



DELPHI
CLASSICS

William Black

Collected Works



Series Twelve

The Collected Works of
WILLIAM BLACK

(1841-1898)



Contents

The Novels

James Merle; An Autobiography (1864)
In Silk Attire (1869)
Mr Pisistratus Brown, M.P., in the Highlands (1871)
A Daughter of Heth (1871)
A Princess of Thule (1873)
Madcap Violet (1876)
Macleod of Dare (1878)
White Wings (1880)
The Beautiful Wretch, The Four MacNicols, The Pupil of Aurelius (1881)
Sunrise (1881)
Judith Shakespeare (1884)
White Heather (1885)
The New Prince Fortunatus (1890)
Stand Fast Craig-Royston! (1890)
Donald Ross of Heimra (1891)
Wild Eelin (1898)

The Short Story Collection

The Magic Ink and Other Tales (1892)

The Non-Fiction

Goldsmith (1878)

The Autobiography

With the Eyes of Youth, and Other Sketches (1903)

The Biography

Brief Biography of William Black (1901) by Richard Garnett

The Delphi Classics Catalogue

William Black

© *Delphi Classics* 2022
Version 1

The Collected Works of
WILLIAM BLACK



By Delphi Classics, 2022

COPYRIGHT

Collected Works of William Black



First published in the United Kingdom in 2022 by Delphi Classics.

© Delphi Classics, 2022.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form other than that in which it is published.

ISBN: 978 1 80170 057 3

Delphi Classics

is an imprint of

Delphi Publishing Ltd

Hastings, East Sussex

United Kingdom

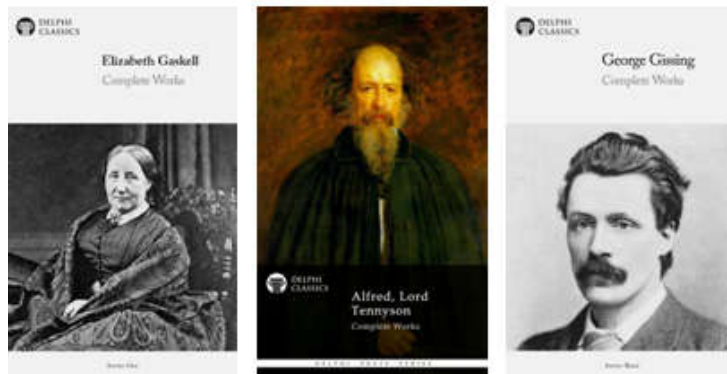
Contact: sales@delphiclassics.com



www.delphiclassics.com



THE VICTORIANS

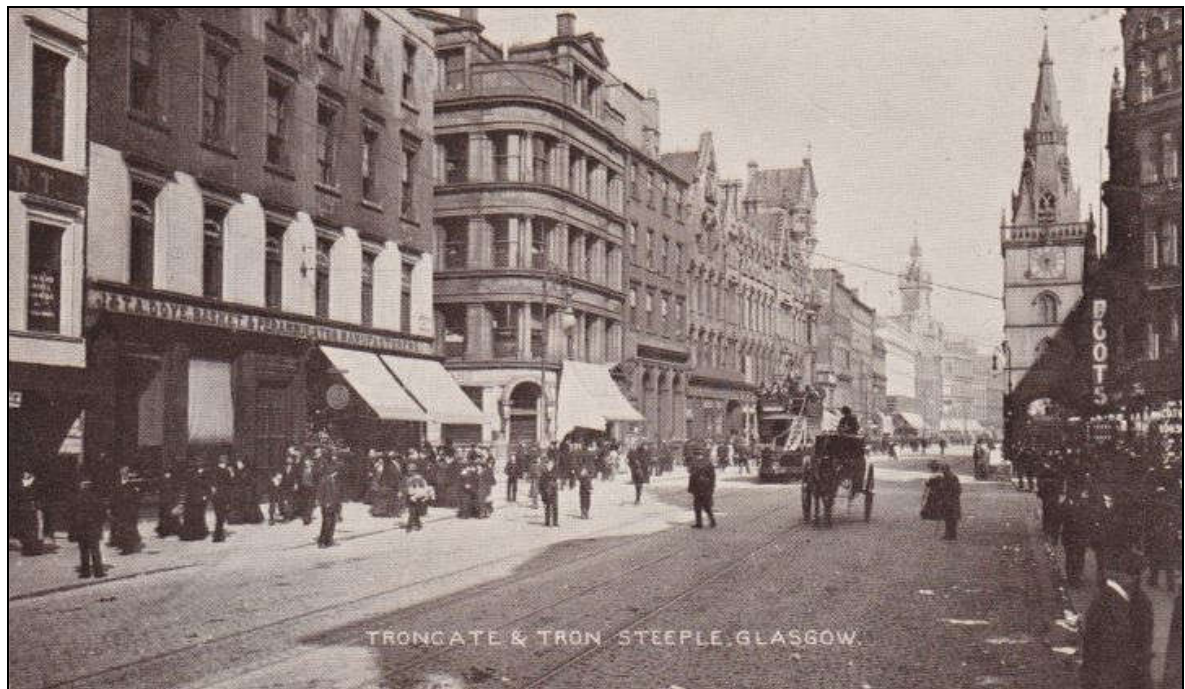


[*Explore the world of the Victorians at Delphi Classics*](#)

The Novels



Glasgow, Scotland — William Black's birthplace



Black was born in Trongate, Glasgow — his father was a minor businessman. Black was not of Lowland blood, as his father's family belonged to a branch of the Clan Lamont, who in distant days had quarrelled with their clansmen and been driven forth from the Lamont country, under the leader Black Clerk or Black Priest.

James Merle; An Autobiography (1864)



Black's first novel was published by Thomas Murray & Son in 1864. Thomas Murray established his publishing house in 1820 in Glasgow, Scotland. The firm owned a premises on Buchanan Street, Glasgow and not only sold a wide range of books, but also stationery and leather goods, such as high-end writing materials. It is perhaps not surprising that Black would have his work released by a publisher based in Glasgow as Black was born and brought up in the city. He had attended the Glasgow School of Art to train as a landscape painter, but quickly realised that he was more suited to writing. He began his career as a journalist working for the *Glasgow Weekly Citizen*, before moving to London when he was twenty-three.

James Merle; An Autobiography was not a commercially or critically successful book. It was subsequently loathed by the author himself, who was so ashamed of it that he reportedly not only disowned it, but went to the effort of buying as many available copies as possible to destroy them. He dedicated the book to James Hedderwick, a poet, journalist and newspaper proprietor from Glasgow.

The narrative takes place in a Presbyterian village in Lanarkshire, at the end of the eighteenth century. It is a fictional sketch of the life, customs and beliefs of the people of the region, narrated by the eponymous James Merle, the son of the village shoemaker.

JAMES MERLE:

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM BLACK.



GLASGOW:
THOMAS MURRAY AND SON.

EDINBURGH: PATON AND RITCHIE.

LONDON: ARTHUR HALL AND CO.

1864.

The first edition's title page

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
CHAPTER XI.
CHAPTER XII.
CHAPTER XIII.
CHAPTER XIV.
CHAPTER XV.
CHAPTER XVI.
CHAPTER XVII.
CHAPTER XVIII.

TO
JAMES HEDDERWICK, ESQ.,

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE DEVIL ENTERED EASTBURN.



IT WAS A time when there were great wickednesses in the land. It was a time when beautiful and accomplished ladies were not ashamed to be carried home tipsy by tipsy chairmen; when gallant gentlemen were not ashamed to boast of the insecurity of the palisades which surrounded this or the other sempstress's virtue; when situations and Government offices were publicly put up to auction, and sold; when men served that King whose whippings they most feared, or whose rewards they most coveted.

Yet even at this period, when one shrewd gentleman was about to publish his "DISCOURSE: Being Five Reasons to Show that it is neither an Unpolite, *neither a Thing of Ridicule, to be a CHRISTIAN,*" there dwelt in some of the midland counties of Scotland a very different race of people, who were quietly living out their life in a very different manner. A strong, reticent people; not given to much talking; many of them the direct descendants of the old Covenanters; with language, usages, and traditions so different from the inhabitants of the towns, that they might have constituted a distinct nationality. The people of these districts, as was evident from the flourishing condition of their fields, were for the most part of Teutonic origin; but here and there amongst them were still to be found traces of the ancient Celtic blood, — in short, square-built, hardy Northmen, whose coal-black eyes and sallow faces betokened a nature equally wild and timid, bold and shy — like that wavering courage which prompts the half-broken mustang to suffer himself to be approached, then causes him to leap like a bolt from the very touch of a human hand.

I belong to this people. I purpose doing what in me lies towards preserving some slight sketch of them, their talk, and their customs; for the race is nearly extinct.

In one of the bleakest and barest of these moors, situated in the upper parts of Lanarkshire, lay the little village of Eastburn; and a pretty little village it had become, by reason of the fortuitous way in which its white gables were scattered hither and thither amid the green of those portions of the morass which had been partially reclaimed. For the inhabitants of Eastburn were an industrious people; and with commendable perseverance had they succeeded in turning a part of that deep, rich, russety brown, into a healthful and wholesome green.

Nor was their labour without due reward. Each autumn that brought heavier and heavier sheaves of gold to the little fields, brought also that grim smile of success — more significant by far than the smile of mere elation — to the face of the Eastburn worthies; a curious, half-hidden, sardonic smile, that seemed to laugh at those despondent people who couldn't look beyond a few short months of frost, and darkness and snow.

I hardly know Eastburn now.

Sometimes I walk up the Lanark road, and round that well-known mound of fir-trees which shuts out from the rest of the world the hollow wherein lies the dear little village. But as I descend into the hollow, as I cross a little rivulet which runs down to the Clyde, and pass under a grove of saugh-trees, I come unexpectedly on a new Eastburn — an Eastburn with twin rows of houses, a Secession kirk, a large stone cross in centre of its market-place, and I don't know how many other new-fangled improvements. Yet I like to visit the old place; for the little houses are still white, and

the roofs are still thatched with the yellow straw, and the little burn which comes down through the moor still murmurs over a bed of the smoothest and roundest pebbles.

But on one of the autumn mornings in the year of grace 1782, the great red sun had crept up from the east, had crept over mountain, and loch, and moor, until he beat with a dimmed radiance on the windows of the Eastburn cottages. At one of those windows I stood looking out upon the white gables, and the dusty road, and the red-brown hedges that slept so strangely under the dim, misty sunlight. For of all sights in nature, that is to some people the most melancholy — when the sun, newly arisen, pierces the wavering white smoke, shedding a pale and dream-like light over the scarcely aroused village — gazing down with a wistful, sorrowful expression on the little enclosures, and on the silent road. Then it seems as though the reciprocal affections of the previous evening — those congenial and trustful emotions that had burst forth and flourished in the calm and beautiful twilight — had again and for ever been shut up and imprisoned in each breast by the stern necessities of every-day life. But this is the talk of an old man.

Ten o'clock struck — sharp, quick, and decisive — and I turned from my day-dreaming to my work; and at that moment — it being the conclusion of our breakfast hour — my father entered, followed by his nephew, a little lad of ten or twelve. We three possessed the confidence of the Eastburn people in the matter of making shoes: Ebenezer Merle was, in fact, the village shoemaker.

“Jamie, man,” said my father, when he had sat down, “it is a sad day this for Eastburn.”

I knew what was coming, and held my peace.

“When ye were born, Jamie, twa-and-twenty years since, there was but three houses in Eastburn, and I had ane o’ the three. I hae seen it grow up, house by house, stretching out into the muir, until it is maist big enough to hae a kirk o’ its ain; and I was proud to see it grow up like a sonsie bit lassie in this oot-o’-the-world place — And now, to think that this prospering has been but ripening fruit for the devil; for weel do I ken what’ll come o’, the place when this public is set up. Satan’s unco cunning, Jamie; the auld serpent has aye some ready excuse for his hell-savouring practices. And sae this man, Fraser, has been talking ower some o’ the godliest men in Muirend Session-House, until they hae maist persuaded Mr Brash that it’s right there should be a public-house in Eastburn — Public-house I ca’ it, and public-house it is, in spite o’ their talking about the needcessities o’ having a place of accommodation on siccan a lonely road. Hech, Jamie, but the devil gets braw names for his ill-faured deeds!”

Despite this speech, my father was the reverse of a talkative person. To those who saw but the outward surface of the man, he was a decent, sober-living shoemaker; taciturn, perhaps, prone to argue, not over-charitable in his judgment of sinners, and rigorous in the extreme with every point of church and domestic discipline. As he himself said, “In these days o’ grievous backsliding, the shortcomings o’ professors were no’ to be glossed ower wi’ specious excuses.”

His harshness and intolerance were chiefly the result of his bringing-up; partly, however, they were caused by the independent position which he had assumed in the great Secession battle. My father had figured prominently therein, and was proud of it. Yet those people — and they were mostly found without and beyond the village of Eastburn — who saw in this man but a strict, stern, combative kirk elder, knew no more of Eben Merle than they did of Eben Merle’s great-grandfather. Under these gray and shaggy eyebrows, that at times were drawn down with a keen, and almost

savage fierceness, dwelt a pair of the kindest eyes that mortal was ever privileged to look upon; and there were not a few who had found how easy it was to penetrate that rugged and forbidding exterior of his — to sail through the outward surge — to glide into the little haven, and rest there in the sunshine.

Eben Merle was the reverse of a talkative man, as I said. But this was an extraordinary occasion — an occasion which made it incumbent upon him to rise and protest. For twenty years the village of Eastburn had grown up and prospered in purity and peace, inhabited by sober and righteous people, the descendants of sober and righteous ancestors. And now that this almost hallowed spot was to be invaded by a “public,” Eben Merle, as one of the oldest inhabitants, as an elder of the Secession kirk, and as a godly man who ruled with probity his own house, rose up to have his say against it. Suddenly he looked up at me from under his eyebrows.

“They tell me, Jamie, that ye ken something o’ thae Frasers.” —

“I’ve seen them at the Lanrik fairs, and elsewhere,” I answered.

“Were ye in their house?”

“Once or twice. I maun e’en do as ither folk.” I hardly believed that; but the words were uttered.

“Well, Jamie, lad, I little thocht any son o’ mine would frequent such houses. And ye maun do as others do, say ye? Deed and I wish you would observe that in your ordinar walk and conversation. Ye were aye the maist contrar and obstinate callant in the parish; and to say ye would be led awa’ by a wheen silly fools! Na, na, lad; dinna tell me. There never was a Merle gaed but where a Merle wanted to gang.”

My aunt Blair came in, with disdain and anger imprinted on her haughty countenance, to say that “these wicked people were even now coming up the road;” whereupon the Eastburn elder rose solemnly from his seat, and passed out to the front of the house, there to commune with one or two kindred spirits who had turned out to witness the great event of the day. Unto him came the village smith, by name John Macaulay, likewise a man of probity. But John was not very clear in his views: of theology he knew only the broader truths, ignoring the finer distinctions which oftentimes occupied the mind of his worthy friend.

“I’m afeard this is a judgment, Mr Merle,” said the smith, gravely.

“Call it a providence, John. It may do harm in the eyes o’ man; but it is no’ for us to question the decrees They’re for good to us and ours, John.”

“A dark doctrine, Mr Merle,” said John, shaking his head.

Had Eben Merle known what would come to him and to his family through this “public,” he might have said so too; but, as it was, he felt bound to reprove John Macaulay’s doubting spirit.

“Dinna say that, John Macaulay; dinna say that! It’s as bright and clear as noonday to the eye of faith. Surely ye maun ken what the godly Mr Burgess sayeth upon this point?”

The smith looked puzzled for a moment. “No, Mr Merle; I’m thinking we hae’na got the book; indeed, I’m no sure that I mind the name.” “*Vindiciæ Legist* John, ‘*Vindiciæ Legis*,’ which meaneth a faithfu’ vindication o’ the law and covenant. A spiritual and thoughtful book — a grand guide, John, to these questions that the scoffers and scorners argue — a beautiful expounder o’ some o’ the severest and maist weighty points in the law and Gospel. And on this very subject Mr Burgess says:— ‘*God would not hae suffered sin to be, if He couldna have brought greater good than sin has evil — not that God needed sin to show His glory (for He needed nae glory from the creature); but it pleased Him to permit sin, that so thereby the*

plenteous riches o' His grace and goodness might be manifestit unto the children o' His love.' Is na that expleecit?"

"Verra clear, Mr Merle; I maun hae a reading o' the book from ye."

"Come in this minute, John; Janet shall get it doon from the book-case."

"If ye please, Mr Merle, to wait till the carts come alang" — Mr Merle glanced contemptuously at the smith — "and then we shall enter the house. But be it providence or no providence, I'm thinking it's an evil thing has come upon us. It may be with this, as with the ungodly pastime o' dancing, the devil may no' be in it, but the devil's ends may come out *o't*."

"Havers, John!"

The scorn with which my father uttered this reproof goaded Mr Macaulay to make reprisals.

"And what for, though it be a work o' the deevil — have we no a minister? And what's the use o' keeping a dog and barking yoursel'?"

I expected my father to come down upon him with a severe reply; but he did not. He seemed to pity the smith.

"Weel, weel, John, we maunna expect to have everything we can wish in this world, or, my certes, we would be for drawin' out a' braw lang catalogue!"

By and by the heavily-laden waggons came up, with their piles of barrels and public-house utensils towering in magnificent confusion. Fraser himself — an elderly man of quiet and care-worn appearance — walked with the two carters; and as the waggons rambled up the main street of our village, there appeared behind them a hitherto unperceived spring-cart, containing a quantity of domestic furniture, over which Mrs Fraser appropriately presided; and by her side sat her daughter, a beautiful young girl of seventeen or so, who seemed rather uncomfortable on meeting the inquisitive gaze of the villagers. Finally, behind the cart walked a large, bony, black and brown shepherd's collie, wearing a grave and wise expression, except at such times as he leapt up to meet the hand of his young mistress extended to him from above. All which things I beheld from our little window — looking with most interest on that blue-eyed and ringletted girl, who was shyly stealing glances at the bashful and blushing lassies of Eastburn, who were as shyly looking at her in return.

These maidens, with the rest of the villagers, were standing in an open space fronting the "smiddy," which John Macaulay had cleared for the reception of sundry ploughs, and harrows sent him to repair; and as the carts came up, they welcomed with shouts of laughter a man who was perched on the summit of the foremost cart, looking like the presiding genius of the "flitting." This man, by name Dan MacColl, was a "half-witted body," who performed the duties of public carrier between Muirend and Glasgow, and, on the intervening days, did any odd job to be got about the country-side. In a thin, high-pitched voice he had recited some doggerel verse, which had occasioned the laughter of the villagers, and he now proceeded with —

"Hooly and fairly, my dear maisters a'

Pull a lang face, and say, this life's a weary ane;

But of a' the drucken folk that I ever saw,

The maist drucken, and generally opprobrious, was an ancient Presbyterian."

The stern silence which followed this sally, showed Dan that he had mistaken his audience. But he seemed to take no notice of this withdrawal of public confidence, further than by glinting over at the lassies, who were wont to reward his rhymes with their brightest smiles. Then he continued, as he got farther up the village: —

“There was a young callant lived in Eastburn,
And wow but he mended shoon brawly;
He had een like a gled, and walked like a laird,
And some folk was tellin’ me he had thoughts o’ gettin’ married to Flora Macaulay.”

“My, Dan!” cried some of them, “Jamie Merle ll be out to ye!”

Now, all the people had been too intent, either listening to Dan MacColl, or watching the “incoming o’ the new public,” to notice an unusual cloud of dust which was being raised farther along the road, when suddenly one of the younger girls uttered a loud cry, and screamed, —

“The Drumsyken Bull! the bull! O mercy me! waes me! We’re a’ killed and dead!”

A succession of shrieks — a clattering of hoofs — a wild scramble and snatching of infants — and John Macaulay’s smithy was crammed to the door with white-faced women and terrified children. Barely had they time to shut the under half of the wooden gate, when the bull came thundering down the road, right in front of the three carts — his tail high in air, his sides white-lined with foam, his wild, sensual eyes reddened with fury. An ugly brute, though not a big one — one of those brown Highland bulls, with low-set forehead and vicious horns. He galloped past the carts — the horses shying, and flinging up their heads in affright — and seeing no other object on which to vent his rage, bore down upon the black-and-brown collie. Another flourish of the tail, and the thick bull-head was levelled. The dog swerved for an instant — well for him that he did so — the impetus of the larger beast carried its huger bulk on, and the next second there were a couple of black jaws at its throat, and six white teeth crashing through its gullet. The dog had sprung at the bull’s neck, and hung there!

This had occurred so rapidly, and every eye had been so fixed on the infuriated animal, that the carts had been allowed to go on without superintendence. But a hollow rumble brought back the wide-opened eyes of Eastburn to the fact that the last of the three horses had taken fright, had passed the other two, and was blindly rushing forward in that uncertain swaying way in which an affrighted horse gallops, while Mrs Fraser had sprang from the cart, with some foolish intent to avert the catastrophe. My father, being farthest up, ran; and at that moment some stupid fool darted out from the hedge to seize the reins. This had the immediate effect of increasing the animals terror, and with a jerk which threw the girl, stunned, into the bottom of the cart, it shied to one side of the road, and again bounded forward, just as Eben Merle, with some of his youthful agility, and with all his own wonted vigour, sprung into the cart from behind.

He caught the reins; but it was useless to pull, and he knew it. On they went — passing the last cultivated field — out to the moor, where the road was of the roughest. But, very luckily, the horse kept to the middle of this path, and all my father had to do was to soothe the animal with kindly words, and be ready for a cessation of the gallop, which came soon enough on such a road; and then he leapt out, and took the horse by the head. Again he shied, but the third-strongest man in Eastburn had the reins in his hand, and gradually the frightened beast was soothed and pacified.

While for the bull. I had seen the scamper of the people into the smithy, and on subsequently noticing how matters tended, I bethought me of a straw rope which hung in the passage. I took it in my hand and walked forth. The bull was still struggling, tossing, bellowing, in futile endeavours to shake off the dog; while the dog was pulling and tugging with claws and teeth to bring his opponent down. Wherefore, I made a noose at the end of the rope, went forward, cautiously enough, threw it over the horns, and in an instant the brute was secured. Not quite! The rope slipped, the

dog loosened his hold, and the bull turned to meet me right in the face. Plainly there was no help for it — I had to make off, and that swiftly. There stood rather than grew by the roadside a ragged old elm, and I had only time to seize one of its branches and swing myself up; where I sat, in silent pensiveness, calmly surveying the upturned countenance of the bull and the alarmed faces of the villagers. This is perhaps not a very heroic position in which to leave the chief personage of a tale, but we must go elsewhere. Indeed, I was never intended for a hero; I was never taught to speak in periods.

My father, on securing the still trembling horse, suddenly found himself a quarter of a mile from the village, in charge of a girl who had just fainted by reason of the fall, with a cartful of broken furniture under his care, and a horse ready every minute to bolt. He gently lifted the young girl out of the cart, laid her on the soft mossy bank which bounded the moor, and went down to the ditch for some clear spring water.

“Eben Merle, I have brought vinegar,” said my Aunt Blair, and he turned and saw his stately sister kneeling by the side of the publican’s daughter.

She bathed the cold, clear forehead, and chafed the dainty little hands, watching eagerly for the first uplifting of the long brown eyelashes that lay so calmly on the pale cheek. It was at this moment that I came up — being released from my ignoble bondage — with two or three of the neighbours. They stood respectfully back, looking curiously at a face and figure, the like of which they rarely saw amongst them. The girl was slightly formed, with white, fair skin, and braided auburn hair, which loosened as it got further down, and hung about her snowy neck in rich, heavy curls. By and by the softest presence of colour came to the delicate cheeks, like the thin, pink flush on a white sea-shell. The crimson returned to the small, neat mouth — the eyelids gently opened, and a pair of large, bright blue baby-like eyes gazed wonderingly around. Then she looked to Aunt Blair, and meeting the old lady’s eyes — those honest, affectionate, calm gray eyes — she turned instinctively towards her.

“My lassie!” said Aunt Blair, passing her thin, brown hand over the white brow to carry back the long and silken tresses from the pale face.

Then my aunt rose, and, turning to me, said, in her stately way: —

“Jamie, lad, I warrant me ye are the strongest man in Eastburn now — wilt carry hame this bit lassie to her father’s house?”

“That will I, Aunt Blair, if ‘twill be anyway easier for her. But I’ve emptied the cart, and now is there plenty o’ hay in’t.”

“The horse winna move an inch,” said somebody; “he’s as dour as a Hielan’ stot.”

“The horse’ll gang brawlys, if he be richtly led,” said my father, “and some o’ ye may carry down the bits o’ things, if so be you are minded to lend a helping hand.”

“Mr Merle,” said John Macaulay, with his grave deliberate way of speaking, “are ye of opinion that I would be richt in assistin’ these culpable though misguided people?”

“Gang your wa’s, John Macaulay!” said Aunt Blair, rising to her full height, “if ye are hindered frae helping the distressed by your stiff conscience, e’en get hame to your ain fireside, and read your Testament for a better mind!”

“Woman,” said Eben Merle, “be not rash in your speech; but let every man walk according to his light. The lassie’s people are now coming up the road; let us leave her to them, nor seek to ingratiate ourselves wi’ them wha are not of us.”

“Man, Eben, I wunner to hear ye! After saving the lassie’s life, ye would tak’ awa’ a’ the obligation o’ t.”

“We want not obligation from such as they are,” said my father, walking sturdily away to his own home, nor even bestowing a look on David Fraser and his wife, as

they hurried up to see their child. Whereupon, I lifted Lilian Fraser, and placed her very gently among the soft hay of the cart, bidding Aunt Blair go sit beside her, to tend her, and keep her company. Then I led the horse down to the “new public,” where Dan MacColl was busy unloading his furniture, and stringing together his idiotic rhymes; there I delivered my precious burden into the hands of Mr and Mrs Fraser, and returned to my work.

But at night, when we were all in bed, my little cousin Alick came softly into my room, and tapping me on the shoulder, said —

“Jamie, will she dee?”

CHAPTER II.

HOW A LITTLE LAD BLUSHED TO BE KISSED.



THE IDEA HAD fairly entered the boy's mind. On the next morning, which was Sabbath morning, I saw him sit cowering by the kitchen fire, gazing into the glowing red peats. He was pondering on what he should do that day, when the weary three hours before breakfast were over, when the weary sermons in Muirend Kirk had been sat out. For our Alick was an ingenious, meditative little lad; and having read one or two very wicked story-books, used to wonder whether, were he selling his soul to the devil, he should be able to repeat all the Shorter Catechism with ease and pleasure — particularly that fearful *Effectual Calling*, through which no unassisted human faculty may bear the youthful student Alick Merle, when thinking of these "questions," was generally of opinion that Mr Brash, as he spoke of the careless and happy life of boyhood, had never been a boy at all. But meanwhile, these, as I afterwards learnt, were the doings of the lad on this particular Sunday.

The Eastburn people universally attended the ministrations of Mr Brash, the Secession preacher of Muirend, a small village about three miles distant. Once there, on Sabbath morning, we were there all day; but one or two families had a practice of sending home, on conclusion of forenoon service, some youthful scion to superintend the preparation of that simple afternoon meal which in all Presbyterian houses did duty for dinner.

This office my Aunt Blair had delegated to Alick; wherefore, on this forenoon, he sped swiftly back again over the moor, slackening his pace, however, on approaching the village, that he might walk calmly and sedately up to his own home, as became a youthful Seceder. He set about his duties, accomplished them in a very short time, and then — why, then our Alick carefully brushed his Sunday cap, locked the door of his uncle's house, and went along the main street of the village until he arrived at the new public. There was nobody about. He endeavoured to look in at one of the front windows. He wanted "just one peep" at the girl whom he had seen the previous day; but a beam of sunshine was between him and the darkness, and he could see nothing. In the passage which went through the house into a back garden, having the usual number of rooms leading off on either side, he saw a door slightly open. This door stood midway between either end of the apartment, the window being at one end, a bed at the other. On the bed lay Lilian Eraser, with those blue eyes, which had so fascinated Master Alick, gazing dreamily out, through the little window, on the sunlit road beyond. There was no one else in the room; and Alick stood in a sort of trance looking at those beautiful eyes, and at the long tresses of light brown hair which were lying over the snow-white pillow. Then the eyes were withdrawn from the window; and, as she happened to turn them towards the door, they lighted up with some surprise, but without fear.

"Come in, Alick," she said; "that is your name, is it not? I think I heard it yesterday."

"Yes, Alick Merle; and what is your name?" he added, quite as a matter of course.

"Lilian Fraser," she answered, with a smile. "Lilian Eraser," repeated Alick, meditatively; "that is a very nice name. And you have a Very nice dog. Lilian?" — he went closer to her side — "will ye dee? I hope no; for — for —"

"Well, I hope not, Alick. I don't see why I should. Now, Alick, sit down in that chair, and tell me about the people in Eastburn. You know I am quite a stranger here."

"And, didna ye get an awfu' fricht when the horse ran off? If it had gaen straight on, it would have run into a great sheugh; and they sometimes say the deevil comes up out o' the water, and walks about the muir in the shape o' a big beast wi' black horns and flaming e'en."

"But you don't believe that, I'm sure."

"I dinna ken," said Alick, shaking his head, "my uncle laughs at it, and so does Jamie; but the smith — and he's the strongest man in Eastburn except our Jamie — *he* is frightened to cross the muir after dark."

"Then ye are Jamie's cousin? I thought Mr Merle was your father."

"Oh, no. My father lives in Bathgate, about sixteen or seventeen miles frae here. There's lots o' Merles about there. Whitburn kirk-yard is nearly filled wi' stanes wi' MERLE on them.... Lilian, are ye no wearied lying there? I think it would be unco wearisome to lie in bed a' the day, doing nothing." —

"I have a hook, you see."

"Oh! but that's a *dreich-looking* book. If ye just wait for a minute, I'll bring ye my *Pilgrim's Progress* that Jamie bought me at Lanrik Fair, that's full o' bonnie, bonnie pictures."

"No, Alick — never mind," she said; but by the time she had said so, Alick was half-way down the village, running like for death or life, until he got into the house; and in about the same time he was back again, bearing in his hand his much-prized volume. He gave it her to read; and while she turned over the leaves, he sat and watched her face.

"Lilian," he said, rising, "would you let me touch one o' your curls?"

"What for that? you foolish boy," she said, smiling; "here it is, though."

