

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



THE STICKIT
MINISTER'S WOOING

S.R. CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First published in book form by Hodder & Stoughton in 1900.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

Apart from the introduction, this work is in the public domain so please feel free to share it around. If you wish to quote from any material written by Cally Phillips please acknowledge and/or send a courtesy email to gallowayraiders@unco.scot

Other formats may be available from Galloway Raiders. As of 2021 you can find out more via the following web addresses:
www.gallowayraiders.co.uk
www.srcrockett.weebly.com

CONTENTS

1. The Stickit Ministers Wooing
2. The Stickit Minister wins Through
3. Gibby the Eel, Student in Divinity
4. Doctor Girnigo's Assistant
5. The Gate of the Upper Garden
6. The Troubler of Israel
7. Carnation's Morning Joy
8. Jaimsie
9. Beadle and Martyr
10. The Blue Eyes of Ailie
11. Lowe's Seat
12. The Suit of Bottle Green
13. A Scientific Symposium
14. The Hempie's Love Story
15. The Little Fair Man
16. My Father's Love Story
17. The Man of Wrath
18. The Lass in the Shop
19. The Respect of Drowdle
20. Tadmor in the Wilderness
21. Peterson's Patient
22. Two Humourists

INTRODUCTION

The secret of his success in these Galloway tales lies in the fact that he knows the men and women of whom he writes through and through. He knows, understands and loves them so well that some of his knowledge, comprehension and love passes perforce to the reader.

The Stickit Ministers Wooing was published as a collection in 1900 by Hodder & Stoughton. There are some twenty-two stories and Crockett gives the role of narrator to his character Alec McQuhirr, son of the redoubtable Saunders. Alec is familiar to the reader from *Bog Myrtle*, *Lad's Love*, and *Love Idylls* and is now a doctor. Several of the stories are in more than one part and some of them are told more obviously in the first person voice than others but it's clear that we are listening to Alec throughout the collection.

As usual in Drumquhat stories, the main town Cairn Edward is a fictionalised version of the real Castle Douglas, with outlying areas including the by now familiar places of Dullarg, Nether Neuk and Whinnyliggate. Travelling between Galloway and Edinburgh, the stories reflect the relationship between rural and urban in the life of Alec. No longer the boy of *Lad's Love*, Alec is now a qualified doctor and a married man with a university education behind him.

The collection opens with a new version of the story of Robert Fraser (first seen in *The Stickit Minister*, 1893). The original story was told by Alec's father Saunders, but this version is told by Alec

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

himself, adding more detail and a more personal perspective to a poignant story of self-sacrifice.

We are then treated to several stories featuring Gibby Denholm, known as 'Gibby the Eel'. Alec uses Gibby to show how different doctors; and in particular medical students; are from ministers. Throughout this collection he frequently compares the joint 'callings' of medicine and the ministry. In 'Hermeneutics' we are treated to a description of the boredom of university training. 'Hermeneutics, of which (it is said) there was once a student who could remember the meaning. He died young, much respected by all who knew him.'

Crockett's ironic humour finds a good mouthpiece through Alec. Alec recalls his student days with humour in several stories. He also shows that 'trained' doctors often have little real knowledge in 'Peterson's Patient' and religion is lampooned more than once in the form of the fictional 'Marrow Kirk.' In 'The Troubles of Israel,' set in Alex's contemporary Edinburgh, we see the consequences of the factionalisation of the Marrow Kirk 'by the eternal process of splitting off, produced by the very faithfulness of the faithful, and the remorseless way they carried out their own ...' A clear comparison is drawn between this and the earlier Covenanting times. Set in Lady Nixon's Wynd the 'old' ways are threatened as an English business man works his way into the Kirk and takes over, trying to encourage a more evangelical approach. The attempt to get rid of the minister Dr Marcus Lawton (a favourite of Saunders McQuhirr) is nearly successful. Two generations after the Killing Times the congregation face a different kind of challenge to

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

their faith. Crockett shows that people only see what they value when they come to lose it. The 'Marrow' influence is also seen in the story 'Tadmor of the Wilderness' (and of course in the novel *The Lilac Sunbonnet*.)

Alec also delves into his own family history in 'The Little Fair Man,' 'My Father's Love Story,' 'Man of Wrath,' and 'Lass in the Shop,' giving us an insight into his family's Cameronian past right back to 17th century. He revisits the days of Samuel Rutherford and Peden the Prophet who also appear in several of Crockett's other novels.

The stories in *A Stickit Minister's Wooing*, cover a wide range of topics and concerns which were prevalent in Crockett's day, for example how to deal with 'good for nothing' ministers. They reveal the role of the Kirk in everyday domestic life as well as exploring more secular aspects of life such as the coming of the railroads and the factories. Alec even delves into feminine psychology in his completely unscientific 'Scientific Symposium' and 'The Hempie's Love Story.'

While there is much humour, the stark reality of life in urbanising rural towns is never far away. Stories tell of the outbreak of diseases, with small pox and cholera outbreaks both being blamed in part on the coming of the cotton mill to Cairn Edward (Castle Douglas) and we see people struggling in poverty in 'Little Dublin' as the bottom of Castle Douglas was then known. We see the consequences of a mining disaster in 'The Respect of Drowdie,' set as a backdrop to the 'pastoral' game of quoits. Crockett wrote at more length of mining in *Vida* (1907) in both cases drawing on his personal

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

experience of the mining disaster of 1889 he attended while minister at Penicuik.

Crockett loves to revisit old friends and time and again in these stories we come across many characters familiar to us from earlier 'Drumquhat' works. These include Henry Marchbanks and Betty Landsborough from 'Kit Kennedy,' Lord Butterhole and The Chrysties from 'Lad's Love' and those stalwarts the McQuhirrs who are to be found in *The Stickit Minister*, *Bog Myrtle*, *A Galloway Herd*, and *Lad's Love*).

There are also outstanding new characters. The love story between Elspeth Stuart and Allan Syme shows us the reality of cholera and cotton mills, as well as the personal impact of religious intolerance. The impact of family feuds are shown in 'The Blue Eyes of Ailie' while 'Carnation's Morning Glory' shows us the path of true love never runs smoothly when a man has no prospects and carries family debt as his burden. Both of these stories remind us of the reality of life for those in the lower reaches of society in late Victorian Scotland. There are people who try to hold onto what is good, and those who are cursed by the impact of delinquency around them, including drunkenness. The story of Willie McNair and his drunken wife in 'Beadle' and the final story 'The Two Humourists,' reminds us that even for the good man, life is a constant struggle for little, if any, real reward.

This is an eclectic mix, held together through the narrative voice of Alec McQuhirr. We should remember that for some twenty years Crockett was writing serial fiction, keeping a range of characters alive both for those who bought his novels and those

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

who read his stories in magazines. The gathering of these stories into collections from time to time offers the reader the chance to catch up on various comings and goings as well as (hopefully) tempting them to read novels dedicated to one or more of the characters we see in the collections.

Cally Phillips

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

1. THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

(These stories have been edited chiefly from manuscripts supplied to me by my friend Mr. Alexander McQuhirr, MD, of Cairn Edward in Galloway, of whose personal adventures I treated in the volume called 'Lad's Love.' I have let my friend tell his tale in his own way in almost every case.)

It was in the second year of my college life that I came home to find Robert Fraser, whom a whole country-side called the 'Stickit Minister,' distinctly worse, and indeed, set down upon his great chair in the corner as on a place from which he would never rise.

A dour, grippy back-end it was, the soil stubborn and untoward with early frost. And a strange sound it was to hear as I (Alexander McQuhirr) came down the Lang Brae, the channel stones droning and dinnelling on the ice by the third of November; a thing which had not happened in our parts since that fell year of the Sixteen Drifty Days, which has been so greatly talked about.

I walked over to the Dullarg the very night I arrived from Edinburgh. I had a new volume of Tennyson with me, which I had bought with the thought that he would be pleased with it. For I loved Robert Fraser, and I will not deny that my heart beat with expectation as I went up the little loaning with the rough stone dyke upon either side — aye, as if it had been the way to Nether Neuk, and I going to see my sweetheart.

'Come your ways in, Alec, man,' his voice came

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

from the inner room as he heard me pause to exchange banter of a rural sort with the servant lasses in the kitchen; 'I have been waitin' for ye. I kenned ye wad come the nicht!'

I went in. And there by the little peat fire, drowsing red and looking strangely out of place behind the ribs of the black-leaded 'register' grate, I saw the Stickit Minister with a black-and-white check plaid about his knees. He smiled a strange sweet smile, at once wistful and distant, as I entered — like one who waves farewell through a mist of tears as the pier slides back and the sundering water seethes and widens about the ship.

'You are better, Robert!' I said, smiling too. Dully, and yet with dogged cheerfulness, I said it, as men lie to the dying — and are not believed.

He stretched out his thin hand, the ploughman's horn clean gone from it, and the veins blue and convex upon the shrunk wrist.

'Ave atque vale, Alec, lad!' he answered. 'That, is what it has come to with Robert Fraser. But how are all at Drumquhat? Ye will be on your road ower to the Nether Neuk?'

This he said, though he knew different.

'I have brought you this from Edinburgh,' I said, giving him the little, thin, green volume of Tennyson. I had cut it to save him trouble, and written his name on the blank page before the title.

