago. At the time on which my memory lingers, the "White Horse" and the "Black Bull" were open on Sabbath, because no closing order compelled things otherwise. Small traffic they did. Now-a-days as public places they are closed, and

only open to the excursionists whose unseemly laughter breaks upon our Sabbath quiet. Yes! the old days have gone. Our village, lying as it does on the main road to the north and south, is exposed to much of the holiday-making which is considered Sabbath breaking. Where, long ago, there were rows of farmers' carts resting on their shafts while their owners were at church, there are now brakes and waggonettes waiting the command of those on pleasure bent. Yes, and even the busy outside world manifests itself on Sabbath in our village. We can hear distinctly the iron horse puff and snort as he, dashing along, links the commerce of the one week to the commerce of the other, and brings city into closer contact with city.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE VILLAGE SCHOOLS.

WE have a School Board in Kennethcreek to-day, another instance that the village has changed since I knew it first. Forty years ago education was in the hands of the church. There were three schools then, although there is only one now. The reason of the existence of three schools is not far to seek. No respectable Anti-Burgher would ever think of sending his children to be taught at the Parish School, and the Free Kirkers had doubts about the ability of the Anti-Burgher schoolmaster. These doubts were strengthened by a two years' experience. Some time elapsed before the Free Kirkers were in a position to get a school under their own church, and, in the interval, their children were sent to the Anti-Burgher dominie. There they learned little, but learned that little well. Any instruction they got was due to self tuition, and pertained pretty much to the defence of the church. Fights were often organised among the boys, the Anti-Burghers ranging themselves against the Frees. It was these organised battles doubtless, as much as anything, that led the Free Kirkers to doubt the ability of the teacher, and to build a school for themselves.

Tammy Teah was employed to instruct in the parochial seminary. He was the village dominie. Some used to say that he was a stickit minister, but he proved himself to be better stuff. One day he blossomed out into the Reverend Thomas MacIntosh. He had passed through his Arts course with distinction, and gave great promise in the Divinity Hall, but in those days honour and ability were of no account unless accompanied by the guiding hand of patronage. For years Tammy failed to find a patron. After having peregrinated for a long time as a probationer, filling many pulpits with acceptance but never being called, he settled down to teach the young idea in Kennethcrook. The sympathy of Colonel Robertson was elicited in his favour, and the Colonel, pleased with his manner and accomplishments, did all in his power to find a charge. Years passed, but at length the time came, and our schoolmaster was presented to a beautiful parish in an upland district on the Borders.

“The ways of Providence are wonderful,” he said to me after he was elected minister. “I’ve waited for a long time on my call, but my waiting has not been in vain.”

Tammy’s instruction is still remembered in the village. Many of the Kennethcrook folk, and especially those who were his pupils, assert that he was the best teacher the village ever knew. If results reflect at all upon the attention and ability of a teacher, they reflect favourably on Tammy’s work. From his class-room came one doctor, two lawyers, and three ministers.

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 107

Kennethcrook was always represented in the professions.

When Tammy Tosh laid down the cane and donned the gown and bands, a successor was found in the person of George Dalrymple. George was engaged in a sawyer's yard in his early days, and, by an accident, sustained the loss of his right arm. After that he became a schoolmaster. He was teacher in various places before he finally settled in Kennethcrook. The want of his arm caused no little talk in the village, and a good many of the folks asked how a man who wrote with the left hand could teach others to do so with the right. But George Dalrymple proved himself equal to the task. The pupils called him "Fisty Darumple"—fisty being the term they applied to one who used the left hand in preference to the right. Circumstances forced the teacher to prefer the left.

In the days when he instructed there was no fear of Her Majesty's Inspector, but Fisty taught for the credit of the village and the church, to which his school was more immediately connected. Luckie Jack said he was her best customer for carpet switches. His mode of punishment was singular. When a boy gave offence, he was taken out from the class and set with his face to a corner till the end of the lesson, then he was brought before the rest of the class and received a caning. If Fisty required a new cane, he waited till some offender presented himself when he gave him a penny and dispatched him to Luckie Jack's for a

switch. On his return, he had the honour, or otherwise, of receiving the first lash from the new birch. And he punished to some tune. In his hand Luckie Jack's switch became the proverbial rod of iron.

George was a fair scholar—much above the average nonclerical dominie. A wide acquaintance with Latin, some familiarity with Greek, and a smattering of French, together with a good knowledge of things in general, equipped him well for the education of the parish, and he made a number of ministers in his day.

But Fisty deserves to be remembered for more than making ministers. There is a Mutual Improvement Association in the village to-day and that institution had its parent in an establishment of the dominie. He was an extensive reader, and the owner of a somewhat large library. In those days books were dear and although the weaving and nailing industries were at their best the hardy sons of toil in Kennethcrook were loath to part with their money for books. Even a penny for a song-sheet to Luckie Jack was grudged.