So he stood with his fingers twined in the rich, silken tress, drawing it out, and curling it back again, feeling how beautifully soft and glossy it was, seeing the delicate ringlets curl back to lie on her tinted cheek — and without anybody to cry to him — "O Alick, beware of woman, and of the devil!"

"It looks so pretty," he said, as a sort of apology, "and it's so long and smooth. There's no one in Eastburn has hair like yours."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure o't," said Alick, sturdily.

"Lord hae mercy on us a', what's this!" cried a voice, and Alick, for the first time in his life, looked as one may suppose Fatima to have looked when she opened the secret chamber.

"This is Mr Merle's nephew, mother," said Lilian.

"Sae, sae, and how may your uncle be, my callant?"

"He's verra well," said Alick, unconsciously returning to his vernacular, "his coat-tails are torn; likewise his hat is smashed."

"Lilian," said Mrs Fraser, sententiously, "we maun present him wi' a new ane, the first time your faither gangs to Lanark. No as ony recompense, Alick, my man, but merely as a kind o' remembrance o' what he has done for us."

Giving Alick a few messages to bear to his family, she allowed him to take his leave; for it was nearly time that the people should be returning from Muirend.

"And am I to read this pretty book?" said Lilian, when he was going.

“Surely, Lilian; and I’ll get Jamie to buy ye one all to yourself the very first Lanrik Fair!”

“O no! please don’t; I have lots o’ books, if the things were only put in order. Come here, Alick.”

She drew him towards her, bade him good-bye, and — *kissed him!* Alick’s ears tingled for very shame. Had *he* kissed *her*, he thought, it would have been all right; but to be kissed like a child! Nevertheless, there was a certain gratification which partly made up for the indignity! He got home just as he saw coming up the village the three-cornered hat and powdered wig of Mr Robert Smith, the only man in Eastburn who wore these worldly vanities. Alick was quite composed when we entered and sat down to dinner.

That meal being despatched, my father and aunt settled themselves down to the spending of the Sabbath afternoon in a profitable manner; and I am minded to show the reader how that was done in the olden times by Presbyterian families.

My Aunt Blair, having cleaned the table, gravely and deliberately took down some volumes from the book-case, which ceremony we called “setting to the books.” The “Shorter Catechism” was given to Alick; my father took Mr Burgess his *Vindiciæ Legis*; Aunt Blair reserved for herself that wonderful volume of eloquence, *Theron and Aspasio*; while I contented myself with Ralph Erskine’s *Gospel Sonnets*. But beyond and above these volumes, there were two books placed on the table, more by custom than for use. Of both of these books Eben Merle was proud; and a Sabbath night would not have looked like a Sabbath night had they not been within reach. For one of them, the great MARROW, bore this inscription: —

This book is to

MR EBENEZER MERLE, from GAVIN BRASH; and may God give him grace to
look on it.

Whitburn, 1744.

And the other, no less esteemed, was *Faith no Fancy*, with the following words on the flyleaf: —

To

EBENEZER MERLE, from his friend,

RALPH ERSKINE.

Dunfermline, 1743.

These two books, with Mr Brown’s recently-published *Self-Interpreting Bible*, and his *Dictionary* of the same, were the jewels of Mr Merle’s library; and it was no contemptible one. For the Merles had always been a reading family; and our old-fashioned book-case contained volumes that had been handed down from grandfather to father, and from father to son — rare old volumes, in many instances, bearing, also, marks of having been well and thoroughly perused.

And while this matter of the books was in hand, you might have heard a pin drop in our kitchen. Not a sound was there but the sonorous ticking of the great eight-day clock in the lobby, or the hiss of a falling peat, as it sent up a shower of sparks to

brighten the rows of plates which adorned the walls. The table was drawn near to the fire, as was also the patriarchal easy-chair; and Eben Merle, as he sat therein, was a study. Across that honest, old face, sixty years of hard battling with the world had left many a rugged line; for the Merles, however mentally superior to their neighbours they may have been, had seldom been able to lift their neck from the grinding heel of necessity; and perhaps it was this which gave a tinge of pride and self-seclusion to a nature otherwise as free and open as daylight. Nor was my father a repining or discontented man. He was too thoughtful to consider himself ill-used. Yet that life-long struggle with circumstances had drawn down those shaggy eye-brows, and made a wonderful difference between *this* Eben Merle, and *that* Eben Merle who, forty years before, had often and often walked a score-and-half of miles, through a snow-storm, to see my mother. And as he now sits there in the arm-chair, with his black-satin vest creaking in its thickness at each long-drawn breath, with his soft, grey hair turned loosely back until it touches the collar of his green and high-neck coat, with his long and bony hand lying on the volume open on his knees, with his keen, inquiring eyes following page after page, and with his venerable and calm-eyed sister sitting at the other end of the table, why, then, you begin to perceive that the accomplishment of ambitious designs is not an indispensable thing in this world, and that a man may live all his life in a groove, and still have deserved well of his generation.

That is the text of my book.

My Aunt Blair, who sat with her head bent over her book, was also a true Merle. She was a grand and stately old woman; with a stern and well-marked face, which was only softened by a pair of kindly gray eyes, and with a sort of royal way with her, which effectually cowed her gossiping neighbours in Eastburn. Even my father, Eben Merle, who was stubborn against domination of any kind, yielded in some things to her; and the piety and inflexible courage of this grand old lady had won for her the admiration of all the godly people about that country-side. She was known as "Janet Blair o' Eastburn, a wonderfu' pious woman, and a worthy and God-fearing housekeeper."

So the evening wore on, its monotony only being broken by Alick attempting to repeat his questions, which he bungled very grievously. For the little lad's head had been confused by his interview with Lilian Fraser, and also by a dread of my discovering that, in the forenoon, he had been examining my geological drawer, and had, as usual, broken one of my best specimens.

Then I went into my own little room — that comfortable little place, from the window of which, in the winter-time, I could sit and look out upon the blinding white of the moor, or, in the calm summer afternoons, upon the miles of brown heather lying under the red sunset — hanging like a glorious dream between earth and sky, while the pale purple of the horizon and the dim outline of "Tintock-tap" loomed through the rosy mist like the amethystine walls and gate of some distant and magnificent paradise beyond.

And now, having spoken of the members of our family to the better furtherance of my story, it perhaps behooves me to say something of myself. Regarding my personal appearance, nothing need be said; for the men of our family were keen as hawks and strong as wild-deer, yet did they never acquire a commanding presence, nor did they ever grow rich and prosperous; while the women were dark-eyed, and tall, and handsome — never fat, and rosy, and beautiful, like their Saxon neighbours.

"It was nae gude," I once overheard a neighbour saying, "that took Jamie Merle awa' by himsel' for days thegither, wandering up and down in desert places like a warlock or a murderer. It was verra fine to talk about knowledge, and sic like; but that

was a queer knowledge that made a man forsake his freens and neebors, as if they werena better than dirt in his sicht. And didna Mrs Macaulay mind that passage frae the pious Mr Hutcheson, where, talking o' the dangers o' worldly learning, he says:—*'Mens ain wit and knowledge are sae great an idol to them, that they canna endure to be reputed ignorant, or to esteem any truth as excellent wherewith they are no' acquainted?'* and maybe, Mrs Macaulay, that callant is but fa'in' into a snare o' Satan, that sae he may be tempted to forget the only true knowledge."

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE WICKED KNIGHT BORE OFF THE BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN.



IT WAS MY aunt's custom to dress carefully on the forenoon of each week-day, and, with a small basket on her arm, go forth to make her purchases. This she called "going into the town." The time so occupied did not exceed twenty minutes. The "town" consisted of but three shops; yet Aunt Blair held to her definition.

So she went forth, and up the village, gravely nodding to one or two of the neighbours, until, happening to cast her eyes forward, she was fairly startled into an exclamation, —

"Bless me, if there isna the publican's daughter comin' down the road wi' Leddy Margaret Seton o' the Ha'!"

This Lady Margaret Seton was yet but a young girl, with raven ringlets, and a quick, pert way with her, which teased as it fascinated everybody. She was the pet of the village; for, being left almost entirely to her own devices, she made no scruple about walking through the little cottages and making fun with the inmates. My father's house was her favourite resort; and not even Aunt Blair had the power to put any restraint upon her.

"Your servant, Mistress Seton," said my aunt, with the formal curtsy of the time, "your leddyship is early out."

"Mrs Blair, I am going straight down to your house. I want to show Mistress Lilian my sweetheart; and I hope he will leave his work or his fossils to go with us for a walk. Indeed, I shall make him — that I shall; so come along, Lil!"

But Lilian Fraser stopped.

"Madam," she said, "I have to thank you for more than I can well say. Indeed, I do not know how — —"

"Say nae mair, lassie, say nae mair," said Aunt Blair, kindly, as she looked at the heightened colour and downcast eyes of the girl. "I have only to blame ye for one thing, and that is, getting out so soon. But I doubt not it was this madcap girl who inveigled ye."

"Mrs Blair, I must have no scolding," said Mistress Seton — for so she imperiously demanded to be called. "I am going down to see my hero, with his eyes of fire and his pale brow. Madam, wherefore does he so draw down his brows, and look so preternaturally grave, as though he thought it were a foolish thing to laugh? Perhaps to reprove me, who knows? Now, Lil, you shall see him."

And so off they went, leaving my aunt in a fever of wonder that "her leddyship" should go about with Mistress Fraser, the daughter of the keeper of a public.

When the two young ladies entered our house I was taking my customary morning exercise by boxing the air with a brick in each hand, and, I suppose, looked foolish enough at being caught in the act.

"That, Lilian," I heard Lady Margaret say to her fair companion, "is how he defends me, his lady-love, against all ill-mannered knights. Is not he a paragon of strength! And look at his brown curls, and his straight neck!"

"Lady Margaret Seton is becoming personal," I said.

"Come hither, sir, that I may introduce you to Mistress Lilian Fraser."

It was in those stupid, courteous old days, when women were honestly frank, and men were honestly free; [Mr Merle forgets the opening sentences of his autobiography. Ed.] wherefore, I went forward and kissed the young girl's hand. She blushed a little, and averted her eyes.

"Mark how my lover leaves me unknissed," said Lilian's friend, with a toss of her dark curls.

"Mistress Seton, it is unfair to hold a tempting bait before a poor gudgeon, and then to withdraw it just as he was about to" —

"Why, sirrah, there is a hook in the bait! But he who would win the bait must brave the hook."

It was the fashion at that time to talk in this way. But I knew, perhaps from experience, that in her case at least, it meant nothing.

"Ah, Lilian," she said, "I see how it is. I wish that I had blue eyes such as yours; *then* perhaps he would at least have been courteous. Never mind; as the old song says:

—
'She went unknissed to market,
Did bonnie Betsy Gray;
But ere the mirksome night came,
Twenty would lead her away.'

And now, sir, will you deign to withdraw your gaze from my friend's face, and go with us to the moor? You may be useful."

"I certainly could never hope to be ornamental — to Lady Margaret Seton."

"Will you go, Mr Merle?"

"I shall go, Lady Margaret Seton, if you give me leave to change my dress." —

"No, sir, you shall do nothing of the sort; and be pleased to call me by my proper name."

So we went. We passed through the village and out upon the wide moor, where the blue harebells and the golden stars of the tormentil were sprinkled over the russet ridges of the heather. The world was thrilling with the great delight of a new morning — and that an autumn morning, when the elm-trees and the plane-trees were brilliant in orange and yellow, and the air filled with the scent of honeysuckle and the resinous sweet-gale.

"You must not mope, sir," said the haughty young damsel to me; "you must do your very utmost to amuse us. If it wouldn't make Lil blush, I should tell you why you are so grave; but she is such a sensitive little chit! Why she has done nothing but talk of you the whole morning, and now she says not a word!"

Lilian Fraser looked frightened; whereat Lady Margaret threw her arms round her neck, kissed her, and told me she was talking foolishly.

I was very proud of my charge; and could have challenged the Lothians to produce such another pair of beauties. Yet somehow I inclined to the side of the fairer and gentler of the two; who was quite a darling with her simple, pretty ways, and her artless wonder as I showed her fossils picked up in the bed of the stream.

"Do you know, Mr Merle," she said, "my father has a great collection of these stones and beasts, but never till now did I think them pleasing to look at." —

"Mistress Lilian, do you tell me your father has a collection of fossils!"

"He has, sir. Indeed, Mr Merle, could I be so bold as to ask you to come and see my father, I know he truly would be glad to receive you." She spoke with so much hesitation, that I knew she was afraid to ask me, the son of Eben Merle, to enter a publican's house. She thought I feared the wagging tongues of Eastburn!

“Mistress Lilian, I shall gladly go with you whensoever it pleases you. Might I see him to-night?”

“I thank you, Mr Merle; he will be proud to welcome you.”

“What! what!” cried Lady Margaret, arching her neck, and throwing back her glossy curls, “assignments already? Why, this is too bad, my masters — yet what a romantic couple you do make! You know the song —

‘The youth was dark as a midnight sky,
And she as rosy as the morn.’

But then —

‘He told his love, with what poor words
His trembling heart might say;
But she was wayward as a child,
And laughed them all away.’

And now, my pretty pair of lovers, I, too, shall have my sweetheart, and hither he comes. Mark you the flowers which I plait for him.”

She stood with her dark eye-lashes drooping on her cheek, and her dainty jewelled fingers interweaving hare-bells and butter-cups with a sprig of pink bell-heather; while the stranger of whom she had spoken drew sufficiently near for recognition. I knew him, and knew no good of him. His name was Gavin or Guy Rankine, and he was son of an elder Gavin Rankine, a writer in Lanark.

Gavin Rankine the younger wished to be considered the gentleman of the district; and, having nothing else to do but spend his father’s money, he dawdled about the streets of Lanark with his hands in his pockets, or made visits to Edinburgh, whence he returned with a red face and the newest fashions. He was a tall, light-haired youth, with a triangular hat of the jauntiest fashion, elaborate silk-ties at his knee-breeches, and brilliant silver buckles on his shoes, while his head was lavishly powdered. In spite of his dress, however, he was not a very reputable-looking person; while a defect in one of his eyes, and a harsh, grating voice, did not tend to lessen the unprepossessing character of his appearance.

On nearer approach, I perceived that he was advancing with a smile on his face, as though he knew some one of us. I turned to Lilian Fraser, and was amazed to see that she was as pale as death. I was startled — I looked again — and at that moment I felt a pang of misery at my heart such as had never been there before.

Fool that I was! I had already been building silly, absurdly silly air-castles! I had looked forward to the remaining years of my life as a long string of golden sunsets; now were they shrivelled into one cold winter’s day. I turned to meet the man, with a very devil in my heart I was young then.

“Good morrow, ladies — your servant, sir,” he said, blandly, going up to kiss Lilian’s hand, and then — her cheek!

He would have spoken to Lady Margaret, but she turned coldly away from him, and talked to me about her flowers. He followed.

“Madam, your servant!” he said, with a low bow.

“I know you not, sir,” she replied haughtily.

“More’s the pity, then — though ’tis easy remedied. Know you, young lady, that my name is—”

“Sir, I wish not your conversation,” she said, with another toss of the head.

“You are somewhat proud, girl, to be a country beauty.”

She turned full upon him, and stamped her little foot.

“My father, sir, is Seton of the Holm, who has a manner of punishing those who are insolent to his daughter!”

She again turned towards me.

“Mr Merle, I thank you for your valiant protection of two defenceless girls,” she said, cuttingly.

“Lady Margaret Seton forgets that I, a mere stranger, cannot possibly interfere between *friends*.”

“Oh, I see,” she said — her quick woman’s wit having caught it at once — “then, sir, I ask you to send away this man for my sake — and for Lilian’s, too, believe me.”

Right gladly did I then go forward to Rankine, and ask a word of him apart.

“Sir, your presence is distasteful to those ladies, and I request you will withdraw it as speedily as possible.

“You are mistaken, sir.”

“I am not mistaken.”

“You are, sir; and by heavens, you blasted fool — “With which he raised his hand.

“Oh, you would fight before the women!” I said.

“I would kick such a hound as you anywhere. You consider yourself a gentleman, I presume?”

“I am so much of a gentleman as to know that you are not one.”

“You are smart also!”

I do not yet know how I refrained from pitching him into the nearest bog-hole — which would have been no difficult matter.

“I shall remember you,” he said, “but meanwhile I shall try my luck with the ladies themselves.”

He went forward to Lilian Fraser, and asked her if she would accompany him back to the village. She looked to the ground, blushed violently, and put her arm in his. I merely smiled.

“Mr Merle,” said Lady Margaret Seton, walking proudly over to me, “I am not answerable for the likings or dislikings of my friends; and I must now ask you to escort me to the Holm.”

The two girls looked at each other — one entreatingly, the other scornfully, and then each couple went their own way.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW CAESAR VANQUISHED HIS ENEMY



“UNCLE!” CRIED ALICK, rushing into our workshop the same afternoon, breathless and eagereyed, “there’s twa drunk men coming down the street!”

“Twa drunk men in Eastburn?” repeated my father, looking at the boy.

“As sure as—”

“Alick!”

“It’s true, uncle, and one o’ them’s as drunk as — as anything! — and the other’s helping him alang. See!” And thereat Alick sprang to the window.

My father and I followed, and there, sure enough, were the two men — one of them Guy Rankine, the other a friend of his, called Henderson, whom I also knew.

“It is a sair, sair sicht to me, Jamie,” said my father; “I thought my auld e’en would hae been spared the like o’ this. Wae’s the day that that public-house came to Eastburn!”

“I know the men,” I said, “and they were drunk, I warrant, long ere they came the length o’ Eastburn. One o’ them I saw this morning, and even then he smelt like a turpentine-jar.”

My father answered not, but turned sorrowfully away from the window.

“Jamie,” cried Alick, to whom the sight was a perfect treat, “they hae been at a weddin’, for ane o’ them has ribbons at his breast and at the end o’ his pig-tail.”

“Weddings or funerals come alike to them wha want to get drunk, Alick, and the devil’s aye near to lend a helping hand.”

“When you say the devil, Jamie, you mean Mr Fraser,” said Alick, acutely.

At that moment we heard a knock at the outer door. These outer doors were seldom shut by the Eastburn people, and as our one yielded to the hand of the visitor, the noise of somewhat unsteady footsteps was heard in the stone passage. Eben Merle rose.

“Father — ,” I said, but at this moment the door of the workshop opened, and Gavin Rankine and his friend appeared.

“What would ye have in this house, gentlemen?” said my father, standing erect before them.

The sunlight was streaming in through the little window, and as Rankine stepped forward his eyes were dazzled for a moment.

“Sir,” said he, “I have come to — to thank — to thank ye, sir, for having rescued from eminent peril — no, from imminent peril, begad — one whose life is — is dearer to me than my own. You understand, sir, I mean Mistress Lilian Fraser, whose tender body was confided to—”

Had the sunlight *not* been in Rankine’s eyes he would scarcely have proceeded so far.

“Can’t you listen?” he proceeded; “ye are as obstinate as the rest o’ the — obstinate folk o’ this God-forgotten country-side! Quarter me, if ever I saw such a—”

“Sir, have done!” cried my father. “This is an honest man’s house, and never till now has it been polluted with the breath of a drunken man.”

“Peace, you old fool! Is it true, then, that this black-a-vised son o’ yours is running after my Lilian?—”

My father made a step forward; but, for Mr Rankine’s safety, I deemed it prudent to rise.

“Father,” I said, “heed not this silly fool. He but wants cooling, and he shall have it.”

Wherewith, I laid hands on Mr Rankine’s collar, and bore him, in a very ignoble manner, through the passage to the front of the house. Close to the wall outside stood the customary stone seat, composed of a single slab of greenstone resting on two blocks of the same material; and here did I deposit Mr Rankine, who, on getting into the fresh air, felt himself considerably revived. This he evidenced by re-opening a running fire of objectionable words and phrases, and otherwise indecorously behaving himself; so much so, that I had again to caution him.

“Good sir,” I said, “ye should be grateful for being so comfortably placed; let alone making such a disturbance. You are aware a hurt dog yowls louder than a killed one; and it might even be needful to dip ye in yonder burn. And rainy days come worst to peacocks, Mr Rankine, as our old women say.”

The cool air had somewhat sobered Mr Rankine. Henderson, who had been a passive spectator of the whole affair, came forward to soothe his friend’s wounded feelings, and arrange his dress.

“And took ye hame the proud beauty this morning,” said Rankine, “and kissed ye her on the way? Ma certes, but I think it wasna for love ye were sae kind to her! And ye would speak to Lilian Fraser? — faith, a gentleman is not to be lightly interrupted in his sport! Eh, Henderson, ye auld chiel, sport — sport!”

Had he not been drunk I should have kicked him. As it was, I only intimated to him that it would be politic on his part to remain quiet, and advised him to quit the village as soon as possible.

Henderson helped him to his feet, and as he did so, David Fraser came up the road.

“Mr Fraser,” cried my father, with a bitter sarcasm in his dark eyes, “it is the duty of every *honest* tradesman to carry home his work when ’tis finished. Ye have forgotten, sir. Surely ye canna leave this poor gentleman in his present condition, seeing he came to it by your means.”

“Mr Merle,” said Fraser, in humble expostulation — but the old man turned scornfully away, and went into the house. David Fraser was imprudent enough to follow him. “Mr Merle, indeed you do me wrong; I have not seen this man for months.”

“Sir,” said Eben Merle, turning to him, “I will have neither drunkards nor publicans in my house! Must I again say it?”

“God forgi’e ye, Mr Merle,” said David Fraser, and then he passed on to his dwelling.

Should I go that evening? I had partly promised to do so, but I hardly dared fulfil my promise. I might find her sitting on the knee of that drunken fool, laughing into his fishy eyes and being kissed by his polluted breath. The very thought was horrible. I knew Gavin Rankine was a visitor at that house for no honourable purpose; nor could I conceive how such a gentle-looking girl could tolerate the presence of such a man. But was not even this assumed innocence a specious hypocrisy, in order to secure an “honest” husband, when discarded by —

“Jamie, what ails you!” said Alick, “ye look fearsome!”

It was foolish, certainly — I was ashamed of myself — tried to shake off the feeling, and resolved to think better of myself and of her. I would go. Indeed, there

were several reasons why I should. I was sorry for the manner in which David Fraser had been repulsed by my father — that stern old hero, who was so nervously afraid of compounding with the devil in any way.

One can hardly now-a-days realise the horror with which my father regarded that public-house. It was the nightmare of his waking life. He would not even accept the thanks of the man whose daughter he had delivered from probable death.

“Mr Fraser,” he had said, the previous evening when the two men met, “among honest persons no thanks are needed for the mere performance of a common act o’ honesty. It betokens an evil nature to be surprised at an ordinary good action; so dinna consider yourself beholden to me or mine for the little help which it pleased the Almighty to render ye through my hands.”

Then the man Fraser was a geologist — a rarity in the year 1782 — and I should have a kindred spirit with whom I could exchange specimens, or talk over the lucky adventures or mishaps of former years. But the chief reason, I may now confess, was, I fear, a foolish desire to show the people of Eastburn that I was above their small prejudices, and could enter a public-house when it suited me to do so. I smile at the notion now; but then I was fresh upon the world, and thought that people took cognisance of my doings. I was just at that stage of life, too, when the world is very new to one. I had grown out of the simply natural and unreflective period of boyhood, had read no novels, had formed no theories of human life; and all the different goings on of men and women, their self-centredness, their narrow aims and small ambitions, their unreasoning and petty rivalries, were strange things to me. I was not conventionalised. Nearly every person was to me a character, and I wondered at each man’s peculiarities. I wondered more that people themselves did not see how odd and exceptional they were; and I used to amuse myself with looking on and watching those little manifestations of human passion. I thought myself very wise then, and fancied I was so far removed above my neighbours, that it was only natural I should like to see their little parts come into my own wider sphere of vision, there to be indulgently smiled at. I was simpler, and more untutored in the ways of the world, than any one of them.

Towards dusk I left my work, and passed up the village towards the “public.” I went into the kitchen, found Rankine and Henderson enjoying themselves at a large peat-fire, and Lilian Fraser sitting somewhat apart, cleaning a brass collar for the great dog Cæsar, who lay crouched at her feet. On my entrance she started, flushed a little, and then rose gracefully and composedly to ask me to be seated.

“My father has not yet returned from Lanark, Mr Merle,” she said, “but we await his coming instantly.”

“Then, Mistress Lilian, I shall rather see him in the morning, when he has rested, and meanwhile—”

“Nay, sir, I entreat you to sit down; he will be here presently, I doubt not.”

She glanced over at the two men as she uttered the words, and there was something in her eye which made me accept the proffered seat.

Rankine had either been shamming in the morning, or, since then, had taken a dose of warm water to cure his ailments and infirmities. He was not yet perfectly sober, but just in that next stage to sobriety, wherein a man, if he be of a pugnacious nature, becomes dangerous, or, if he be of a cowardly disposition, becomes insolent. Even as it was, however, Rankine pretended to have less consciousness than he really had, in order, possibly, to indulge his taste for strong language; wherefore, as I entered, he and Henderson were calling each other all manner of hard names, such as only a very black pot can call a very dirty kettle.

Lilian and I entered into conversation, as likewise did Rankine and Henderson; with this difference, that Rankine kept his eye upon us to watch the effect of his talk.

"Henderson, ye auld sinner, what for did ye bring me to this wicked place, where all the men are rogues — no' forgetting the smith, wha commits forgery every day? Ah, ha, Henderson, words may mean different things, lad, when they put ye in the Tolbooth o' Glasgow, they maltreat you, but it's by giving ye bannocks and yill. Can my shoemaker knight understand that?"

"Pray Heaven, sir, ye may never experience their kindness!" I said.

Rankine was clearly sober, and was evidently bent on provoking a quarrel. "What matters it to you, ye shoemaker loon? And what for do ye come here, wi' your ells-lang face and your sanctimonious looks, to spoil the sport o' your betters?"

"My betters had as well keep a calmer sough, or they may have their extremities reversed. 'Deed, Mr Rankine," I added, "I would have ye more mannerly in any man's house."

Mr Rankine's reply was to fling at my head a half-burnt block of wood, which had fallen down by the fire-place. I fortunately caught it, and pitched it again into the blazing peats.

"There's a Providence watches over drunken men, Mr Rankine."

"What d'ye mean by that?" bawled the other.

"Toots, man, Mistress Fraser here is wondering ye should cry so loud in such quiet company. A collier has little cause to waste his oil in daylight."

"A collier? A collier's an honest man, ye drucken ne'er-do-weel! What for do ye talk to me on my behaviour? Is the house yours? Were ye licensed? Preach at your ain gable-end, gudeman; and meddle not with things which do not concern ye."

"Drop your bletherin'!" growled Henderson, stroking his bristly chin.

"Henderson, gin your faither was an honest man, I'm far mista'en! If he was, his honesty is in heaven, for he took it a' with him, leaving ye ne'er a morsel! Henderson, Henderson, gin Satan had his ain, ye wouldna be sitting here the night. What made ye leave Stirling, the druckenest hole in Scotland? Lord save us, I have seen the road ahint the castle blocked up wi' drucken women, flung there by their husbands till they sobered, a' lying atap o' ane another!"

"Lying in tiers, probably, Mr Rankine," I said. "I meant to say, lying profusely there — you observe, Mr Henderson, how the vulgar manners of common people are apt to encroach upon the conversation of gentlemen. Save us, how red the lassie is getting! Of a' the fearsome things that ever were let loose on the earth, the warst is an angry woman. Henderson, ye crouse auld chiel, look at that awesome Juno ower there — wadna she like to have us driving like wud through the saut sea faem, which I take to be a free and graceful exposition of *spumas salis aëre ruebant*? And a bonnie bit lassie she is for a", and gin she had but a spice o' deevilment in her toes, she might even be up and saying, *Ego quæ Divûrn incedo regina*. Peradventure — but hang me if I think not the devil has brought me to these parts to be contaminated with the vulgar manners and speech o' these conventicle people!"

"In which case, sir," I said, "the devil would hae done ane o' his ain bairns a gude turn. It's a pity he has such a backward scholar."

"Mr Merle," said a more musical voice, "I pray you not to enter further into conversation with him. It will but aggravate him, and indeed I cannot sit still and hear, even though it be expected of me, seeing my father and mother are from home. Indeed, I earnestly wish they were come!"

She spoke in a low voice, that Mr Rankine might not hear; but he divined what was passing.

“Aha! my pretty one, secrets? Nay, I maun e’en claim my rights, and have a kiss if I promise to tell no tales. But we shall forget these things when ye are Mrs Gavin Rankine, with a castle as big as the Tower o’ Babel on your head, and a satin gown on that might stand by itself Then we shall go down to Glasgow, and I’ll become a tobacco-lord to strut about the plain-stanes wi’ my scarlet-cloak, while you’ll be the reigning toast o’ every club in the city. Bless us, she’s blushing wi’ pleasure at the very thought o’t.”

Lilian rose from her seat, shame and indignation filling her beautiful eyes. She spoke to Rankine, not loudly, but proudly; told him how that he dared not to have insulted her had her father been at home; told him how manly it was of him to do so, when he knew he was safe in doing it; and finally, her wrongs and her indignation getting the better of her, burst into a fit of crying.

“Deed, laird,” said Rankine, “I never saw the lassie look so handsome. I maun hae a kiss from my little wifie, and that will mend matters, I’m thinking.”

Rankine rose; so did Cæsar. The girl, with white lips, caught the dog by the collar, and as Rankine made another step towards her, she flung the dog from her, who at once leapt full at Rankine’s throat. Down went the man, with a cry, striking his head heavily on the corner of a chair, and had I not seized the animal, and dragged him back by main force, his fangs would the next second have been in Rankine’s neck.

With the fright of seeing the man fall, Lilian screamed such a scream that the ostler of the place came running in to see what was the matter. Henderson was too stupefied to do anything; so this man at once caught up Rankine’s head, loosened the neck of his laced coat, and shook him as a terrier would shake a rat That being of no avail, he laid hold of a watering-can, and threw the contents round the fellow’s head, being assisted thereto by an equally copious shower of oaths from Henderson. Between them, and after some time, Rankine came to himself, and got up, smiling in a very ghastly manner; but his rage being once more enkindled, he lifted a poker, and hit out in a vague and general manner. I felt a sharp pain at the back of my head, but not knowing that I was struck, I merely wrested the poker from Rankine’s hands, caught him by the collar, and walked him out of the house. He stormed and vowed all manner of vengeance; but having got Henderson out also, I locked the door inside, and allowed them to vent their wrath on the unoffending air.