I shall never forget the way he looked at it. He opened it as a woman unfolds a new and costly garment, with a lingering caress of the wasted finger-tips through which I could almost see the white of the paper, and a slow soft intake of the breath, like a lover's sigh.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

His eyes, of old blue and clear, had now a kind of glaze over them, a veiling Indian summer mist, through which, however, still shone, all undimmed and fearless, the light of the simplest and manfulest spirit I have ever known. He turned the leaves and read a verse here and there with evident pleasure. He had a way of reading anything he loved as if listening inly to the cadences — a little half-turn of the head aside, and a still contented smile hovering about the lips, like one who catches the first returning fall of beloved footsteps.

But all at once Robert Fraser shut the book and let his hands sink wearily down upon his knee. He did not look at me, but kept his eyes on the red peat ash in the 'register' grate.

'It's bonnie,' he murmured softly; 'and it was a kind thing for you to think on me. But it's gane frae me, Alec — it's a' clean gane. Tak' you the book, Alec. The birdies will never sing again in ony spring for me to hear. I'm back upon the Word, Alec. There's nocht but That for me noo!'

He laid his hand on a Bible that was open beside him on the stand which held his medicine bottles, and a stocking at which his wearied fingers occasionally knitted for a moment or two at a time.

Then he gave the little green-clad Tennyson back to me with so motherly and lingering a regard that, had I not turned away, I declare I know not but that I had been clean done for.

'Yet for a' that, Alec,' he said, 'do you take the book for my sake. And see — cut out the leaf ye hae written on and let me keep it here beside me.'

I did as he asked me, and with the leaf in his hand he turned over the pages of his Bible carefully,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

like a minister looking for a text. He stopped at a yellowing envelope, as if uncertain whether to deposit the inscription in it. Then he lifted the stamped oblong and handed it to me with a kind of smile.

'There, Alec,' he said, 'you that has (so they tell me) a sweetheart o' your ain, ye will like to see that. This is the envelope that held the letter I gat frae Jessie Loudon — the nicht Sir James telled me at the Infirmary that my days were numbered!'

'Oh, Robert!' I cried, all ashamed that he should speak thus to a young man like me, 'dinna think o' that. You will excite yourself — you may do yourself a hurt.'

But he waved me away, still smiling that slow misty smile, in which, strangely enough, there was yet some of the humoursomeness of one who sees a situation from the outside.

'Na, Alec, lad,' he said softly, 'that's gane too. Upon a dark day I made a pact wi' my Maker, and now the covenanted price is nearly paid. His messenger wi' the discharge is already on the road. I never hear a hand on the latch, but I look up to see Him enter — aye, and He shall be welcome, welcome as the bridegroom that enters into the Beloved's chamber!'

I covered my brows with my palm, and pretended to look at the handwriting on the envelope, which was delicate and feminine. The Stickit Minister went on.

'Aye, Alec,' he said meditatively, with his eyes still on the red glow, 'ye think that ye love the lass ye hae set your heart on; and doubtless ye do love her truly. But I pray God that there may never come a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

day when ye shall have spoken the last sundering word, and returned her the written sheets faithfully every one. Ye hae heard the story, Alec. I will not hurt your young heart by telling it again. But I spared Jessie Loudon all I could, and showed her that she must not mate her young life with one no better than dead!

The Stickit Minister was silent a long time here. Doubtless old faces looked at him clear out of the red spaces of the fire. And when he began to speak again, it was in an altered voice.

'Nevertheless, because power was given me, I pled with, and in some measure comforted her. For though the lassie's heart was set on me, it was as a bairn's heart is set, not like the heart of a woman; and for that I praise the Lord — yes, I give thanks to His name!

'Then after that I came back to an empty house — and this!'

He caressed the faded envelope lovingly, as a miser his intimatest treasure.

'I did not mean to keep it, Alec,' he went on presently, 'but I am glad I did. It has been a comfort to me; and through all these years it has rested there where ye see it — upon the chapter where God answers Job out of the whirlwind. Ye ken yon great words.'

We heard a slight noise in the yard, the wheels of some light vehicle driven quickly. The Stickit Minister started a little, and when I looked at him again I saw that the red spot, the size of a crown-piece, which burned so steadfastly on his cheekbone, had spread till now it covered his brow.

Then we listened, breathless, like men that wait

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

for a marvel, and through the hush the peats on the grate suddenly fell inward with a startling sound, bringing my heart into my mouth. Next we heard a voice without, loud and a little thick, in heated debate.

'Thank God!' cried the Stickit Minister, fervently. 'It's Henry — my dear brother! For a moment I feared it had been Lawyer Johnston from Cairn Edward. You know,' he added, smiling with all his old swift gladness, 'I am now but a tenant at will. I sit here in the Dullarg on sufferance — that once was the laird of acre and onstead!'

He raised his voice to carry through the door into the kitchen.

'Henry, Henry, this is kind — kind of you — to come so far to see me on such a night.'

The Stickit Minister was on his feet by this time, and if I had thought that his glance had been warm and motherly for me, it was fairly on fire with affection now. I believe that Robert Fraser once loved his betrothed faithfully and well; but never will I believe that he loved woman born of woman as he loved his younger brother.

And that is, perhaps, why these things fell out so.

I had not seen Henry Fraser since the first year he had come to Cairn Edward. A handsome young man he was then, with a short, supercilious upper lip, and crisply curling hair of a fair colour disposed in masses about his brow.

He entered, and at the first glimpse of him I stood astonished. His pale student's face had grown red and a trifle mottled. The lids of his blue eyes (the

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

blue of his brother's) were injected. His mouth was loose and restless under a heavy moustache, and when he began to speak his voice came from him thick and throaty.

'I wonder you do not keep your people in better order, Robert,' he said, before he was fairly within the door of the little sitting-room. 'First I drove right into a farm-cart that had been left in the middle of the yard, and then nearly broke my shins over a pail some careless slut of a byre-lass had thrown down at the kitchen-door.'

Robert Fraser had been standing up with the glad and eager look on his face. I think he had half stretched out his hand; but at his brother's querulous words he sank slowly back into his chair, and the gray tiredness slipped into his face almost as quickly as it had disappeared.

'I am sorry, Henry,' he said simply. 'Somehow I do not seem to get about so readily as I did, and I daresay the lads and lasses take some advantage.'

'They would not take advantage with me, I can tell you!' cried the young doctor, throwing down his driving-cape on the corner of the old sofa, and pulling a chair in to the fire. He bent forward and chafed his hands before the glowing peats, and as he did so I could see by a slight lurch and quick recovery that he had been drinking. I wondered if Robert Fraser noticed.

Then he leaned back and looked at the Stickit Minister.

'Well, Robert, how do you find yourself tonight? Better, eh?' he said, speaking in his professional voice.

His brother's face flushed again with the same

swift pleasure, very pitiful to see.

'It is kind of you to ask,' he said; 'I think I do feel a betterness, Henry. The cough has certainly been less troublesome this last day or two.'

'I suppose there are no better prospects about the property,' said Dr. Fraser, passing from the medical question with no more than the words I have written down. I had already risen, and, with a muttered excuse, was passing into the outer kitchen, that I might leave the brothers alone.

So I did not hear Robert Fraser's reply, but as I closed the door I caught the younger's loud retort: 'I tell you what it is. Robert — say what you will — I have not been fairly dealt with in this matter — I have been swindled!'

So I went out with my heart heavy within me for my friend, and though Bell Gregory, the bonniest of the farm lasses, ostentatiously drew her skirts aside and left a vacant place beside her in the ingle-nook, I shook my head and kept on my way to the door with no more than a smile and 'Anither nicht, Bell.'

'Gie my love to Nance ower at the Nether Neuk,' she cried back, with challenge in her tone, as I went out

But even Nance Chrystie was not in my thoughts that night. I stepped out, passing in front of the straw-thatched bee-hives which, with the indrawing days, had lost their sour-sweet summer smell, and so on into the loaning. From the foot of the little brae I looked back at the lights burning so warmly and steadily from the low windows of the Dullarg, and my mind went over all my father had told me of what the Stickit Minister had done for his brother: how he had broken off his own college career that

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Henry might go through his medical classes with ease and credit; and how, in spite of his brother's rank ingratitude, he had bonded his little property in order to buy him old Dr. Aitkin's practice in Cairn Edward.

Standing thus and thinking under the beeches at the foot of the dark loaning, it gave me quite a start to find a figure close beside me. It was a woman with a shawl over her head, as is the habit of the cotters' wives in our parish.

'Tell me,' a voice, eager and hurried, panted almost in my ear, 'is Dr. Fraser of Cairn Edward up there?'

'Yes,' I said in reply, involuntarily drawing back a step — the woman was so near me — 'he is this moment with his brother.'

'Then for God's sake will ye gang up and tell him to come this instant to the Barmark cothouses? There are twa bairns there that are no like to see the mornin' licht if he doesna!'

'But who may you be?' I said, for I did not want to return to the Dullarg. 'And why do you not go in and tell him for yourself? You can give him the particulars of the case better than I!'

She gave a little shivering moan.

'I canna gang in there!' she said, clasping her hands piteously; 'I darena. Not though I am Gilbert Barbour's wife — and the bairns' mither. Oh, sir, rin!'

And I ran.

But when I had knocked and delivered my message, to my great surprise Dr. Henry Fraser received it very coolly.

'They are only some cotter people,' he said; 'they

must just wait till I am on my way back from the village. I will look in then. Robert, it is a cold night, let me have some whiskey before I get into that ice-box of a gig again.'