"It's fair wastry," Andra Duchart was wont to remark, "an' the dominie's the maist wasterfu' man I ever kent. Nae suner has a buik made its appearance than he's able to tell ye a' that's in't."

But although Duchart looked at the purchase of books in that light, he was one of the first to avail himself of the schoolmaster's library when the dominie threw it open to the village.

Dalrymple's way of working was something

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 109

like this. He invited some of the villagers to his house one evening, and told them that if they cared they could have the use of his books by arranging to come for them on one particular night. Friday was resolved upon. At first about half-a-dozen took advantage of the offer, but, gradually, the circle widened until it compassed thirty. This fostering of the spirit of self-improvement led to the organisation of a meeting which was held weekly in the school-house, and over which the dominie presided. At this weekly meeting his custom was to take up a book, tell his listeners a little of its author, and give them a summary of its contents. In the winter time these gatherings were held regularly, and from them sprung the now flourishing "Mutual Improvement Society." I believe they were a source of profit to very many, and there was a deal of enthusiasm at the time. There were one or two book-shelves filled after this. The love of reading led some of the villagers to invest in literature.

One of the most enthusiastic members of that early literary association was Willie Allan the Anti-Burgher teacher. Our teaching staff was a somewhat incomplete one. George Dalrymple lamented the loss of an arm, and his co-instructor was wont to look for legs where legs appeared not. By a serious mishap, dominie Allan, as the Anti-Burghers called him, was deprived of his nether limbs. He was carried to and from the school by Nicol Blane, whose nailshed was near to the Anti-Burgher place of learning. For this service the dominie instructed

Nicol's daughter in the proverbial three R's —'rithmetic, 'riting, and reading. In this way the whole of Nicol's family was educated. He never was a very successful nailer, and looked upon the dominie's deformity as a blessing in disguise. He wished his children to receive an education, but if it had been necessary to pay their fees he would have found the task a difficult one.

Dominie Allan's pupils were mostly girls. Boys never have much respect for a school-master. The Kennethcrook boys lived on the same plane. Bird nesting at one time and skating at another presented temptations too great for the male portion of the scholars to resist. Their only obstacle was a legless dominie. I believe if the statistics of truant playing had ever been required of the village schoolmasters the rate of the Anti-Burgher school would have been very high indeed. Dominie Allan was at a disadvantage. If he wished to cane a boy, he had to sit till the offender went to him. If Mahomet would not go the mountain, the mountain could not go to Mahomet. Some of the boys used to set the dominie at defiance. Inattentive to their duties he would call them forth. They would not come. They only sat in their seats and made wild grimaces at the master. The other scholars laughed. Then some one was deputed to take a note to the offender's parents. That made the dominie square with the pupil—especially if the pupil was not at school the following day.

Willie, despite his deformity, taught to the

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 111

satisfaction of his superiors. There are some who look back on his teaching with pride. Only the other day I was reading the life of one of our humbler poets, and saw from it that that poet had been a scholar of Allan's. There has been no Anti-Burgher school in Kennethcrook for a long time. It was closed at Allan's death.

When the Anti-Burgher kirk-session intimated that the school was permanently closed, Anti-Burgher parents, forgetting the unfavourable opinions passed by the Free Kirk folk, sent their children to the Free Kirk School. It was superintended by a lady—Miss Wilkie she was called. There are surviving memories of Miss Wilkie's tuition also. The other night I was sitting in a house where some children were engaged at their lessons. One little fellow was struggling hard with what his father called a "lang-nebbit" word. Many were the ineffectual attempts he made to master it. T E L E G R A P H Y he spelled out, letter after letter, once, twice, and thrice, and then stopped. Looking up to his mother, with eyes that implored assistance, he received the reply—

"Tickly, tickly, pass it over, as Miss Wilkie used to say."

That was the secret of Miss Wilkie's popularity as a teacher. She got over little difficulties in that fashion. The Session always reported favourably on her work. She took great pains with the imparting of Bible knowledge, and the teaching of the Shorter Catechism. These were the principal subjects the Session examined the

pupils in. Miss Wilkie was a woman of kindly disposition, and what elements of education she failed to instruct in, were counterbalanced by her object lessons in kindness and charity. She was the only schoolmistress our village has ever known. There are female teachers in Kennethcrook now-a-days, but they are only assistants. They are never entrusted with schools. Not so with Miss Wilkie. She was her own mistress, and her only assistants were precocious pupils. In this office she discharged the duties for many years, but felt herself unequal to the task when the School Board was instituted and coming Inspectors cast their shadows before.