Then I returned to see how my brave girl was getting on. But the deadly nightshade of her wrath was gone, and now she was once, more the gentle, fragile lily, beautiful for all men to see. I spoke kindly to her, and tried to cheer her and comfort her, but she was too agitated to speak. She was sitting rather before me, so that I could with safety gaze on the rich masses of brown hair that were brought gracefully back from her forehead, and on the pale profile of her cheek, that was lit up now and again by a flickering glare of the fire. The candles were burning dimly, and as a current of air came in from the door, or a peat fell, the ruddy gleam would run out to sprinkle these braids of hair with living threads of gold, and to kiss with chastened light the rounded cheek The very sight of this gentle maiden seemed to add new riches to my being.

And still she sat motionless, frightened and pale. A tear was trickling down either cheek as she sobbed out, —

“We should not have let him go — he is hurt He will never come back again.”

Then she cared for him? I was angry, and I was a fool; for I knew not how instinctively a true woman’s heart longs to repair even a fancied injury.

“Madam,” I said, “I am amazed you should desire the presence of such a man. Sure he is no fitting company for any honest man or woman.”

“He is hurt, sir; sorely hurt, it may be; and ’tis impossible they can reach Lanark to-night If Mr Henderson knows the way to Muirend, they may pass the night there, as I trust they will” Then again, she said, —

“My father winna like to hear o’ this matter, Mr Merle; for Mr Rankine is a friend o’ his.”

“Deed, then, Mistress Lilian, to be plain with you, I wish, for his own sake and for yours, that he had less of such friends.”

She turned, and laid her hand on my arm.

“Mr Merle, I can trust you. My father is indebted to this Mr Rankine’s father in the way of certain papers, about which I know little; and I am sorely afraid that this night may bring sore trouble to our house.”

Suddenly her grasp of my arm was tightened. I turned and saw that she was deadly pale, and was staring at the back of my head. I put up my hand, it was wet. I was about to ask her what the matter was, when I felt strangely giddy; and then I only remembered having heard a shriek, as she threw her arms round me to prevent me from falling, and that afterwards there were voices in the kitchen — those of Mr and Mrs Fraser, my father, and lastly of Aunt Blair, as her kind, gray eyes bent over my face.

CHAPTER V.

HOW I WAS CONVICTED OF HAVING DEALINGS WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS.



“HE WAS A wonderin’ man, the faither o’ our minister,” said my Aunt Blair to Mrs Macaulay; “a wonderin’ pious man. Weel do I remember that day on which he brought those worthy servants of God, Mr Ebenezer Erskine, and Mr Ralph, and Mr Kid o’ Queensferry, to our house, which was then in Whitburn. That was a proud day for our Eben (Jamie wasna born than); but it was nae mair than we had a right to expect; for the Merles, as ye ken, Mrs Macaulay, have been kent far and wide, for generations, to be pious and godly people.”

“Deed, yes!” said Mrs Macaulay, who would as soon have thought of questioning the authenticity of the Confession of Faith as of doubting the statements of her grand, old friend.

“And weel do I mind the peculiar way that auld Mr Brash had o’ stirring his tea, puir man!

He took more time to it than maist folks, and did it sedately and thoughtfully; no’ as if he was in a hurry to partake o’ creature comforts. But it’s a mournfu’ world atweel, as Solomon saith, ‘What hath man of all his labour, and o’ the vexation o’ his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?’ and sae, just before the present Mr Brash was ca’d to Muirend, the auld man depairtit this life, and sae was hindered from seein his son’s advancement.”

Why did Aunt Blair pause when she came to the word “son?” That very morning she had come into my room — where I still lay in bed from loss of blood — and remonstrated with me, in her stately, didactic way, on the exceeding sinfulness of my having dealings with a publican.

“Your father is grieved,” she said, “nor is that a’. It is no for the temptation o’ strong drink; he kens brawly there was nane o’ our family but is proof against *that*. But, Jamie, he has another sore suspicion troubling his mind. Will I say it?”

“Surely, Aunt.”

“Then, Jamie, he is led to predict a sad future for ye, if ye go about this public. Indeed, Jamie, I saw he was thinking about his only son marrying the daughter o’ a public-house keeper, and if sic a thing should happen, as I pray God to forfend, weel ken I he would cry wi’ Rebecca, in the bitterness o’ his heart, ‘I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth... what *good shall my life do me?*’”

But whatever cause for anxiety my father may have had in this matter, was allayed by the one feeling of expectation becoming general in Eastburn and over the whole country-side. Next Sabbath was to be a great day — a day to be marked with a white stone: Dr Brown of Haddington was to preach in Muirend kirk.

The Sabbath morning came round, bright, and blue, and breezy; and there were such numbers flocked to hear this pious servant of God, that the little kirk could not contain them by one-half Wherefore Mr Brown bade them go out to the churchyard, which they did; and there, in the sunshine, looking far down on purple miles of moorland, they sat on stones or on the grass, while the old man told them of the living

springs and beautiful valleys of the heavenly Canaan. Not full of the terrors of the law was this sermon, as has been objected to the sermons of some of the Secession preachers. That point on which John Brown of Haddington, and his spiritual fathers, the Erskines, mainly delighted to dwell — as may yet be seen in their printed works — was the wonderful riches of Christ. They were never wearied of this subject. Those sermons of theirs which have been preserved are full of it. And on that beautiful Sabbath morning — long to be remembered by many a one there, when the old man who spoke to them had passed away from this earth — he told them of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Looking far across the moor that lay between him and the Tinto hills, he saw the little cottages dropped here and there amid the brown heather; and spoke to the people before him of the many sore trials and vexations of this life. “But,” added he, with kindling eye, and finger lifted up to the blue heaven, “all this will be forgotten in yonder holy city of our God. For there, having been washed in the blood of the Lamb, having gotten the white stone with the name written thereon, ‘God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things shall have passed away.’”

And so the service proceeded, quiet and solemn in its simple ritual. Nor was it without some of that wild fire of eloquence which had been handed down from Covenanting forefathers; for eloquence is little else than vocal earnestness, and surely those men were in earnest who rose up individually to do battle with a collected power, and with an authority that almost arrogated to itself the infallibility of the Church of Rome, about what appeared to some people a ridiculous matter of conscience. And yet, as Eben Merle said, it “didna seem ridiculous to him, that a man should stand up for his right to fecht for his ain soul against the devil, without interference from the General Assembly o’ the Kirk o’ Scotland, or ony ither assembly o’ mortal men.”

In the evening, when my father was sitting by his own fireside, reading Mr Hutcheson’s Exposition of John’s Gospel, and when I also was there engaged in a similar fashion, the latch of the door lifted, and Mr Brown entered with outstretched hand. He had walked across the moor to pay a visit to his old friend — attended only by a member of Muirend Session, a long and “spaly” man, beside whom Mr Brown looked like a well-knit Saxon sentence, terse, firm, and vigorous, placed in front of a long, Latin-English one, full of ins, and pros, and cons. And as Aunt Blair drew in a chair for them to the fireside, “she trusted that Mr Dryhope hadna been wearied in crossing the moor.”

“No, Mrs Blair,” said John Dryhope, seriously, as being somewhat in awe of the venerable dame, “though some o’ the sheughs are verra deep, and the grun unco sliddery.”

“I wouldna, Mr Merle,” said the minister, “have interrupted your private meditations on a Sabbath night, had I not to leave for Stirling early to-morrow morning. For I consider the practice o’ visiting on Sabbath nights, chiefly for the purpose o’ gossiping — now becoming fashionable in our big towns — as maist reprehensible.”

My father was thinking of sending over for John Macaulay; but this settled the point. Then Mr Brown, knowing how they should best enjoy the visit, and put it to most profit, bade me draw in my chair to the fireside. He then placed Alick between his knees, parting back the light brown curls from the lad’s forehead, while my father began to speak of those matters over which he had been gravely pondering for some years back — matters which it had been vain to lay before the like of John Macaulay.

Not of the broader points of the law and gospels were they — not of heresies, though heresies then, as now, were rife — not even of the MARROW, for the Marrow controversy was well nigh at an end. But on such points as the Experience of Believers, the Manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the Voluntary or Involuntary Acceptation of the Spirit by Sinners, Eben Merle wished to have his own opinions confirmed or refuted.

And in course of time my father thought the moment had arrived for the introduction of his more immediate perplexity. He was not without some hope that this man of God — so great an authority in the church, so skilled in all the mysteries of human evil and Divine good — might be instrumental in bringing him help.

“Mr Brown,” he said, approaching with some timidity a difficult subject, “we have had changes in Eastburn since last ye were here. It is with no little sorrow I maun tell it, but there is now a public-house in the place.”

“A public-house in Eastburn!”

“Even so, sir,” said my father; “and it is a sair thing for me to sit here the night and say any such thing. For I hae been proud o’ this bit village o’ ours, sir, and was aye glad that you should visit it when you were this airt; for till this time there dwelt not a man in Eastburn under whose roof, Mr Brown, ye wouldna hae been pleased to sit. But it is far otherwise now.”

“Ye perhaps take this matter too much to heart, Mr Merle,” said Dr Brown; “’tis maybe but a place of accommodation such as I have sorely felt the want of at times; and surely it has not brought any positive evil amongst ye.”

Now had the time come. Positive evil? For a moment my father glanced back to all the ancestry of the Merles, thought of their great and good name for piety, thought of that hereditary godliness that had come down without intermission from generation to generation. He thought of all the Merles now alive — without exception pious people, and the old man’s eyes filled as he came to tell Mr Brown — the man whose friendship was an honour to the whole family — that the last of that race had demeaned himself, and made himself unworthy. Yet he hesitated not; nor did his tongue swerve as he uttered the words: —

“Sir, my son there, I am loath to say, is in a fair way to be in daily communion with the publican himself, and with his household.”

Sadly he said it, though firmly; and he looked in the old minister’s face as that man may have looked in the face of his Lord, when he cried: “*Master, my daughter is even now dead, but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.*”

I answered nothing to the accusation. The matter was not to be made better by talking. But Aunt Blair raised her head with an indignant look, and even interrupted Dr Brown.

“Minister,” she said, “ye must not leave this house thinking that my nephew goes drinking about a public. It is no his way to speak for himsel’, or brawlys he could tell ye what it is which takes him to Mr Fraser — wha is a decent man — in spite o’ the manner o’ his leevin’. Deed, sir, believe me, he wouldna harm ony leeving thing; and even when ither lads and lassies stand bletherin’ by the roadside, he’s awa’ out-oure the muir, picking up these queer stanes, which are innocent enough, I’s e warrant, in spite o’ what they say. And it is *that*, sir, which has taken him to Mr Fraser, as can be made manifest to you if ye speir at himsel’!”

During this outburst, my father had been sitting fidgetting with his satin vest, evidently about to break forth with an exhortation concerning the silence of women. But now he deferentially waited for a moment, to see if Dr Brown would speak, which the minister accordingly did.

“You leave me little to say, madam. When I consider his family, and the way he has been brought up, I can well believe that no nephew o’ yours would go far astray. And you must remember, Mr Merle, that this man Fraser may be a decent man, despite his calling — our Lord himself was not ashamed to consort with publicans and sinners — and the publicans o’ these days, as you know, Mr Merle, had a worse character than those o’ ours — And yet, Jamie lad, I’d have ye tak’ tent o’ your companions. A grand preservation of virtue is the choosing of honest and God-fearing friends; and such are seldom to be got about a public-house.”

Suddenly Mr Dryhope lifted his chin with a jerk, as though newly awoke from sleep. He took a pinch of snuff, looked wise, and said: —

“As Mr Ralph Erskine hath observed in one o’ his sermons—’ *The very sight o’ gaunting and yawning smites others with the same trouble; a fit o’ laughter will provoke others to laughter; and so will the weeping and wailing of a few set an hundred weeping and wailing; merely by a sympathetic temper amongst people, which temper is doubly dangerous in places o’ temptation!*’ And young people whose feet are apt to be unwary, fall oftentimes through carelessness; for as Mr Erskine again says:— ‘*It is but our own guiltiness and faithlessness that arms Satan’s malice against us.*’”

“Mr Brown,” I said, “were the devil’s ends ever furthered by inquiry?”

“Never, lad.”

“I think not. I take it, ignorance and Satan go hand in hand; and I think that if people would inquire as much as they imagine about a man’s character, there would be less slander in the world. I know little of this man Fraser; but I take him to be an honest man, who has been unfortunate — and ’tis no wonder people are so careful about appearances, when we see how charity is withheld from those who have been unfortunate in worldly things. Further, and not to continue a subject which is no pleasing one, it were better that we had more of this same charity even for the most wicked I think it would be a poor thing for sinners such as we ourselves are, to seek to limit the doctrine o’ salvation by grace.”

I had said what I had to say on that subject, and resolved to speak no more on it that night. But Mr Dryhope, not seeing how therein he had been ignored, ventured forth again.

“But it is right for all young persons to flee temptation. He would be a fool who should rush into battle merely to try the strength o’ his armour.”

“What!” said Dr Brown, with a quiet smile, for it was but seldom Mr Dryhope was moved to deliver an opinion, “ye should remember Mr Erskine’s context— ‘*Temptation is a school for training up Christ’s soldiers; as a sword glitters by using, which would rust in the scabbard.*’”

“Eh, but isn’t he gleg at quoting!” whispered Aunt Blair, who was proud that John Brown of Haddington was taking her nephew’s part.

Then Dr Brown rose to leave; and my father took down his gnarled and knotted holly to accompany his friend a part of the way over the moor. Dr Brown bade farewell to us all, counselling me to be diligent in the pursuit of all knowledge, but especially the knowledge of life everlasting.

“Like you,” he said, “I was eager on such matters in my younger days, and my father used to say to me, “Ah, Johnnie, lad, I’m no ower anxious to ken much about the stars, for I’ll get a braw glint o’ them when I’m going hame to my Father’s house.””

They were going towards the door, when my Aunt, not knowing very well how to testify her gratitude for the great honour done to her house, came forward with two little parcels.

“Minister, ye’ll maybe take this bit parcel? and ye, likewise, Mr Dryhope? They’re no verra fine atweel; being but home-made bannocks.”

“I must differ with ye, madam,” said the minister; “I have tasted your bannocks before, and I never come this airt but the very wind seems to savour o’ them.”

And so, again bidding us farewell, they were gone.

“He was a wonderfu’ man for a compliment,” said my Aunt, long after this day, “was Dr Brown; and so grave was he, and dignifit in his manner, ye but kent he was speaking the words o’ truth and soberness.’ Deed, it was worth while baking bannocks a’ your life to see the way he acceptit ane or twa — and the hamely way that he, a professor in Enbro’, spak the auld-farrant Lanarkshire words.”

My father, returning from his convoy, must needs call in upon John Macaulay, to impart to him the news of the minister’s visit. John Macaulay’s house was the largest in the village, by reason of the smiddy and his dwelling-house being in one. He had likewise a considerable garden behind; and John, being a thrifty man, sent to the Lanark market part of the produce of his fruit-trees. Aunt Blair was also remembered pretty often with a basket of rosy-cheeked Lanarkshire apples — and better apples there are none — which she forthwith converted into the most wonderful and inscrutable of dumplings.

My father entered. John, his wife, and a little girl were sitting by the fire.

“Where is Flora?” was the first question.

“She just gaed up,” said Mrs Macaulay, a little nervously, “a wee while to see Robin Smith’s lassie — that’s Jeannie — wha is rather ailin’ the now wi’ her throat.”

—
“She gaed up to see Robin Smith’s son, I’s e warrant,” said Eben Merle, severely; “and whether or no, it ill befits any Christian household to have ane o’ its members out stravaygin here and there on a Sabbath night, as if there werena such a thing as eternity to prepare for!”

This may have been rude of my father; for it is often hard to say where decision of character ends and rudeness begins. I know, at least, that the old man never intended anything he said to be rude; he was too-kindly-hearted for that. “We saw wham ye had the privilege o’ entertainin’,” said the smith, thinking enough had been said about Flora’s absence.

“I was ettlin’ to send across for ye, but it sae happened that his first words were directed against the growin’ evil o’ Sabbath-day visiting.”

“Thinking o’ Mr Brown,” said John, “and o’ Mr Ralph Erskine, I took out the *Gospel Sonnets*, and read ance mair the *Think and Smoke Tobacco*. And really, Mr Merle,” he added, “ye maun acknowledge that a body has some authority for takin’ a bit draw o’ the cutty, when such an eminent and pious man countenances it.”

“John Macaulay,” said my father, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, “ye are like the bairns wha get a bowl o’ milk and a cogie o’ parritch set down to them. They would fain drink the milk and leave the parritch untasted. And if ye smoke upon the strength o’ Ralph Erskine’s *Sonnet*, ye maun bear in mind that *Think* comes before *Smoke*. He says— ‘Thus *think* and smoke tobacco,’ and yell find, John, that the maist feck o’ folk, while smoking, dinna bother themselves much wi’ the thinking pairt.”

“But surely, Mr Merle, if we think to the best o’ our abeelities, we are not to be held responsible for the imperfections o’ our powers.”

“John Macaulay, listen to me. It seems to me that naeboddy has a richt to smoke but them wha are compelled to think mair than is common to the human frame — sich as ministers, doctors, and the like. But for you and me, John, wha are but common people, we have nae real need o’ ony sic thing, and it but begets an indolent and lazy disposition o’ mind; for, as I was reading in Mr Hutcheson the day— *‘It is a fault incident to our nature to be muckle addicted to our own ease, and to that which brings present comfort, and to abhor any lot or way of God’s service which proves contrary to that.’*”

“Verra true, Mr Merle, but ’tis hard, hard to gie up a habit o’ thirty years’ standing.

“I didna bid ye gie’t up, John — I only endeavoured to show ye wherein ye were wrong in attempting to get Mr Ralph Erskine’s authority to countenance it.”

““Deed, Mr Merle,” said John’s wife, “I’m afeard he’ll no stop it now; though I wish he would. I canna get the smell o’ his tabawka scrubbed out o’ my dresser, let me fecht wi’t as I like!”

“When there’s nae positeeve enactment, Mrs Macaulay, against it in the Word, and when it has maist become pairt and paircel o’ a man’s being, I think he would be a fushionless gowk to gie’t up for one man’s opinion or for another man’s opinion.”

And there spoke the blood of the Eben Merle of twenty years bygone.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE ROSE OF MY LIFE BURST INTO BLOSSOM.



BUT DURING THE few days in which I was confined to bed, the current of my existence had changed; the summer of my life had arrived in all its voluptuous fulness. I was a dumb, gray lake, lying asleep between the mountains, and she was the white sunlight that fluttered down from heaven, and smote me on the brow, and bade me laugh back again to her. I was a wild moor, lying dark and rugged through the stillness of the night, and she was the lady-moon that kissed me, and wound her white arms around me, and enticed the fairies out from the brackened knolls. Indeed, there are few of us who do not remember this pleasant time, when the air was wondrously pure and clear, when the lark sung higher in the heavens than ever he had done before, when the scent of the sweet-brier was sweeter, and the pink of a rose-petal more tender, and the song of the mavis more lusciously entrancing than ever they had been, even in the long, golden day of childhood. Many pass through this pleasantest of all the pleasant times in life without knowing its value until it has gone; even as the young man spends his early years in preparing to live, and, coming to maturity, finds that the best of his life is past.

But I was very sad and impatient at first. As I lay in the bed of my little room, listening to the footfalls without the house, the melancholy of my situation grew upon me, and I somehow felt myself cut off from all the usual offices of neighbourly kindness — I felt myself alone in the world. Tidings of the late affray had, of course, got wind, and the whole village buzzed with it. David Fraser had sent his daughter to stay with an aunt of hers, who dwelt in a small cottage some eight miles off, in the bleakest part of that bleak country-side. And she had gone, leaving no message or remembrance for me. Then, between my father and me an estrangement had arisen, for, no doubt, the old man was thinking of all those families of Merles who lived on the hills or in the valleys between Eastburn and Linlithgow, and how one by one they should come to hear of his son, and of his son's doings. For there were about as many versions of the story as there were mouths to tell it; agreeing, however, in the main points, that Jamie Merle had been in a public-house, had nearly killed Mr Rankine o' Lanark, by knocking down the poor gentleman when he was drunk; that Jamie Merle had then offered to kiss David Fraser's daughter; and that David Fraser had been compelled to send his daughter out of the village!

And my occupation during this time? Why, I lay there, thinking of the little cottage away on the distant moot; thinking of *her* sitting by the red peat-fire, as the gray gloaming came down over the land. During those weary days, I lay forming dream-like pictures of her, and of the cottage, and of a little lake that lay near the dwelling. At one time, I would have the water dark and drumly, the sky and earth of a dull, leaden gray, when suddenly a glint of sunshine would fall on some tiny promontory that would thereupon run out into the lake like a bar of gold. And straightway another beam would fall upon the cottage, lighting up the yellow stonecrop on the thatched roof, entering by the window, and painting squares of light on the sanded floor.

And by and by SHE would pass the stream of glory — quickly, it might be, and like a spirit — yet snatching from it a brightness and a loveliness beyond the beauty of dreams.

Then, in the evening, when Tinto and Coulterfell were sleeping in purple vesture under a rosy sky, and streaks of crimson lay along the bosom of the lake, I would see her bring her work out to the stone seat in front of the cottage, and there, in the fading twilight, sit until the first silver point appeared in the sky above; and the lingering light still dwelt upon her hair, and on her sweet face, until she again passed into the house, and the vision was gone. I thought I was miserable in those days. Not long after, I thought I had never been so happy. I looked back upon them with tearful eyes, and prayed God that I might not go mad.

Before long, I was entirely recovered. I set to work to repair the loss of time, and by dint of vigorous hammering at once attained that end, and chased away, as well, all meditative pinings and imaginations.

My father thought I had learnt a lesson, that I would henceforth give up thinking about this woman of the Canaanites. But my father did not notice how that Alick was one afternoon absent altogether from Eastburn; and how that Alick, on returning, came into my room, as haying something to say unto me. And there the young messenger did reveal how he had faithfully executed his commission by seeing Lilian Fraser, and inquiring after her health, and how he had exceeded his commission by telling her all about his cousin's hurt, of which she did know nothing.

"And she said you might come and see her, any time you were near Bishopburn. She said a good heap more, but I dinna ken rightly what it was. She was greetin' when I cam away," added Alick, simply.

Alick went to his bed that night richer by one sixpence than he had ever been before in his life. And this was no talismanic sixpence, to be hung by cord or tassel; but a real sixpence, potent to purchase all manner of good things at the next Lanark Fair.

Soon thereafter I called upon Mr and Mrs Fraser, was kindly received by them, and gave them to understand that I meant to go some afternoon to the cottage at Bishopburn.

I went to Bishopburn, far over the wide moors, by the side of a lovely little loch. I went to Bishopburn, once, twice — who knows how often? — and there, by the side of a streamlet, on one calm evening, did she and I, lover-like, plight our troth the one to the other, swearing to be faithful to each other through life even until death. I went to Bishopburn, walking those weary miles of morass through rain, or wind, or snow, or, worst of all, through that cold, white mist that came down and lay over the valley in chill, damp, shroud-like folds. Was not I ever weary, you ask? With a coarse homespun plaid round my shoulders, I walked those sixteen miles thrice-a-week, as though it were but going to Muirend kirk. Winter was coming on, the ground was oftentimes hard and crisp, the wind cutting and "snell," but a fire of light and gladness, more potent by far, was in my heart. Sometimes I rose before a mortal in the village was awake, lit up the workshop, and worked there with a will, until I had my day's labour finished by dinner-time; and then away again, with plaid and stick.

How could I be weary? Was there not some one coming to meet me? and over those level moors her figure was visible at a mile's distance. She wore one of those cloaks which were in fashion fifty years ago — useful though unhandsome garments — reaching from the crown of the head to the ground, and fastened in front by a little brass chain. That cloak was to me the most beautiful object in the universe, for it held my whole world. Every sunset was dear to me, for I knew that it lingered over the

little cottage at Bishopburn. The morning light was welcome — I knew she was awake, thinking of me. And again and again during the long day's work, my thoughts would speed swiftly across that russet moor, unto the little cottage, and visiting there a holy angel of light, would return to me with worlds of comfort.

Do I weary you, reader? Or do you, too, remember when your eye was bright, and your heart was big, so that you could have taken all mankind home there as brothers? when you lay down with a prayer, and awoke with a blessing for HER? when your whole better being was rejoicing within you, and you almost doubted the reality of your own happiness?

When my father, referring to the occurrence in the public-house, quoted Mr Hutcheson, saying that "*men falling into a quarrelling disposition prove themselves to be deprived of tenderness, and in an evil frame o' spirit; in that they can neither discern what they are doing, nor be sensible o' the heinousness o' sic an evil, which a tender heart would tremble at,*" I said nothing, but inwardly I rebelled against the inference. Deprived of tenderness! On those Sabbath mornings when we met each other in Muirend meeting-house, that little, gray building was filled with some strange light and glory — as though a summer day had wandered down into November, throwing all its sunshine and warmth into the little kirk.

These were happy, happy days. I only longed, for some great opportunity to present itself that I might do something of valour and renown for her sake. And had I not a mistress worthy any such devotion? Never under panoply of crimson and gold sat there a fairer maiden — never had nobles and knights fought for a queenlier smile than dwelt on the face of my little lily.

And she, too, I dare say, looked upon me as the wisest and bravest of men! As we together sat and planned out our future, scanning the great map of life that lay before us, as though we had begun a new existence, and were yet but as children, she looked up to me with a winning trustfulness that endeared her to me more and more every day. Nor was she without that calmness and gentleness of forethought which sits so well on a matron's brow; although the conflict between this becoming gravity of demeanour and her naturally buoyant and merry disposition was oftentimes ludicrously apparent on her countenance. I think it was to acquire a character for matronly prudence that she once told me, very seriously, how that a sister of hers, about to be married, had died; and how that her father, though sorely pressed at times, would never part with the bride's plenishings. They were to be kept for her, said Lilian, with a little blush. But I only laughed at her; for our main wealth was hope and love; and I knew we should need little more.

One still moonlight night, I had left Bishopburn half a mile behind, when an unusual feeling of anxiety made me retrace my steps to bid her again farewell. Guided by the red light of the little window, which she always left unbarred that I might see the light grow less and less as I went homeward over the moor, I again reached the cottage. I looked in, and saw her sitting by the peat-fire, gazing on the flickering tongues of flame whose ruddy light darted over the floor and up the opposite wall, and with her white hand lying across the neck of the faithful Cæsar, who had one morning unaccountably found his way from Eastburn to Bishopburn. Her uncle and aunt were both in bed; I tapped at the window and she came and opened the under half.

"Lilian, I wish you would bar the window to-night."

"What is it, Jamie?" she said, looking up in my face; "you look pale and *hard*, as you used to do when I first came to Eastburn. You haven't looked like that for ever so long."

"And why, Lilian?"

Of course there occurred that little love-passage which answers all questions.

“Is there anything wrong, Jamie?”

“No, Lilian. But somehow I want you to bar the window — safely and surely — and likewise the door. I fancy I heard some one following my steps as I neared the Boor-tree burn, but that concerns me only, and I shall be all right when I know you are safe.”

“Oh, Jamie!” she cried, in great terror. But I laughed away her fears and bade her shut the window.

She promised to do so; I kissed her, and once more I was out upon the moor.

I paid little attention to the footsteps which I heard dodging mine, but I felt as though I were on the brink of some great precipice, and was being drawn forward by some subtle and powerful spell. I went forward in a sort of dream, at one time thinking of Lilian, at another of our own house at Eastburn. As I neared the Boor-tree burn, I again heard slight footsteps behind a long row of willow bushes which skirted the stream, but I heeded them not. Suddenly, however, a pistol-bullet whizzed above my head, followed by a report which rung high and wide over the moor. It was but a momentary stun. I looked over the summits of the brier-bushes and willows, saw no one, and still kept on my way. And when, some time after, in the clear moonlight I saw a dark figure stealing over the distant fields, I did not think of giving chase. I seemed inwardly impelled to continue my journey: I had a vague presentiment that there was evil in our own home.

But when I entered the house, I laughed at myself for my foolish fears. Mr and Mrs Macaulay were sitting in the kitchen with my father.

They were waiting on Aunt Blair, who had been to Muirend, and who had promised to bring them some household stuffs from the shops there.

“Is not Aunt Blair home yet?” I asked.

“It is hardly time for her,” said my father; “she was to wait on Dan MacColl coming up, for a bit paircel frae Glasgow. And, as I was saying, John Macaulay, it is no’ for the like o’ you or me to say what is wrong in the government o’ our country. But it is ower plain there is something wrang, when scores o’ honest men have to work their lifetime out in weary servitude to pamper the lusts o’ some godless spendthrift in high places. It is nae problem, John Macaulay. I hae seen things in Enbro’, John, wad mak ye think the devil had the orderin’ o’ the things o’ this world. It is nae problem. Lang-nebbit words will never mak’ ony sane man or woman believe but that a man should reap the benefit o’ his ain labour.”

“Deed, that’s true!” said Mrs Macaulay, pleased that she could understand what her great authority was talking about. But John Macaulay shook his head gravely. He had seen too often how a man did *not* reap the benefit of his own labour — how, as he thought it went to the “fattenin’ o’ them wha had already ower muckle o’ this world’s gear.”

It was seldom my father touched upon this point. Generally, he had, at least, an outward respect for all constituted authority, and was scrupulously exact in performing the duties required of him. I saw, however, that the subject had been introduced for another end.

“Yet, in spite o’ these tribulations, John Macaulay,” he continued — and there was a sort of triumph in his eye — “there’s grand philosophy in that sayin’ o’ the good Mr Hutcheson — ‘It may help to wean our hearts from the world when we consider that, however, natural hearts feed upon the things o’ the world, and their souls imagine satisfaction in them; yet, they will get no more of it but their *hit meat, which the poorest may attain to.*’ Yes, John, it’s but little we need in this world, and it’s

wonderfu' with how little we can be happy, or, at least, content And just sae in spiritual matters. It is maybe right for ministers to occupy their mind wi' difficult doctrines; but I'm getting an auld man now, John, and I'm beginning to see the truth o' what Mr Burgess wrote to the Lady Ruth Scudamore in his *Epistle Dedicatorie*, that '*while others rejoyce in opinions and new notions about faith and holiness, do you delight in the things themselves.*'"

"That's true, Mr Merle," said John Macaulay.