The Stickit Minister turned towards the wall-press where, ever since his mother's day, the 'guardevin,' or little rack of cut-glass decanters, had stood, always hospitably full, but quite untouched by the master of the house.

I was still standing uncertainly by the door-cheek, and as Robert Fraser stepped across the little room I saw him stagger, and rushed forward to catch him. But ere I could reach him he had commanded himself, and turned to me with a smile on his lips. Yet even his brother was struck by the ashen look on his face.

'Sit down, Robert,' he said, 'I will help myself.'

But with a great effort the Stickit Minister set the tall narrow dram-glass on the table and ceremoniously filled out to his brother the stranger's 'portion,' as was once the duty of country hospitality in Scotland.

But the doctor interrupted.

'Oh, I say!' he exclaimed, when he saw what his brother was doing, 'for heaven's sake not that thing — give me a tumbler.'

And without further ceremony he went to the cupboard; then he cried to Bell Gregory to fetch him some hot water, and mixed himself a steaming glass.

But the Stickit Minister did not sit down. He stood up by the mantelpiece all trembling. I noted particularly that his fingers spilled half the contents of the dram-glass as he tried to pour them back into the decanter.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Oh, haste ye, Henry!' he said, with a pleading anxiety in his voice I had never heard there in any trouble of his own; 'take up your drink and drive as fast as ye can to succour the poor woman's bairns. It is not for nothing that she would come here seeking you at this time of night!'

His brother laughed easily as he reseated himself and drew the tumbler nearer to his elbow.

'That's all you know, Robert,' he said; 'why, they come all the way to Cairn Edward after me if their little finger aches, let alone over here. I daresay some of the brats have got the mumps, and the mother saw me as I drove past. No, indeed — she and they must just wait till I get through my business at Whinnyliggate!'

'I ask you, Henry,' said his brother eagerly, 'do this for my sake; it is not often that I ask you anything — nor will I have long time now wherein to ask!'

'Well,' grumbled the young doctor, rising and finishing the toddy as he stood, 'I suppose I must, if you make a point of it. But I will just look in at Whinnyliggate on my way across. Barmark is a good two miles on my way home!'

'Thank you, Henry,' said Robert Fraser, 'I will not forget this kindness to me!'

With a brusque nod Dr. Henry Fraser strode out through the kitchen, among whose merry groups his comings and goings always created a certain hush of awe. In a few minutes more we could hear the clear clatter of the horse's shod feet on the hard 'macadam' as he turned out of the soft sandy loaning into the main road.

The Stickit Minister sank back into his chair.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Thank God!' he said, with a quick intake of breath almost like a sob.

I looked down at him in surprise.

'Robert, why are you so troubled about this woman's bairns?' I asked.

He did not answer for a while, lying fallen in upon himself in his great armchair of worn horsehair, as if the strain had been too great for his weak body. When he did reply it was in a curiously far-away voice like a man speaking in a dream.

'They are Jessie Loudon's bairns,' he said, 'and a' the comfort she has in life!'

I sat down on the hearthrug beside him — a habit I had when we were alone together. It was thus that I used to read Homer and Horace to him in the long winter forenights, and wrangle for happy hours over a construction or the turning of a phrase in the translation. So now I simply sat and was silent, touching his knee lightly with my shoulder. I knew that in time he would tell me all he wished me to hear. The old eight-day clock in the corner (with 'John Grey, Kilmaurs, 1791' in italics across the brass face of it), ticked on interminably through ten minutes, and I heard the feet of the men come in from suppering the horse, before Robert said another word. Then he spoke: 'Alec,' he said, very quietly — he could hardly say or do anything otherwise (or rather I thought so before that night) — 'I have this on my spirit—it is heavy like a load. When I broke it to Jessie Loudon that I could never marry her, as I told you, I did not tell you that she took it hard and high, speaking bitter words that are best forgotten. And then in a week or two she married Gib Barbour, a good-for-nothing, good-

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

looking young ploughman, a great don at parish dances — no meet mate for her. And that I count the heaviest part of my punishment.

‘And since that day I have not passed word or salutation with Jessie Loudon — that is, with Jessie Barbour. But on a Sabbath day, just before I was laid down last year — a bonnie day in June — I met her as I passed through a bourock fresh with the gowden broom, and the 'shilfies' and Jennie Wrens singing on every brier. I had been lookin' for a sheep that had broken bounds. And there she sat wi' a youngling on ilka knee. There passed but ae blink o' the e'en between us — ane and nae mair. But oh, Alec, as I am a sinful man — married wife though she was, I kenned that she loved me, and she kenned that I loved her wi' the love that has nae ending!’

There was a long pause here, and the clock struck with a long preparatory g-r-r-r, as if it were clearing its throat in order to apologise for the coming interruption.

‘And that,’ said Robert Eraser, ‘was the reason why Jessie Loudon would not come up to the Dullarg this nicht — no, not even for her bairns' sake!’

2. THE STICKIT MINISTER WINS THROUGH

Yet Jessie Loudon did come to the Dullarg that night — and that for her children's sake.

Strangely enough, in writing of an evening so fruitful in incident, I cannot for the life of me remember what happened during the next two hours. The lads and lasses came in for the 'Taking of the Book.' So much I do recall. But that was an exercise never omitted on any pretext in the house of the ex-divinity student. I remember this also, because after the brief prelude of the psalm-singing (it was the 103rd), the Stickit Minister pushed the Bible across to me, open at the thirty-eighth chapter of Job. The envelope was still there. Though it was turned sideways I could see the faintly written address:

MR. ROBERT FRASER,
Student in Divinity,
60, St. Leonard's Street, Edinburgh.

Even as I looked I seemed to hear again the woman's voice in the dark loaning — 'I canna gang in there,' and in a lightning flash of illumination it came to me what the answer to that letter had meant to Jessie Loudon, and the knowledge somehow made me older and sadder.

Then with a shaking voice I read the mighty words before me: 'When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' . . . But when I came to the verse which says: 'Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?' I saw the Stickit Minister nod his head three times very

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

slightly, and a strange subtle smile came over his face as though he could have answered, 'Yea, Lord, verily I have seen them—they have been opened to me!'

And as the lads and lasses filed out in a kind of wondering silence after Robert Fraser had prayed — not kneeling down, but sitting erect in his chair and looking out before him with wide-open eyes — we in the little sitting-room became conscious of a low knocking, persistent and remote, somewhere about the house of Dullarg. We could hear Bell Gregory open and then immediately close the kitchen door, having evidently found no one there. The knocking still continued.

'I believe it is somebody at the front door,' I said, turning in that direction.

And then the Stickit Minister cried out in a curious excited voice: 'Open to them — open, Alec! Quick, man!'

And his voice went through me with a kind of thrill, for I knew not who it was he expected to enter, whether sheriff's officer or angry creditor — or as it might be the Angel of the Presence Himself come to summon his soul to follow.

Nevertheless, with quaking heart enough, and resolving in future to be a more religious man, I made bold to undo the door.

The woman I had seen in the lane stood before me, as it were, projected out of the dense darkness behind, her shawl fallen back from her face, and her features all pale and changeful in the flicker of the candle I had snatched up to take with me into the little hall. For the front door was only used on state occasions, as when the parish minister came to call,

and at funerals.

'He has not come — and the bairns are dying! So I had to come back!' she cried, more hoarsely and breathlessly than I had ever heard woman speak. But her eyes fairly blazed and her lips were parted wide for my answer.

'Dr. Fraser left here more than an hour ago,' I stammered. 'Has he not been to see the children?'

'No — no, I tell you, no. And they are choking — dying — it is the trouble in the throat. They will die if he does not come.'

I heard a noise behind me, and the next moment I found myself put aside like a child, and Robert Fraser stood face to face with her that had been Jessie Loudon.

'Come in,' he said. And when she drew back from him with a kind of shudder, and felt uncertainly for her shawl, he stepped aside and motioned her to enter with a certain large and commanding gesture I had never seen him use before. And as if accustomed to obey, the woman came slowly within the lighted room. Even then, however, she would not sit down, but stood facing us both, a girl prematurely old, her lips nearly as pale as her worn cheeks, her blown hair disordered and wispy about her forehead, and only the dark and tragic flashing of her splendid eyes telling of a bygone beauty.

The Stickit Minister stood up also, and as he leaned his hand upon the table, I noticed that he gently shut the Bible which I had left open, that the woman's eye might not fall upon the faded envelope which marked the thirty-eighth of Job.

'Do I understand you to say,' he began, in a voice clear, resonant, and full, not at all the voice of a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

stricken man, 'that my brother has not yet visited your children?'

'He had not come when I ran out — they are much worse — dying, I think!' she answered, also in another voice and another mode of speech — yet a little stiffly, as if the more correct method had grown unfamiliar by disuse.

For almost the only time in his life I saw a look, stem and hard, come over the countenance of the Stickit Minister.

'Go home, Jessie,' he said; 'I will see that he is there as fast as horses can bring him!'

She hesitated a moment.

'Is he not here?' she faltered. 'Oh, tell me if he is — I meant to fetch him back. I dare not go back without him!'

The Stickit Minister went to the door with firm step, the woman following without question or argument.

'Fear not, but go, Jessie,' he said; 'my brother is not here, but he will be at the bairns' bedside almost as soon as you. I promise you.'