High up above the village, on the face of Flint's Brae, stands the public seminary of Kennethcrook. It is a stately erection, built but a few years ago, and much more imposing than the schools which, in their divided efforts, performed the function it to-day discharges. But amid a changing world there are some things that do not change. The merry shouts of laughter that break upon my ear from the playground after school hours are almost the same shouts I listened to in the Kirk Wynd four decades ago. They are made by other voices, for the children of long ago are the parents of to-day, but the sounds are so similar that I might once again be watching Tammy Tosh's or Miss Wilkie's pupils at play. I am sometimes constrained to listen to and watch their childish talk and prattle, for they help to keep passing times in happy recollection.

Tammy Tosh's school, which was the most



## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 113

pretentious of the three, was near to the Parliament Close. It has long since been taken down and tenements erected on its site, but sometimes I hear it referred to as the "auld schule." Here the dominie lived and taught. A large stretch of vacant space behind which ran down to meet the Lunarty, and which belonged to the school, served the purpose of a playground. The dominie's desk was at the back of the school-room, and just above it, was a window which commanded a full view of the playground. From this window, Tammy watched the proceedings at playtime, and often, after classes were re-assembled, meted out punishment to some misbehaving boy who, in a moment of rash forgetfulness, struck a girl and failed to remember the window above the dominie's desk. On the walls of the school-house were one or two alphabet sheets and object-lesson placards. On the one side of the room hung a map of Scotland, with the Orkney and Shetland Islands cramped into a little space at the right hand upper corner; on the other side hung a map of Palestine, with Jerusalem marked by a huge red spot, and Calvary indicated by a great black cross three or four times the size of the rugged outline which was supposed to represent the hill. These maps, together with a small sphere that stood on the dominie's desk, and which showed the continents in blue and the islands in red, equipped the school for its geographical instruction. A blackboard swung in its frame just to the left of the door as you entered, three desks ran right along the room,

and opposite to these were a number of forms. The dominie from his desk had a full survey of the school.

At the annual examination (exhibition, I think, is the name applied to such a gathering under the School Board system of education) the schoolhouse looked more attractive. Three chairs were brought ben from the dominie's parlour. The arm chair was the one in which the minister sat, and on each side an ordinary one was placed. These were generally occupied by Colonel Robertson and Saunders Denovan. The Colonel came because he wished to manifest an interest in the life of the school ; Saunders Denovan was present as ruling elder, to see that Mr MacThomas was sufficiently exacting in his demands as to the children's knowledge of the Shorter Catechism. The pupils were dressed in their Sabbath outfit for the examination, and they all came with bouquets of flowers in their hands. These were regarded as an offering to the dominie. I have seen much competition manifested between the children as to who would have the best bouquet. The offering which was deemed the choicest by the schoolmaster, was presented to the minister amid the cheers of the children. The pupils, as they filed into school, placed their flowers on the dominie's desk, and they lay there till after the examination. At this annual event, which took place just before the summer vacation began, parents were expected to be present. One or two seats were reserved for them at the back of the schoolroom.

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 115

The chief subjects in which the children were examined were the Shorter Catechism and the Bible. The Shorter Catechism was supposed to be known from beginning to end. "What is required in the ninth commandment?" the minister would enquire, pointing to a boy at the back of the school. The boy at once rose to his feet, repeated "what is required" from beginning to end without a stop, and then resumed his seat. "What is man's chief end?" the minister would at once demand of a boy in the front seat, at once changing from one part of the Catechism to another. The boy was equal to the occasion, and the minister was at once informed of man's chief end.

One of the branches of scriptural instruction was a knowledge of the books of the Bible. Each pupil was supposed to be so conversant with them as to be able to repeat them from Genesis to Malachi. Yes, and sometimes even to Revelation. When the examiner considered that the scholars had exhibited a sufficiently extensive knowledge of the Catechism, he turned his attention to the Scriptures. This work was generally undertaken by the girls. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and so on they would go, finishing up almost out of breath with Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Several of the girls would be singled out, the one to repeat the books fast after the other. A feat was once undertaken in connection with this memory work: it was to repeat the books from Malachi to Genesis. One or two of the girls managed to carry this out with success.

The test of the junior class was something on the same principle, and it was it that suggested the reversion of the books of the Bible. This test was to repeat the alphabet from Z backwards. When one or two of the first year pupils had gone through this exercise, the minister declared himself satisfied.

The dominie was proud on this day. He saw the end of his year's labours, and, unlike his successor, who has to fear the fearless and cold report on paper which is submitted on so many sheets of note by that dignitary known as Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, was awaiting the chairman's verdict. This was always complimentary alike to pupils and teacher. The children smiled their approval when the minister spoke of the manner in which they had gone through their various lessons, and the dominie gleamed with satisfaction. Prizes were distributed to those scholars who had given prominence during the year. Then three cheers were awarded the chairman, and the school holidays were declared to have begun. The pupils each received a bun as they retired; it was the gift of the opulent Colonel Robertson.

