

THE LAST JOURNEY

(Abridged for Recitation.)

THE autumn was passing into winter, when it became apparent to the people of Drumtochty that forty years of hard work—borne without complaint—were beginning to tell upon their beloved doctor. The Glen noticed that the doctor's hair had turned gray, that his manner had lost all its roughness, and that even Flora Campbell's wonderful compound of honey and whisky could not stop his cough. At last, on a bitter December Sabbath, Maclure's old house-keeper told Drumsheugh, the farmer, that the doctor was not able to rise, and wished to see him in the afternoon. The doctor had weakened sadly, and could hardly lift up his head, but his face lit up at the sight of his visitor, and the big hand, which was now quite refined in its whiteness, came out from the bedclothes with the old warm grip.

“Come in by, man, and sit down; it's an awfu' day tae bring ye sae far, but I kent ye wudna grudge the traivel. A' wesna sure till last nicht, an' then a' felt it wudna' be lang, an' a' took a wearyin' this mornin' tae see ye. We've been freends sin we were laddies at the auld schule in the firs, an' a' wud like ye tae be wi' me at the end. Ye'll stay the nicht, Paitrick, for auld lang syne?”

Drumsheugh was much shaken, and the sound of his Christian name, which he had not heard since his mother's death, gave him a shiver as if one had spoken from another world. . . . “It's maist awfu' tae hear ye speakin' aboot deein', Weelum; a' canna' bear it. We'll hae the Muirtown doctor up, an' ye'll be aboot again in nae time.”

“Na, na, Paitrick, naething can be dune, an' it's ower late tae send for ony doctor. There's a knock that canna be mista'en, an' a' heard it last nicht. A've

focht deith for ither fouk mair than forty year, but ma ain time hes come at laist."

Drumsheugh went over to the fireplace, and for a while did nothing but break up the smouldering peats, the smoke of which powerfully affected his nose and eyes.

"When ye're ready, Paitrick, there's twa or three little trokes a' wud like ye tae look aifter, an' a'll tell ye about them as lang as ma head's clear. . . . A' didna keep buiks, as ye ken, for a' aye hed a guid memory, so naebody 'ill be harried for money aifter ma deith, an' ye'll ha'e nae accounts tae collect. But the fouk are honest in Drumtochty, and they'll be offerin' ye siller, an' a'll gi'e ye my mind aboot it. Gin it be a pur body, tell her tae keep it and get a bit plaidie wi' the money, and she'll maybe think o' her auld doctor at a time. Gin it be a well-to-do man, tak' half of what he offers, for a Drumtochty man wad scorn tae be mean in sic' circumstances; and if onybody needs a doctor an' canna pay for him, see he's no left tae dee when a'm oot o' the road."

"Nae fear o' that as lang as a'm livin', Weelum," said Drumsheugh.

"If the new doctor be a young laddie and no verra rich, ye micht let him ha'e the buiks an' instruments; it'll aye be a help. But a' wudna like tae sell Jess, for she's been a faithfu' servant, an' a freend tae. There's a note or twa in the drawer a' savit, an' if ye kent ony man that wud gi'e her a bite o' grass an' a sta' in his stable till she followed her maister——"

"Confoond ye, Weelum," broke out Drumsheugh, "it's doonricht cruel o' ye tae speak like this tae me. Whaur wud Jess gang but tae Drumsheugh? She'll ha'e her run o' heck an' manger sae lang as she lives; the Glen wudna like tae see anither man on Jess, and nae man'll ever touch the auld marc."

"Dinna mind me, Paitrick, for a' expectit this;

but ye ken we're no verra gleg wi' oor tongues in Drumtochty, an' dinna tell a' that's in oor hearts. A'm gettin' drowsy, an' a'll no be able tae follow ye sune, a' doot; wud ye read a bit tae me afore a' fa' ower? Ye'll find my mither's auld Bible on the drawers'-heid."

Drumsheugh put on his spectacles and searched for a comfortable scripture, while the light of the lamp fell on his shaking hands and the doctor's face, where the shadow was now settling.

"Shut the buik and let it open itsel', an' ye'll get a bit a've been readin' every nicht the laist month."

Then Drumsheugh found the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, and read it with a tremulous voice to his friend.