'Thank you, Robin,' she stammered, adjusting the shawl over her head and instantly disappearing into the darkness. The old sweetheating name had risen unconsciously to her lips in the hour of her utmost need. I think neither of them noticed it.

'And now help me on with my coat,' said Robert Fraser, turning to me. 'I am going over to the village.'

'You must not,' I cried, taking him by the arm; 'let me go — let me put in the pony; I will be there in ten minutes!'

'I have no pony now,' he said gently and a little sadly, 'I have no need of one. And besides, the

quickest way is across the fields.'

It was true. The nearest way to the village, by a great deal, was by a narrow foot-track that wound across the meadows. But, fearing for his life, I still tried to prevent him.

'It will be your death!' I said, endeavouring to keep him back. 'Let me go alone!'

'If Henry is where I fear he is,' he answered, calmly, 'he would not stir for you. But he will for me. And besides, I have passed my word to — to Jessie!'

The details of that terrible night journey I will not enter upon. It is sufficient to say that I bade him lean on me, and go slowly, but do what I would, I could not keep him back. Indeed, he went faster than I could accompany him — for, in order to support him a little, I had to walk unevenly along the ragged edges of the little field-path. All was dark gray above, beneath, and to the right of us. Only on the left hand a rough whinstone dyke stood up solidly black against the monotone of the sky. The wind came in cold swirls, with now and then a fleck of snow that stung the face like hail. I had insisted on the Stickit Minister taking his plaid about him in addition to his overcoat, and the ends of it flicking into my eyes increased the difficulty.

I have hardly ever been so thankful in my life, as when at last I saw the lights of the village gleam across the little bridge, as we emerged from the water-meadows and felt our feet firm themselves on the turnpike road.

From that point the Stickit Minister went faster than ever. Indeed, he rushed forward, in spite of my restraining arm, with some remaining flicker of the vigour which in youth had made him first on the

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

hillside at the foxhunt and first on the haystacks upon the great day of the inbringing of the winter's fodder.

It seemed hardly a moment before we were at the door of the inn — the Red Lion the name of it, at that time in the possession of one 'Jeems' Carter. Yes, Henry Fraser was there. His horse was tethered to an iron ring which was fixed in the whitewashed wall, and his voice could be heard at that very moment leading a rollicking chorus. Then I remembered. It was a 'Cronies' night. This was a kind of informal club recruited from the more jovial of the younger horsebreeding farmers of the neighbourhood. It included the local 'vet,' a bonnet laird or two grown lonesome and thirsty by prolonged residence upon the edges of the hills, and was on all occasions proud and glad to welcome a guest so distinguished and popular as the young doctor of Cairn Edward.

'Loose the beast and be ready to hand me the reins when I come out!' commanded the Stickit Minister, squaring his stooped shoulders like the leader of a forlorn hope.

So thus it happened that I did not see with my own eyes what happened when Robert Fraser opened the door of the 'Cronies' club-room. But I have heard it so often recounted that I know as well as if I had seen. It was the Laird of Butterhole who told me, and he always said that it made a sober man of him from that day forth. It was (he said) like Lazarus looking out of the sepulchre after they had rolled away the stone.

Suddenly in the midst of their jovial chorus someone said 'Hush!' — some one of themselves —

and instinctively all turned towards the door.

And lo! there in the doorway, framed in the outer dark, his broad blue bonnet in his hand, his checked plaid waving back from his shoulders, stood a man, pale as if he had come to them up through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. With a hand white as bone, he beckoned to his brother, who stood with his hands on the table smiling and swaying a little with tipsy gravity.

'Why, Robert, what are you doing here?' he was beginning. But the Stickit Minister broke in.

'Come!' he said, sternly and coldly, 'the children you have neglected are dying — if they die through your carelessness you will be their murderer!'

And to the surprise of all, the tall and florid younger brother quailed before the eye of this austere shade.

'Yes, I will come, Robert — I was coming in a moment anyway!'

And so the Stickit Minister led him out. There was no great merriment after that in the 'Cronies' club that night. The members conferred chiefly in whispers, and presently emptying their glasses, they stole away home.

But no mortal knows what Robert Fraser said to his brother during that drive — something mightily sobering at all events. For when the two reached the small cluster of cothouses lying under the lee of Barmark wood, the young man, though not trusting himself to articulate speech, and somewhat over-tremulous of hand, was yet in other respects completely master of himself. I was not present at the arrival, just as I had not seen the startling apparition which broke up the 'Cronies' club. The

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

doctor's gig held only two, and as soon as I handed Robert Fraser the reins, the beast sprang forward. But I was limber and a good runner in those days, and though the gray did his best I was not far behind.

There is no ceremony at such a house in time of sickness. The door stood open to the wall. A bright light streamed through and revealed the inequalities of the little apron of causewayed cobblestones. I entered and saw Henry Fraser bending over a bed on which a bairn was lying. Robert held a candle at his elbow. The mother paced restlessly to and fro with another child in her arms. I could see the doctor touch again and again the back of the little girl's throat with a brush which he continually replenished from a phial in his left hand.

Upon the other side of the hearthstone from the child's bed a strong country lout sat, sullenly 'becking' his darned stocking feet at the clear embers of the fire. Then the mother laid the first child on the opposite bed, and turned to where the doctor was still operating.

Suddenly Henry Fraser stood erect. There was not a trace of dissipation about him now. The tradition of his guild was as a mantle of dignity about him.

'It is all right,' he said as he took his brother's hand in a long clasp. 'Thank you, Robert, thank you a thousand times — that you brought me here in time!'

'Nay, rather, thank God!' said Robert Fraser, solemnly.

And even as he stood there the Stickit Minister swayed sidelong, but the next moment he had recovered himself with a hand on the bed-post. Then

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

very swiftly he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and set it to his lips.

His brother and I went toward him with a quick apprehension. But the Stickit Minister turned from us both to the woman, who took two swift steps towards him with her arms outstretched, and such a yearning of love on her face as I never saw before or since. The sullen lout by the fire drowsed on unheeding.

‘Jessie!’ cried the Stickit Minister, and with that fell into her arms. She held him there a long moment as it had been jealously, her head bent down upon his. Then she delivered him up to me slowly and reluctantly.

Henry Fraser put his hand on his heart and gave a great sob.

‘My brother is dead!’ he said.

But Jessie Loudon did not utter a word.

3. GIBBY THE EEL, STUDENT IN DIVINITY

(These studies I wrote down during certain winters, when, to please my mother, I made a futile attempt to prepare myself 'to wag my head in a pulpit.' Saving a certain prolixity of statement (which the ill-affected call long-windedness), they were all I carried away with me when I resolved to devote myself to the medical profession.— A. McQ.)

Naturalists have often remarked how little resemblance there is between the young of certain animals and the adult specimen. Yonder tottering quadrangular arrangement of chewed string, remotely and inadequately connected at the upper corners, is certainly the young of the horse. But it does not even remotely suggest the war-horse sniffing up the battle from afar. This irregular yellow ball of feathers, with the steel-blue mask set beneath its half-opened eyelids, is most ridiculously unlike the magnificent eagle, which (in books) stares unblinded into the very eye of the noonday sun.

In like manner the young of the learned professions are by no means like the full-fledged expert of the mysteries. If in such cases the child is the father of the man, the parentage is by no means apparent.

To how many medical students would you willingly entrust the application of one square inch of sticking-plaster to a cut finger, or the care of a half-guinea umbrella? What surgeon would you not, in an emergency, trust with all you hold dear? You

may cherish preferences and even prejudices, but as a whole the repute of the profession is above cavil.

There is, perhaps, more continuity above the legal profession, but even there it is a notable fact that the older and more successful a lawyer is, the more modest you find him, and the more diffident of his own infallibility. Indeed, several of the most eminent judges are in this matter quite as other men.

But of all others, the divinity student is perhaps the most misunderstood. He is wilfully misrepresented by those who ought to know him best. Nay, he misrepresents himself, and when he doffs tweeds and takes to collars which fasten behind and a long-skirted clerical coat, he is apt to disown his past self; and often succeeds in persuading himself that as he is now, diligent, sedate, zealous of good works, so was he ever.

Only sometimes, when he has got his Sunday sermons off his mind and two or three of the augurs are gathered together, will the adult clerk in holy orders venture to lift the veil and chew the cud of ancient jest and prank not wholly sanctified.

Now there ought to be room, in a gallery which contains so many portraits of ministers, for one or two Students of Divinity, faithfully portrayed.

And of these the first and chief is Mr. Gilbert Denholm, Master of Arts, Scholar in Theology — to his class-fellows more colloquially and generally known as ‘Gibby the Eel.’

At college we all loved Gilbert He was a merry-hearted youth, and his mere bodily presence was enough to make glad the countenances of his friends. His father was a minister in the West with a large family to bring up, which he effected with

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

success upon a stipend of surprising tenuity. So it behoved Gilbert to keep himself at college by means of scholarships and private tuition. His pupils had a lively time of it.

Yet his only fault obvious to the world was a certain light-headed but winsome gaiety, and a tendency to jokes of the practical kind. I used often to restrain Gilbert's ardour by telling him that if he did not behave himself and walk more seemly, he would get his bursary taken from him by the Senatus.

This would recall Gilbert to himself when almost everything else had failed.