Instruction in the other schools was imparted in the same manner, similar articles of furniture were in the other schoolhouses, and similar exhibitions brought their sessions to a close.

Besides the distribution of prizes which took place at the examination held to inaugurate the summer holidays there was another which took place on the afternoon previous to Hogmanay. It, however, was peculiar to the school over

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 117

which Fisty Dalrymple presided. I never heard of the other schools having anything bearing a similarity to it. By the end of the year, the dominie's desk was filled to overflowing with nicknacks of every description. The dominie's eagle eye was ever on the outlook for anything that might in any way distract the attention of a pupil from the immediate business of tuition. If heads were close together, as if in examination of something curious, the master was over in a instant demanding what was the cause of the inattention. Occasionally he was foiled in his attempt to discover the object of interest. Yes, but it was only occasionally. Very frequently he returned to his desk with something in his hand, while a boy looked wistfully after him fully conscious that he had most likely seen the last of his treasure. By degrees the dominie's desk became a veritable toyshop. Articles that had a charm only for children were there, many and varied. Peeries, bools (glessies and stanies), strings for playing at horses with, and pocket knives. Sometimes story books, such as "The Babes in the Wood," and "Cinderella," that were to be bought of Luckie Jack, had to be given up to the resolute teacher. The girls, too, had often to part with their trinkets, for not even to them did the dominie grant indulgence. For a year these things were collected, and then came the division of the spoil. This was looked upon by most of the children as the only mean thing of which the dominie was guilty. The articles did not go back to their rightful owners. In the forenoon,

Fisty told several of the pupils (those whom the rest of the scholars had come to regard as favourites) to wait behind after school hours. Then the treasure trove was unlocked, and the various articles that had found their way to the desk during the year were distributed among the favourites.

The other distribution of which I have told you something is represented to-day in the exhibition that brings the session to a close. This later one which took place at the end of the year has no representative now. It has come down with the oral traditions of the village, and will last only so long as the memory of Fisty Dalrymple endures. Nor is it this alone that has passed away. Many other customs of our village schools are gone for ever; revolving time brings many changes. The days when the children appeared on the Monday morning with their three halfpence or their twopence halfpenny, and laid it on the dominie's desk, as though they demanded another week's instruction, are at an end. Fees are things of the past. The Board School looks down upon our village. It seems to say *Taxes, Taxes.*

## CHAPTER XI.

### CHARACTERS.

IN depicting to you scenes from village life, and in sketching the various characters who went to the composition of Kennethcrook, I have hitherto confined myself pretty much to certain classes. There are some types of village character, however, which will suffer no classification. In my album of recollection I have many portraits which must be dealt with individually. The originals moved in lines peculiar to themselves, and their memories decline to be subjected to any system of dovetailing into a composite village life. They stand aloof from their fellows. In this chapter I extend to you the acquaintance of these. Every place I suppose has its worthies. At least if there is one place that has not its worthies that place is not Kennethcrook. I have no doubt it would be difficult to find any of the present-day villagers worthy of being signalled out for treatment. It is of long ago, however, that I write, and in the perspective of my vision linger a few who belong to that time. They have long since gone over to the great majority, but their sayings and doings have so interwoven themselves into the history and conversation of Kennethcrook that their memor-

ies are no less than parts of the village. Their witty retorts and wise words developed in time into proverbs, and, linked together, form a chain of friendship to-day between the past and the present.

Not so very long ago a lonely traveller in the far west of Western Australia was pushing on his way, hoping that at every turn of the road some sign of habitation might present itself. Far on he went, but nothing was to be seen except the bleak, sun-dried land, on which the shades of evening were deepening. As he pursued his way there suddenly appeared from a hollow the red glare of a camp fire, and, determined to take his chance, be the inmates friends or be they foes, he crossed to where the choffer fire burned. On his reaching the camp he was heartily welcomed by a group of men busily chatting within their canvas dwelling. Taking advantage of their proffered shelter for the night, he joined them in their conversation. While they were speaking, a thunder storm began, and in the midst of it he remarked to one of the company—

“Ay, as an auld friend o’ mine, Saunders Denovan, used to say, ‘They’re best aff that has nae hame to gang to!’”

“Saunders Denovan!” exclaimed the man; then adding, “Do you come frae Kennethcrook?”

“That I do,” replied the stranger, and the words sealed a close and lasting friendship.

Saunders Denovan, of whom I have already told you something, contributed many sayings to our village stock of proverbs, and one of the



## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 121

most familiar was that which joined two hearts in the far distance of the Western world. It is a saying that has puzzled not a few to get its meaning, but any native of Kennethook sitting indoors and at home on a stormy night understands and can appreciate the remark—"They're best aff that has nae hame to gang to."