"As I said, John, it's little a man needs in this world, either in spiritual or temporal matters. For Mr Burgess sayeth further on, that "he that canna see by the light o' one sun, would not see any more though there were a thousand suns." It is a happy thing, Mr Merle," said John Macaulay, "to have these sayings o' pious men to support us in our privations. 'Deed, I think if they but kent how weel a body can remember their bits o' sayings, they wouldna sae often widen and widen out till the meaning o' the passage is maist lost ategither!' —

"Have ye heard o' Mr Thomas Manton?" asked Eben Merle, pleased to have his powers of selection acknowledged.

"No, Mr Merle," said John.

"Mr Manton sayeth, that '*Miseries are sweet or bitter, according as we will reckon o' them.*' And again, that '*The perfection o' our graces is not discovered till we are put upon many and great trials.*'"

And as my father uttered these words, a shade came over his face. For the old man was thinking of what "saying" would have power to comfort *him* if his son were to disgrace the whole Merle family by an alliance with this publican's daughter — thinking what philosophy that would be which would bear him up to face the scorn of a whole country-side. And as he thought of all these things, he grew silent and sorrowful.

"Aunt Blair should have been home ere now," I said, "so I shall e'en take a step ower the moor to meet her." —

"As ye like, Jamie," said my father.

I again took down my plaid and stick, and as I was throwing the former round my shoulders, I was startled by my father uttering a short, quick cry of pain. I turned, only in time to see the old man suddenly bring his hand up to his brow.

'Oh, what's this, Jamie! I'm blind! Jamie, Jamie, my bairn, I canna see!' he cried piteously.

Mrs Macaulay had run to his side. He was weak and nerveless as a child, and from that moment did not speak.

"John Macaulay," I cried, scarce knowing what I said, "lift him up into the bed, and I'll go ride to Muirend for a doctor!"

So they lifted the old man into the nearest bed; and I went forth into the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW I WROUGHT CHAINS FOR MY OWN BINDING.



NOW MY AUNT Blair had been detained by waiting on the Glasgow carrier. And when it became evident, from the sound of a discordant violin, that Dan MacColl was drawing nigh, she was just about to leave without any parcel Up into the court-yard drove the cart — the first on that road to supersede the ancient panniers; and as Dan MacColl ceased his scraping of the disjointed violin in order to loosen his horse, he sung, as usual —

“The Glasgow blades are unco rogues,
They’re neither leal nor frisky,
There’s but ane good thing to say o’ the toun,
And that is, that in it you can get — if you —
like to pay for it — very good whisky.”

But to Dan’s horror, the first man who came forward to receive his goods was a veritable Glasgow weaver, sojourning in Muirend for his health.

Wherefore, our ballad-singer had to change his tune, and with imperturbable gravity proceeded to chant: —

“I have travelled all the world over,
And many another place beside,
But the beautifullest town that ever I saw
Is Glasgow, that stands on the navigable banks o’ the Clyde.”

“And how are ye, Mr Stenhouse; and how are ye, Mrs Blair? Passing weel, sir, I warrant, as the auld woman said to the deil when he wanted a licht frae her.”

“Tarry me not wi’ your haveril sangs,” said Aunt Blair, “it’s now three hours I have waited, and ye are singing as if ye were afore your time, let alane ahint.”

“Hoo-toots, my leddy, singing is to me what grease is to wheels — we gang the faster!”

“And is it the wheel that gangs fastest which makes maist noise?”

“That’s for ye, Dan,” said the weaver.

Dan looked from one to the other, and took refuge in another of his rhymes; but he had barely completed the first couplet, when Aunt Blair went forward and caught him by the boulders. He, however, glided like an eel from her grasp, and at length consented to bring the parcel. “Now, Mrs Blair, that’s what I’ve got for ye in the way o’ goods. But here’s what I’ve got for ye in the way o’ advice — dinna cross that moor this night. ‘Deed, I wudna do it for a thoosan pound o’ the reddest gowd in Enbro’. There’s deevils, and witches, and warlocks riding about the night; and no for twal thoosan pound would I cross the moor.”

Dan grew solemn as he spoke; but my aunt scornfully laughed at him, and departed. She only heard as she left the court-yard —

“O ’twas fearsome and dark on the moor that nicht,
And the wind blew loud and eerie,

Twa men cam' riding out ower the moor,
And nae mair was heard o' our winsome Mary."

But Aunt Blair was not the woman to be turned by "haveril sangs." She left the village of Muirend, and as the last lights of the cottages became invisible, she was out upon the broad moor, endeavouring to decipher the faint traces of the footpath. The night was windy, but the moon was up, and there was not a speck of cloud in the sky. Every minute or so my aunt looked forward in the direction of Eastburn to see whether any one were coming to meet her; but there was no living thing visible through that strange halo of mist and moonlight. In that place, and at that time, a more courageous woman than she might well have felt timorous and "eerie." Now and again she fancied she saw a face, or a pair of glassy eyes gleam out upon her from the surrounding bushes; and sometimes the moonlight would dwell upon a polished stem, until it grew out of the gloom like a white spirit. Wind was rising, and as it came sweeping over the moor, it seemed to talk to her — it seemed a human thing — crying, or moaning, or hissing, as it flew past. It came up out of the distant south, from the dim, black outline of hills, and rushed shrieking over the moor, through the stunted birches, and down by the bed of the gurgling river. And as she struggled on, there seemed to come a living sound with the gale — a sound that became more and more distinct — the long, piteous howl of a dog. The superstitious stories of her childhood — of mysterious warnings, visitations from the other world, and presentiments of evil — came crowding up in her mind, until her courage altogether gave way, and she was ready to sink with fear. For the boding howl of a dog by night is the most dreadful of all sounds to those villagers. And over the moor still came that unearthly cry, until in her terror it seemed to be on every side of her; now near, now distant, now in front, now behind. She struggled on — having in her panic long ago wandered from the footpath — with that weird, wild cry still dinning in her ears. And now there came another sound through the night — like the rustling of distant waves — she looked forward — between her and the white moon she beheld a great, black horse galloping madly towards her, bearing on its back a figure. Nearer came the horse's hoofs — nearer — as though the figure would trample her down.

"O God!" she cried, sinking upon the heather, "have mercy upon me!"

"Aunt Blair!"

"Is it you, Jamie?"

"Aunt Blair, rise, for Heaven's sake, and hurry home! Father has ta'en some kind o' fainting fit, and I am now riding to Muirend for the doctor!"

Again she was alone on the moor; but a cold shiver had passed over her heart, and she walked on like one in a dream. By and by she came in sight of Eastburn. Who has not passed on some cold winter's night those little wayside cottages that seem to cower before the cutting wind, and paused to think on the griefs, and joys, and fears that each interior may hold? There is something strange in looking at the little dwellings lying almost hid in the darkness of the roadside, surrounded, perhaps, by a shrunken hedge and one or two blasted trees — whose branches bear streaks of snow that quiver gray in the gloom — with the thatch of the roof bending over the walls, as if endeavouring to protect the miserable things from the cold, and the frost, and the snow.

Aunt Blair long remembered that keen, dark night, and the wan glare that sometimes came across the hard and crisp road from the half-hid moon, as she went up the silent village, and into her own home. But more than all did she remember the scene inside the house.

My father had been removed to the bed of the largest room. There was no fire in the apartment, but two candles placed on the mantelpiece shed a ghastly yellow light over the old-fashioned furniture. Mrs Macaulay sat crying; while up and down one side of the room strode the tall figure of the blacksmith, his hands clasped behind his back, the while he repeated in a loud and yet mournful voice those texts of Scripture, which, from all time, have been used for the comfort of the dying Christian. It sounded like a funeral knell to hear that strong man's voice utter the words.

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble. Incline thine ear unto me; in the day when I call, answer me speedily."

"In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

* * *

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

A knocking at the door, and the doctor entered; he had ridden over with me from Muirend. He was a little, near-sighted person, with small, neat hands, and a pale face; and just as he was unlike the strong-bodied country people, in proportion they regarded him with awe, if not with fear. I had explained what I could of the case to him on our journey over the moor; so he bled his patient, placed him properly in bed, and gave such instructions to Aunt Blair as he thought fit. It was all he could do, and he did it; then, with some further counsels, he left the room, beckoning the smith to follow him. I had gone round for his horse.

"For God's sake," he said to the smith, "go and shoot that dog. Every time that poor woman hears it she shivers."

"Doctor," said the smith, with a curious expression of face, "I've tried to get hold o' the dowg, and it can in nowise be found. I'm afeard there's something strange concernin' it."

"Hoots, man!" said the doctor, impatiently, and at that moment the dismal cry was again heard, "it is down at the foot o' the village there. Were I a lad, I should have it pretty swiftly kenneled up, I'm thinking!"

"What say ye, doctor, will he get better?"

"He may, and he may not He has been a temperate man, and that is much in his favour." John Macaulay went in for his hat, and the doctor rode off towards Muirend.

And all this time my father had spoken not a word; except some indistinct mutterings when he was being bled. He lay in a heavy soporific sleep, with his lips apart, and his bushy eye-brows hanging over the closed eyes. John Macaulay returned, saying he thought the dog was somewhere about Robin Smith's garden, but that he could not get hold of it. He sat down in the arm-chair, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality."

I saw how every word went to my aunt's heart like a stone; yet that calm, old woman sat motionless and still, not betraying the working within by the slightest sign. I besought John Macaulay to desist. "Loath am I, Jamie, but it is even as he would wish it, could he speak."

And again he went on with that terrible, knell-like voice.

“So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

No sooner were the last words uttered by that monotonous and mournful voice, than my father moved in the bed.

“Thank ye, John Macaulay,” he said, in a feeble voice, “ye put me in mind o’ John Brown’s sermon on that beautifu’ mornin’ at Muirend..... Is Jamie there?”

“Yes, father,” I said, for I was just by his side.

“Jamie, laddie, I have had it on my mind for a lang time.... Jamie, I’m thinking this is my last night.... Surely — surely ye will promise not to marry that man’s daughter

— Fraser may be a decent man, but — will ye promise, Jamie?”

“Father, I canna do it — indeed I canna do it!”

The old man had relapsed into a kind of slumber. And now the rosy light from the east streamed in through the white window-blinds; and John Macaulay pulled them up, and we saw the first tinge of the coming day on the moor. It was strange to see it enter the little chamber, lighting up with its cool gray tints the old furniture that had lately been dark and brown under the orange light of the candles.

“Jamie,” murmured the old man, “have ye said it? Will ye say it, Jamie?”

“I dare not, and will not,” I said.

“Jamie, let me dee in peace. I would have ye marry an honest woman into — into this family — say, then, that. . . that you will wait till Aunt Blair gie’ ‘s ye her consent — and — and let her exercise her Christian prudence, as she would hae God remember her and hers. Jamie, will it be sae?”

“Yes, father, I shall wait till then, and may God help me to do so!”

No one had heard aught of this.

“I’m glad — glad o’ that,” he said, “and now I shall gang hame in peace.”

Farther on in the morning, when Mr and Mrs Macaulay had gone home, the doctor came over from Muirend. I turned towards the window when he came in; I feared what he had to say. In a minute or two he came over.

“Your father is greatly better — has he spoken?”

I could hardly believe him — but, turning towards the man’s face, I saw there was at least hope there.

“He has every chance in his favour, though it is kittle wark to say ay or no,” he answered, in reply to a question from my aunt, “but, madam, come hither.” —

He went over to the bedside. Aunt Blair, rising in her stately way, folded her hands in front of her, and followed. The doctor gently lifted my father’s eye-lids, and the old woman gazed into them.

“And our Eben’s blind!”

It was all she said. She returned to the easy-chair, and, with apparent calmness, opened our family Bible.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE WORLD SOUGHT TO STIFLE LOVE.



“IT’S UNCO TRUE, your leddyship. But if a’ maidens are gude, whither come a’ the bad wives?”

“You are learning wisdom, Dan.”

“Oo, ay, your leddyship. A wise man may pick up knowledge in the company o’ fools — saving your leddyship’s presence.”

“Thank you, sir; I shall remember you when I have Miss Polly stabled-up at Bishopburn.”

“Deed your leddyship’s gey gleg wi’ the switch at times, as Lord Hume said to his daft mother-in-law. And what for should I tak’ ye to Bishopburn, gin these be the wages I may expeck?”

“You would not lead astray a forlorn maiden, Dan?”

“A forlorn maiden — ma certes! Ane wha tries to mak’ breaches in the affections o’ whatever young blade she meets; and wha will wear these same garments — to wit, breeches — until the end o’ her days.”

“Fie, fie, Dan! your smartness is becoming shallow.”

“Atweel-a-wat, your leddyship. Shallow water rins clear.”

“Why, then, will men marry in spite of all these unhandsome qualities they see in us, Dan?”

“Weel, your leddyship,” said Dan, scratching his head meditatively, “hanging and marriage come by luck, as the auld wife said to the minister, and there’s little to choose between them. A married man’s at the end o’ a rope a’ his days; and a hanged man’s there for an hour or twa — wherefore, the hanged man hath the better o’t. And e’en as it’s foreordained that a man’s to be hanged, so is it that he is to be married, and there’s little use trying to escape what’s in store for him.”

“We shall have you before Muirend session, Dan, for heresy.”

“Thresh me, but gie me my victuals, as the man said when they sent him to the Bermudas. And this cottage now in sicht, your leddyship,

is the verra cottage you’re seeking, sae I shall e’en get back to my ain proper wark.”

“And as heretofore, you’ll take no money from me, Dan, I suppose?”

“No, your leddyship.”

“What is your reward to be, then, most worshipful sir?”

Dan looked up with a shy, bashful glance.

“It is a foolish bairn greets for the moon, your leddyship,” he said.

“Oh, I see. You want a lock of my hair, or a kiss, or some such thing. Well, perhaps next time, Dan, — good-bye?”

She rode her pony up to the cottage-door, and Dan turned to go his own way.

“What a rampant deevil o’ a wife she’ll make!” said Dan to himself as he crossed the moor, “hech, sirs, but her man — her lord, I should say — ‘ll no have his sorrows to seek, I’s warrant! But a’ they gentle-folks are alike — I never saw a braw leddy but her man — or her lord — was kept in hot-water by her. It’s maybe a providence to

caum their pride, wha kens? — and to mak them keep their heads less high. Gosh, but it's a blessing we're no a' lords!"

Lilian came out to meet her friend whenever she heard the sound of the pony's feet, and with the usual feminine exchanges, the two girls — for they were little else — having fastened the pony's bridle to the door-post, went into the house.

"And so my Lily has got a lover — and what a splendid lover! And a husband, too; and she is going to give up her girlhood, and waste all her days in cooking somebody else's victuals, and rearing children, and petting and stroking a sulky hedgehog of a husband!"

"Mistress Seton," said Lilian, with becoming gravity, "I, who am to be a wife, cannot possibly listen to such foolish talk. And will not my raven-tressed one, also, be getting a husband some o' these days, when she is weary of teasing all those poor young men in Edinburgh?"

"Sweet madam," returned her friend, with a curtsy, "you act the part to such perfection that I scarce would have known you. And you talk to me boastingly, pityingly, reflecting not that I, out of my bounty, gave you a sweetheart! Lilian, Lilian, if you had seen the beautiful bouquets he used to bring me! and how, one Hallowe'en night, he led me down a country-dance in Robin Smith's barn — why, my Lily is going to cry! — what ails the girl?"

"Nothing, Lady Margaret Seton. Only — only you make light of everything, and know not when to stop."

"There now, Lil, kiss and be friends, for I didn't mean it. And you shall get on your cloak, and ride over on Miss Polly, and we shall go see this stalwart lover of yours."

"May you have a husband like him!" said Lilian, with her arm round her friend's waist. So Lilian, laughing once more, mounted the pony, her friend caught the bridle, and together the two girls came away over the moor.

But during this time, a conversation of a very different character was going on in the house which they proposed to visit. I had almost forgot the unhappy promise given to my father, until its terrible reality thrust itself upon me when I turned from our houseful of affliction to think of Lilian. Having no hope of moving my father by anything I could say, I went to Aunt Blair, besought her passionately, entreatingly, to release me from this bond, showed her under what circumstances it had been extorted

from me, and how that it was her duty, now there was no need for it, to cancel it. "Jamie," she said, slowly and reflectively, "of myself I see not what should hinder ye from taking this lassie to be your wife — though maybe I could have wished ye to choose another pairther. But it will sorely grieve your father — and in his present state annoyance o' any kind might be sorely hurtful to him — wherefore" —

"Then, Aunt Blair, as soon as he gets better, there surely can remain no reason "why" —

"Listen to me, Jamie. My brother has left the decession o' the matter wi' me; but until he himsel' opens his mouth, neither ay nor nay will come from my lips. I can pity ye, Jamie, for I ken what ye maun suffer; but I am far mista'en if the son o' Eben Merle would seek to forfeit his given word."

"I shall keep to my promise, Aunt Blair."

"I'm sure o' that, Jamie."

"But can ye, as a Christian woman, destroy the happiness o' two fellow-beings, and a' for the saying o' a couple o' words, which it is right and lawful for you to say? Aunt Blair, I didna think it of ye, and it's an ill day would bring strife and division into a family on such sma' matters."

"Strife and division — what mean ye, Jamie?"

"I shall remain here till Sabbath night, Aunt Blair. If by that time my father be in a fair way o' getting better — and if ye, Aunt Blair, dinna see it possible to be more Christian-hearted, I shall even leave for Glasgow on the Monday morning."

"And may the Great Guide sustain me in doin' my pairt, whatever that may be!"

She had barely uttered the words, when a ringing laugh sounded through the passage, and the crack of a whip came to the kitchen door, Aunt Blair rose up with knitted brows to answer the summons.

"Oh, Mrs Blair!" she burst forth.

"Lady Margaret Seton," interposed my aunt, with her grave voice, "this unseemly mirth ill becomes the chamber of affliction."

"What?" cried both the girls in a breath, looking frightened.

"Ay, nearly the chamber o' death. My brother, Mrs Seton,—"

Lilian's friend burst into tears.

"Indeed, Mrs Blair, I am so grieved to have come upon you at this time! And is Mr Merle, whom I have known for so long — is he—"

"Na, na, lassie, it is no sae bad as ye seem to think. It has pleased the Almighty to leave my brother still wi' us, though for what time we canna tell."

So my Lilian had come to see me, and I dared not speak to her! How could I, on that beautiful Spring morning, wither up her young hopes, and cast her from me as a worthless thing? She looked so beautiful and happy, that as I thought of myself taking the sunshine out of that fair blue eye, and chasing the smile away from the little mouth, I could have cursed myself where I stood, for I knew that neither my aunt nor my father would ever give consent to our union. I made some excuse, went forth from the house, and returned no more to the village that day.

But at night, when the cottages of Eastburn, and the moor, and the sky, were steeped in blackest darkness, I betook myself to the old and well-known footpath, and as of yore, reached Bishopburn and the little dwelling. Lilian left the room in which she had been sitting with her uncle and aunt, and came into the kitchen, where a large peat-fire was throwing its fitful shadows up and down the apartment. She was about to light a candle, but I stayed her hand, and together we sat down in the red darkness. Her rich tresses of auburn were unbound, hanging down in heavy folds that grew beautiful in the ruddy light, and there was a subdued smile of welcome lingering about her eye — as though she were proud that her own husband had come to have his grief soothed by her caresses and her love. I turned away my face from her.

And there, with broken speech, and with sore, sore heart, I told her how that we must part — that our many happy meetings and our dear remembrances, and the sweet hours spent under the evening skies, were but parts of a dream. I strove to administer consolation to her — fool that I was! She said very little during that long, long hour; and accepted passively a lock of her hair that she had given me one starlit night in Autumn. It fell listlessly from her hand, and lay in its misery of beauty on the stone floor. I rose, and left.

I went out into the black moor, feeling as though the brand of Cain were imprinted on my brow. Few can know the depth of misery that comes down on a man's heart when he looks forward to all the coming years of his life, and beholds them as so many empty, worthless mockeries. My thoughts reached on and on, till I saw myself a miserable old man tottering helplessly and friendlessly to an unpitied grave, far away from the place of my birth, in a land of strangers.

Might I not have one token of remembrance from my poor Lily? I turned, and went back to the cottage. The outer-door was still open; I went in, entered the room, and never until the day of my death shall I forget the sight that then met my eyes. Her

head was bowed down over the little table, her long hair scattered about her neck and shoulders, her hands clasped on her forehead, while she sobbed most piteously. The noise of my entrance made her start — she looked up with alarmed eyes, so different from the look of trustful love with which she used to welcome me! But in an instant, she had composed herself, and was sitting apparently calm. She lifted the curl of brown hair from the ground.

“Lilian, I came back to ask you for it Will you not give it to me?”

“No, James Merle,” she said, with something of that firmness which I knew so well; “it is better that — that it should be forgotten.”

And therewith, her self-command giving way again, the poor girl cried very bitterly.

“Lilian, lassie, I wish to God I had died ere either of us had come to this. But it is past help. Indeed I could not, even though I would, break this most wicked promise—”

In an instant she was calm and erect. “Did I ask you? No, no, Jamie, you know me too well to think it. Good-bye; and I shall pray God to have you in His keeping.”

Her blue eyes looked up to my face once more, she pressed my hand and tried to smile through her tears; then I went out again to the moor.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW I MET A PHILOSOPHER IN TOY-BOOTS.



AS I HAD foreseen, Aunt Blair and my father were both inflexible in their resolution, wherefore I said that I also should be so. I bade farewell on the Sabbath evening to those of the Eastburn people whom I knew, and on the following morning rose early, that I should not have to repeat what was a very painful ceremony.

Early as I was, however, there had been one awake before me. I went to the door, opened it, and looked out on the dark road, and on the sleeping cottages. A light breeze was stirring the grateful freshness of a Spring morning, and bringing a clear and wholesome perfume from the sweet-gale of the moors; while overhead in the dark sky were countless larks singing their morning song, long before the faintest tinge of dawn was visible in the east I returned once more to my room, where I had been arranging my stores of fossils and other things for safe carriage to Glasgow, and passing by the window, perceived something white lying on the floor. It was a letter that had evidently been dropped in from without; the people of Eastburn seldom using such things as bolts and bars. I took it to the lamp, opened it, and the little silken lock of hair curled out and lay on my hand. She had forgiven me.

Away through the darkness I went, with that dear token still in my hand, until I had left Eastburn far behind. Then up and over the sky came the dim morning light, and the gray and ghostly trees sprung up like phantoms on the distant knolls; until, by and by, the rose-clouds of morning gave place to the golden richness of day, and the sweet-scented hawthorn stood white and sparkling with dew in the warm sunshine, and all the sparrows and robin-rebreasts were alive and singing, from the lowest whin-bush to the highest heavens. But the brightness and beauty of this Spring morning only aggravated my grief. I was leaving that pleasant countryside, perhaps never more to return; and at this moment, as if it were the last thing that had bound me to Eastburn, I looked over the brier-scented hedge, and saw an old, broken-down, miserable-looking chestnut mare lying on the damp grass. Then I thought of that joyous afternoon wherein this same poor animal had helped me to win the "BROOSE," but then was it a young and gallant steed, with wind that was never known to fail. Well did I remember that long line of galloping horses and flying dog-carts, the hoarse roars of the competitors, the loud cheers of the men in the fields, the neck-to-neck struggle that my noble Jess had to bring me to the front, and the loud clatter of her iron hoofs as she carried me bravely into the causewayed farm-yard, a stone's throw in front of my nearest opponent, to snatch the bottle of wine from the hands of the blue-eyed and blushing dairy-maid How Was the man at whose marriage I had that day been? — Dead. His widow sold the farm-stock, and went to another part of the country. Jess, too, was sold; and she who had been the pride of all the farmer-lads about, had been stripped of her saddle and sent to the plough, was then yoked to a paltry milk-cart, and finally went down, down, until some kind old farmer was here allowing her to die in peace.

As I stood looking at the poor old brute, I was accosted by an elderly man whom I had seen coming along the road, and who was evidently desirous of having my companionship on the journey. And as it befel that we were both bound for the same

destination — the distance to Glasgow was something under thirty miles — I went very willingly with him; for I longed for something to allay my vain repinings.

This man was a philosopher — no great rarity in these parts. He was an old man, quaint in speech, quaint in dress, with long fair hair suspended in a neat club-tail from his three-cornered hat, a brilliant blue brass-buttoned coat well brought over his body, and a ponderous pair of boots rising nigh unto his knees.

“To what country, sir, do you think I belong?”

“Maybe to the north side,” said I, “or aiblins to Ireland.”

“Ye are right in your latter surmise, sir, though it is few who discover it. For with living among the barbarians — begging your pardon — of this country-side, their uncouth method of expression hath in some instances ingratiated itself with my mother tongue. But what, say I to myself, is bad grammar? There is no such thing. Bring me a man from your famous universities. I talk to him. He saith to me: ‘You speak wrongly. You make blunders. You speak in defiance of grammar.’ I tell him he lies. Every nation hath a language which is most natural to it: why not every district? Whence came grammar? Not from Adam; nor yet from his wife, though women have ever been more gifted wi’ the tongue than men. Grammar, sir, was formed upon a language already existing: wherefore, language is superior to grammar. Why should not every language have its grammar, that all men may speak correctly? I say to your Oxford man, or your Cambridge man, or your Glasgow man, I say: ‘You talk *your* language; I talk *mine*. Your language hath a grammar; mine hath not. But mine is equally correct with yours.’”

He branched off into other subjects; and so interesting did his talk become that I began to enjoy it. But it was that wan sort of enjoyment which people experience under an ever-impending sorrow; it was like looking on a beautiful landscape over which hangs a thunder-cloud.

So we continued our journey through the pleasant valley of Clydesdale, with its innumerable glens — all hanging in leafy luxuriance of Spring

— running down into the main channel of the river. From the heights of the road we had sudden glimpses of the stream, at times sweeping through narrow rocky chasms, again rolling slowly between verdant banks which were rich in hawthorn and wild cherry, or leisurely winding through cultivated fields clad in the blooming green of young corn. “The Orchard of Scotland” the place was, and still is, called; and the sweet, pure Spring air that came breezily over from the blue horizon, brought up with it a fragrance of countless apple-trees, lying far below in showers of rosy blossoms. A beautiful and most picturesque valley, clad in brightest foliage of young elm, and birch, and sycamore — rising on one side into the far heights of Tinto, and on the other to Cathkin, and the wild Mearns Moors — lying a dark line of purple near the sky; while from the brilliant blue and white of May-day clouds fell floods of tremulous music from unseen larks, who were stirring the very heavens in generous emulation of song. By and by we perceived the dim blue smoke of a village rising into the blinding white of sunshine; and as we neared the cottages, girt round about by golden laburnum and witchscaring boor-trees, we could hear the merry shouts of white-headed, rosy-cheeked bairns, rushing gladly home from school.

“Hamilton!” said I.

“Hamilton!” said my companion.

Whereupon we perceived a small hostelry, and entered. Mr Landlord bowed us into his public room, where were two men and a lad engaged in vehement conversation. At our entrance, they at once subsided into whispers — for in those days there was a certain degree of respect paid to the wearer of a blue coat and silver

buttons. I bade the host go bring some “twopenny” for myself, and a glass of Jamaica for Mr Gregory Smith, my companion.

Now, it was evident to both of us that the two men were dealing unfairly by the lad. One of them was a gaunt Lothian labourer, with broad upper lip and protruding eyes — the other, a shrewd little Highlander, with keen, gray eyes and firm lips; the lad being a blythe-looking chap, evidently working in the country, and much the worse for drink.

With the generosity of half-tipsy people, he staggered over to me with a glass of rum, and to Mr Smith with a tankard of ale, praying that “the gentlemen would excuse him making free, but he liked to see everybody happy, and hoped they would drink.” I did thereupon taste the rum, Gregory Smith took a pull at the ale, and the lad was satisfied.

“Now, sir,” said I, “will you have dinner with me? I take it you do not live in this quarter, like your friends, and a plate of broth would be better for you than any more ale, and would fit you for setting out, if so be that you are travelling.”

“Shake hands, sir,” said the lad, reaching dubiously over the table, “I like to — to see gentlemen making free — I do. Why, sir, we’re all men, aren’t we?”

“I hope so. And I’ll go tell them to bring you the broth.”

“Nay, sir, if you please, not Disagrees with me.... Oh, gentlemen!” he cried, suddenly changing his tone, “what am I doin’ sittin’ here, when I should be in Glasgow? Wae’s me! but I dinna deserve to leeve!”

“Gentlemen,” said the Lothian man, “my young frien, Maister M’Intosh, says he likes to see gentlemen like yoursels making free, but it is nae mair than he does himsel’. Sir, he is a gentleman out and out, and spends his money like a gentleman. A freer-handed bit chappie is no frae Landsend to John o’ Groat’s. And a brave bit laddie, tae, if he would just favour ye wi’ a bit sketch o’ his life.’Deed he’s come through mair than ye would think, and he’s still a prime bit callant to the last. Get up, Duncan, and tell the gentlemen what ye’ve seen!”

“Well, then, gentlemen,” said the lad, rising and steadying himself by the table, “there was just me and my father and my brither leeving in St Andrews, and it was ill biding in the house, for my faither was unco crabbit and lickit us sairly, sairly. Then my faither said he couldna keep me ony langer, for I was the younger, being but nine years old, and he kent the captain o’ a bit schooner rinnin’ frae St Andrews to Holland, and he put me there. I was but nine years old, gentlemen, and there’s not a d — d word of a lie in what I’m sayin’” —

“Duncan, Duncan, ye maunna sweer. It is no genteel to sweer!”

“And we set out i’ the afternoon, and we lost our helm, for there was a storm. Hech, sirs! what a storm — the water knockin’ us about like a cork — and in the mornin’ d’ye ken where we were?”

“Not drowned, surely,” said Mr Smith.

“We were agrun on the shore aff Dunbar, and there was naebody saved but me and John Pettigrew! And John Pettigrew says he to me— ‘Duncan, what money have ye?’ Says I, ‘John, I’ve twa shillings my brither gied me when I left St Andrews.’ Then he said, says he— ‘Duncan, HI toss ye whether I’ll gie ye twa shillings, or youll gie me yours.’ So he put up a bawbee, and I cried ‘heads!’ and he didna let me see it come down, but he said it was ‘tails,’ and I had to gie him my twa shillings. Wasn’t a shame, gentlemen, a — shame?” —

“Duncan, Duncan, ye maunna sweer!”