Part of Gilbert's personal equipment was the certain lithe slimness of figure which gained him the title of 'Gibby the Eel,' and enabled him to practise many amusing pranks in the class-room. He would have made an exceptionally fine burglar, for few holes were too small and no window too secure for Gilbert to make his exits and entrances by. Without going so far as to say that he could wriggle himself through an ordinary keyhole, I will affirm that if anybody ever could, that person was Gilbert Denholm.

One of the most ordinary of his habits was that of wandering here and there throughout the class-room during the hour of lecture, presuming upon the professor's purblindness or lack of attention. You would be sitting calmly writing a letter, drawing caricatures in your note-book, or otherwise improving your mind with the most laudable imitation of attention, when suddenly, out of the black and dusty depths about your feet would arise the startling apparition of Gibby the Eel. He would

nod, casually inquire how you found yourself this morning, and inform you that he only dropped in on his way up to Bench Seventeen to see Balhaldie, who owed him a shilling.

'Well, so long!' Again he would nod pleasantly, and sink into the unknown abyss beneath the benches as noiselessly and unobtrusively as a smile fades from a face.

Sometimes, however, when in wanton mood, his progress Balhaldiewards could be guessed at by the chain of 'Ouchs' and 'Ohs' which indicated his subterranean career. The suddenness with which Gilbert could awaken to lively interest the most somnolent and indifferent student, by means of a long brass pin in the calf of the leg, had to be felt to be appreciated. Thereupon ensued the sound of vigorous kicking, but generally by the time the injured got the range of his unseen foe, Gilbert could be observed two or three forms above intently studying a Greek Testament wrong side up, and looking the picture of meek reproachful innocence.

In no class could Gilbert use so much freedom of errancy as in that of the venerable Professor Galbraith. Every afternoon this fine old gentleman undertook to direct our studies in New Testament exegesis, and incidentally afforded his students an hour of undisturbed repose after the more exciting labours of the day.

No one who ever studied under Doctor Simeon Galbraith will forget that gentle droning voice overhead, that full-orbed moon-like countenance, over which two smaller moons of beamy spectacle seemed to be in perpetual transit, and in especial he will remember that blessed word 'Hermeneutics,' of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

which (it is said) there was once one student who could remember the meaning. He died young, much respected by all who knew him.

Dreamily the great word came to you, soothing and grateful as mother's lullaby, recurrent as the wash of a quiet sea upon a beach of softest sand. 'Gentlemen. I will now proceed to call your attention ... to the study of Hermeneutics . . . Hermeneut . . . Gegenhauer has affirmed . . . but in my opeenion, gentlemen . . . Hermeneutics . . . !' (Here you passed from the subconscious state into Nirvana.)

And so on, and so on, till the college bell clanged in the quadrangle, and it was time to file out for a wash and brush-up before dinner in hall.

Upon one afternoon every week, Professor Galbraith read with his students the 'Greek Oreginal.' He prescribed half-a-dozen chapters of 'Romans' or 'Hebrews,' and expected us to prepare them carefully. I verily believe that he imagined we did. This shows what a sanguine and amiable old gentleman he was. The beamy spectacle belied him not.

The fact was that we stumbled through our portions by the light of nature, aided considerably by a class copy of an ingenious work known by the name of 'Bagster,' in which every Greek word had the English equivalent marked in plain figures underneath, and all the verbs fully parsed at the foot of the page.

The use of this was not considered wicked, because, like the early Christians, in Professor Galbraith's class we had all things common. This was our one point of resemblance to the primitive Church.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

One day the Doctor, peering over his brown leather folio, discerned the meek face and beaming smile of Gilbert the Eel in the centre of Bench One, immediately beneath him.

‘Ah! Mr. Denholm will you read for us this morning — beginning at the 29th verse — of the chapter under consideration?’

And he subsided expectantly into his lecture.

Up rose Gilbert, signalling wildly with one hand for the class ‘Bagster’ to be passed to him, and meantime grasping at the first Testament he could see about him. By the time he had read the Greek of half-a-dozen verses, the sharpness of the trouble was overpast. He held in his hands the Key of Knowledge, and translated and parsed like a Cunningham Fellow — or any other fellow.

‘Vairy well, Mr. Denholm; vary well indeed. You may now sit down while I proceed to expound the passage!’

Whereupon Gibby the Eel ungratefully pitched the faithful ‘Bagster’ on the bench and disappeared under the same himself on a visit to Nicholson McFeat, who sat in the middle of the class-room.

For five minutes — ten — fifteen, the gentle voice droned on from the rostrum, the word ‘Hermeneutics’ discharging itself at intervals with the pleasing gurgle of an intermittent spring. Then the Professor returned suddenly to his Greek Testament.

‘Mr. Denholm, you construed vary well last time. Be good enough to continue at the place you left off. Mr. Denholm — where is Mister — Mister Den — holm?’

And the moon-like countenance rose from its

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

eclipse behind six volumes of Owen (folio edition), while the two smaller moons in permanent transit directed themselves upon the vacant place in Bench One, from which Gibby the Eel had construed so glibly with the efficient aid of 'Bagster.'

'Mister — Mist — er Denholm?'

The Professor knew that he was absent-minded, but (if the expression be allowable) he could have sworn

'I am here, sir!'

Gibby the Eel, a little shamefaced and rumpled as to hair, was standing plump in the very middle of the class-room, in the place where he had been endeavouring to persuade Nick McFeat to lend him his dress clothes 'to go to a conversazione in,' which request Nick cruelly persisted in refusing, alleging first, that he needed the garments himself, and secondly, that the Eel desired to go to no 'conversazione,' but contrariwise to take a certain Madge Robertson to the theatre.

At this moment the fateful voice of the Professor broke in upon them just as they were rising to the height of their great argument.

'Mister — Den — holm, will you go on where you left off?'

Gibby rose, signalling wildly for 'Bagster,' and endeavouring to look as if he had been a plant of grace rooted and grounded on that very spot. Professor Galbraith gazed at Gibby in situ, then at the place formerly occupied by him, tried hard to orient the matter in his head, gave it up, and bade the translation proceed.

But 'Bagster' came not, and Gilbert did not distinguish himself this time. Indeed, far from it.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Will you parse the first verb, Mr. Denholm — no, not that word! That has usually been considered a substantive, Mr. Denholm — the next word, ah, yes!'

The first aorist, active of— *confound you fellows, Where's that 'Bagster?'* I call it dashed mean — yes, sir, it is connected with the former clause by the particle — have you not found that book yet? Oh, you beasts!

(The italics, it is hardly necessary to say, were also spoken in italics, and were not an integral part of Gibby's examination as it reached the ear of Professor Galbraith.)

'Ah, that will do, Mr. Denholm — not so well — not quite so well, sir — yet,' (kindly) 'not so vary ill either.'

And Gilbert sat down to resume the discussion of the dress clothes. By this time, of course, he considered himself quite safe from further molestation. The Professor had never been known to call up a man thrice in one day. So, finding Nick McFeat obdurate in the matter of the dress suit, Gilbert announced his intention of visiting Kenneth Kennedy, who, he said pointedly, was not a selfish and unclean animal of the kind abhorred by Jews, but, contrariwise, a gentleman — one who would lend dress clothes for the asking. And Kennedy's were better clothes, anyway, and had silk linings. Furthermore, Nick need not think it, he (Mr. Gilbert Denholm) would not demean himself to put on his (Mr. McFeat's) dirty 'blacks,' which had been feloniously filched from a last year's scarecrow that had been left out all the winter. And furthermore, he (the said Gilbert) would take Madge Robertson to the theatre in spite of him, and what was more, cut Nick

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

McFeat out as clean as a leek.

At this the latter laughed scornfully, affirming that the grapes had a faintly sub-acid flavour, and bade Gibby go his way.

Gibby went, tortuously and subterraneously worming his way to the highest seats in the synagogue, where Kenneth Kennedy, M.A., reposed at full length upon a vacant seat, having artistically bent a Highland cloak over a walking-stick to represent scholastic meditation, if perchance the kindly spectacle of the Professor should turn in his direction. Gibby gazed rapturously on his friend's sleep, contemplating him, as once in the Latmian cave Diana gazed upon Endymion. He was proceeding to ink his friend's face preparatory to upsetting him on the floor, when he remembered the dress suit just in time to desist.

'Eel, you are a most infamous pest — can't you let a fellow alone? What in the world do you want now?'

Whereupon, with countenance of triple brass, Gibby entered into the question of the dress suit with subtlety and tact. There never was so good a chap as Kennedy, never one so generous. He (G.D.) would do as much for him again, and he would bring it back the next day, pressed by a tailor.

Kennedy, however, was not quite so enthusiastic. There are several points of view in matters of this kind. Kenneth Kennedy did not, of course, care 'a dump' about Madge Robertson; but he had the best interests of his silk-lined dress coat at heart.

'That's all very well, Eel,' he said, raising himself reluctantly to the perpendicular; 'but you know as well as I do that the last time I lent it to you, you let some wax drop on the waistcoat, right on the

pocket, and I have never been able to get it out since.'

Suddenly the pair became conscious that the gentle hum of exegetical divinity from the rostrum had ceased. The word 'Hermeneutics' no longer soothed and punctuated their converse at intervals of five minutes, like the look-out's 'All's well' on a ship at sea.

'Ah, Mis — ter Den — holm, perhaps you have recovered yourself by this time. Be good enough to continue where you left off — Mis — ter Den — holm — Mister Denholm — where in the world is Mr. Denholm?'