But Saunders was not the only man who could turn a neat sentence and put much in little speech.

Colonel Robertson of Blair had a factor whose disposition suited the type of man one is inclined to associate with this profession. Martin was the factor on the Blair Estate. I could tell you his other name, but I prefer not to do so, for he was never known in the village by anything else than Roarin' Martin. He was never popular with the tenants on the Blair Estate. They hated him as they hated Satan. Most exacting in his demands, his visits were never sought for. He had found favour, however, in the eyes of the Colonel, and much of the working of the estate was left entirely in his hands. Any power he had he magnified, and, as was afterwards discovered, he did many harsh things in the name of Colonel Robertson of which the Colonel knew nothing. I remember of one occasion when he was discomfited by Andra Simpson, the farmer at the Mill Farm. Andra had been a little behind with his rent, and the factor, taking advantage of the situation, was more imperative than usual. He would do this, that, and the other thing. Colonel Robertson had given him his instructions, and he would attend to them,

and so forth, garnishing his importance with a plentiful use of the Colonel's name.

"Aweel, Martin," said Andra, after he had listened for some time to the voice of authority, "ye'll get it when I'm ready, and ye can tell the Colonel that ; and what's mair, ye can tell him that I'm better aff than him although he's the laird, for he has but his life-time o' the place, an' I've a nineteen years' tack."

Andra paid his rent when he was ready. Many a time have legal proceedings been threatened, but Andra's effects never came to a compulsory sale. He always discharged his just and lawful debts before the law was put in action. As for Martin, his authority came to an end. His days did not close in peace : he was found dead one morning on the Myreton Road. His death is one of the mysteries of the village. Andra's tack also came to an end, but he saw three factors out before the renewal of it.

This inability to pay the necessary dues lingers in another floating tradition of Kennethcrook. It is long since the toll-bar was sawn asunder, and carried off by thrifty housewives for firewood. My story belongs to a time anterior to that. The toll-dues were drawn by the proprietor of the "White Horse" and, as I have already told you, were a fruitful source of revenue. Mrs Morrison was a terror to many who came under the ban of the toll-levy. I have known Peter let a man on horseback through and, if he did not seem to be too wealthy, never enforce his demand, but that could not be said of his wife. She held to the last farthing. On one occasion

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 123

Patey Steenson, a brother to our watchmaker, had been deputed to Merlestone to procure an ass for the forester on the Blair Estate. Patey set out fully equipped for toll-dues but having regaled himself over-freely found on reaching the south toll of the village on his return that he had nothing wherewith to gain him entrance. He hoped that Peter Morrison might present himself but he was disappointed. It was the wife. He told a story of some kind, pitiable, no doubt, but it failed to awaken any sympathetic response from the toll-keeper. He might have compromised the thing by a promise but he was not given to keeping his promises and he knew the publican's wife would not be inclined to accept any questionable undertakings. He entered into a long discussion of the toll-levies, their nature and their varying extent. Sixpence for a cart and horse ; threepence for an ass such as he was driving ; foot passengers free.

"An sae' muckle dae ye charge for foot-gaun folk wi' back burdens?" queried the wily Patey.

"Naething for that," replied the unsuspecting toll-keeper.

"Fegs," he said, "an that's no dear. Naething for a back burden."

"No, no," answered Mrs Morrison, "it would never dae to charge onything for the like o' that."

"Aweel, guidwife," said Patey, "gin that be the wey o'd, I think I'll mak the cuddy a back-burden," and, lifting the ass, he shouldered it and demanded admittance.

The guidwife, outwitted, drew back the bar and allowed the victorious Patey to enter in triumph.

For some time Patey, filled with a sense of his own importance, carried himself very haughtily and tried to look becoming. He spared no pains to spread the incident through the village and many who had encountered the exacting manner of the toll-mistress openly rejoiced with Patey in his so cleverly outwitting her. Patey told the story with great gusto in the parlour of the "Black Bull" and was treated handsomely by the young men of the village who considered themselves humorous. Indeed to such an extent was the manifestation of his triumph carried that, for a time, our only sailor was jealous of the homage paid to him.