"That micht ha'e been written for me, Paitrick, or ony ither auld sinner that hes feenished his life, an' hes naething tae say for himsel'. . . . It wesna easy for me to get to the kirk, but a' cud ha'e managed it wi' a stretch, an' a' used langidge a' sudna, an' a' micht ha'e been gentler, an' no been so short in the temper. A' see't a' noo. . . . It's ower late noo to mend, but ye'll maybe juist say that a' wes sorry, an' am hopin' that the Almichty 'ill ha'e mercy on me. Cud ye . . . pit up a bit prayer, Paitrick?"

"A' ha'ena the words, Weelum. Wud ye like's tae send for the minister?"

"It's no the time for that noo, an' a' wud rather ha'e yersel'—juist what's in yir heart, Paitrick: the Almichty 'ill ken the lave Himsel'."

So Drumsheugh knelt and prayed, with many pauses, a homely prayer for his friend, and for a "welcome hame aifter a' his wark."

"Thank ye, Paitrick, and guid-nicht tae ye. Ma ain true freend, gie's yir hand, for a'll maybe no ken ye again. Noo a'll say ma mither's prayer and ha'e a sleep; but ye'll no leave me till a' is ower?"

Then he repeated, as he had done every night of his life, a simple prayer he had learned in his childhood.

He was sleeping quietly, when the wind drove the snow against the window with a sudden "swish," and he instantly awoke, so to say, in his sleep. Some one needed him.

"Are ye frae Glen Urtach?" and an unheard voice seemed to have answered him.

"Worse, is she, and sufferin' awfu'? That's no lichtsome; ye did richt tae come. . . . Gie's a hand wi' the lantern when I'm saiddling Jess, an' ye needna come on till daylight: a' ken the road."

Then he was away in his sleep on some errand of mercy, and struggling through the storm.

"It's a coorse nicht, Jess, an' heavy traivellin'. Can ye see afore ye, lass? for a'm clean confused wi' the snaw. . . . Steady, lass, steady; dinna plunge; it's a drift we're in, but ye're no sinkin'. . . . Up noo. . . . There ye are on the road again. . . . Eh, it's deep the nicht, an' hard on us baith, but there's a puir woman nicht dee if we didna warstle through. . . . That's it; ye ken fine what I'm sayin'. . . . Yon's the hoose black in the snaw. Sandie, man, ye frichtened us; a' didna see ye ahint the dyke. Hoo's the wife?"

After a while he began again:

"Ye're fair dune, Jess; an' so am I mysel'. We're baith gettin' auld, an' dinna tak' sae weel wi' the nicht-wark. . . . We're ready for oor beds, Jess. . . . Ay, ye aye like a clap at a time; mony a mile we've gaed thegither. . . . Yon's the licht in the kitchen window. Nae wonder ye're nickerin'; . . . it's been a stiff journey; a'm tired, lass; . . . a'm tired to death" . . . and the voice died into silence.

Soon he resumed speaking. He has forgotten the toil of later years, and has gone back to his boyhood.

“The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want,” he repeated, till he came to the last verse, and then he hesitated. “Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me.”

“Follow me . . . and . . . and’ . . . what’s next? Mither said I wes tae ha’e it ready when she cam’. . . . ‘A’ll come afore ye gang tae sleep, Wullie, but ye ’ill not get yer kiss if ye canna feenish the psalm.’ . . . ‘And . . . in God’s house . . . for evermore my’ . . . Hoo dis it rin? A’ canna mind the next word . . . ‘my, my—’ It’s ower dark noo tae read it, an’ mither ’ill sune be comin’.”

Drumsheugh, in an agony, whispered in his ear, “My dwelling-place, Weelum.”

“That’s it, that’s it a’ noo. Wha said it? ‘And in God’s house for evermore my dwelling-place shall be.’ . . . A’m ready noo, an’ a’ll get ma kiss when mither comes. A’ wish she wud come, for a’m tired, an’ wantin’ tae sleep. . . . Yon’s her step . . . an’ she’s carryin’ a licht in her hand. . . . A’ see it through the door. . . . Mither! a’ kent ye wudna forget yir laddie, for ye promised tae come, an’ a’ve feenished my psalm. ‘And in God’s house for evermore my dwelling-place shall be.’ Gi’e me a kiss, mither, for a’ve been waitin’ for ye, an’ a’ll sune be asleep.”

The gray morning light fell on Drumsheugh still holding his friend’s cold hand, and staring at a hearth where the fire had died down into white ashes; but the peace on the doctor’s face was of one who rested from his labours.

IAN MACLAREN.

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