The spectacles were hardly beaming now. A certain shrewd suspicion mixed with the wonder in their expression, as Dr. Galbraith gazed from the Eel's position One to position Two, and back again to position One. Both were empty as the cloudless empyrean. His wonder culminated when Gilbert was finally discovered in position Three, high on the skyline of Bench Twenty-four!

How Gilbert acquitted himself on this occasion it is perhaps better not to relate. I will draw a kindly veil over the lamentable tragedy. It is sufficient to say that he lost his head completely — as completely even as the aforesaid Miss Madge Robertson could have wished.

And all through the disastrous exhibition the Professor did not withdraw his gaze from the wretched Eel, but continued to rebuke him, as it seemed, for the astral and insubstantial nature of his body.

No better proof can be adduced that the Eel had become temporarily deranged, than the fact that

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

even now, when it was obvious that the long-latent suspicions of the Gentle Hermeneut were at last aroused, he refused to abide in his breaches; but, scorning all entreaty, and even Kennedy's unconditioned promise of the dress suit, he proceeded to crawl down the gallery steps in order to regain position Number One in the front seat under the Professor's very nose.

Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.

Meanwhile the class, at first raised to a state of ecstatic enjoyment by the Eel's misfortunes, then growing a little anxious lest he should go too far, was again subsiding to its wonted peaceful hum, like that of a vast and well-contented bumblebee.

Suddenly we became aware that the Professor was on his feet in the midst of a stern and awful silence.

'My eye has fallen,' he began solemnly, 'on what I do not expect to see. I hope the — gentleman will remember where he is — and who I am!'

During the pronouncement of this awful allocution the professorial arm was extended, and a finger, steady as the finger of Fate, pointed directly at the unhappy Gibby, who, prone in the dust, appeared to be meditating a discourse upon the text, - 'I am a worm and no man!'

His head was almost on the level of the floor and his limbs extended far up the gallery stairs. To say that his face was fiery red gives but a faint idea of its colour, while a black streak upon his nose proved that the charwomen of the college were not a whit more diligent than the students thereof.

What happened after this is a kind of maze. I suppose that Gibby regained a seat somewhere, and

that the lecture proceeded after a fashion; but I do not know for certain. Bursts of unholy mirth forced their way through the best linen handkerchiefs, rolled hard and used as gags.

But there grew up a feeling among many that though doubtless there was humour in the case, the Eel had gone a little too far, and if Professor Galbraith were genuinely angered he might bring the matter before the Senatus, with the result that Gilbert would not only lose his bursary, but be sent down as well, to his father's sorrow and his own loss.

So when the class was at last over, half-a-dozen of us gathered round Gibby and represented to him that he must go at once to the retiring-room and ask the Professor's pardon.

At first and for long the Eel was recalcitrant. He would not go. What was he to say? We instructed him. We used argument, appeal, persuasion. We threatened torture. Finally, yielding to those heavier battalions on the side of which Providence is said to fight, Gibby was led to the door with a captor at each elbow. We knocked; he entered. The door was shut behind him, but not wholly. Half-a-dozen ears lined the crack at intervals, like limpets clinging to a smooth streak on a tidal rock. We could not hear the Eel's words. Only a vague murmur reached us, and I doubt if much more reached Professor Galbraith. The Eel stopped and there was a pause. We feared its ill omen.

'Poor Eel, the old man's going to report him!' we whispered to each other.

And then we heard the words of the Angelical Scholiast.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Shake hands, Mr. Denholm. If, as ye say, this has been a lesson to you, it has been no less a lesson to me. Let us both endeavour to profit by it, unto greater diligence and seemliness in our walk and conversation. We will say no more about the matter, if you please, Mr. Denholm.'

We cheered the old man as he went out, till he waved a kindly and tolerant hand back at us, and there was more than a gleam of humour in the kindly spectacles, as if our gentle Hermeneut were neither so blind nor yet so dull in the uptake as we had been accustomed to think him.

As for the Eel, he became a man from that day, and, to a limited extent, put away childish things — though his heart will remain ever young and fresh. His story is another story, and so far as this little study gees it is enough to say that when at last the aged Professor of Hermeneutics passed to the region where all things are to be finally explicated, it was Gilbert Denholm who got up the memorial to his memory, which was subscribed to by every student without exception he had ever had. And it was he who wrote Dr. Galbraith's epitaph, of which the last line runs:

'GENTLE, A PEACE-MAKER, A LOVER OF GOOD AND OF GOD.'

4. DOCTOR GIRNIGO'S ASSISTANT

'Off, ye lendings!' said Gibby the Eel to his heather-mixture knickerbocker suit, on the day when his Presbytery of Muirlands licensed him to preach the gospel.

And within the self-same hour the Reverend Gilbert Denholm, M.A., Probationer, in correct ministerial garb, had the honour of dining with the Presbytery, and of witnessing the remarkable transformation which overtakes that august body as soon as it dips its collective spoon in the official soup.

I knew a Presbytery once which tried to lunch on cold coffee and new bread. The survivors unanimously took to drink.

But the Presbytery of Muirlands were sage fathers and brethren, and they knew better than that. They dined together in a reasonable manner at the principal inn of the place. An enthusiast, who suggested that they should transfer their custom to the new Temperance Hotel up near the railway station, was asked if he had sent in his returns on Life and Work — and otherwise severely dealt with.

Gilbert had been remitted to the Presbytery of Muirlands from his own West Country one of Burnestown, because he had been appointed assistant to the Reverend Doctor Girnigo of Rescobie; and it was considered more satisfactory that the Presbytery within whose bounds he was to

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

labour, should examine him concerning his diligence and zeal.

So they asked him all the old posers which had made the teeth of former examinees of the Presbytery of Muirlands chatter in their heads. But the Eel's teeth did not chatter. He had got a rough list from a friend who had been that way before, and so passed the bar with flying colours. The modest way in which the new brother (unattached) behaved himself at dinner completed Gibby's conquest of the Brethren — with the single but somewhat important exception of the Reverend Doctor Joseph Girnigo of Rescobie, Gilbert's future chief.

It was the cross of Dr. Girnigo's life that his Session compelled him to engage an assistant. Dr. Girnigo felt that here were three hundred pieces of silver (or more accurately, £60 sterling) which ought to have been given to the poor — that is, to the right breeches' pocket of Joseph Girnigo — instead of being squandered in providing such a thorn in the flesh within the parish as a licensed assistant.

Dr. Girnigo was in the habit of saying, whenever he had made it too hot for his acting assistant, that he would rather look after three parishes than one probationer. At first the engaging and dismissal of these unfortunate young men had been placed unreservedly in the Doctor's hands; but as the affair assumed more and more the appearance and proportions of a mere procession to and from the railway station, the members of Session were compelled to assume the responsibility themselves. So long as the Doctor's sway continued unchallenged, the new assistant usually arrived in Nether Balhaldie's 'machine' on Saturday night, and

departed on Tuesday morning very early in the gig belonging to Upper Balhaldie. He preached on Sabbath, and Monday was spent in Dr. Girnigo's study, where it was explained to him: first, that he knew nothing; secondly, that what he thought he knew was worse than nothing; thirdly, that there is nothing more hateful than a vain pretence of earthly learning; and fourthly, that Paul and Silas knew nothing of 'Creeticism.' No, they were better employed — aye, and it would be telling the young men of the day — the conclusion of the whole matter being that the present victim would never do at all for the parish of Rescobie and had better go.

He went, in Upper Balhaldie's gig, and Watty Learmont, the tenant thereof, who could be trusted to know, said that the rejected probationers very seldom engaged in prayer (to call prayer) on the road to the station. I do not know what Watty meant to insinuate, but that is what he said. He had that mode of speech to perfection which consists in saying one thing and giving the impression that the speaker means another.

But it was felt that this was a state of affairs which could not continue. It amounted, indeed, to nothing less than a scandal that the Session should be paying £60 for an assistant, and that at the end of the year eight of these should only have spent exactly twenty-seven days in the parish, while the remaining three hundred and thirty-eight days had been occupied by the Doctor in filling the vacancies he had himself created. Besides, since he always insisted on a week's trial without salary when he engaged his man (in order, as he said, to discover where there was a likelihood of the parties being

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

mutually satisfied), the shrewd business men of the Session saw more than a probability of their good and hardly gathered sixty 'notes' still remaining intact in the possession of their minister.

It was, however, the affair of the prayer-meeting which brought the matter to a head. For after all, such hard-headed bargain-makers as Learmont, Senior of Balhaldie, and his coadjutors on the Session, could not help having a sort of respect for the Doctor's business qualities. But they could not bear to be made a laughing stock of in the market of Drumfern.

'What's this I hear aboot your new helper's prayer-meetin' up at Rescobie?' Cochrane of Tatierigs cried one Wednesday across the mart ring to Upper Balhaldie. 'Is't true that that minister o' yours broke it up wi' a horse-whup?'

No, it was not true. But there was enough of truth in it to make the members of Rescobie Session nervous of public appearances for a long time, indeed till the affair was forgotten.