The only sailor that the village boasted, lounged at the door of the "Black Bull." No very becoming occupation for one who had ploughed the deep and seen all manner of animate and inanimate life. But sailor Geordie took things easily. The stories he told drew numbers round him, and if a man is known by the company he keeps, Geordie had often those who considered themselves important in the village hanging anxiously on his words. He was a source of revenue to the "Black Bull," and I believe its trade languished considerably after his death. The tales that the old salt had to tell were wonderful, and used to hold eager audiences in rapt astonishment. But there were some who were in Geordie's secret, and laughed at the credulity of the other fre-

*Some Sketches of Village Life.* 125

quarters of the Inn. To them Geordie had confided his real nautical experiences. He was like the microscope man who stood at the entrance to Drum Park at the Fair. For a trifle you were permitted to see into the glasses and behold all manner of curious things. You did so and wondered. The itinerant smiled pleasingly as he took your penny, and expressed his delight at your astonishment. A few who knew the manipulation of the machine stood by and laughed. Geordie's amusing stories were on the same scale. For a long time things went smoothly, but a day came when much of the glamour of the seaman's life was dispersed. One of those in the secret made a revelation. Geordie's ship was a merchantman, and its cargo fruit and timber. So he said, and the village gave credence to his story. One night when retailing with enthusiasm the tales he had so often repeated, some one put the question—"And what, Geordie, did fruit and timber consist of?" "Ou," said Geordie, "juist fruit and timber." But there was one at the door who had been a sort of running commentary all the evening, and he deduced an explanation of the cargo. "Fruit and timber," he remarked, "it was naething but tatties and besom shanks!" A loud laugh was chorus to the remark, and Geordie's occupation, like Othello's, was gone. He had been for a few months on a canal boat sailing between towns about twenty miles apart, and from this duration of sailor life his knowledge of the ocean was drawn. It may have been too bad to divulge the secret of years in a

second. "Tatties and besom shanks" was Geordie's epithet subsequent to the incident.

But Geordie was not the only one who tried to vaunt his knowledge of affairs uncommon. Jamie Rutherford had a turn for the same thing. The fact of having seen Royalty was held to be something in Kennethcrook. One or two of the villagers who had retired on the pension list, after a long life in the service of their king and country, were permitted to say that they had looked upon George III. If I remember correctly there was one also who had beheld William IV. When a sovereign died much of the charm of having seen him passed away, and when Victoria ascended the throne anxious eyes were cast about for some one who had had the privilege of seeing her. Tammy Roy, the bellman, had the ambition to be the first, and set out for Windsor one cold wintry morning. A week later he returned, and although no one ever asked him whither he had gone, he gave us to understand that he had not seen the Sovereign. Jamie Rutherford therefore had the victory, and he flaunted his advantage on every possible occasion. Not that Jamie had ever looked on Victoria. No, he never said he had. He was at Falkirk Tryst once, and met a man who had seen her. That was the ground on which Jamie stood.

There were some men of strong determination in Kennethcrook.

I have already told you something of the opposition that was given when some of the worshippers of St Mary's spoke of using a hymnal.

## *Some Sketches of Village Life. 127*

That opposition was doubly strong over the introduction of the Paraphrases. The Paraphrases were part and parcel of the religion of Kenneth-crook for years before I came to the village, but the opposition that had been given to their introduction had not altogether died out. Some of the worshippers retained their seats when a Paraphrase was intimated to be sung. The man, however, who took up the strongest position in regard to the human hymns was Tarry Morrison, who had a baker's shop at the south end of the Main Street, near to Peter who kept the toll. Tarry would never for a moment suffer a paraphrase to be spoken of in favourable terms. Once he went to the minister to lift his lines. I never heard what transpired, nor do I think any of the villagers knew, but Tarry did not lift his lines. It was remarked that there were no paraphrases sung for some time. By-and-bye, however, they were re-introduced, and I think Tarry's opposition was feebler than before. But his ill-feeling towards the hymns only ended at his death. In his last illness Robin Alison used to call for him. They had many points in common, but they disagreed on the use of the paraphrases. Calling for him one day, the conversation turned to the service of the previous Sabbath. Robin remarked that there had been a paraphrase sung.

"Ay," said Tarry, "and whatna ane was't."

Robin recollected for a moment.

"It was that ane that rins something like—

"Ye indolent and slothful rise  
View the ant's labours and be wise."

“Imphm!” said Tarry, in his most sarcastic tone, “the same’s we gae’d to the kirk to sing about emmooks and bumbees.”

There were one or two wealthy villagers in Kennethcreek. At least they were considered wealthy by their fellows. I would not like to say that they had very much money, but village sayings always mean something, and there were a few who were regarded as being “weel to dae,” or who were referred to as “unco rugh.” “Weel to dae” and “unco rugh” are phrases which, in our common parlance, mean money.