“And sae ane way or anither I got ower to Bathgate, and got work frae a man there, and lived decently for a lang, lang time, and I had five pounds gathered. And then I

dinna ken how he fand me out, but my brither cam' a' the gate frae Enbro' to see me, walking through the night. And says he, 'Are ye Duncan M'Intosh?' And says I, 'Yes, I'm Duncan M'Intosh.' And says he, says he— 'I'm your brither Donald.' And says I, 'Are ye Donald?' And says he, 'Yes!' Before God, gentlemen, I didna ken him — didna ken my ain brither! And I was that prood o' seein' him that I wared the five pounds on him, and him and me spent it in twa nights; and he gaed awa' back to Enbro', and I've never seen him since, and I've never had five shillings o' my ain since, s'help me, till the now!"

"And what for are ye here?" I asked. "Sure ye winna make many five pounds by staying in a public-house."

"Now, sir, just hear till me — didna I tell ye nay brither cam' to see me frae Enbro', and says he, 'Are ye Duncan M'Intosh?' and says I, 'That's my name, Duncan M'Intosh,' and I didna ken a line o' his face. And when we had spent the five pounds, I sellt a braw new coat to a Mr Paiterson, a merchant in Gleskey, for half-a-crown and a gill, and he said, any time I cam' for't to the Sautmarket he would e'en gie me't for five shillings, and I'm now walking in to get nay coat."

"Have ye money, then, to get your coat?" asked Mr Smith.

"That have I. There was twal shillings and a groat in my pouch this morning, but now I have but sax, and I am bound to play my friends here for the odd shillin'."

"Duncan, lad," I said to him, "we're going into Glasgow, and well help you on your way a bit. So come your wa's, and fetch your bonnet, and let us get on. It is ill travelling without company."

Therewith, despite the remonstrances of the men, I put the lad's cap on his head, settled his score for him, and took him out to the fresh air; but there he began to stagger in a very helpless condition, whereupon Mr Smith observed: —

"Sir, to business people credit is life; and credit rests mainly upon appearances. Wherefore, I object to entering the city carrying a drunken man. Let us put him into this cart which is now overtaking us, and give the man a sixpence to land him in the Sautmarket, and then we may continue our conversation in our own way."

But on nearer approach, the carter turned out to be no other than my old friend the Lanark carrier, driving his empty waggon down to Glasgow. On his coming up, Dan performed a very grave salutation, and with solemn face began to chant: —

"Three drunk men came down the Lanark road —
One was an auld man, and lookit like an earl;
One was a young chap, verra, verra drunk,
The third a strappin' chiel, wi' curly brown hair, wham they called James Merle."

"Gude save us!" cried Mr Smith, "is the man mad?"

"Dan," said I, "how's the auld mare?"

"Oo, finelys and brawlys, as I said to Lord Hume when he kissed the beadle's wife. And how are ye yoursel', Mr Merle? I havena wet my throat the day."

"Ye maun e'en take this bit chappie into the Sautmarket, Dan, and I'll mind ye next Tuesday when I see ye."

"Tuesday's Tuesday, Mr Merle, and this day's Monday. Gie me't when ye mind, as Johnny Armstrong telled his mother when he was expeekin' a thrashin'."

"Dan, Dan, when will ye learn havins? Would you hae us turn back to the public?"

"Toots no, Mr Merle. Bawbees before meal, as every beggar kens."

"You an independent Scotchman, Dan?"

"That am I, Mr Merle, when I meet wi' folk wha'll pay me for saying sae."

"Where d'ye expect to go to, Dan? Yell be shown at the Cross, or I'm mista'en."

“That may be, or it may no’ be, Mr Merle, but I’m no’ paid for speaking, as the dog said when they wanted him to bark withoot gie’in him meat.”

So, Dan being properly bribed, we deposited the lad among the loose straw of the van, and continued our journey. Roads were then rough, and the carrier and his waggon were soon a considerable way behind, though we heard Dan MacColl singing as we left: —

“Yonder gang twa men wi’ their heads fu’ high,
As prood as a weel-doing miller;
I carena a rap though they turn up their nose,
For I hae got at least a braw tasting oot o’ their siller.”

“An impudent vagabond,” said Mr Smith.

“He has mair wit than wisdom in his head, pair chiel,” said I.

“Like many a better man,” said Mr Smith.

We had not journeyed far ere the keen gray eyes of the old man had divined from my countenance that there was something troubling me. He ventured to make the observation; whereupon, with the frankness and simplicity of youth, I told him all about the matter.

“Sir,” he said, when I had finished, “you are going into this town of Glasgow, which resembleth not a little the ancient city of Babylon. Learn, then, not to give your confidence to every one you meet; as now you have given to me. You think I’d trust ye as far? ‘Deed no, sir, I would not trust a sixpence wi’ ye for half-an-hour.”

“I don’t believe that,” said I. “Further, lad, ye must learn to take every man for a thief and a liar until you have proved him an honest man.”

“I neither believe that, sir, nor do I believe that ye believe it.”

“Ye’re an obstinate kind o’ callant I’m thinking ye havena much to fear in this den o’ sin and wickedness whither we are journeying. St Anthony, was it, outwitted the devil? But to return; are ye satisfied this promise or oath o’ yours is properly binding upon ye? — Gude save us, sir, ye’ve een like a gled!”

Gregory Smith discreetly allowed this subject to drop; evidently reflecting within himself that his companion, who seemed otherwise liberally-’nded, was on one point only a fanatic; and it was but a harmless foible, he would not argue me out of it. Gregory Smith was an honest man, and a kind-hearted man; but knocking up and down the world, as he had done, for a lifetime is apt to make the most inflexible of consciences a little elastic.

“Life in a city,” said Mr Smith, “begets a knack of observation, a habit of observation, which you’ll learn. Let us suppose a case. If I were suddenly taken away from your side at this present moment, you would have but the vaguest idea of what I was like. You could not accurately describe me. Put a Glasgow keelie—”

“What is that?”

“A thief Put a Glasgow keelie in my place, and in three minutes he would have indelibly fixed on his memory your height, breadth, age, manner, colour of eyes, of hair, of whiskers, the shape of your coat, breeches, and boots, and the number of stripes on your cuffs.”

“And have you, sir, acquired the qualifications o’ a Glasgow keelie?”

“Not quite. But I could gie a wonderfu’ guess o’ what your future life will be. I could tell, sir, if you intend biding in Glasgow, the very mainner o’ your future life.”

“I should like to hear it,” said I.

“You’re a domestic animal The first point settled. You ‘might endure hardship; but only wi’ the expectation o’ having permanent happiness thereafter. You will settle

quietly down with wife and bairns, and you'll never be a great man, nor do I think it will trouble you much."

"You are promising somewhat too much," said I, "like every fortune-teller."

"Indeed, sir, I can prophesy this future for ye: that ye will be one o' a class o' men who are not quite so scarce as is imagined. Men who scorn the false courtesies of a mercantile life, who cannot bow and cringe for success, nor help my lady from her carriage over the mud into their shop; and who recompense themselves by the pleasures and pursuits o' some one particular science. They are revered and maist idolized by a few; yet do they never attain to wealth or to the eminence which wealth alone can bring. They are bright and shining lights in their own sphere; but their nature is too unworldly for the great places of the earth; and their honesty, and their candour, and their good-heartedness perish wi' them. Ye may think, sir, I'm flattering ye. But I ask not the loan of money from ye; and ye may ponder on my words when Gregory Smith is either hanged or in Jamaica."

"Are ye going abroad, then?" I asked.

"You, sir, know nothing o' Glasgow life, and the less you know thereof the better. What think ye o' a society that is composed chiefly o' these two classes: primo, men who go cursing, and swearing, and rum-drinking, and women-hunting all the days o' their wicked life, until the hair falls from their bloated, red faces, and they fling themselves into a self-made and dishonoured grave. *Secundo*, men who, having dashed into all the pleasures o' life in their youth, were stawed therewith, and let them sour on their stomach, until every mortal thing which God ever made savours to them o' sinful pollution. They gang about with their white, leprous faces and green een, sniffing out all manner o' wickedness in what a common Christian would regard but as innocent diversions. And what between the open profligacy o' the one lot, and the sanctimonious orthodoxy o' the other, the town is more like a hell than a place for human beings to live in. You asked if I was going abroad. "Deed, sir, it matters not much to me whether I be carrying a chair through London streets, or carrying the king his colours in Bermudas."

"Have you no friends in Glasgow?" said I, looking at this queer, old man, who, in his fiercest invective, seemed to bear himself very equably, as though it were merely for information to me that he spoke of such disagreeable matters.

"He hath most friends who esteemeth as brethren all mankind, and who hath the happy knack of fraternising wherever he goeth."

"I don't call *these* friends," said I.

"Let me tell you, sir, I have received more of kindness from people utterly unknown to me than ever I experienced from my own relations. And, by the bye, if you have not provided yourself with lodgings in this city whither we go, you cannot do better than come to Mrs Wardrop's lodgings, wherein I also remain for the present; and we shall not quarrel about doctrine, which it seemeth to me might be our only point of dispute. For my religion, sir, is a wide religion, embracing all creeds; the religion of the world."

"Which meaneth," said I, "that you have no religion."

"No, sir, you mistake. I believe in many fondamental doctrines o' your church; but leave the lave to be settled among people who have more time."

"I'm afraid, Mr Smith, that a man who cannot find time to save his own soul, cares not much whither it is going."

Nevertheless I agreed to accompany my mentor to Mrs Wardrop's, seeing that I thought him a very honest man.

And thereupon we came in sight of Glasgow, which city I had seen but once before, and that when I was a very small callant. We came in by the Gallowgate, passing the famous Saracen's Head Inn at the foot of the Dow-hill; thereafter crossing the Molendinar rivulet by an old-fashioned bridge, and finally coming full in view of the then most picturesque street in Europe. The afternoon sun was rejoicing in the glory of the Trongate — the great Tolbooth with its entry-stair and sentry-box was like a palace of gold — while up and down in front of King William his statue, strutted the proud tobacco-lords in all the pomp and magnificence of their scarlet cloaks and cocked hats. Through the misty, wavering sunshine I looked upon that gorgeous street, as some tawny-faced savage may have gazed from the Tiber up to the palaces of Rome; beholding, as I looked, the Town-hall, and Tron Steeple — the Hutchesons' Hospital, even unto the Buck's Head Mansion, with the little farm-house opposite. We walked along the "Trongate," while Mr Smith smiled at my wonder as I saw fine lords and ladies, all gold lace and jewels, spruce gentlemen with long perukes, silvered coats, and beautiful swords, reverend ministers with grave countenances and attenuated legs, and the merchants with their conspicuous cloaks and uplifted faces. We looked up the Candleriggs and saw droves of cows going by way of the Back Cow Loan homeward to their byres in the Cowcaddens. Finally, having arrived at the Stockwell, we did turn downwards, unto a little house with a flight of wooden steps outside, which Mr Smith informed me was Mrs Wardrop's lodgings.

Having partaken of some dinner — in the preparation of which I thought Mrs Wardrop somewhat dilatory — we two again sallied out to look about the city. This we did until the Tolbooth clock tolled the hour of nine, when it was deemed fit that we should return. And then I went Up to my little room in the attics, and with a prayer for one very dear to me, laid me down and slept And these came unto me in dreams:

Is it the wind that is sighing over the moor by night? An Æolian harp is at her window, and it wakes the whispering air into music as she sleeps. She sleeps; she is dreaming of thee. She beholds thee in her sweet dreams; and her young bosom beats, her pure soul is yearning, only for thee! — O wind, breathe gently around her until she awake! O moonlight, full of stars, lie softly on the little dwelling, for she is dreaming of me!

And I went away up to a lonely mountain, and built myself there a cottage, to end my life apart from friends. And through the long days, and through the weary nights, I was ever thinking of her — of one far away, for ever lost to me. Yet the silver sound of her voice came unto me in sleep; and in vision I saw her sweet eyes, and her beautiful white, white brow! Speak to me, O angel of light! Closer, closer come to me, darling of my heart! O fair, blue eyes that make me shudder with their depth of infinite mystery — speak to me of love, speak to me of the happy nights, in the times gone by, by the side of streams, under the stars! Hark!... the music fades... like the echo of an angel's song... she beckons me!

O father, I cannot! She is my life — without her I am dead. Stand aside, John Macaulay; speak gently, for they tell me he is dying. Father, die in peace — I have said it — I have said it... O father, my life is taken away from me!

The green light of Spring is over the land, and the blue sky is smiling on the earth like an angel sister. Rise, O lark, into the highest heavens, for my sweet one is coming through the dewy fields, where the scent of the hawthorn is sleeping over the young corn! Sing, O lark, until her sweet eyes are raised to heaven, to the deep, deep blue where thou art invisible! See how she comes along, with gentle carriage — with

proud, soft step — stately as a queen, graceful as a fawn. Nay, look not, or the pale roses of her cheek will give place to paler lilies, for her inmost soul is pure — pure as the maiden snow that kisses the first red light of morning on the mountains of Cashmere!... Come, darling!... I wait, I wait — under the young rowan-trees, within hearing of the purling of the stream. O look not so reproachfully! She passes weeping — sorely weeping — O stay, my own one, turn and come to me!... She is away into the green shade of the glen, and the noise of the waterfall is roaring through the trees, and I can see her no more.

CHAPTER X.

HOW BUSINESS FAILED TO CURE OR QUENCH LOVE.



THE AMERICAN WAR had been decided; the effects of a dearth which occurred in the same year were yet felt; trade was bad: wherefore I could get no work. Morning after morning Gregory Smith went out, resolved to bring home news of some situation for me, and night after night he returned home barren of such news.

Meanwhile, my small stock of money being yet unexhausted, I went about seeing people, and manners, and things. I trained myself so that I could look on fine lords and ladies without much awe; and when the beautiful eyes of one of the latter happened to alight upon me, I did not blush so much as my wont had been. Somehow I did not grow democratic. I never thought of instituting comparisons between my own neck and shoulders and those of some little lord bowing under the weight of his honours and sins.

But when I beheld — as was often beheld in those days — some great nobleman, with all manner of stars and decorations on his breast, drunk as a judge, and incontinently cursing and swearing at his chairmen, the blood of the old Merles rose within me, and made my fingers itch for a horsewhip.

Likewise did I find much scope for geological pursuits around Glasgow. On the clear, fresh spring-days, then coming in, I went off early in the morning — trusting mainly to Providence to look after my situation — and did not return until night-fall, with a light heart and a heavy pocket. Sometimes these rambles extended even to the sea-side, and there was such a strange and pleasant charm in walking by the margin of the murmuring water, that often I lingered until night came — until the dark clouds came down from the purple hills, and lay over the black and lake-like firth — until from out the uncertain gloom peeped the orange lights of the distant shore — villages running round the base of the mountains like a luminous string of jewels hung waveringly between sea and sky. Then through the night had I to walk my thirty miles again to Glasgow, tumbling into bed in the Stockwell as the gray morning came streaming up the Gallowgate.

Matters were beginning to look serious, however. So one morning Gregory Smith rose from our breakfast-table, saying “he would get me a situation, or would never return to the Stockwell.”

“Pray, sir,” said I, “do not be minded to go drown yourself in order to leave me a fortune.”

“Sir,” said Gregory Smith, “ye have imbibed a wicked practice o’ making light o’ serious matters, wherein ye adopt the manners o’ the children of Belial.”

“Who are represented to me in the person of—”

“As you like. Indeed you are getting over gleg wi’ your tongue for an old man like me. It is an element of your character hitherto undiscovered.”

“A man who looks through mirthful eyes sees something ludicrous in everybody: so do not miscall my poor wit, Mr Smith, for it has existence only in yourself.”

Gregory Smith gave a fashionable little laugh, smoothed down his cue, carefully dusted the hair-powder from the breast of his coat, and went out, a very different man from him whom I had met in the Lanark road.

Mrs Wardrop came to clear the breakfast-table. Mrs Wardrop was a decayed gentlewoman — a pleasant looking little person, who dearly loved to introduce the French phrases of her youth into her walk and conversation.

“Mr Merle,” she said, “excuse me, if you please, but having occasion to arrange your books, I did see written thereon the name ‘Ebenezer Merle.’ Is he a kinsman of yours?”

“Madam, that is my father’s name. If you wish to read any of these books, I shall be glad to leave them to you for that purpose.”

So I rose to hand the old lady several of my precious volumes, whereon were inscribed such tokens as these:

Ebenezer Merle, his book, and to him it doth pertain. Eastburn, 1763.

Martha Merle aught this book. Whitburn, 1714.

Janet Blair, her book, and God give her grace to look on it. Eastburn, 1766.

While one bore this legend on the fly-leaf: —

“Alick Merle is my name,
Scotland is my nation,
Eastburn is my dwelling-place —
A pleasant habitation.
And when I’m dead and in my grave,
And all my bones are rotten,
This little book will tell my name
When I am quite forgotten;
And if this book is stole away,
Remember, at the latter day,
That Jesus Christ will come and say:
‘Where is the book you stole away?’”

But Mrs Wardrop, accepting the volumes with the grand curtesy of the time, gave me to understand that her question had arisen because she knew, or had heard of Mr Ebenezer Merle.

“He was famed, your father, for his courage, for his boldness, for his — oh, I know not what! — in the Secession cause. My faith! you will have plenty of friends in Glasgow. If you will do me the honour to escort me, I shall take you to many. Indeed, sir, you must come on Sabbath to the meeting-house in Inkle Factory Lane, where will be many to welcome you.”

On that Sabbath, and on many a succeeding Sabbath, I went to Inkle Factory Lane meetinghouse, where I heard many old and reverend fathers of the Secession; and to many of the people did I become known; for the name of Merle was held in exceeding repute among the Secessionists of that time, as having been connected with many instances of rare piety and virtue.

But for my introduction to Glasgow society, I was indebted to another person than the good Mrs Wardrop. On the evening of the day with which this chapter opens, Mr Gregory Smith returned to his orange-coloured easy-chair by the fireside. There was victory in his eyes. Evidently he had been successful. Before communicating the exact import of his news, however, he, as was his wont, improved the occasion by introducing a few general maxims.

“There is good reason,” he said to me, “in your Scotch saying— ‘Tak tent when ye come to the sheddins.’ Ye are come to the sheddins, for I have to offer ye a situation

in an ironmonger and Holland-ware merchant's place; which offer ye must weigh carefully. A man is never so much at home as at his own trade: but a man frequently makes his fortune by going abroad."

"When a man," said I, "has either o' these two courses to take — to starve or to go abroad — there is but small reason in weighing the matter too nicely."

"Which meaneth, my callant, you will go to Mr John Lightbody's with all possible despatch. Therefore, let me caution you. It is a great blessing we are not all either fools or philosophers. The great body o' mankind go straggling in a dubious mainner between the two extremes. But it happens that most of your go-betweens have an odd habit o' misplacing these extremes; whereby they take the fool for a philosopher, and the philosopher for a fool. It is the safest way for an honest man to be neither; and ye maun forthwith give up your Eastburn practice o' hairsplitting and refining, or ye will be put down as either fool or philosopher."

"Mr Smith, when I thank ye for your advice, you will understand I don't mean to take it. But I do thank ye for your trouble in getting this place for me, which is more than I could have expected from a stranger. I am beginning to believe your doctrine o' fraternity from this example; and indeed, sir, I never look on your face but I think better of myself and of everybody else."

"Ye maun leave off your Eastburn conscience," said Mr Smith, without heeding the interruption, "and your Eastburn tongue as well. The latter will go by and by. But, above all things, ye maun give up these dangerous notions concerning the King and the Constitution. They may have fitted well in an out-o'-the-world place that might have been in open rebellion for what anybody cared. But they winna do here. Look at me. Here have I been knocked up and down for fifty years among all manner of democracies, barbarous and otherwise, yet have I never become like unto that foolish bird, the stork, which cannot build his nest in any country where there is a king. I thank God I have my digestion."

Mr Smith leaned back in his easy-chair, and surveyed me from head to foot with an expression of the most complacent benevolence. He was satisfied with himself, and therefore with the whole world. He stretched out his hand to the table, and laid hold of some of my ancient books which Mrs Wardrop had left lying thereon.

"*Historiæ Scoticæ Latino-Vernacula*," he read aloud, continuing his remarks with that sort of expression which only the faces of smokers wear; "this book, my lad, which I see is dated Edinburgh, 1688, is not unlike some more modern volumes, in that a mass of bad English and worse Scotch is prefixed by a grandiloquent title. Is this a sample of your library, Jamie?"

"The Scotch may have been the Scotch of his time, Mr Smith, and for the English, I am beholden to take your opinion, seeing I know but little of it."

Mr Smith smiled. Evidently he thought his pupil was improving on his hands.

"What have we here?" he said, "Paris edition, 1550, *Commentaries of Audomarus Talæus on Cicero. Rerum Scoticarum*, by George Buchanan, 1584. I knew not you could read the Latin, Jamie?"

"I can but little, Mr Smith. The books belonged to an uncle o' mine, whae was a schoolmaster in Bathgate till the year 75. Then having foolishly married a daughter o' Pettigrew o' that ilk, whae brought him some money and a couple o' bairns — for she was married before to a Hollander — auld Robin Merle went south, and we never heard more of him. Indeed, it sorely regrets me that I know little of Latin beyond a few barbarous adjectives." —

"Yet there be people, Jamie, who make their living by clothing the world with adjectives; and sometimes they have a fashion o' making up the garments in the maist

curious possible manner. Look you," he continued, "how this book hath been damaged by the researches of a book-worm, who hath eaten his way into the very heart of it! Indeed, lad, I can conceive of no happier life than that of a book-worm — he lives in a universe of meat — his life is a succession of feasts, and go where he will they await him on every side — he is but rarely disturbed, and has leisure to educate his children in the maist perfect seclusion, away from the vices and follies o' the world. He lives a happy life, and dies a righteous death, leaving behind him many a memorial o' his progress. I wish an' we were all such as he!"

"Mr Smith, you are like an eel in a horse-pond, who would fain win to the sea, thinking he would there get fatter!"

"It is fine to think, Jamie, nevertheless, that no more pain or happiness can come to us in this world than we are able to bear."

"Mr Smith, Mr Smith, ye talk as if circumstances were made for man, not man made to adapt himself to circumstances. Sure, it is very encouraging to think of how man's powers are exactly suited to his wishes! Say, now, that Providence had placed every man's head on front o' his stomach, I doubt not your naturalist would show how admirably adapted that situation was, as being near the digestive organs, as being in a place of comparative security, while the shoulders would be extolled as the proper place for lifting and carrying burdens. Given a condition, the creature will adapt itself to that condition, and philosophers will endeavour to show that the condition was made for the creature!"

"If you please! You Scotch people must have pegs whereon to hang your endless disquisitions, and the most trifling remark will serve you. I was never bothered wi' any metaphysical fever; but there is one point which seems to me worthy of all study, and thereon — but no farther — am I willing to listen to you. Many and many a time, Jamie, have I stood on the street to see some puir, feckless fellow, sair begrutten, wi' not a hale stitch on his back, being taken up the Tolbooth stairs wi' aims on his wrists, and I have said to myself— 'Had this luckless mortal the chances I had? Is he to be blamed? Am I to congratulate myself on my superior moral purity, when I was born with it in my nature, and he born without it?'"

This time Gregory Smith was in earnest; and I was somewhat glad to have an opportunity of laying down the law to my didactic schoolmaster, so far as that could be done by me.

"Mr Smith," I said, "ye cannot have moral responsibility without moral consciousness. What we call conscience is simply the result of education, differing wi' different systems o' education; but I'm thinking there never was a man so morally ignorant as to commit any palpable sin without being fully aware that he was doing wrong. Now, Sir, be patient for a minute, and then ye can argue as long as ye like. The savage that kills a white man thinks he does no wrong. Why? Because he does it from a desire of retribution or revenge — which is aiblins his idea of justice. But brawly he kens that to kill a man without cause is a crime deserving of punishment, and if he does that thing it is with the resolution to risk the consequences. Mr Smith, there never was a callant picked your napkin out o' your pocket but he knew finely he had nae business there, and knew likewise that he deserved well to be whipped for being there."

Mr Smith threw himself back in his easy-chair, and rubbed his hands. Mr Smith was happy.

"It is pleasing, sir, very pleasing, to have your conscience soldered by arguments. Sir, I am surely obliged to you for showing me that when a man is being pelted in the pillory, it is no business of his neighbours to ask themselves why he is inside and they

outside. Satisfactory, sir, very.” Perhaps there was a little sarcasm in Mr Smith’s voice, but he had not the moral courage to raise another objection.

“The imputing of crime is one thing,” I said to him, “the punishing of it another. We have lessons of mercy to learn from a higher Teacher than our own notion of right.”

For I thought of how I had striven — perhaps in vain — to forgive those who had brought sorrow down on my life.

“I thank God,” said Mr Smith, “for having given me consciousness of my many shortcomings from what I ought to be. There is nothing to me so pitiable as the spectacle of a man who thinks himself perfect — for it shows what a small standard of perfection he has raised up for himself. A man should be greater than his faults.”

I have thought of what Mr Smith said since then, and the older I grow it seems to become the truer.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW NEWS CAME FROM EASTBURN.



I PROSPERED WELL in Mr John Lightbody's shop. I got on good terms with my fellow-shopmen, though I had no spirit to go with them to the then little Glasgow theatre, nor yet to taverns for the purpose of carousing, whither they often tended. I prospered; but, I often asked myself, to what end? Whither away led those fine descriptions of future wealth which Gregory Smith was so prone to prophesy? — And some times I rebelled against even this prospective wealth. I would not mock myself with a semblance of happiness when happiness was far from me; I would not load my coffin-lid with gold, when I lay, a corpse, within.

Now when I think of it, I was in a poor way indeed. Had it not been for old Gregory Smith, I believe some morning I should have found my way to one of the vessels lying at the "Tail of the Bank," and have gone to fling my life at the head of some grinning savage.

Almost my only gratification then was to go out the Lanark road of an evening and meet the Muirend carrier, who stopped his discordant fiddling to give me news of the people of the moors. I hardly dared ask for Lilian — my Lilian. Yet sometimes Dan would give me, unquestioned, sufficient gossip about her to set me thinking and dreaming about her for another week. She had left Bishopburn, and had returned to her father's house. Dan said— "She didna take kindly to the place. She was growin' unco thin and white, and her bonnie bit face was ower sober-like for a lassie o' her age. But when she got a sweetheart she would cheer up brawlys — lassies aye looked well when there was a lad after them!"

Dan had heard but little of Gavin Rankine, further than that he had been "horse-whuppit" by a farmer, near Breich-water, for kissing the man's wife, which certainly seemed to me a quite cogent reason for the horse-whipping. But one afternoon Dan had other tidings for me.

"Ye ken, sir," said he, "the Frasers were owing auld Rankine o' Lanark some money; and that auld deevil has rowpit them out at the hoose-door, leaving them hardly a stool to sit on. They hae taen a sma'bit hoose at the end o' Eastburn, and the lassie gangs ower to Lanark every day to sew and do sic like wark for some leddy; but it's a waefu' case, atweel."

That was sufficient news for one day, and I returned to my lodgings with a sore heart. But Gregory Smith was in high glee that night. He had obtained for me an invitation to a grand assembly on that day week; and he bade me go order a new coat and ruffles, likewise pomatum and hair-powder; for there were to be great and mighty people at the assembly — with an enumeration of whom Mr Smith passed the evening very pleasantly until bedtime.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE VILLAIN OF THE DRAMA PLAYED A BOLD CARD.



NO ONE WOULD have recognised Gregory Smith. He was absolutely magnificent. The bows of ribbon at his queue were superb. The gracious smile that dwelt on his face was second only to that of his illustrious Highness George Prince of Wales.

When I went down from my little dressing-room, in that new-fashioned finery I had obtained from the merchants, Mr Smith was also pleased to compliment me on my assumption of a new character. But on one point he was dogmatic; and on that point I was inflexible. I disliked pomatum. Our moor-land people laughed at hair-powder. I would wear my own hair.

"Then, sir," said Mr Gregory Smith, "ye must go amongst them as a bear, and ye maun dance to my music. If ye had but some red paint, we might introduce ye as an Indian chief."

"Jamie Merle," he continued, as he finished his toilette, "the absurdities of a great man become peculiarities. Philosophers are above fashion. A pair of Shakespere's shoes, with the heels down and the buckles wanting, would be a fortune to anybody. A great man picks up a vulgarism, affixes to it the signature of his genius, and it becomes a classic. Do you think if our Prince George were to adopt the hodden-gray, everybody would not immediately follow suit?"

"Mr Smith," said I, "Prince George may dress himself as an old woman for aught I care. And ye may introduce me as a Bed Indian, or a philosopher, or a bear, just as it pleases you. But I shall leave pig-tails to those wiser philosophers who accommodate themselves to circumstances, and rise superior to their own dislikes."

"Ye're a verra deevil for being positive. Yet I despair not o' being able in time to civilise ye. Never venture, never win, lad."

"Them wha strive maist win least."

"Where gat ye that proverb, Jamie?"

"Made it, Mr Smith."

The chairmen were depositing many a precious freight in front of the Saracen's Head, when Mr Smith and I sallied up the Gallowgate on foot. And as noble gentlemen and beautiful ladies stepped daintily into the passage, my heart sank within me for fear I should by any misadventure disturb the capacious repose of their dress. It was not a dinner-party. The merchant who had invited those people was the scion of a noble house, a man of fashion, and poor. This meeting, therefore, was to take the form of a ball, to be held in the spacious assembly-room of the inn.

"There," said Gregory Smith, as we entered the passage, "is Mr De Stair, the man who is supposed to desire the company of all those people."

I saw a little old man, with a very red face, and a very white head of hair, helplessly hanging on the arms of two friends, drunk.

"Is it necessary that I should be introduced to this person?" I asked with the foolish dignity of a young man.

"Deed no, Mr Merle. He was as drunk as that when I got your invitation for you; and he has but small idea of the distinguished Timon who is honouring his rooms."

“Then,” said I, still standing very erect, “it befits me to return.” —

At this moment our noble host — still supported by his two friends — came forward to Gregory Smith, and with an astonishing variety of feebly-uttered and fashionable oaths, huskily bade him welcome. Perhaps Mr Smith would have introduced me to this gallant gentleman, had not the latter, with the incontinence of purpose peculiar to drunken men, shouted for a chairman to come drink wine with him. Whereupon he was forcibly borne off by his two friends.