The truth was that during the Doctor's absence at the house of his married son in Drumfern, Mr. Killigrew, a soft-voiced young man, who, being exceedingly meek, had been left in charge of the parish, thought it would be a surprise for his chief if he started a prayer-meeting on Wednesday evenings in the village schoolhouse. He pictured to himself his principal's delight when he should hand over the new departure as a going concern. So he made a house-to-house visitation of Rescobie village and neighbourhood, this young man with the soft voice. The popular appeal was favourable. He went round and saw the school-mistress. She was fond of young

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

men with soft voices (and hats). She readily consented to lend her harmonium, and to lead the singing from a certain popular hymn-book.

The first meeting was an unqualified success, and the young man promptly began a series of rousing addresses on the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' There were to be thirty in all. But alas for the vanity of human schemes, the second address (on the Slough of Despond) was scarcely under way when, like an avenging host, or Cromwell entering the Long Parliament, the Doctor strode into the midst, booted and spurred, as he had ridden over all the way from Drumfern. He had a riding-whip in his hand, which was the foundation of the Tatierigs story, but there is no record that he used it on any in the meeting.

The services closed without the benediction, and as the Doctor wrathfully clicked the key in the lock, he said that he would see the school-mistress in the morning.

Then he turned to the young man in the soft hat. The remains left Rescobie early next morning in Upper Balhaldie's gig.

Since this date it was enough to call out to a Rescobie man, 'Ony mair Pilgrims up your way?' in order to have him set his dogs on you or wrathfully bring down his herd's crook upon your crown.

Being thus stirred to action, the Session wrestled with Dr. Girnigo, and prevailing by the unanswerable argument of the purse-strings, it took the appointment and dismissal of the 'helpers' into its own hands.

So Dr. Girnigo had to try other tactics. Usually he gave the unfortunate 'helper' delivered into his hands no peace night or day, till in despair he threw

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

up his appointment, and shook the Rescobie dust off the soles of his feet.

First (under the new regime) came Alexander Fairbody, a thoughtful, studious lad, whom the Doctor set to digging top-dressing into his garden till his hands were blistered. He would not allow him to preach, and as to praying, if he wanted to do that he could go to his bedroom. So Mr. Fairbody endured hardness for ten days, and then resigned in a written communication, alleging as a reason that he had come to Rescobie to work in a spiritual and not in a material vineyard. The Doctor burked the document, and the Reverend Robert Begg reigned in the stead of Alexander Fairbody, resigned for cause.

Mr. Begg was athletic. Him Dr. Girnigo set to the work of arranging his old sermons, seven barrels full. He was to catalogue them under eighteen heads, and be prepared to give his reasons in every case. The first three classes were — 'Sermons Enforcing the Duty of Respect for Ecclesiastical Superiors,' 'Sermons upon Christian Giving,' and 'Sermons Inculcating Humility in the Young.' The Reverend Robert Begg would have enjoyed the digging of the garden. He stood just one full week of the sermon-arranging. He declared that sixteen of the eighteen classes were cross divisions, and that the task of looking through the written matter permanently enfeebled his intellect. Sympathetic friends consoled him with the reflection that nobody would ever find out.

On the second Wednesday after his appointment he departed, uttering sentiments which were a perfect guarantee of good faith (but which were manifestly not for publication) to Watty Learmont as

he journeyed to the railway station in the Upper Balhaldie gig.

A new sun rose upon Rescobie with the coming of Gibby the Eel. He had known both of his predecessors at college, and he had pumped them thoroughly upon the life and doctrine of their former chief. In addition to which Gilbert had taken to him a suit of tweeds and a fishing-rod, and with a piece of bread and cheese in his pocket, and guile in his heart, he had gone up the Rescobie water, asking for drinks at the farmhouses on the way, much as he used to perambulate Professor Galbraith's classroom in his old, abandoned, unregenerate, sans-dog-collar days.

Hitherto the helper, a mere transient bird-of-passage, had lodged with Mistress Honeytongue, the wife of Hosea Honeytongue, the beadle and minister's man of Rescobie. This brought the youth, as it were, under the shadow of the manse, and what was more to the point, under the eye of the minister. But Gilbert Denholm had other aims.

He took rooms in the village, quite three-quarters of a mile from the manse, with one Mrs. Tennant, the widow of a medical man in the neighbourhood who had died without making adequate provision for his family. She had never taken a lodger before, but since his investiture in clericals the Eel had filled out to a handsome figure, and he certainly smiled a most irresistible smile as he stood on the doorstep.

Gilbert arrived late one Friday night in Rescobie, and speculation was rife in the parish as to whether he would preach on Sabbath or not. Most were of the negative opinion, but Watty Learmont, for reasons of his own, offered to wager a new hat that

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

he would.

On Saturday morning Gilbert put on his longest tails and his doggiest collar and marched boldly up to the front door of the manse, with the general air of playing himself along the road upon war pipes. Perhaps, however, he was only whistling silently to keep his courage up.

'Is Miss Girnigo at home?' said he to the somewhat stern-visaged personage who opened the door.

'I am Miss Girnigo,' said a sepulchral voice. (Miss Girnigo was suffering from the summer cold which used to be called a 'hay fever'.)

'Indeed — I might have known; how delightful!' said the Eel, now, alas! transformed into an old serpent; 'I am so glad to find you at home!'

'I am always at home!' returned Miss Girnigo, keeping up a semblance of severity, but secretly mollified by the homage of Gibby's smile.

'Then I hope you will let me come here very often. I shall find it lonely in the village, but I thought it better to be near my work,' said Gilbert; 'I am staying with Mrs. Tennant, the doctor's widow. Do you know Mrs. Tennant?'

'Oh, yes,' said Miss Girnigo, smiling for the first time; 'she is one of my dearest friends. I often go there to tea.'

'I love tea,' said Gilbert, with enthusiasm; 'Mrs. Tennant has invited me to take tea in her parlour in the afternoon as often as I like, but I was not expecting such a reward as this!'

Miss Girnigo was considerably over forty, but she was even more than youthfully amenable to flattery and to the Eel's beaming and boyish face.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'You are the new assistant,' she said, 'Mister — ah!'

'Denholm!' said Gilbert, smiling; 'it is a nice name. Don't you think so?'

'I have not thought anything about the matter,' said Miss Girnigo, bridling, yet with the ghost of a blush. 'I do not charge my mind with such things. Have you come to see my father?'

'Yes, after a while. But just at present I would rather see your plants!' said the Serpent, who had been well coached. (No wonder Watty Learmont smiled when he asserted that the New Man would preach on Sunday.)

Now Miss Girnigo lived chiefly for her flowers. The Serpent had a list of them, roughly but accurately compiled from the lady's seed-merchant's ledger by a friend in the business. He had also a fund of information respecting 'plants,' very recently acquired, on his mind.

'How did you know I was fond of flowers?' asked Miss Girnigo.

'Could anyone doubt it?' cried Gilbert, with enthusiasm. 'Who was the Jo' (he was on the point of saying 'Johnny') 'g — gentleman of whom it was said: 'If you want to see his monument, look around' — Sir Christopher Wren, wasn't it? Well, I looked around as I came up the street!'

And Gilbert took in the whole front of the manse with his glance. It certainly was very pretty, covered from top to bottom with rambler roses and Virginia cress.

Gilbert entered, and as they passed in front of the minister's study door Miss Girnigo almost skittishly made a sign for silence, and Gilbert tiptoed past

with an exaggeration of caution which made his companion laugh. They found themselves presently in the drawing-room, where again the flower-pots were everywhere, but specially banked round the oriel window. Gilbert named them one after the other like children at a baptism, with a sort of easy certainty and familiarity. His friend the nurseryman's clerk had not failed him. Miss Girnigo was delighted.

'Well,' she said, 'it is pleasant to have someone who knows *Ceterach Omcinarum* from a kail-stock. We shall go botanising together!'

'Ye-es,' said Gilbert, a little uncertainly, and with less enthusiasm than might have been expected.

'Good heavens,' he was saying, 'how shall I grind up the beastly thing if I have to live up to all this?'

But Miss Girnigo was in high good-humour, though her pleasure was sadly marred by the incipient cold in her head, which she was conscious prevented her from doing herself justice. At forty, eyes that water and a nose tipped with pink do not make for maiden beauty.

'I have a dreadful cold coming on, Mr. Denholm,' she said; 'I really am not fit to be seen. I wonder what I was thinking of to ask you in!'

'Try this,' said Gilbert, pulling a kind of india-rubber puff-ball out of his pocket; 'it is quite good. It makes you sneeze like the very — ahem — like anything. Stops a cold in no time — won't be happy till you get it!'

'I don't dare to — how does it work?' demurred Miss Girnigo.

Gilbert illustrated, and began to sneeze promptly, as the snuff titillated his air passages.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Now you try!' he said, and smiled.

Gilbert held it insinuatingly to the lady's nostrils and pumped vigorously.

'A-tish — shoo!' remarked the lady, as if he had touched a spring.

'A-tish — shoo-oo-oo!' replied Gilbert.

After that they responded antiphonally, like Alp answering Alp, till the door opened and Dr. Girnigo appeared with a half-written sheet of sermon paper in his hand.

The guilty pair stood rooted to the ground — at least, spasmodically so, for every other moment a sneeze lifted one of them upon tiptoe.

'What is this, Arabella, what is this? What is this young man doing here?'

'Don't be — a-tish — OO — stupid, papa! You know very well — shoo — it is Mr. Denholm, the new Assist — aroo!'

'Sir!' said Dr. Girnigo, turning upon his junior and angrily stamping his foot.

Gilbert held out his hand, and as the Doctor did not take it he wagged it feebly in the air with a sort of impotent good-fellowship.