One of those who were so named made his money in a rather curious way. He was a sort of money-lending agency. His principle was something between that of the professional money-lender and that of the pawnbroker, if there is any allowable distinction. He was like the professional money-lender because he never asked for great security (money lenders never do according to their own story), and he was like the pawnbroker because he hesitated not to lend money on articles of any description. In this latter respect he did but a small trade. The most thriving of the branches of his broking was what he termed his penny interest. Many of the villagers—weavers and nailers alike—lived from hand to mouth. There is a proverb—more emphatic than polite—which is sometimes used when this class of folk is under consideration. It refers to their method of existence as being “a hunger and a burst.” I do not know what these folks would have



## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 129

done if they had been born with the proverbial silver spoon in their mouths, for they never knew how to take care of the few shillings committed to them at a week's end. It was to this class that Geordie Brown, the village money-lender, looked for support. He was an incomer to Kennetherook. What was his calling before settling down among us was one of the few things the village never came to know. His money making propensity as broker was not considered too honorable by some folks, but I believe his resources were means of relief to many. He extended loans varying from a sixpence to a crown. His interest was a penny a shilling for a day. A high rate of interest you may be inclined to say, but it was never very difficult to clear off as it was usually borrowed on Friday, and capital and interest discharged on Saturday. The borrowing of a shilling enabled many a one to eke out the week's existence without incurring debt of another character, and the thirteen pence returned on the following day made Geordie in time a man of means. He was known by the village as "Interest" Geordie. In his money lending he established a system of traffic previously unknown to Kennetherook, but if results go for anything the organisation was a failure. The system died with its founder, and thus he was the only Shylock we ever knew.

Thirty or forty years ago there was a fraternity which had representatives in every village and town in Scotland. I refer to the

order of naturals. This order has to a large extent disappeared. He who was looked upon as our village natural was Sandy White. He lived in a little tumble-down cottage just beside the mill, and as he was considerably undersized was known as the "Toy." Some unthinking and senseless folk often tried to take advantage of the natural. It was a mean advantage—a case of hitting below the belt—which even the brutes of the prize-ring would not descend to. There are stories on record of how these same felks have been outwitted by the natural at whose expense they wanted fun. The "Toy" over-reached a few in his day. He never seemed to work—it may have been that he was not able. He was always to be seen about the village, and very often loitering about the bridge in the Main Street. One day, when he was at his usual place, Roarin' Martin, into whose important presence I have already ushered you, came swinging down the Main Street with some strangers behind him. Seeing the "Toy" I suppose he was prompted to jest at the half-wit's cost. He came up to where the worthy was standing, and after repeated unsuccessful attempts to make mirth, he asked the "Toy" how much it would cost for an ass to cross the bridge? In the beginning of the century the bridge was a sort of toll-bar, but the worthy knew and the factor knew that such practises had long before been discontinued.

"Yes, 'Toy,'" he said, "and how much will it take for an ass gaun owre there?"

The "Toy" waited for a moment, seemed to

*Some Sketches of Village Life.* 131

think, and then, looking archly into the factor's face, said in his pawkiest way—

“Juiſt gang owre an' they'll chairge for ye.”

The factor never forgave him. “Toy,” with all his defects, lived on a different plane. He went to the factor's funeral.

One of the greatest evils that the factor had to deal with was poaching. He tried to put it down with a high hand. The gamekeepers on the Blair estate were famed for their detection of poachers, and the Court exchequers were often enriched at the expense of some villager. There were a few who obstinately refused to pay; they would sooner do “time.” Geordie Anderson, who worked in Rockburgh as a flesher, was one of the most noted poachers of thirty years ago. Many a Court pronounced judgment on him. These things, however, are seldom spoken of in the village. Kenneth-crook tries to hide her faults. In connection with one of Anderson's convictions she was in a dilemma. On the one hand she had her dignity to maintain, and on the other hand the just rights of the poacher's humour to regard. She regarded the latter and admitted her fault. Anderson, with many previous convictions, against him, entered the dock to be put on trial for a repetition of his old offence. Duly tried and found guilty, the Justices were conversing as to a proper fine to impose when the prisoner encouraged them in their work by the remark—

“Dinna pinch yersel's, gentlemen, for ye'll no get ae penny.”

Nor do I believe they ever did.

One of the village worthies was Mary Muckle. Outside Kennethcrook she was known as Mrs Meikle. The villagers, however, as was their wont, had no great respect for the title which matrimony conferred upon the fair sex, and generally continued to refer to them by their maiden names. And so Mrs Meikle was Mary Muckle. Her memory is enshrined in the recollection of a tub. Down at Flint's Brae there was a public drying-green, and close to it the Colonel had built a wash-house. Quite a number of the villagers' tubs were allowed to lie in the wash-house from the one week to the other. One night, however (it was the evening of the Fast Day, and accordingly the evening before the Fair), a raid was made upon the wash-house, and several of the tubs disappeared. Suspicion fell upon the show folk who were in the Drum Park preparing for the following day, but nothing was done at the time in the way of recovery, and years after the thief was found to be one who had a closer connection with Kennethcrook than any of the itinerant show folk. After this, however, precaution was taken by several of the villagers, and their tubs were kept at home. Mary Muckle, whose detective powers fathered the theft on a villager, deemed the carrying home of a tub too much trouble. She said she would put her name on hers. Her private opinion was that so long as her name was on it no villager would dare to steal and use it within the boundaries of Kennethcrook. She accordingly got some paint from Sandy Powrie whose artistic

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 133

skill produced the legend above the post-office door. She did not, however, deem it necessary to entrust Sandy with the lettering. She resolved to do that herself. In due time the tub was emblazoned with two mystic letters crudely drawn, but bearing a distinct resemblance to a B and an N. When asked what the letters meant, she replied quite indignantly—

“Eh? What d’ye say? B N. Wha wadna ken that for Mary Muckle?”