“Ye were thinking o’ returning?” said Gregory Smith, “what for that? Are ye afeard o’ being classed wi’ publicans and sinners? ‘Deed, sir, I believe there are not two persons in this house who have come this night out o’ friendship for Stair — excepting, maybe, a parcel o’ women who seem to be capable of fancying the ugliest abortion ever whelped into the world.”

So we passed through the inn to the brilliantly lighted ball-room; where the people were already gliding through the figures of a stately minuet. I had never seen such a display of splendour. It was dream-land to me. I was bewildered. Before me flitted gay gentlemen, in beautiful blue coats with golden buttons, in handsome embroidered waistcoats, in neatest knee-breeches M adorned with lovely buckles, in exquisite slippers likewise surmounted by massive ornaments of silver. One or two old beaux were there, in large full-skirted coats with enormous cuffs all glittering with lace and gold, and with elegant knots of ribbon at their pig-tails and at their knees. The ladies, too, how handsome they looked! — how beautiful and graceful they were in that fashion which prescribed the arm-pits to be the region of the waist; that length of skirt, reaching from the bosom to the ground, was almost classic in its severe simplicity. And the wonderful towers on their head, wreathed round and round with heavy rows of pearls, shone in the candle-light like the work of genii.

“Here cometh John Lightbody,” said Gregory, and I saw the man who supposed himself to be my master coming towards us through the crowd. I would have fallen behind; but John Lightbody, though a hard drinker, a coarse swearer, and a generally immoral man, had withal a sort of generosity about him, being little of what in modern times our young men would call a sneak. He came forward and spoke to both of us, introduced me to a young damsel whom he had with him, and then engaged in conversation with

Gregory Smith. Then again he took the young woman under his charge, and passed on.

“Mr Smith,” said I, when he had gone, “why hath not Mr Lightbody his wife with him?”

To which Mr Smith made no other reply than a simple shrug of his shoulders.

And as we sat down to rest ourselves, a beautiful lady, whom from afar I had seen and admired, came forward and spoke to Gregory. He introduced her, also, to me, and she was gracious to me, and spoke to me, and gave me her fan to hold while she regulated some part of her attire. And as she received her fan again, preparatory to sailing away, she bade me remember I was to dance with her that evening.

“Mr Smith,” I said, in great amazement, when she had gone, “that woman has chalk on her face!”

“Lord bless us,” cries Gregory, “what would you have us old people do? If we remain as we are, you say we are hideous. If we endeavour to improve ourselves, you are shocked!”

“Sure that lady is not old,” said I.

“Sir, that woman was married when you were a bairn at school. Nor did her husband apparently find much bliss in connubial sweets, for he, in a fortnight thereafter, did one morning depart for the colonies, and hath not since returned.”

“What was that for?” I asked.

“Who knows?” said Gregory, complacently smoothing his ruffles; “but the wife of one o’ our Glasgow magistrates did about, the same time mysteriously disappear; and it was rumoured, some time after, that they were living together in Jamaica.”

“And did the magistrate seek consolation in likewise sheltering this forlorn lady?”

“Sir, he was an old man, and out o’ the fashion.”

As Gregory Smith had said, there were probably not present three people who cared a rushlight for their noble host. One-half, Mr Smith said, had come for business purposes — the others had come for personal enjoyment, or to see the fashions, or to see their friends. Ostensibly he, too, had come to meet business acquaintances; though neither I, nor Mrs Wardrop, nor anybody else, knew what pursuit he followed. So Mr Smith walked about, chatting to this fine gentleman, bowing to the next, until I thought he knew everybody there.

De Stair had long ago been deprived of motion, and, like a discreet man, had allowed himself to be put to bed, leaving his guests to entertain themselves as best they might. Most of them were merely walking about; some were dancing; while here and there small coteries of card-players were seated round convenient side-tables.

Suddenly I grasped my friend’s arm, and stopped. For at the further end of the room, in a blaze of light and jewels, I saw a beautiful young girl standing, who was so like my own Lilian that I almost took her for an apparition. I went nearer to her through the throng, and saw too surely that it was not she, yet I asked Mr Smith to introduce me to her, if he had that privilege. Whereat the old hero smiled.

“Truly,” he said, “you have some judgment in the matter of women. That lady is the daughter of Colonel Burton — the half-tipsy man in the corner — but, being in poor circumstances, he has had her educated in Ayrshire, where she hath obtained an accent about as barbarous as your own. Certes, lad, I think the colonel might even fancy you for his son-in-law!”

But I heard him not. I was still looking at this vision, who wore the same tresses of brown hair as my own Eastburn maiden, with the same soft blue eye, the same delicate flush on her maidenly cheek; and who carried her beauty with the like proud grace — haughty as a thunder-cloud in winter, but gentle as the snow that *falls* therefrom.

“James Merle,” whispered Gregory, as we went through the crowd, “she is the only woman here in whose hands I could safely leave you — *she does not play cards.*”

The next minute I found myself speaking to the lady, though I trembled within me in case I should commit some dreadful blunder of behaviour. But her pleasing ways made me forget my backwardness, and I began to talk to her of the country, and of the country-people, and of their good old habits and customs. She was inclined to be merry, laughed heartily at times in a way that none of our modern ladies would think it becoming to do; and Gregory Smith, seeing that I was well established, sought him out companions elsewhere.

So the night wore on, until most of the gentlemen becoming very drunk, their women-folks, for their own *safety*, were glad to get them away. As in duty bound, I reserved to myself the honour of handing the colonel’s daughter downstairs; and as she and her father were stepping into their carriage, she urged me very earnestly to visit her. I promised to call with Mr Smith; the black footman sprung up behind,

caught hold of either corner, the horses drove away down the dark street, and they were lost in the gloom.

I returned to the hall, and was soon enabled to pick up Gregory Smith from a whist-table. We left the rapidly-thinning room, and were soon passing down the Gallowgate, where a faint moonlight was coming over the chimney-tops, making ghastly contrast with the dim and sickly lamps.

Somehow I felt very wretched. I was young; and that brilliant assemblage had seemed to me to be all that was noble and beautiful on the earth. The men were for the most part drunk. They swore, played cards, and probably cheated. Many of the women were hideous to behold. Even I, a country greenhorn, could discern the absurd affectation of the ancient belles. And yet — and yet — I felt very miserable. I had been there only on sufferance. Properly speaking, I had no right to be there at all. Should I ever have that right? It was not very likely. And then the remembrance of the lady's voice — I was almost ashamed of myself for having promised to visit her. It was something very like imposture. Old Gregory Smith, probably noticing my glum looks endeavoured to joke me about Miss Burton's blue eyes. Of blue eyes I may have been thinking, but they were not hers.

The moonlight was lying softly on the front of the old Tolbooth, and the sentry-box was almost hid in the dusky shadow of the entrance-stair, at the foot of the High Street. Just as we had reached the Cross, and were passing the gloom of the ancient steeple, a figure suddenly sprang out from the darkness — I felt myself caught by the collar from behind — Gregory Smith burst out with a furious oath — there was a gleam of steel, and the next second Smith and another man were rolling on the street. Over they went, with a sharp ring of metal on the causeway, and then Smith got up, with his knee on the man's breast. It was the work of a moment.

"Hi! Bed-coats! Hi! Guard, there!"

Up came running some minions of the Tolbooth, and with them came people who had heard the cry ring along the street. Just as they reached the place, the man sprang to his feet, knocking over Gregory Smith, and throwing the dagger at my head — then down the Saltmarket he went, with the whole pack of his pursuers at his heels. Down the dark street ran the gathering crowd, shouting with all their might, until many an alarmed citizen thrust his night-capped head out of window to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, when suddenly the foremost runners drew up, stopping the tide that was flowing and rolling behind them. The man had in a moment disappeared.

"Up here!" shouted one of the men, and two or three of the boldest darted into one of those narrow entries which abound until this day in that street. We, outside, heard the sound of a desperate scuffle, and then amid much furious swearing the others returned to the mouth of the "close," dragging their captive with them. I saw the man, and knew him.

"How are ye to-night, Mr Rankine?" said I.

He only ground his teeth.

"Oh, this is your Lanark friend!" said Mr Smith, as he of the dagger was being taken up the street. "Deed, sir, it was quite romantic, but ye took a very unromantic place for your escapade. Was it predestination, think you, bade ye wait about the Tolbooth? It was a pity, sir, we kept ye so long outside; ye will feel more at home within."

He was taken up the Tolbooth stair — the massive door swung open — the watchmen bade Gregory and myself attend the next morning, and again the great door swung on its hinges.

“Jamie, lad,” said Gregory, “let us get to the Stockwell with all possible despatch — I should like some water. The infamous villain! — he hath destroyed my best coat, which hath served me faithfully upwards of three years come Whitsunday.”

Mrs Wardrop well nigh fainted when she opened the door, for Mr Smith’s coat-sleeve was dripping with blood. I helped him to undress so far as to show the wound, while Mrs Wardrop bade the girl go run to the nearest tavern for a surgeon. The man of science came — preceded by a strong odour of alcoholic liquors — and after severe scrutiny, bade us all take courage, seeing that the wound, though deep, was in a harmless part. So it was bathed and dressed, and we did all go to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE PHILOSOPHER TRIED TO COMBINE FIRE AND WATER.



“AND IS THIS the beautiful country-side of which I have heard so much, Mr MacColl? Are these the picturesque moors, concerning which you matter-of-fact Scotsmen become maudlin? Certes, Dan, they have been grievously misrepresented; for an uglier and bleaker place is ne’er on this side o’ Orkney!”

“Mr — what’s your name, if I may speir?”

“Smith.”

“Weel, then, Mr Smith, ye’re nae pheelosopher.”

Gregory turned angrily upon his guide; then stopped short, and laughed.

“How now, Dan?”

“Ye are nae pheelosopher, as I said, or ye would ken what maks a country-side weel-favoured. If ye but kenned some bonnie bit lassie about here, whase sonsy face would mak your heart dunt as ye saw her coming out-ower the muir— ‘deed, sir, ye would eschew a’ your foreign-fandangled notions about places, and would sweer this was the bravest country-side in Christendom!”

“Pray proceed, Dan; you are illustrating graphically the metaphysical doctrine of association.” —

“‘Deed I’m no. I’m talking sense, as ony sensible Christian would perceive. D’ye see yon bit bumie rinnin’ through the muir, down by the saughs, and out among the queen-o-the-meadow?”

“I do, Dan, and witness nothing remarkable thereabout.”

“But gin ye had to meet a gowden-haired lassie doon by the bushes, and gin ye sat there on a moonlicht nicht, and listened pairtly to the water, and pairtly to yoursels twa breathing, and pairtly to the wun that cam’ down through the lang gerse, ye would gang through your life sweerin’ there ne’er was a muir like Eastburn Muir, and there ne’er was a burn like the burn that rins through it —

And aye she sang, Come back my love!

Come back across the sea!

The hollow wind leuch in her face,

And she lay doon to dee!”

“Mr MacColl, your talents are wasted in your present sphere! Have you never made verses? — sure there be many worse hands at the trade.”

“Hoot awa’, sir! dinna speir questions, as Lord Home said to me when I axed him the age o’ his eldest bairn. And, sir, hae ye never cast your e’en on some sweet-faced bit cummock whae ye would like to see sittin’ at one end o’ the board while ye said grace at the ither?”

“What the deuce do you mean, sir?”

“Ou, naething ava, naething ava; only ye’ll be a bachelor, I trow?”

“How may that concern you?”

“I’m no saying it did; but it concerns *you* — and ye might answer a ceevil quastion.”

“And what though I had both wife and weans?”

“Then ye hae a family, sir? — and what for may ye be coming here without them?”

"That concerns me only."

"Ye'll be coming to these pairts to colleck accounts for some Glesco merchant?"

"D — n your questions! Where now is this village we are seeking?"

They were within a few hundred yards of Eastburn, being on the north side of the mound of fir-trees; but Dan MacColl looked all around, and scratched his head. He was displeased with the Southern's reticence.

"Weel, sir, I'm no saying we're far aff the place, but when I mind, I hae some wark to do in Muirend, and I'm thinking I'll better be turning thitherward. Good day to you, sir!"

"But what the devil am I to do in this desert? Here, you, sir!"

But by this time Dan was at full gallop across the moor; nor did he pause in his flight until he was at least a quarter of a mile away. Then Gregory heard a shrill voice sing: —

"There are some men deaf, and some men dumb,
There some canna gang, and some canna come;
But ae man I ken is worse than them a',
For he's neither deaf, nor dumb, nor blind,
and he'll no reach Eastburn before night fa'."

And, with shrieks of eldritch laughter, Dan made off as fast as he could, until he was visible only as a small speck moving over the moor.

Gregory Smith turned, resolved to continue the path along which they had been travelling; and just as he had rounded the clump of firs, he came full in front of a young lady, very gaily dressed, who was riding smartly up to him on a white pony.

"Save us!" cried Gregory, "is the place haunted? Ill swear this is the same madcap lassock whilk Jamie did speak of — her raven curls and devil-may-care look, and all! 'Deed, I maun introduce myself to Lady Margaret Seton, if this be she!"

The lady was hardly less surprised than was Gregory himself, as she saw this brilliant stranger, in all manner of holiday finery, dropped in middle of the moor. Gregory, as he afterwards told me, went forward to the pony's head, stood at a respectful distance, and made a very low bow.

"Madam, your servant!"

Lady Margaret still looked on in speechless wonder.

"I address you because I imagine I know something of you, and hope you will permit me to ask, madam, if your name be Lady Margaret Seton."

She turned the pony's head and gathered up the reins.

"Then you are not a warlock or fairy," she said, having recovered her usual bantering manner, "but a nice old gentleman with a smiling countenance, and I may speak to you."

"Your ladyship will excuse my boldness when I say I am a friend of that Mr Merle who, some months ago, left this place for Glasgow; and that I am now in quest of the village of Eastburn, which a grinning fool agreed to show me, and then ran off, leaving me in this outlandish place!"

"Sir, you have been too much exasperated by the Muirend carrier, whom I take to have been your guide, to look straight in front, or you would have seen Eastburn lying in yonder hollow. And may I now ask you two questions — first, your name, that I may speak to you; then, if you have come from James Merle himself?"

"My name is Gregory Smith, your ladyship, and I am come hither solely on my own responsibility to see if I cannot have some small influence in arranging a few matters on my friend's account. I am a man of business, and do not care to talk over

private matters with strangers; but shall be extremely obliged to your ladyship if you will return to the village and show me Mr Fraser's residence."

"Sir," she said, with a little laugh, "I thought not there was another person besides myself in the parish who could have made such an impudent request; wherefore I shall gladly return with you; and as we go, you may as well confide your secrets to me, seeing that I know all concerning the matter which has brought you hither."

"But I have no secrets," said Mr Smith, "and I should wish, more by token, that you should tell *me* what you know of Fraser's family, and if Jamie Merle's father is more, leniently-minded than he appears to have been."

"Mr Smith," said Lady Margaret Seton, "I fear me you have come upon a bootless errand. The Merles, sir, root and branch, are as obstinate as hazel-bushes — you may bend them as you like, but they will leap back in spite of you. And truly, sir, I am grieved to see our Lilian walk to Lanark and back again each day, getting paler and more care-worn week by week, and yet as obstinately bent upon it as though she were a Merle herself I am sure if the old man could see how this girl labours to support her family — you know they have given up the public?—"

"I have heard so," said Mr Smith.

"He would surely unbend and make some reparation for the unhappiness he has caused them all. I have reasoned with him, sir, to no purpose; and I doubt you will not succeed where I have failed. He has duties, he says!"

"Madam," said Mr Smith, in a querulous and dissatisfied way, "I should greatly like to pick a quarrel with somebody and run that person — whoever he or she may be — through the body! It isn't Jamie's father, it isn't Jamie himself, nor yet the lassie Fraser, nor yet you — and indeed I'm beginning to think it must be myself who is at the bottom o' a' this mischief! Can nothing be done?"

"Oh, sir," she said in a mocking tone, "a Glasgow merchant would surely never seek counsel from a silly country girl!"

Gregory Smith looked up into her face, and as he met the laughing light that peeped from under the dark eye-lashes, a spasm nearly choked his utterance.

"Madam!" he blurted out, "have you a lover?"

The question immediately appeared to Gregory to have somewhat of a novel character, and as he again looked up to see how she received it, he was more than ever surprised to find that, beyond a little rosiness in her cheeks, it had in no way discomposed her.

"Lover?" she repeated, laughing; "why, scores of them! I've had nothing all my life but lovers, and now I scarce know how to get rid of them but by remaining *perdue* in this country-place. But to speak seriously, sir, I hope you may be of some good in straightening this very crooked courtship; and instead of going into Eastburn, we had better loiter about here for yet a while until my Lilian comes over from Lanark, which she is bound to do presently; or would you rather enter the village and call upon Mr Merle? I am your humble attendant either way."

Gregory Smith paused for a minute. Then he said: —

"I shall await Mistress Fraser's coming. I see not but that all may yet be well if she is not as stupidly obstinate as are all other people — saving yourself, your ladyship — in this unhappy country."

How Gregory and the young lady passed the intervening time I never knew. Mr Smith spoke much of Lady Margaret Seton on his return to Glasgow; and at meetings of a certain club — to be hereafter spoken of in these memoirs — grew so violently aristocratic in his notions — talked so much of gentle blood, and the beauty of Scotland's daughters, that there were not wanting certain cavillers who hinted that

their honoured friend and president was about to vacate his chair in order to occupy a patriarchal throne at the top of his own domestic table. Certainly the conversation of both would not languish where Lady Margaret was present; while Glasgow could not have sent a more fitting representative of its gallantry and politeness than the person of Mr Gregory Smith!

By and by the sun dipped down behind the shoulder of Tinto; and as Lady Margaret, for the fiftieth time, looked over the moor in the direction of Lanark, she clapped her hands. "Yonder comes my Lilian!" she cried. "Oh! Mr Smith, is it not a shame to have her walk that weary way night and morning? Nor will she take any assistance even from me, though I have offered it in a hundred delicate ways — she will hardly let me come about the house lest I should surreptitiously make her father a present! The most she will yield to accept is a trot over the moor on Miss Polly here, when I meet her in the morning; and, as you may suppose, sir, I manage to bring about the meeting pretty often."

Then my pretty one came along the path, and in her shy way looked to see who was this stranger to whom Lady Margaret was speaking.

Gregory Smith subsequently confessed he fell in love with her the moment he saw her, and that had not Lady Margaret been present, he surely would have kissed her, and so ended his ambassadorship in a declaration of deadly quarrel. And yet he was very much afraid, he said, and would have given half his fortune to be quietly sitting in his easy-chair by Mrs Wardrop's fireside.

"Lilian," said Lady Margaret, "this is Mr Smith, a gentleman from Glasgow, who knows Mr Merle, and wishes to call upon his people."

"James Merle," she repeated, and walked forward to him, laying her hand upon his arm and looking up in his face, "is he well?"

"Lassie," cried Mr Smith, "ye are as white as white! Sure it is no' ill I have to tell ye — let's walk gently over the moor until ye revive the roses in your cheeks where I like not to see so much of the lily."

She smiled herself into a little colour again; and they all three set out for the village.

"And he is well, sir?"

"Yes — yes, why shouldn't he be? Of course he is well — that is, he is down somewhat in spirits, you know, Mistress Fraser, but in bodily health he has little to complain."

"And is he very sad?" she said, and again she Digitized by looked up into his face in a way that made Mr Smith very uncomfortable. There was no evading her questions, as I had many a time discovered; you could not tell the whitest lie to those truth-seeking dear blue eyes.

"Look you, madam, he talks not of it. But oftentimes in our conversations I see his eyes turned wistfully to the door, as though he expected some one; and he goes on long journeys, whither no one can tell — nay, nay, my lassie, ye maunna greet, or I shall have nothing more to say."

Again she looked up with a faint smile struggling through her tears.

"Indeed, sir, I will not. I was foolish; and now I want to hear of how Mr Merle is enjoying his health in Glasgow."

And while Gregory discourses upon that subject, Lady Margaret Seton rides carelessly along, endeavouring to twist a chain of buttercups from a hatful of flowers she had on her pony's neck. She wishes to let them have their conversation in peace, so she keeps plaiting the yellow buttercups, and scarlet champions, and pale blue

harebells, while she sings to herself this little ballad, to one of the plaintive airs that still linger about that country-side: —

“The willow-tree grows by the brown burn-side,
The wild rose is bonnie and cheerie;
A young man down by the bushes did glide,
To clasp to his bosom his dearie.

“The rowan-tree carries its bunches red,
And the Autumn leaves softly are dying,
And she lies white upon a white bed,
While far o’er the sea he is sighing.

“The sloe-thorn whitens anew in the Spring,
Ah, me! but the young days are dreary;
Sadly her friends by her bedside cling,
But she ne’er again will be weary.”

“But why should it not be so?” said Gregory Smith, impatiently, to Lilian, “one word, from you and he would instantly throw aside this foolish promise, this bond of straw which the weakest Samson would cast to the winds!”

“Sir,” said Lilian, “I know all you would say, and you may spare both yourself and me. I have but one question to ask — Was it Mr Merle himself wished you to come?”

“He knows nothing of it, Lilian, but—”

“Then, sir, you need say no more.”

“But I may have done wrong in coming to you first,” said Gregory, eagerly, determined not to be baffled in his generous purpose, “and if I come to you with *his* consent?”

“Nay, Mr Smith,” she said, quietly, “even had you come at his asking, it could not have been otherwise. But I knew he would not send; I was sure *he* would not send,” she added, proudly.

Then a sadder light came to her eyes and she said:

“I think I may speak to you, sir, as a friend. You do not know the people of this country-side. We are taught to keep our promises as we keep - our oaths; nor will James Merle break his, I well know. I would not have him do it though he wished. Indeed, sir, you must not judge too harshly of him, nor think it obstinate or wrong of him to do as he has done — I did not know his worth till now, Mr Smith I pray God to support me in bearing my own part of it, and surely it is easier for me than for him — away in a strange town, where he has no friends.”

Here the blue eyes filled again — she hastily turned to the pony’s head, took hold of the bridle, and began talking to Lady Margaret “Lord bless me!” said Gregory to himself, “what fools these country-people are! Here is a silly girl who should be crying her eyes out over a novel, and nothing will do but she must make a martyr of herself with a simplicity that would

mock the most cold-blooded philosopher who ever preached self-renunciation! ‘Deed, it is a sight to shame an old man like me!’”

“Mistress Fraser,” he said aloud, “it sorely grieves me I can do so little in this unhappy matter. But consider this refusal of yours. I take it, God cannot be displeased with the happiness of His creatures. And think of that poor lad down in Glasgow — he does not talk much, but a fool may see how he suffers.”

“Oh, Mr Smith, I pray you do not talk of it! It is but a poor courage we have at the best, and we need it all to support our weak resolves. You try to persuade me through

kindness — that I know; but think what you would have. Nay, Mr Smith, you cannot yourself say I ought to do it!”

He took her hand.

“I am an old man, Lilian, but I shall think more of human nature now, as I have seen it in one of its brightest examples.”

The silken eye-lashes fell on the soft, white cheek, as she stammered some reply. Mr Smith retained her hand as he looked down upon the fair young face, innocent as that of a child, and beautiful as that of an angel — he was almost ashamed to think of what his mission had been.

“Pardon me, madam,” he said, half laughing at himself for being such a fool, “if I tell you that until lately I considered James Merle to be a silly and romantic boy. As he told me how there was but one woman he could ever love, and that this woman was a simple country lassie in Eastburn, I only laughed at him. But now, Lilian — I am an old man, and may say anything to you — I should have felt it in my heart to have pistolled him, had he left such a one as you are for the best woman of whom Glasgow can boast I knew not *then* the goodness and beauty of my Lily of the moors.”

“Now, now, now!” cried Lady Margaret, “have done, if you please, Master December, making love to this young May-month She is smiling and crying at once, just like another May; but as I don’t like troubled weather, and as we are now approaching Eastburn, the sooner she dries her sky-eyes the better. And has he persuaded you, Lil, to run away and leave your own countree? Nay, then, I shan’t jest about it; and so I opine Mr Smith had better call upon my reverend friend, the elder of Muirend kirk, in order to open his battery of persuasion against that impregnable fortress, after his bullets have been turned aside by this little silken banner floating in the wind.

Now up and away on your horse, cavalier!
Leave my lips and your flagon untasted;
For soon two old roundheads will follow you here,
And you will be glad you have hasted!

Wherefore ye must go forward, my little children — or stay, Lilian, you and I shall loiter behind, to let our brave and valiant knight go forward to attack the griffin, again to return to us triumphant to receive his reward.”

“I shall come to you, then, Lady Margaret,” said Mr Smith, “and you have promised—”

“Hush, sir! Friends should know all secrets except lovers’ secrets —

‘For he who tells tales of his mistress’s lips
Will soon have no hold of his mistress’s heart.’”

So they passed down the hollow and over the bridge, ascended the slight incline, and came unto the northern end of Eastburn. And there, by good fortune, Lady Margaret was enabled to point out to Mr Smith my Aunt Blair, who was sitting on the stone-seat in front of the house knitting.

Nor had they done speaking of her, when an old man, led by a young boy, was seen also to approach the cottage, and Lady Margaret bade Mr Smith hasten forward, for there were Eben Merle and his nephew at the little wooden door.

“Jamie, lad,” said Gregory to me afterwards, “the meeting with these two lassies — particularly with her of the raven ringlets — had so upset my usual composure,

that I was glad to have some work to do in order to steady my nerves — a quarrel, an argument, anything.”

Mr Smith arrived in time to prevent my father and my aunt entering the house, briefly explained the object of his seeking them, and waited their answer. I could have told him pretty nearly every word my father would say, but I shall put it down as I received it.

“Sir,” said Eben Merle, “when my son is afraid to come openly to his father’s face and speak to him, the cause thereof cannot gain by the mediation of strangers.”

“But, sir, James Merle knows not of my coming here.”

“And wherefore have ye, unbidden, interfered in this matter?”

“By the right that one man has to help another — there is a text somewhere in the Scriptures to that effect, and you will know it, sir, better than I. Mr Merle, you are unjust to your son, to this girl whom he fain would have for wife, and to yourself, by refusing to yield up a trivial promise.” —

“And ye would lecture me on my duties!” said Eben Merle— “a worldly man, a man unacquainted with the law and gospels, mayhap a friend o’ these very publicans. Sir, I have sought after my conduct in this matter with much prayer and heart-searching, and even as I hae been brought to do as I hae done by a higher power than my own judgment, so will I abide thereby.”

“And is this decision final and irrevocable?”

“Please to speak, sir, in our common tongue. You ask if I would change my mind? As I hae tellt ye, I hae been led to this manner o’ looking at the subject by other than human influence.”

“Mr Merle, you may be mistaken in that, as all men are liable to err. And why speak of the matter in so callous a way? He is your only son — you are an old man — why should there be disagreements between you the few remaining years of your life?”

“I am an old man,” he repeated; “the poor candle of this earthly life is well nigh burned out, but the morning light of heaven is shining all the brighter; therefore would I hold by my testimony for yet a little while before the great and increasing wickedness o’ the world.”

“And you, a Christian, can so far forget the essential virtue of all Christianity as to wreck the peace of two young lives. Here is this girl — not now the daughter of a publican — and she is toiling out her life from week to week to support her parents, never complaining, never even sad, as it seems!”

“Eh, what? Janet — what’s this?”

Aunt Blair had been standing motionless, with her hands folded in front of her black satin apron, looking on with her calm, gray eyes.

“Sir,” she said to Gregory, in her stateliest manner, “you have opened an old sore, for which we cannot thank you. Since ever my nephew left Eastburn, the subject of this man Fraser and his daughter has been passed over by us; we did not wish to set my brother thinking and grieving over that which could not be helped. Hence he knows not that the man Fraser has given up the public; we wished not to annoy him.”

“That was wrong, Janet; that was exceeding reprehensible,” said my father.

“Eben,” said Aunt Blair, putting her hand on the old man’s shoulder, “it was done for your sake.”

“And they have left that polluted place, say ye?”

“Surely, sir,” said Gregory, with a more hopeful face; “and now what hinders your son marrying the girl? — think of it; Mr Merle!”

My father drew himself up as he used to do when he could fix his eagle eye on the face of a questioner.

“And will not the dog return to his vomit? The barrel steeped in oil canna be purified by water — let them dree their penance, let them dree it, sir, and time will show whether they be honest people or no.”

“My brother must needs have rest, sir; he is not perfectly recovered. You will not further disquiet him?” said Aunt Blair.

Mr Smith bade them both farewell, and followed Lilian and Lady Margaret who had passed through the village while he had been talking.

He reached them as they gained the confines of the moor which lay at the other end of the cottages, stretching down to Tinto. He briefly told them what had occurred; they were not surprised.

“In this unhappy matter,” said Gregory to the girls, “I see that human interference can do nothing; though the way is clear enough, but for their hateful Pharisaic pride. There needs but some sudden calamity to soften the obdurate stillness of their hearts; and when I look on you, Lilian, I could almost wish it to come!”

“Mr Smith, you are angry,” said Lilian, with her sweet voice, “or you would not be unjust I honour Mr Merle and Aunt Blair — as I still call her — for that very determination which has brought sorrow to me. But let us talk of other matters. You will pass the night with us — it is but poor accommodation we can offer ye, but, such as it is, you will be welcome to it.”

“I pray you, not, Mr Gregory Smith,” cried Lady Margaret; “I must house my knight, even though he was unsuccessful in the tournament You shall come round to the Holm, sir, with me, where my father — if he be at home to-night — will warmly welcome you! And ere we go, I shall lead you over the moor to a ford of the Clyde, to show you some of the pretty places of Eastburn.”

“And I, Margaret,” said Lilian, “shall return home. They may wonder at my staying.”

So they each went their separate way; but Lilian, after a while, paused and sat down on a bank by the roadside. She saw the figures of her two friends grow less and less as they went away across the moor, and she sat still to watch them. Then the red afternoon sun grew paler, and she looked up and saw the whole heavens transfigured in a mist of golden light, a dim and uncertain radiance that shifted waveringly over the sky. The sun had gone behind the clouds, and now masses of vapour, stretching from north to south across the whole western horizon, were formed into a great palace of glory, brilliant and undefined. Strangely dwelt this cloud-city, this palace of dreams, motionless, in the burning yellow haze, until all at once it grew silvery and clear, as though it were the very gates of heaven, and a white figure seemed to arise on the walls, clad in long and flowing robes, beckoning to the earth. She was afraid. The moor became invisible under the pressure of that flood of light, until again the clouds grew heavy and dull, and the sunlight came up behind to give a rim of burning gold to the wall and to the heads of the lions. And as the sky became redder and darker, the walls and ramparts were steeped in deepest purple, the golden rim had changed to crimson, and the manes of the lions were locks of fire curling in fierce glory against a violet sky. Then as she sat and watched, feeling the cool breath of the fragrant south wind upon her fair cheek, the great palace melted away into the west, and silver star-points came out in the evening gray.