It is some time since Mary answered the roll call, but only a week ago I was walking down Flint’s Brae and saw her tub with its quaint inscription. Our deeds outlive ourselves.

One or two of our villagers were given to dissipation. Geordie Travis had a love for excisable liquors that was constant through many years. So long as he could get plenty of whisky, Geordie never gave anything much concern. He was said to be “guid company,” and when he died he was admitted to have been “his ain warst freend.” Geordie was catholic in his views of religion; he did not belong to any of the three churches, and each of the ministers thought it his duty to take Geordie in hand with a view of reform. One day he went to the “Black Bull” for his usual errand, as fate had endowed him with a few shillings. Whisky was cheaper then than it is now, and he invested in a quantity which was known among the villagers as a “quart.” Coming sailing along the Main Street with the neck of the black bottle protruding from his pocket, he was accosted by Mr Turnbull.

“Still at your auld ways, Geordie?” said the minister, as he, pointing to the bottle, added, ‘What are you daein’ wi’ the devil i’ your pocket?’”

“Oh, sir,” said the worthy, “the devil! That’s the craitur you’ve been efter a’ your days? Wait a crack till I get round the corner an’ I’ll put the odds on him,” and Geordie moved off to kill the author of sin and misery if Mr Turnbull was right in his assertion that the black bottle was the devil.

There were one or two folks who had a passing connection with Kennethcrook. On the Fast day, Mr Turnbull always had a stranger in the pulpit. I am perhaps wrong in saying that because in time the village folk got to know the stranger. MacKenzie was his name, and he officiated in a church in the south of Scotland. A big powerful man and a forcible preacher, he was spoken of familiarly as “Roarin’ Charlie,” an epithet applied with a meaning altogether different from that which was given to the Factor on the Blair Estate. On the morning of a Fast day a number of the young men were gathered at the Toll as the bells were ringing for service. Just as Mr MacKenzie was coming forward one of the company put the question—

“Weel, chaps, whaur i’ ye gaun the day?”

“Ou,” replied one who made himself spokesman for the rest, “to hear Roarin’ Charlie.”

The minister overheard the remark, but judiciously passed on.

After service the company was again at the

## *Some Sketches of Village Life.* 185

**Toll.** They were discussing the sermon when the divine, returning to the Anti-Burgher Manse, came up to them.

He did not know any of them, but, taking that liberty which is usually conceded the cloth, he enquired—

“Weel, lads, what did ye think o’ Roarin’ Charlie?”

The tradition does not contain the reply, but gives us to understand that the minister joined them in discussion.

Some of the strangers who connect themselves with Kennethcrook are those who made “Waterloo day” an event in our local history.

There was a military depôt at Rockburgh, and the pay-officer lived in Kennethcrook. At the present time the pensioner gets his money transmitted by post, but in those days he went to the pay-officer’s residence. As the stated day came round, the veterans of war gathered from the surrounding district. If you had not known the reason you might have thought it was an infirmary on strike. There was an absorbing interest attaching to these remnants of humanity. They could tell strange stories of bloody war. Feted by the villagers with their own pension money, they hesitated not to expatiate on the victories that Britain counts her glory, and long before nightfall were fighting their battles over again. Nor did they fight them in words only. There is a proverb in the village which says “There’s nae blessin’ wi’ the Queen’s bounty,” and certainly there was little blessing attached to the pensions as they were

then doled out. Much of the money went to the sustenance of the "White Horse" and the "Black Bull," and when, in the grey gloaming, pockets were becoming empty and tongues loose, the heroes were assisted to the street. Then the fray began. No regular constabulary assisted to preserve the peace, and the night watchman was discreet enough to remain silent. The stories of the day gave place to quarrels in the night, and with sticks and crutches (weapons deadly enough for the fragmentary combatants) Waterloo was fought over again. To the joy of the villagers the battle was sustained till far on in the night, often till some ghastly wound lent a sobering influence to the scene. Then, as best they could, the pensioners took off their several ways, frequently affording additional humour by the contrivances by which they managed to get along. But we see Waterloo no longer. When Peter Murray goes down the Main Street jauntily and marches into the Post Office flourishing a paper printed in blue, we are brought to remember the glories of Waterloo day.