Lilian, arise and go home, for the night is cold!

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE DEVIL GOT HIS DUE, AND HOW CERTAIN POETS QUARRELLED.



FOR SOME TIME the good town of Glasgow buzzed with the news of Mr Rankine's escapade; and it was universally admitted that he had done a foolish thing in choosing the vicinity of the Tolbooth as scene of his exploit. Hate is blinder than love, however. The random shot which he fired on the Bishopburn moors was comparatively a wise proceeding. There was a chance of escape. Here there was but little. So Gavin Rankine had to bide his time in the Tolbooth, waiting his trial, and listening to the pleasant chiming of the bells in the Cross Steeple.

The law procedure of those days was not much swifter than that of our own; and plenty of time was given for people to speculate on the probabilities of the trial. Gregory Smith often engaged in talk upon this subject, for the old man was doing his best to make me forget those things which I found it impossible not to remember. In nothing is human nature so impotent as in the endeavour to control the memory; frequently the very struggle to forget serving but to impress the matter more firmly on the mind.

And now, dear reader, that we have our villain safely housed in the Tolbooth, and in a fair way to become settled in life by being shipped for the colonies, it remains only that we fire the customary volley of warnings over his metaphoric and untimely grave. Otherwise, it were hard to excuse the admission of a villain — be he ever so real — into any modern story. He may, however, benefit others by ruining himself, like the drunken man who boasted himself a powerful auxiliary of the temperance movement, on the ground that he was the DREADFUL WARNING! But in those days abstainers' societies had not carolled themselves into existence; and the chief lesson to be learnt by the incarceration of any poor wight was, that every good and honest citizen should the more earnestly cram the Shorter Catechism down their bairns' throats. So, with a sigh of regret that this poor lad should have inherited more time and money than his small stock of brains could properly keep in subjection, we may dismiss him to the antipodes, where, let us hope, he became a sadder and a wiser man.

Gregory Smith returned from Eastburn resolved to withhold from me even a knowledge of his having been there. But for the first time in his life, he rebelled against "the order of things;" and as there are few who can consider themselves wronged and nevertheless hold their peace, so Mr Smith was forced to confide the whole matter to me. His benevolent intent being foiled in this particular direction, he bethought him of another way; wherefore he led me about from one fashionable rout to the other, and was never weary of talking. As I look back upon this time, I feel all the more grateful to the old man, for I must admit I was not the pleasantest of companions. He thought he had nearly cured me of brooding and thinking, and that when I laughed I was really happy; but he had never known what it was to love my Lilian. Wherever I went, she went; and I could no more give up thinking of her than I could lay down my life and expect to live. Many times I fancied I saw her figure, and, hastening forward, would be about to touch her upon the shoulder, when some

Glasgow merchant's daughter would discover her face to me, and madden me with disappointment. Why, then, did not I go up to Eastburn and see her? Because, I loved my little Lily of the moors, and rather would have lost my right hand than have caused her even a passing sigh of pain.

"James Merle, you will come this evening to the club of which I am president. There must be no gainsaying, so prepare you your best coat, and banish from your face that Jesuitical gravity which becometh you grievously ill. Have all the Merles those wild and Ishmaelish eyebrows?"

"Mr Smith, about a year ago there came unto Bathgate a south-country Merle, with his wife, who had never been in our place before. He took her to church the following morning, and she being naturally a shrewd and observant woman, was enabled to pick out of the people those whom she thought to be Merles, by 'head-mark.' As was afterwards known, she made hardly a mistake; so I wot their features are distinctive enough, and are made so, I fear, by their temper, which is not of the best."

"Chastened by Christian humility, a violent temper becomes strength and decision of character. There's consolation for ye, Jamie; and now let's get straight away to the club, for supper will be well nigh over."

So I put on my best coat, and together we went out. The club — the name of which is immaterial — was held, like its compeers, in a tavern; the members being for the most part unmarried men, and a capacity to stand unlimited toddy being the only test of eligibility.

As Mr Smith had predicted, supper was over when we arrived. We were just in time for Gregory to take his place at the head of the table, whither were passed to him the materials for filling the enormous punch-bowl which graced the board. Amid a hum of very noisy conversation, my presence was almost overlooked, and I had ample opportunity to look around and examine my new associates. The room was a large one, well furnished, carpeted, hung round with engravings of Bible subjects, and two or three coarse wood-cuts of political caricatures. A few ornaments, such as foreign shells, peacock's feathers, and china figures, adorned the mantelpiece; while at the head of the large mahogany table, which formed the main portion of the furniture of the room, was placed a massive punch-bowl, the hereditary property of the club.

And very soon Gregory had leisure to indicate to me one or two of the chief celebrities of the club, amongst whom I had already perceived Mr De Stair and Colonel Burton. Both were, as yet, sober, though evidently bent upon becoming otherwise. And as the toddy circulated and conversation warmed, one by one each little coterie gave up its little subject to join in general debate. Joke followed joke, and classical pun came close upon the heels of some rather coarse story, until the wits of the party, having gained the general ear, reigned supreme. They were nearly all what are called "characters," even in an age when it was not the bounden duty of every man to act and speak precisely as his neighbour acted and spoke. One little oddity of a medical man, with a wonderfully grave face and portentous spectacles, sat near the head of the table; and, being utterly ignorant of every subject but one, was remarkable chiefly for the great ingenuity he displayed in turning every little current of conversation into his own channel.

"Gentlemen," he would say, if his friends were speaking of a plurality of worlds, "we cannot suppose that a beneficent Providence would people all those planets and stars with beings subject to the like infirmities with ourselves. Existence, to be a pleasure, must needs be rid of that ever-impending dread of disease which is characteristic of humanity. And of all diseases for embittering the mind and permanently injuring and souring the disposition, I take rheumatism, —," etc.

At the other end of the table sat a Mr Joseph Warnock — a man who did a little writing for the then *Glasgow Mercury* — a man who knew some Latin, and who was drunk three-fourths of his waking life. He had once been handsome; and there was still to me something pleasant in his eye, though his face bore too evident marks of his way of living.

Near him sat Mr M’Kinlay, commonly known as “the scythe” — a tall, keen, gray-eyed Glasgow merchant, who would not have despaired of demonstrating the fallibility of the first proposition in Euclid. He objected to everything, picked flaws in everything, and was only consistent in contradicting himself. Last of those who were in any way prominent, sat a Mr Colquhoun — a portly gentleman, with sandy-coloured whiskers, and a pale, blue eye that slowly opened and shut like that of a stranded dolphin. He had a kind of shrewdness and pugnacity about him which often helped the club in a dearth of something at which to laugh, though his habit of becoming somewhat hot-tempered, when fully awoke, was occasionally dangerous to his antagonist. Yet they all of them agreed remarkably well, being subject to the soothing influence of their courteous and kindly president.

“Gentlemen,” cried Warnock, elevating his well-beloved toddy tumbler, “I drink to the health of our never-failing friend, the punchbowl! — our comforter in adversity and sorrow, our companion in mirth and gladness! I ask —

‘Quis post vina gravem militiam aut pauperiem crepat?’

There’s no such fool, I hope, among us. The Doctor, *post vina*, forgets that his shop-boy is pilfering the lozenges, and that he himself must visit peevish patients on the morrow; Mr M’Kinlay forgets that he is on the brink of bankruptcy; Mr Colquhoun that he has a termagant wife; our president that—”

“What?”

“That there is a rope being spun for his neck!”

“And yourself, Joseph Warnock?”

“Why, I forget that I waste my time in the company of a lot of dissolute companions. Could we do all that without the punch-bowl? Certes, no!

‘Siccis omnia nam dura deus proposuit;’

wherefore I cry, ‘Bring hither, O youth, the green turf, the vervain, the frankincense, with a bowl of the mellowed wine;’ only if my friend Horace had been wiser than his day and generation he should have chosen whisky-toddy!”

“What say you, gentlemen,” said Gregory, “to the dreadful disclosures of our companion?”

“Say?” quoth the sleepy Colquhoun, “my Latin fails me, but I remember the adage, *Humanum est inebriari*, and I think Mr Warnock has shown himself human too early in the night.”

“Bravo!” cried they all. “And now that order is restored,” said Gregory Smith, “I’ll read you, gentlemen, if you please, some verses by one whom I scruple not to call a new poet, albeit he hath — .”

“Name, name!” cried everybody, poetry being a favourite theme of discussion.

“His name matters not,” said Gregory, looking anxiously towards me; “he is not a native o’ this city.”

“Stay, Mr Smith,” said Warnock, laying down his glass, “is the laddie a dark-complexioned, curious-looking —

“People of dark complexions,” said the Doctor, “are more subject to —

“Well proceed, Doctor, if you please,” said Gregory, gravely.

“Yes, Mr Smith,” said Warnock, with a grin, “well proceed, if you please. As I was asking, or about to ask, was this laddie a native o’ Ayrshire?” —

“Toots no!” said Gregory, “mind your tumbler, and I’ll read ye the verses.”

Thereupon he produced a piece of soiled paper — at sight of which I greatly wondered — and read those lines: —

TO —

The pale light fadeth from yonder sky,
I sit and I dream of the olden time:
O thou, in whose voice, in whose dark blue eye,
I dreamt of such thoughts as never may die,
I pray thee accept of this worthless rhyme.

Long ago in silent glade,
Underneath a drooping willow,
Thou and I lay in the shade,
Overhead the sunshine played,
Darting down upon our pillow;

As we lay on fern more green
Than e’er grew by stream or river;
Up above my crowned queen
All the leaflets danced in sheen,
Danced and leapt in joyous quiver!

Thy soft hand was laid in mine —
Softly, softly lay the treasure:
My warm hand was closed o’er thine,
Gently did they intertwine In an ecstasy of pleasure!

Sweet the kiss came from thy lips —
Sweeter far than in the gloaming,
When the last bee lightly sips
Perfume from the scented tips
Of the flowers as he is roaming.

Bright the hawthorn was I placed
On thy hair, so richly flowing!
As I looked on it so graced,
Soft my arm stole round thy waist,
While thy cheeks with red were glowing!

Yet they tell me to be gay —
Gay, when thou art gone for ever!
Yet I never to them say
Why it is I stay away,
Why I love the lonely river —

Where, adown the rushy side,
Evermore in placid motion,
Growing wider, yet more wide,
Silently the waters glide
Far away to deep blue ocean.

Oh, that thee I here could meet!
Then the stream, in very gladness,

Should run up to meet thy feet,
Up to kiss thy white, white feet,
Throwing to the winds its sadness!

Joyously it then should bound,
Bright and free in sunshine quiver;
While the laughing, laughing sound
Should awake the woods around —
Wake them into dreamy shiver!

But, alas! it cannot be:
Here, alone, I wait and weary;
Yet I should not wish to thee
Aught of that which comes to me —
Life, at best, is very dreary.

No! I should not wish to thee
Aught of all the pain and anguish
Which must ever come to me
While in dreams thy face I see,
While I wait, and weep, and languish.

Still they talk, and sing, and play,
While my brain with grief is burning,
While my heart is far away.
Queen of life! O say — once say —
Are thy thoughts to me aye turning?

Yes! I know — I know I may,
Long as leaves in sunshine quiver,
Ever to my spirit say —
Yes! she thinks of thee alway,
Fondly thinks of thee for ever!

I could have thrown my toddy-tumbler at Mr President's head for his impudence in reading my poor verses to such a critical audience; and, indeed, it was with some inward struggle that I managed to give no outward expression to my thought. If I did look annoyed, it was not remarked; and, luckily, the verses — which had appeared silly enough to me — met with but one dissentient voice.

"A plague on these maundering love-verses!" cried the keen-eyed M'Kinlay; "why canna the loon go kiss the girl decently, without crying about it afterwards — until people's ears are amaist deaved wi' the tell-tale nonsense?"

Mr Smith rose. There was in his eyes what he himself usually termed "deevilment," and I knew that something was coming. The blundering broad-sword of M'Kinlay was no match for the lithe rapier of Mr President.

"John M'Kinlay," said Gregory, "the gift o' reticence is NOT for poets. We despise, and justly despise, the silly haveril who runs shrieking about the world, proclaiming to everybody his loves, his griefs, his joys, his disappointments. Why? Because he is no poet. What right has a common person like you or me, Mr M'Kinlay, to pester our friends with tales of the colour of our sweetheart's eyes, or lips, or hair, or our evening walks, or what she said, or what you said? You, Mr M'Kinlay, see in the woman but a decent young female who will boil your porridge for you, clean up your kitchen for you, and present you with a reasonably large family. But your poet, sir, who sees in every woman a beauty undiscoverable to the common eye, Providence hath sent him into the world to proclaim it — to 'blether' about it, if you will, but to 'blether' divinely!"

“Hear, hear!” cried De Stair, from the bottom of a toddy-tumbler.

“Look you, my masters,” cried Warnock, “Colonel Burton laughs! I’ll wager my head he has discovered a joke that was uttered half-an-hour ago.”

“Be sure it was none o’ yours,” growled the Colonel.

“I see him in the morning,” continued Warnock, “as he walks along the Trongate, smiling like a milk-lassie on a May morning, and I know it is over some joke he heard a fortnight before! He laughs only a fortnight behind time. I wonder how his memory preserves the proper rotation.”

“Mr Warnock,” said the Doctor, taking a pinch of snuff, “it is a well-known fact that the memory can lay past, as it were, certain subjects to be called up at will And in certain troubles which affect the mind, these hoarded treasures involuntarily come forth, more especially in the delirium produced by—”

“Precisely, Doctor,” said Warnock, who was growing less courteous as he grew less sober, “and I was going to ask our president for his observations on these verses.”

“Which are,” said Gregory, “first: all poets should be young. To limbo with your metaphysical poetry, or your poetry measured by the inch, either! I say, all poets should be young, should have the fire of poetry in them; and we should with thankfulness accept what the gods send us — rather desiring the living fire of poetry from a young and hair-brained son of the Mount than from some doting old fool who regulates his gouty feet by the prescribed march of the ancients. Second: there are two mistaken lights in which we view women. Your man-of-the-world takes her for a fool; your poet takes her for an angel. Both are wrong — for women are but very ordinary creatures — yet, I take the latter view to be the safer and the more ennobling of the two. By all means let your poet hold fast by his opinion — let him shout it at the corners of the streets — let him cry it aloud to the world, if his voice should ever have such an audience! And never, gentlemen, will you get the belief so thoroughly believed, so unhesitatingly propounded, as by a young poet. Let him preach, I say, this good doctrine!”

“Mr Colquhoun,” said Warnock, who was getting every minute thicker in speech, “let’s have the verses you spoke o’. Ye will be made a bailie some o’ these days for your poetry!”

“Gif ye dinna haud your tongue, Warnock, I’ll gie ye a bit o’ my mind.”

“Keep it, Colquhoun; keep it, man! — it is but little ye have a’together!”

“I’ve been blessed, at least, wi’ mair judgment than to mistake a drove o’ sheep for a wheen friens and brethren,” said Mr Colquhoun, whose choler was rising.

“What’s this, Mr Colquhoun?” cried several “That doited loon, there, rambled awa’ into the cattle-market the other night; and being unco sober-ways, lay down amang the sheep, where he was found next morning wi’ his arm round the neck o’ a brown-faced auld tupe!”

“Laugh, Burton!” cried Warnock; “‘twill save you time next week.”

“The exposure to alternations of heat and cold,” said the Doctor, “which must have occurred during the night, might have resulted in serious trouble.”

“Do you think so, Doctor?” said Warnock.

“Certainly,” said the Doctor. “Three-fourths o’ the young women who are annually carried off by consumption, do not inherit the disease from their parents, but bring it on by going from heated balls and routs into the night-air. The cold, settling down upon their lungs, plays the very — .”

“Doctor!” —

“I beg your pardon, Mr President. Does serious hurt thereunto.”

“You hear that, Colquhoun,” said Warnock; “you might hae killed me.”

“Me, Mr Warnock?”
“Yes, you. Sure ’twas you who exposed me!”
“Ye’re a haveril,” said Colquhoun, incensed at being made the subject of a joke;
“and, Mr Smith, as the verses are in my hand — they are by a son o’ mine at college
— perhaps ye’ll read them?”
“Surely,” said Gregory, and therewith he gave them this

HISTORY OF GARDENER’S LOVE.

’Twas long ago I met with Nell —
I thought her beautiful as witty,
Her eyes were of the speedwell blue, —
I softly called her None-so-pretty!

Her cheeks were of geranium pink
Of bright ranunculus her tresses,
Her lips quite shamed the poppy’s red
And seemed to lie in wait for kisses.

And then her head was nicely poised
On jasmine neck, so white and slender;
With aspect of the Touch-me-not —
From common contact to defend her.

A fool was I to think of her!
The children called me Ragged-Robin,
With working in the garden plots,
Although my father’s name was Dobbin.

But once she came some fruit to buy,
She wished to manufacture jelly —
And while the currants I did pull,
I gently whispered— “Darling Nelly!”

She came with many a mantling blush,
And stood beside a laurestinus;
And nothing but the currant-bush
Its prickles interposed between us.

I leant across and took her hand —
A hand as white as any lily! —
And when I pressed it to my lips,
She drew it back, and cried— “You silly!”

“O Nelly, Nelly, you’re my life!”
“O Dobbin, Dobbin, sure you’re joking!
I wish you’d pull the currants quick:
Upon my word you’re quite provoking!”

I filled her basket to the brim,
And spread it o’er with mountain laurel;
I added, then, a China-rose
To see if it would heal our quarrel.

I escort gave her to the gate,
And though I wanted speech so badly,
We walked along the gravelled path
In solemn silence very sadly.

We reached the gate. I knew it was
The turning-point of all my life.
I seized her hand, and gasped the words —
“O Nelly! will you be my wife?”

“What’s that you want, you thund’rin’ thief?”
A great hoarse voice cried, sharp and quickly;
I leaned against the garden gate,
I felt so weak, and then so sickly.

“Hush, Dobbin!” cried my darling Nell,
“’Tis Mister Thomson drubbing Willie;
Let’s wait a minute till he’s by,
And, Dobbin, dear, don’t look so silly!”

“O Nelly, Nelly!” then I said,
Indeed ’twas all that I could say;
Again I led her down the lane,
And through the white-thorn we did stray.

And then she fell upon my breast,
And faltered out in joyous sobbing —
That long they called her Nelly Brown,
But soon they’d call her Nelly Dobbin!

“Out upon your maudlin rhymes,” cried Mr M’Kinlay, “if a man—”
“Mr M’Kinlay,” cried Warnock, “will ye wheesht? Ye ken nae mair about poetry
than a drummock-fed sparrow kens o’ a barrel-organ! Stay a bit!”

He plunged his hand into the abyss of his coat-pocket, and brought forth a mangled
piece of paper. Diffidence having flown away with the second tumbler, he without
further comment read

THE BALLAD OF SIR EDWARDE.

Sir Edwarde he was rover bold,
As ever trode the west countrie;
He’d wandered north, he’d wandered south,
He’d wandered over land and sea.
“Nor ever maid shall have my love,”

Thus did Sir Edwarde blythely sing,
“Until she love me for my love,
Nor love me for the gold I bring.”

He clad him in the meanest garb,
In meanest garb of sodden gray,
And, with a beggar’s bag in hand,
Through Scotland he has ta’en his way.

The night came dark; the driving rain
Him sorely wetted through and through —
“Now I must reach some fair cottage,
And for a bed most humbly sue.”

He’s knockit at the cottage door,
He’s drawn the band out ower his knee —
“Oh! wilt thou pity a beggar man,
The drivin’ rain he canna dree?”

“Gae ‘wa, gae ‘wa, thou beggar man,
Nae beggar loons will rest wi’ me;
The nicht is dark, the wind is loud,
But it is fitting sae for thee.”

“Guid troth,” quo’ he, “my bonny lass,
Ye’se ne’er be wedded wife o’ mine;
And though ye live a hundred years,
Your maiden name ye shall na tine.”

He’s wandered out into the nicht,
Until he’s come a house unto;
And to the door there quickly comes
A bonny lass, wi’ een sae blue.

Her een were o’ the bonnie blue,
And gowden yellow was her hair,
Her cheeks were o’ the roses red,
Her voice was sweet and sait to hear.

“I trow,” she said, “I’ve never seen
Sae braw a man in this countrie;
Surely some mischance has him ta’en,
That he a beggar man should be.”

“Now, maiden fair,” quoth Sir Edward,
“If that your father give me leave,
I willing am to work his work,
And for his pay he will na grieve.”

She’s took him to her father dear,
And gi’en him meat and clothes anew;
And he has gane into the field,
From morn till nicht tae haud the plough.

And he has ta’en the man’s daughter,
And syne he’s kissed her cherry mon’ —
“Now, Janet, thou shalt be my wife,
For I will marry nane but thou.”

“Oh! ye ha’e neither gear nor kye,
And wad ye think to hae a wife?
Na, na,” the lassie laughed, “for then
We twa should live in endless strife.”

“Oh, ken ye na Dumwhinnle lands?
Nor ken ye Castle-Comyn fair?
Oh, ken ye na the woods o’ Fife?
Nor ken ye o’ the grounds o’ Stair?”

“I dinna ken Dumwhinnle lands,
Nor ken! Castle-Comyn fair;
And what hae ye to dae wi’ Fife?
Or even wi’ the grounds o’ Stair?”

“My father has Dumwhinnle lands,
And mine is Castle-Comyn fair;
My father has the woods o’ Fife,
And mine are a’ the grounds o’ Stair.

And nane but ye, my braw Janet,
Shall be the lady o' them a';
Syne put ye on your silken gown
This nicht ye'll sleep in Comyn—'

His head fell forward. He was drunk.

"And is a' that nonsense about him and the fat wife in the Gallowgate?" said Mr Colquhoun, who saw his opportunity.

"Let sleeping dogs lie, Colquhoun," remarked the Doctor.

"We maun put him to bed," suggested Mr Smith; "some o' you gentlemen will help him ben to Mrs M'Luckie, and there hell sober in time to get home."

"O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified!" said a big lawyer at the foot of the table, who looked as though he daily dined off prize ox.

"Who is that maltreating Will Shakespere?" cried the drunken man, partially rising; "what said ye o' the metaphor 'to take up arms against a sea o' troubles?' Ye ne'er-do-weel vagrants, think ye a man would swim wi' his arms tied to his body? What else would he lift on going into the waters than his arms? — Out, ye obtuse villains!"

Amid much laughter, Mr Warnock was forthwith delivered to the care of the landlady, where, we may hope, he came to see the folly of his ways.

Colonel Burton, who had assisted us in carrying Mr Warnock to bed, on returning, sat down by my chair, and did enter into conversation with me. The Colonel, who was not a little tipsy, bade me beware of the follies and temptations of the town; adding, that when a man sat down to toddy, he did not himself know that he was becoming drunk. In conclusion, the Colonel told me that Miss Burton — I had once previously called — desired Mr Smith and me the next evening to tea, and that he, the Colonel, would be there to see that the conversation of the ladies did not become insipid. We promised to go. By this time the club had again split up into sections, each one talking with all the vehemence peculiar to societies in danger of being overlooked.

Sometimes a roar of laughter would be heard from one corner, followed by an inadvertent oath from another. The Doctor was lecturing on bronchitis to a select circle of friends, each of whom seemed eager to profit by the medical advice thus imprudently squandered. M'Kinlay was demonstrating to his neighbours the precise length the foot should be passed into the stirrup; other three-eighths being, according to him, culpable recklessness; and five-eighths certain death!

Then did the Doctor rise to propose Mr Gregory Smith's health.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we shall drink to the first of men, the first of critics, the first of presidents, and," added he, turning to Gregory, "I respect ye as a man, I venerate ye as a critic, but I like ye awfu' weel as our president!"

The toast was drank with great enthusiasm, and the noise had scarcely ceased when the door opened, and Mr Warnock, with half-blinded eyes and stupified look, entered.

"I'm glad to be able to see you, gentlemen," he said, in reply to a burst of laughter. "Warm water is the best doctor — begging your pardon, sir — known to man."

"Emetics, taken promptly, are frequently the best method of curing a disease in its earlier stages," quoth the Doctor.

"If ye dinna want to forfeit my esteem for evermore, Doctor," said Warnock, "never let me hear ye again call harmless intoxication a disease."

'Narratur et prisci Catonis
Sæpe mero caluisse virtus.'

There is an example for you!"

"Unfortunately," said Gregory, "in these degenerate days it is the nose of a man, not his valour, which is inflamed by wine."

"I trust, gentlemen," said Warnock, gravely, "that my countenance—"

"Is but an index of the soul within," said the Doctor, which was smart for the Doctor.

"Nay, gentlemen," said Warnock, "what would you have? So soon as I betray the least symptoms of sobriety, my landlady, without the smallest warning, proceeds forthwith to pitch her daughter at my head. And when I say, gentlemen, that that daughter is hideous to the last degree, I have, I conceive, justified myself. There is no refuge for me but toddy; when I get tipsy she ceases persecuting me. What more would you have, gentlemen? The case stands so: dissipation, or my landlady's daughter. Let no man question my sanity in choosing the former."

"Sir, you should overlook female imperfections," said one.

"Sir, braw words'll no gar could parritch equal salmon-steak."

So the evening passed away, and the night passed away, until I bethought me of the gray morning, of Mr Lightbody's warehouse, and of the daily round of care. One or two had already left — among them Colonel Burton — when a man sitting opposite to me was bold enough to call in question Miss Burton's honour, and that before the whole club. I shall not repeat what he said, though it seemed in nowise to surprise the others — except perhaps Mr Smith. But I was a hot-blooded young fool then; and taking advantage of an opportune moment, I went round to the man, and informed him, quietly, that he was a liar. He turned and looked up.

"All right," said he, "let us go out for a minute, young gentleman."

Still unobserved, we passed along to the door, then down the back-stair, and out into the stable-yard, where an entrance communicated with the bar.

"You do not carry a sword, sir," he said with a sneer, "as most young men do who set themselves up for wits in public companies. Nay, sir, do not be surprised — I know how you affect the good graces of Miss Burton, and 'twas for your edification chiefly!"

"Your pardon, sir, but we shall not waste time in fruitless discussion."

I knew that most hostelries had a pair of small swords lying about the bar somewhere or other, nor was I long in persuading Mrs M'Luckie to lend me hers. The court-yard was dark; no one had seen my antagonist enter, and I rejoined him unobserved. In my younger days I had been proud of my skill with such weapons, and I was not now afraid to risk myself against a common tavern-frequenter. To it we went, neither pressing the other very much, for the only light we had came from the bar-window; but by and by I found that my opponent retreated and then worked forward again in a manner to which I was not accustomed. I feared some trick, and kept well on my guard; but soon thereafter, seeing the way good, made a full lunge for his arm, merely with the intent to disable him. I stabbed the air; the man had suddenly disappeared! I was thunderstruck, and was just about to rush forward in the dark, when a single step revealed to me that, in stepping backward, he had fallen into a large rain-barrel, flush with the surface of the ground, and which had stupidly been left uncovered. Luckily there was but little water in it, and the man was standing only knee-deep, endeavouring with all his might to scramble out again, which, from the shape of the barrel and his cramped position, was no easy matter. Of course my sword was at once thrown aside that I might help him out; and as we were together pulling and struggling, Mr Smith, followed by the other members, came running forward from the stair-foot. I still think of the merriment and loud laughter of our homeward

walk that night; and I think of it with a shudder. For I knew not that at that very moment, an old man, with tottering steps and gray hair, was toiling across the dark peat-bogs in the pale morning light — toiling across the Eastburn moors with a letter in his hand — to be in time for the Muirend carrier.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE THUNDERBOLT FELL IN MIDST OF THE FEAST.



NOW, WHEN I went home the following evening from Mr John Lightbody's shop, I found Mr Smith already dressed. That worthy impatiently bade me remember that "women were themselves the most procrastinating creatures in existence; that a woman, having promised to visit a friend in the forenoon, was sure to be found at dinnertime with her morning-wrapper on. And yet at those tea-drinkings, if you were not there by six o'clock precisely, your welcome was certain to be a succession of frowns from every woman present So important an item," added Gregory, "in the economy of woman is the fact of drinking tea." Wherefore I did dress directly, and we proceeded to the Colonel's house, which was situated a little distance beyond the town, in what is now called Anderston, and on our way thither Mr Smith gave me to understand what sort of entertainment I might expect, bidding me not be offended in the event of the conversation of the ladies being somewhat less interesting than that of Gregory's club.

"The education of women," said Gregory, branching off into his generalisations, "should consist in learning how to keep the mouth shut Were such the case, the company of women might be at least bearable. As it is, they pride themselves on their conversational powers; and the Lord have mercy on a single man like myself when they begin to talk of their victuals, or of their bairns' diseases!"

"You remember," said Gregory, again, "how that, to annihilate the absurd ambition of mortals, the confusion of tongues came upon them at Babel That confusion could not exist for ever; wherefore it became necessary to provide against their becoming as ambitious as before. I therefore think that Providence, employing a new instrument, hath deprived women of whatever little sense they originally may have had. The chief end, therefore, of women is to destroy ambition; and they amply fulfil their destiny. Whenever I hear of a man who has made himself a hero, and who is married, I say to myself —

'Behold a man who is doubly strong in both ambition and power. What might that man have done, had he not been married?' Indeed, sir, you may remark it, that no sooner is a man tied to a woman than his light is summarily and for ever quenched, no more to be seen amongst men but in feeble, flickering remonstrances with his gigantic extinguisher. I pity the fool who marries and yet imagines he may be a great man."

"You know not all women," I said, somewhat proudly, perhaps.

"I meant not, lad, to malign women further than by saying they fulfil the end for which they were sent into the world. Whether it be, that a man, on marrying, finds himself in quite a reservoir of happiness whence he can in no wise extricate his clogged and powerless wings, I know not; but sure am I that when a man marries he subsides into a sort of domestic utensil, falling into the dead level of humanity, never more to make himself remarkable for anything in this world."

"And is it every man's duty to strive to make himself remarkable? Mr Smith, he who has been such a fool as not to marry, is sure to talk like a fool on either women or marriage."

I fear I was becoming hot on the subject. I have never been able to argue on such a subject abstractly.

“Your honour’s servant, sir!” said Gregory. “A Daniel come to judgment!”

“Nay, sir, you mistake the chronology. It is Daniel in the den of lions, were all men of your way of thinking.”

“Women having tamed the leonine spirit of the people, you need not fear. Jamie, lad, the Roman Catholic priesthood are in the right. A man, to elevate his fellows, to do them good in any way, or even to set them a noble example, must never sink into a kitchen-lord.”

“Mr Smith,” said I, “with propriety I might forbear to answer ye according to your folly. But rather, I say that there are certain people who, being placed in any situation of life, do therein develop a grovelling disposition to find its lowest depth, there to wallow in congenial mire. Cannot a man have a house of his own without becoming a kitchen-lord? We step over the mud in our path, Mr Smith; we do not, eellike, wriggle through it.”

“Jamie Merle,” he said, solemnly, “your wits have been sharpened since you came to Glasgow, as was evidenced in our club yesterday evening, where you talked like a philosopher, a poet, and a man of business rolled into one. But your wit and your arguments will never convince me. Indeed, it mattereth not. There may be good women, and clever women, and sensible women; but it is better for a man like me to look merely at the casual beauties which lie on the surface of marriage, even as streaks of blue and crimson float on a greasy oil-tub. I leave the bath to somebody else. And here we are at Mistress Burton’s.”

The house we approached was a short, square-built erection, standing a short way back from the road, in middle of a well-kept lawn, and surrounded by a few fruit trees and a hedge which also enclosed a garden at the back. The soft, clear twilight was dying down into dusk, and already the windows were tinted with the orange of the lamps within. As the door was opened to us by a black footman, the Colonel’s daughter happened to pass through the hall, and at once tripped forward, in a girlish, graceful way, to receive us. She was indeed very like my Lilian, and I was more than ever indignant at the man who had dared to question her honour before the members of Gregory’s club. I had never spoken sufficiently long with her to know much of her mental qualities, but I was sure that such a beautiful tabernacle could not but contain a worthy altar, flower-laden and fruit-laden, within. For the present I saw no more of her, as she allowed us to be ushered into a large parlour, brilliantly lit by a chandelier and several lustres placed about the room. Specimens of Holland crockery-ware, Prussian lace, and odds and ends from the Indies, adorned the recesses of the windows; while in centre of the room, on a massive rosewood table, shone the tear-service, displaying, of course, that magnificent set of china which was the special pride of every housewife. As yet there were only gentlemen present, and not till they had all assembled did the ladies come sailing in, gorgeous with adornments and majestic with stateliness and grace. Indeed it was no laughing matter with these poor women: an inadvertent stumble might have injured their castellated head-gear irreparably for the evening.

Among the gentlemen of Mr Smith’s club, I had felt quite at home; here I felt considerably otherwise. I was afraid I might say something very positive which might shock the female mind. And, indeed, as the people sat down to the business of tea-drinking, their talk was not of a character which warranted the interposition of my clumsy ordnance; wherefore, I sat nearly silent, except by an occasional remark to Miss Burton, who sat next me. Nevertheless I found an agreeable amusement in

passing along the cups to their respective owners, as was the fashion of the house; and, each tea-spoon being numbered for the purpose, as was the fashion of the time, it became a satisfactory mental exercise to remember the numbers and the people to whom they belonged. But as the conversation warmed, and as Miss Burton entered more eagerly into the various topics, I discovered how much I had been mistaken in her. By and by, my idol was altogether down, with its poor head lying dismally in the dust; and I began to reproach myself for having imagined that there could be two Lilians. As I thought of the half-laughing and half-earnest talk of my Eastburn Lilian — her shrewd, quaint remarks, and her honest, straightforward replies, and compared them with the frivolous gossip of this Glasgow lady, I knew not whether to feel disappointed at the result, or to feel proud that there should be but one Lilian Fraser. Miss Burton spoke of that odious and awkward thing, an umbrella, which had been introduced into Glasgow by a gentleman a year or two previous. She wondered how any body could tolerate such a stupid and such an unwieldy thing; and her wonder was reciprocated by the assembled ladies. Then she talked of Mr Jackson's theatre in Dunlop Street, and of its wonderful glories and enchantments, remarking privately to me that there were at the table one or two ladies who had subscribed part of the forty silk gowns presented to Mrs Bellamy, when that very celebrated lady's properties were burned, along with the former theatre, by a fanatic mob twenty years before. Then she asked me if I had been to Inkle Factory Lane meeting-house, to which I replied that I had gone there many times. She then intimated to me that she should some day honour the church with her presence; but here the Colonel, who had promised to keep the conversation from becoming vapid, remarked that he would "be — before any daughter of his should go running after these radical villains, the Secession ministers, who went about the country raving nonsense against the church, king, and constitution. Hadn't she already gone whining and snivelling after the nopopery rioters — hadn't she cried her eyes out after that — villain, Lord George Gordon, who should have been torn to pieces by horses?" This was language of quite sufficient strength. Colonel Burton looked pleased after having thus assisted the talk of the evening.

A young man, with barely a shadow on his upper lip, and with a profusion of powder on his hair and on the neck of his coat, said he thought religion was pretty much alike all through the world: that Christians, and Brahmins, and savages had their principal ideas in common.

The observation was caught up by an elderly man, sitting under shadow of his wife, who added that those who worshipped the sun had an excuse for so doing, inasmuch as the sun had at least one of the attributes of Deity: he saw everything at once. A murmur of approval ran round the ladies.

"Nay, sir," I remarked, "the sun cannot be said to see everything at once."

"Explain, if you please, sir."

"Because he sees but half the world at a time."

Mr Smith took a violent fit of coughing, which caused him to cover his face with his handkerchief; but the younger theologian came to the rescue of his elderly friend.

"Doctors, not of divinity, but of medicine," he said, apparently to me, "are the ministers needed now-a-days. Give a man his health, and you need not send him to the priest."

"Sir," I said, "to those who have no souls to look after, the body must always be the principal care."

"And who have no souls, sir?"

“The fathers of our church say that selfexamination is practical religion. When a man finds he has no soul in him, let him give up the church.”

“Speaking o’ ministers,” said the Colonel, “do you know, Mr Smith, that Tom Kirkaldy has lost his wife?”

“I do, sir. And heard ye what he said to Eben Drysdale when Eben asked if she was to be buried on Friday? ‘Friday! Save us!’ cried Tom, ‘ — and that the day o’ Falkirk Tryst? — no very likely!’”

“Cruel man!” cried some of the ladies, “to let his worldly concerns interfere with his wife’s funeral.”

“Nay,” said Gregory, “he was but remembering one of our favourite maxims.”

“How, Mr Smith?”

“Business before pleasure, madam.”

The conversation then branched off into tea, into sugar, and into “shortbread;” each lady relating her experience in these respective departments of domestic economy with unwearied minuteness. Colonel Burton, remembering his promise, began to abuse the villains in Ireland, who were doing this thing, and the other thing; and really the Colonel seemed rather glad that they were doing something very wicked, in order to afford people conversation. -

Lord North came in for his share of vituperation.

Young Mr Pitt was also, but more favourably, scrutinised.

The Americans were annihilated with contempt.

The French Court was very properly extolled; the ladies and gentlemen figuring therein being styled the high-priests and priestesses of manners, who prevented the world running into barbarism.

From the French Court there was but one step to Charles I. — a martyr of blessed memory, as the Colonel, scorning originality, ventured to observe.

The regicides were denounced Charles Edward was a hero.

William of Holland was a villain — a d — d villain! What right had he to leave his fat, lazy, beer-drinking boors, and come over here to rule a nation of gentlemen?

“Perhaps, after all,” said a mildly-speaking man, with fair hair, “’twas as well William *did* come over.”

“Else had we all been Papists,” growled Gregory.

The ladies looked inexpressibly shocked even to think of such a thing.

“And we might have been as near heaven going by way of Rome as going by way of Westminster,” added Gregory.

From that moment Gregory Smith was looked upon as an atheist by these gentlewomen. No wonder. Later in life, I myself fell under the same bann, because I was known to prowl about the environs of the city in search of twisted bits of stone.

The sensation had barely subsided, when Miss Burton, rising from the table, bade me follow her into another room. I, naturally wondering what she meant, looked to Mr Smith, but that gentleman paying no attention, there was nothing for it but to obey the request. I rose, and followed. She paused when we were both in the hall.

“I thought you might wish some music to break the monotony of the evening,” she said; “will you go up stairs to my room, and listen to what little I can afford you?”

I professed myself delighted, and, again following her, ascended first the general house-stair, and subsequently a smaller flight of steps which led to a little room near the summit of the building. She bade me wait until she should bring her harp; and as I entered the apartment and sat down, I had leisure to examine its contents. It was, so far as I could see, a small room, very tastefully furnished, and adorned with all those little trinkets and pretty things which are nowhere found so plentifully as in a lady’s

pet apartment Costly books, pictures, musical instruments, and other little nick-nacks, were lying hither and thither in variegated and pleasing disorder, upon couches and tables, and around the walls. The chamber was nearly dark, except for a ray of light which, coming from a lamp in what I took to be an adjacent bed-room, entered by the partly-opened door, and fell athwart a tall alabaster vase, causing it to gleam like a tongue of white fire. Then, and not till then, did I perceive that in place of a window, there were at the opposite end of the chamber two folding glass-doors, leading out to a balcony which overhung the garden, and consequently looked to the back of the house. I went forward, and had just begun to inhale the perfume of the rose-bushes which clustered about the balcony, and about a stair descending from it to the garden, when Miss Burton re-appeared, bearing with her a peculiar kind of harp, the like of which I had never seen before.

“You may carry the harp,” she said, “and we shall go down to the arbour. No one will disturb us there, and I always fancy that music sounds more sweetly in the open air.”

Well, I certainly was somewhat amazed at this pretty speech, but I had too much rustic awkwardness to suggest any other course of procedure; wherefore I bore the instrument down the flight of steps, and then along the garden walk, until we reached a little summer-house, hung round with honeysuckle, and sheltered in front by two large lilacs. Here, in the partial darkness, we both sat down.

She began the music — a low and murmurous sound, like the lapping of waves by night, like the long rush on a sea-beach heard in the solitude of a distant glen. Shall I tell you, reader, how it affected me? I forgot the player, the instrument, the people waiting on us, our situation; for I dreamed that I was under the deep, green sea, where never sunlight had been, and there I heard the singing of the beautiful sea-maidens. How it run along the sea-caves, until the great fish curbed their arrowy flight, and hung spellbound over the sirens! What music it was! — sweet, sweet, until the shells leaped together in ecstasy! It was a music of memories, bringing with it far-off tidings — the music of dreams! And as I listened in the depths of the coral caves, there was one note ever recurring — oh, so wild it was! — so daringly wild and sweet! And I hungered for it, and longed for it, until the melody brought it back again; and I wept that I could not enchain it and keep it beside me for evermore. And I thought the maidens floated away through the deep green calm; and the mighty halls, and the great caverns, with their gleaming shells of gold and crimson, were silent and lone. And I followed, and again followed, that wondrous music; for still the plaintive echoes came sighing through the watery hollows, telling that the sound of the silver lutes and the blowing of the golden horns still continued. And even then I followed!

I awoke from my dream to find that my companion had left her harp, and was now sitting beside me, with her hand resting on my arm. She was looking into my face as well as the darkness would permit, and there was a strange light in her eyes. I could not make it out. She sighed deeply.

“Mistress Burton,” said I, “will not you proceed with the music? It is exceeding beautiful.”

“Mr Merle, you will not think me unwomanly if—”

There was a sound of footsteps behind the lilac trees, and she sprang to her feet. In another moment she had vanished from my sight, so quickly that I scarce could tell whither she had gone. The footsteps came nearer, and, as I still sat in the bower, Mr Gregory Smith entered.

“Jamie, lad, you had better come with me. I’ll bind ye to the mast as ye pass the sirens.”

“Mr Smith interferes somewhat strangely in other men’s affairs,” said I.

“This is no affair of yours, Jamie, lad, and I know it. Even now they are asking for you, though Mistress Burton’s absence is not yet noticed.”

So we returned to the house by passing through a door casually left open on the ground floor, and found our way, with some difficulty, back to the room which we had recently left. Miss Burton did not appear again that night. Soon thereafter the arrival of the “lassies wi’ the lanterns” was announced, and that being the signal for the general breaking up of our party, Colonel Burton proposed that the gentlemen should remain and have a quiet tumbler of punch. A few of them agreed to do so, but Mr Smith and I returned home to the Stockwell.

Gregory came up to my room with me, to have a chat over the frivolity of the evening, and while there Mrs Wardrop also appeared, with a letter in her hand.

“This,” she said to me, “was brought by the Muirend carrier, and the poor man was crying when he left.”

So I opened the letter, and read: —

“To James Merle, in the Stockwell of Glasgow.

“SIR, — My daughter having told me what has passed between you and her, I should not, God knows, have troubled you in this matter, had any other way been left. So far as we can judge, she is very near to death, and we are but trying to let her end her life in peace. She has expressed a wish to see you. Will you not grant this last request, and that before it is too late?

Yours to command,

DAVID FRASEE.”

I leant back against the bed. I felt sick and cold; very cold, except my head, which was burning and throbbing with heat. Then I strove to right myself, and the heat left my brow, and I found myself wet with perspiration, and very faint I did not say anything to Mr Smith. I crossed the room, took down my plaid and stick, and walked out into the darkness.

Lilian! my Lilian!

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW I TRAVELLED THROUGH THE NIGHT.



DOWN THROUGH THE silent streets I went, out into the dark road, with teeth set hard against the cold wind, and a fire of impatience and fear at my heart. I met no one, save a solitary horseman riding into the city. The night was pitch dark, except at times when masses of flying cloud, stormily crossing the sky, allowed a pale, faint moonlight to struggle through the rifts. On I went, thinking not of the road, nor of the time, nor of the darkness, but of a lonely little house in Eastburn, and of one there lying dying.

Then I thought of one beautiful summer day, wherein I had wandered round the Cowal shore, looking over the blue sea to the little island of Bute, with the peaks of Arran behind. I had been alone, yet not alone. All the clear morning and all the sunlit day, as I wandered over the hot white sand or on the cool green grass by the seaside, it seemed to me that she was there with me to look at everything at which I looked — to speak to me — to think with me — to be very close and very near. And I thought of the sunshine that lay on the blue, blue ripples, and of the great expanse of sea and sky, seeming to meet, far away, in a maze of white glory; of the snowy sea-gulls, and the warm breath of the land-winds coming from the fir-trees and the ferns, and the strong, clear odour of the sea-wrack, lying crisp and brown in the sun. I thought of it until my eyes were blinded with tears, and the weight of an immeasurable despair came down upon my heart. How could I ever again bear to look upon that blue water? How could I bear to see, even from afar, that white promontory running out into the waves, and think of that summer day in which I had been so happy communing with her? For then I should be alone in the world, and remembrance an agony unendurable.

I was young and hot-headed then; and the iron will of my youth rose within me, as though of itself it would rescue my poor Lilian from the very jaws of death.

I knew of a by-path that should shorten the road by a mile, and away over the fields I went, with blackness without and blackness within. By and by I came to a ford of the Clyde, which here is a broad and shallow stream, crossed by blocks of stone. I gained the other side, and stopped. I could go no farther. A strange spell in the white ripples drew me back — made me sit down by the brink of the river. A gust of wind had rent the clouds overhead, and the moonlight came down upon the water — the calm and pure water — that seemed so peaceful and still, idly and dreamily lapping on and on away into the gloom. A mournful sound was coming from afar — the murmur of the wavelets amongst the pebbles; but here everything was clear, calm, silent. Why should I hurry on this wild journey? Was my brain turned, that I was out here at this time of the night? Even though I reached Eastburn, I could be of no use. I was late — too late! and that awful word rang in my ears. Dead — dead! that more terrible sound went through my brain, searing and scorching it. And still I looked on the cold, idle ripples. I did not think of suicide: but in those few moments I underwent a strange mental emotion which, I pray God, the reader may never experience.

I seemed, as it were, to live after my death. I came back a solitary man into the great wide world, and saw it moving on, and on, with its grinding wheels, and its cold, cruel, self-interest, battling, and struggling, and striving; and I was alone. It was a

cold, gray world; and I saw from afar the great cities mournful and silent in that morning light, and I saw crowds of men passing self-absorbed, every one seeking his own, no one caring for me. And the days passed on, and I wept through my weary life that I had no friend. It was a wild, wild vision, and I gazed spell-bound into this future of despair; but suddenly I cried aloud to God in the midnight to deliver me from this trance, and again I sped on my way.

Should I be too late? There she lay dying, perhaps thinking of me, and I yet miles away from her. Then I thought of the little lake by Bishopburn, where I had first called her my own, and folded the little sunny head to my breast. When will the lake catch the first light of morning? Tinto will have it soon, and Coulterfell, and the broad moors, and then on the bosom of the water the first gray streaks will become dimly visible. How well I know it! — the little promontory jutting out into the lake, where the gray and green rocks are crowned with hazel bushes, and in by its side a little semicircular bay. There oftentimes have I lain down in the quiet evenings waiting for her, gazing out on the liquid plain that even at noonday was clear as glass and black as midnight. Then a slight breeze was wont to ruffle the centre of the lake, and imperceptibly the faint gray pencillings crept closer in, changing the dull stillness of the surface into a soft sheen of light. And then a gust of wind coming across the moor, and the sunshine bursting forth, the wavelets rose to laugh with their blue light to the sun; for away over the moor I saw her coming, down by the clump of green willows, hastening with a smile of light on her sweet face to meet me, to spend with me the long summer afternoon. King yet again, O lake, with the melody of her silvery voice! Echo once more, dear little lake, the sound of her morning hymn! For now she is lying low, and the soft blue eyes may never again look out on the tumbling water — . Hasten, hasten, ere it be too late!

Late! late! — the same word, must it ever come back? The wind had stilled, the black clouds above were motionless, and still this wild night-journey was continued. I reached the height where, on my downward walk to Glasgow, I had taken my last look of Eastburn and her moors. Well I remembered having seen what few see in their lives — where masses of lowering cloud had come up from the rainy west, covering the whole country-side in gloom, even to what one would think was the horizon. But higher still, in middle of the dark mist, a burst of green light shone forth, and I knew that Eastburn and the far-off moors were lying in sunshine, appearing like a paradise lifted above the earth.

But now from the same height were visible but dark outlines of hedges and woods, mounds of earth covered by black fir-trees, and sombre shadows of distant farm-houses.

Eastburn? — surely these are the little cottages down yonder in the hollow, dimly visible through the pale light of dawn? There is an orange speck in one of the windows, gleaming through the gray twilight like a ghostly eye. It beckons me on — on, and I go up the main street of the village — up through the well-known cottages, turning neither to the right nor to the left, until — until in front of me stands that lone house at the end of the village, where the light is streaming through the window.

How well I knew the old place! Cæsar, the gaunt collie, lay at the door, his great forepaws stretched out upon the stone, and as I attempted to enter he rose up with a growl. I saw Mrs Fraser and another woman come out of the room on hearing the dog's growl, and not perceiving me, they went in another direction. Cæsar knew me, and leapt up, wagging his tail. In another moment I was in *her* room, and no one there but our two selves. I stepped cautiously forward to where she lay; saw the pale white cheeks and beautiful blue eyes that now seemed to have a strange lustre in them; saw

the rich brown hair that clustered and curled affectionately round her little neck; saw the white little hand lying listlessly on the coverlet. She did not know me! She turned and looked at me with a strange, wondering look, and then turned away her head.

“Lilian!” I said.

She did not answer; and then I took the little hand, and, kneeling down by her bedside, swore before God to right the great wrong I had done her, and prayed for my darling that she should be restored to life — prayed to the great and merciful God.

A short gasp interrupted her low, quick breathing. She opened her eyes — looked at me — seemed to know me — seemed to know what I had been saying, and drew her hand quickly away: but the old, trustful habit came back again, and she put out the little trembling fingers to meet mine, and looked up to my face with tearful eyes.

“Jamie,” she said, in a low, sweet voice, “kiss me before I die.”

I took her hand, and kissed my little one again and again, and looked once more into the dear eyes that I knew so well. It was a reminiscence of bygone times; and the long dark months of sorrow seemed to have passed utterly and for ever away. And so I tried to cheer her, and bade her be brave — told her that it should all be for the best, and that I should no more leave her, come what might in this world. But she only smiled — such a sad smile! — for this little girlie had a strong will and determination of her own, and I saw that her resolve was fixed.

There was a hectic flush on her soft cheek as she strove to utter the words —

“Give me your hand, Jamie — Kiss me again, dear, and now go, and the Lord go with you and prosper you. Oh, I’m glad, Jamie, you have come to see me, but it must be for the last time — Oh, Jamie, for the last time!”

And with that her voice broke down, and she turned away on the pillow, sobbing very bitterly.

It was hardly a time for reasoning or argument. What could I say to this poor stricken deer? I left her in other and wiser hands than mine.

And yet again I turned and strove to comfort her, placing her head upon the pillow and smoothing the tresses of her silken hair, and speaking to her. But she would not be comforted. Still she sobbed — not petulantly, but with the settled misery of an irrevocable despair. Nay, again she partly rose, and with some of the sweet firmness of other days, bade me gently to be gone.

“Why should you stay?” she said, calmly enough, but evidently with a sore effort, “it is not right, Jamie. I know you have been thinking of me, dear, as I have been thinking of you through these weary, weary months. I am so glad you have come to see me! And now, Jamie, go away back — back to Glasgow, and forget it all, and leave me.”

“Please God, my Lilian, I never will.”

Mrs Fraser came into the room, went over to the bedside, and my poor lassie threw her arms round her mother’s neck, and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE SUNLIGHT OF LOVE BROKE THROUGH THE CLOUDS OF PREJUDICE.



I WENT OUTSIDE and walked up and down in front of the house, while the pale morning light came up over the moors, and the villagers began to throwback the shutters from the windows. By and by I heard a soft step behind me, and, turning, beheld old David Fraser, with a countenance haggard and care-worn as ever man had.

"Jamie," he said, kindly enough, "will not ye come in and rest till breakfast is ready? Ye maun be ganging down to your work again in Glasgow; your staying, here will do nae good, none in the world."

I followed him into the house, and we sat down in the empty kitchen.

"It is a sair trial, Jamie, but He who has sent it will help us to bear it. If we could only think it was sent by Him! But I'm afeard, Jamie, that human prejudice and human anger and spite — ay, spite, Jamie — are the cause o' this misfortune."

There was a nervous excitement in the man's usually quiet face.

"Yes, James Merle, you may talk to me o' principle, and o' right and wrang, but I tell ye there are many out o' the pale o' the kirk — as it's ca'd — hae kindlier hearts than them wha are in't Your father and auntie — for I'll be plain wi' ye, lad — may be Christians, but they're cruel-hearted anes — and I'se warrant there ne'er was ane o' the Fraser family would hae done the like to them."

"Mr Fraser," I said to him, humbly enough, for I knew the suffering which had wrung those bitter words from the old man, "you have been wronged, but do not let that lead you to blame others unjustly. My father and aunt may have been trained up in an over-rigorous school, but I know the kindness of their hearts, and I know that it was with a sore sacrifice to their own feelings that they have acted as they have done. I cannot excuse them, David Fraser, but this much I say — that they walked according to their light Think ye they suffered nothing when they shut me out from my father's house — banished me even from the country-side, because they could not sin against their conscience? The blame, Mr Fraser, is mine, in having made this wicked promise, and now I shall make what poor restitution I can by breaking this promise — the first I have broken in my life."

But he laughed such a laugh of scorn!

"You think, James Merle, that I have brought you hear to beg of you as a boon what you should beg from me? Sooner than that my daughter should be married to you at this moment, I would see her dead at my feet."

Was it David Fraser who thus spoke to me? I almost doubted it, and yet there was the thin pale man, with his lips quivering, and his eyes dilating with anger. I answered him as mildly as I could: it was no time to bandy words.

"Mr Fraser, are not you in this doing what you reprehend in others! Why be so unreasonable? When the wrong has been done, the sooner it is righted the better."

David Fraser rose, with his face turned towards the door. There were some figures in the entry, standing darkly against the light outside, so that I could hardly distinguish them; but he did.

“What want they here?” he said, going towards the door, and standing erect before them.

An old lady, tall and stately, was leading forward an aged but straight-shouldered and silvery-haired man, who, with his other hand, groped his way along the passage.

“My father!” I said to David Fraser, as I saw Aunt Blair open the room-door, and take him with her into the chamber where my Lilian was lying. We followed. And there stood Eben Merle — sightless, white-haired — by the girl’s bedside, while Aunt Blair was bending over my Lilian’s face, striving to cheer her, though she was herself crying.

“Is David Fraser here?” said my father.

“Here he is, sir,” said Mrs Fraser, leading forward her husband.

“Will ye give me your hand?” said my father, holding out his own.

“I will not, Mr Merle,” said David Fraser. “When but one word o’ yours might have saved my lassie’s life, that word I scorned to ask. Now it is too late, and I want not my door darkened by them wha hae brought misery to it. Come to make friens wi’ me? No’ as lang as I can see your handiwork on yonder bed!”

“David Fraser,” said my father, “have a care how you blaspheme your Maker. Are not we overruled by One wiser than ourselves? Have not I been overruled sorely against my own natural and sinful inclination in this matter? And now when the Lord has seen fit to make me open my mouth and release my boy from his promise, if in that aught can be done to better your daughter’s ailment, the refusal maun lie at your ain door. I have done my duty, David Fraser, so far as we puir worms can see — and that wi’ nae ill feeling, believe me, to your daughter, whom now I ken to be a guid and honest lassie, seeing she has striven and fought for her earthly parents in their misfortunes and trials — and now I take my leave.”

“Stay, Mr Merle,” said David Fraser, taking my father by the hand, “it is maybe because o’ my bringing up that I canna quite understand the scruples o’ them wha are deeper than me in spiritual matters; but if anything will better my poor lassie, I care not much whither it may come, and sae—”

He turned away from us, with his hands over his eyes. And during this I had been standing by Lilian’s side, with her hand closely clasped in mine; and now I bent over and whispered —

“Do you hear, darling?”

“Yes, dear, it will be right now — will it not? and we shall not have to be so far away from each other any more! But had it not been for me, Jamie, you might have lived a far happier life.”

“Had it not been for you!” — it was all I could say. I was awed into silence by the great unselfishness and depth of this truehearted woman’s love.

“Why, what on all the earth is this, Mrs Fraser? Bless my soul and body, woman, did not I leave instructions that no one should enter this room but yourself and Mrs M’Killop, and here I find something like a dozen people, with Lady Margaret Seton coming down the road to add her own head and her pony’s to the assembly!

Really—” —

This was the doctor, and we left the room. But the victory which he was to achieve had already been won for him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW LILIAN AND I RODE INTO GLASGOW.



I LINGERED FOR a day or two about Eastburn, until we were assured of Lilian's recovery, which progressed not very quickly at first; and during that time I wandered over all the well-known places which she and I had visited in bygone days. Here was the willow under which we had sat — there was the burn over which I had earned her; and often I found myself at the little cottage of Bishopburn, with its over-drooping thatch and little windows. Then, as Lilian got better, there was talk of removing her to the Holm, for Lady Margaret Seton had appointed David Fraser head-gardener at the Lodge, and although David had not for many years practised what had been his original calling, yet her Ladyship's commands were not to be gainsayed. And when that removal took place, I returned to Glasgow.

Then, in the autumn time, appeared a wonderfully fine gentleman in Eastburn — so fine that I was nigh ashamed to walk through the village with him. And one morning shortly afterwards there were furious ridings and chasings on horseback and on dog-cart from Muirend kirk to the gardener's house at the Holm, at finish of which all the people sat down to an old-fashioned country wedding-dinner. And there Gregory Smith's finery shone like the trappings of a magician, and my aunt was gorgeous in satin, and Mrs Fraser was glittering in silk — the gift of Lady Seton; while David Fraser and John Macaulay were busked and blythe, and my father wore white silk ribbons with the best of them. Lilian was very shy, and very pretty, and very happy.

How well I remember it all! Mr Gregory Smith was the presiding genius of the homely celebrations, and conducted himself with a gravity of demeanour and a refinement of courtesy which were wonderful to behold! The honest country people bowed to him as to a lord, until, as certain uproarious toasts began to thaw the reserve between them, we perceived Gregory suddenly grow exceeding humorous, as though he were at the head of his club-table, and manifold bursts of merriment betrayed the altitude of spirits into which he was insensibly raising our small company. And then he withdrew himself from the crowd, and I lost sight of my venerable tutor. But Lilian came to me and whispered in her shy way that I should direct my eyes to a modest corner of the apartment, hidden in partial obscurity. Therein was Gregory sitting, but not alone. A certain imperious and raven-tressed young lady occupied a seat by his side, and Mr Smith had again adopted those beautiful and graceful manners which so awed us rustics. Lady Margaret was not laughing now, for Mr Smith was talking seriously to her. Concerning what might be this speech of his? I cannot say definitely; but Lilian, placing her arm in mine, nestled into my side and looked up to my face with those fond blue eyes.

"Would you not like them to be as happy as we are?" she said.

"Is that possible?" I answered.

"Mr Smith, you told me, was very rich; why should not he have a wife—"

"When I, who am so poor, have inherited such a treasure."

"A poor treasure, I fear, Jamie. I do not think I can look after a house."

Of course there was no answer to this but the one, which, the people being too much engaged to look at us, was speedily forthcoming.

“Mr Smith might do worse,” I said, “but I fear me Lady Margaret would fancy a younger husband. If she does accept him, she will meet with the best husband she could wish — one who will only be amused at her importunity, and who will bear her teasings with the greatest equanimity.”

Lilian still clung to her idea, however. Herself happy, she would have everybody happy. Then we went to prepare for our journey, of which I remember every circumstance — even the minutest. I remember the luscious, golden afternoon in which we rode down to Glasgow, and how the crimson paled into a clear starlit evening ere we came in sight of the Tolbooth. And the night came down over the land, and the fair moon rose in all her wondrous beauty over the cottages scattered hither and thither in the dim hollows or amongst the woods, wherein slept the little children of earth, sleeping away all their cares and sorrows, to awake with a cheerful heart and an open brow to receive the morning light from heaven.



End of Sample