'All right,' he said; 'better presently—only c-curing Miss — Miss Girmi — goo-ahoo — arish-chee-hoo — of a cold!'

'I do not know any one of that name, sir!' thundered the Doctor, not wholly unreasonably.

'No?' said Gilbert, anxiously; 'I understood that this — a-tishoo — lady was Miss Girnigo, though I thought she was too young for a daughter — your granddaughter, perhaps, Doctor?'

And the smile once more took in Miss Girnigo as if she had been a beautiful picture.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

By this time Miss Girnigo had somewhat recovered.

'Papa,' she said, sharply, 'Mr. Denholm is going to be such an acquisition. He is a botanist—a Fellow of the Linnaean Society, I understand.'

'Of Pittenweem,' muttered Gilbert between his teeth.

'And he is going to preach on Sunday. You have had a lot to worry you this week and need a rest. Besides, your best shirts are not ironed — not dry indeed. The weather has been so bad!'

'I had made up my mind to preach on Sabbath myself,' said Dr. Girnigo, who, though a tyrant untamed without, was held in considerable subjection to the higher power within the bounds of his own house.

'Nonsense, papa — I will not allow you to think of such a thing!' cried Miss Girnigo. 'Besides, Mr. Denholm is coming to supper tonight, and we will talk botany all the time!'

Which was why the Eel, falling off his bicycle at 1.45 P.M. that same day in front of my house in Cairn Edward (sixteen miles away), burst into my consulting-room with the following demand, proclaimed in frenzied accents: 'Lend me your Bentley's Botany, or something — not that beastly jaw-breaking German thing you are so fond of, but something plain and easy, with the names of all the plants in. I have the whole thing to get up by eight o'clock tonight, and I'll eat my head if I can remember what a cotyledon is.'

It is believed that on the way back the Eel studied

Bentley, cunningly adjusted on the handle-bar, with loops of string to keep the pages from fluttering. (He was a trick-rider of repute.) At any rate, he did not waste his time, and arrived at the manse so full of botanical terms that he had considerable difficulty in making himself intelligible to the maid, who on this occasion, being cleaned up, opened the door to him in state.

This was the beginning of the taming of the tiger. Gilbert preached the next forenoon, and pleased the Doctor greatly by the excellent taste of his opening remarks upon his text, which was, 'To preach the gospel . . . and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.'

The preacher, as a new and original departure, divided his subject into three heads, as followeth: First, 'The Duty of Respect for Ecclesiastical Superiors;' second, 'The Duty of Christian Liberality' (he had to drag this in neck and crop); and thirdly, 'The Supreme Duty of Humility in the Young with respect to their Elders.'

While he was looking it over on Sunday morning Gilbert heartily confounded his friend Begg for forgetting the other fifteen divisions of Dr. Girnigo's sermons.

'I could have made a much better appearance if that fellow Begg had had any sense!' he said to himself. 'But' (with a sigh) 'I must just do the best I can with these.'

Nevertheless, Dr. Girnigo considered that Gibby had surpassed himself in his application. He showed how any good that he might do in the parish must not be set down to his credit, but to that of Another who had so long laboured among them; and how

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

that he (the preacher), being but 'as one entering upon another man's line of things,' it behoved him above all things not to be boastful.

'A very sound address — quite remarkable in one so young!' was the Doctor's verdict as he met the Session after the close of Gilbert's first service.

The Session and congregation, however, did not approve quite so highly, having had a surfeit of similar teaching during the past forty years.

But Walter Learmont, senior (sad to tell it of an Elder), winked the sober eye and remarked to his intimates: 'Bide a wee — he kens his way about, thon yin. He wad juist be drawin' the auld man's leg!'

At any rate, certain it is that after this auspicious beginning Gibby the Eel (M.A.) remained longer in Rescobie than all his predecessors put together.

But it was to Jemima Girnigo that he owed this.

5.THE GATE OF THE UPPER GARDEN

For the first six months that Gibby the Eel, otherwise the Reverend Gilbert Denholm, M.A., acted as 'helper' to Dr. Joseph Girnigo in the parish of Rescobie, he was much pleased with himself. He laughed with his friend and classmate, Robertland, over the infatuation of the doctor's old maid daughter. The parish, reading the situation like a book, smiled broadly when the 'helper' and Miss Jemima Girnigo were discerned on an opposite braeface, botanising together, or, with heads bent over some doubtful bloom, stood silhouetted against the sunlit green of some glade in Knockandrews wood.

During this period Gibby hugged himself upon his cleverness, but the time came when he began to have his doubts. What to him was a light-heart prank, an 'Eel's trick,' like his college jest of squirming secretly under class-room benches, was obviously no jest to this pale-eyed, sharp-featured maiden of one-and-forty.

Jemima Girnigo had never been truly young. Repressed and domineered over as a child, she had been suddenly promoted by her mother's death to the care of a household and the responsibility of training a bevy of younger brothers, all now out in the world and doing for themselves. Her life had grown more and more arid and self-contained. She had nourished her soul on secret penances, setting herself hard household tasks, and doing with only

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

one small, untaught, slatternly maid from the village, in order that her father might be able to assist his sons into careers. She read dry theology to mortify a liking for novels, and shut up her soul from intercourse with her equals, conscious, perhaps, that visitors would infallibly discover and laugh at her father's meannesses and peculiarities.

Only her flowers kept her soul sweet and a human heart beating within that buckrain-and-whalebone-fenced bosom.

Then, all suddenly came Gilbert Denholm with his merry laugh, his light-heart ways (which she openly reproved, but secretly loved), his fair curls clustering about his brow, and his way of throwing back his head as if to shake them into place. Nothing so young, so winsome, or so gay had ever set foot within that solemn, dreich old manse. It was like a light-heart city beauty coming to change the life and disturb the melancholy of some stern woman-despising hermit. But Jemima Girnigo's case was infinitely worse, in that she was a woman and the disturber of her peace little better than a foolish boy.

But Gilbert Denholm, kindly lad though he was, saw no harm. He was only, he thought, impressing himself upon the parish. He saw himself daily becoming more popular. No farmer's party was considered to be anything which wanted his ready wit and contagious merriment. Already there was talk among the Session of securing him as permanent assistant and successor. There were fair ways and clear sunlit vistas before Gilbert Denholm; and he liked his professional prospects all the better that he owed them to his own wit and knowledge of

the world. He was a good preacher. He made what is called an excellent appearance in the pulpit. He did not 'read.' His fluency of utterance held sleepy ploughmen in a state of blinking attention for the better part of an hour. Even Dr. Girnigo commended, and Gibby, who had no more abundant or direct 'spiritual gifts' than are the portion of most kind-hearted, well-brought-up Scottish youths, was unconscious of his lack of any higher qualifications for the Christian ministry.

But Gibby was like hundreds, aye, thousands more, who break the bread and open unto men the Scriptures in all the churches. His office meant to him a career, not a call. His work was the expression of hearty human goodwill to all men — and so far helpful and godlike; but he had never tasted sorrow, never drunken of the cup of remorse as a daily beverage, never 'dreed' the common weird of humanity. Sorely he needed a downsetting. He must endure hardness, be driven out of self to the knowledge that self is nowise sufficient for a sinful man.

Even Jemima Girnigo was a far better servant of God than the man who had spent seven years in preparation for that service. In the shut deeps of her heart there were locked up infinite treasures of self-sacrifice. Love was pitifully ready to look forth from those pale eyes at whose corners the crow's feet were already clutching. And so it came to pass that, knowing her folly (and yet, in a way, defying it), this old maid of forty-one loved the handsome youth of four-and-twenty, the only human love-compelling thing that had ever come into her sombre life.

Yet there were times when Jemima Girnigo's

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

heart was bitter within her, even as there were seasons when the crowding years fell away and she seemed almost young and fair. Jemima had never been either very pretty or remarkably attractive, but now when the starved instincts of her lost youth awoke untimeously within her, she unconsciously smiled and tossed her head, to the full as coquettishly as a youthful beauty just becoming conscious of her own power.

It was all very pitiful. But Gibby passed on his heedless way and saw not, neither recked of his going.

Yet a time came when his eyes were opened. A new paper-mill had come to Rescobie, migrating from somewhere in the East country, where the Messrs. Coxon had had a serious quarrel with their ground landlord. From being a quiet hamlet the village of Rescobie began rapidly to put on the airs of a growing town. Tall houses of three storeys, with many windows and outside stairs, usurped the place of little old-fashioned 'but-and-bens.' Red brick oblongs of mill frontage rose along the valley of the Rescobie Water, which, dammed and weired and carried along countless lades, changed the cheerful brown limpidity of its youthful stream for a frothy mud colour below the mills.

The new immigrants were mostly a sedate and sober folk, as indeed, nearly all paper-makers are. To the easy-going villagers their diligence seemed phenomenal. They were flocking into the mill gates by six in the morning. It was well-nigh six in the evening before the tide flowed back toward the

village. Among the youths and men there was night-shift and day-shift, and a new and strange pallor began to pervade the street and show itself, carefully washed, in the gallery of Rescobie Kirk. The village girls, finding that they could make themselves early independent, took their places in the long 'finishing saal,' while elderly women, for whom there had been no outlook except the poor-house, found easy work and a living wage in Coxon's rag-house.

The increase of the congregation in the second year of Gilbert Denholm's assistantship compelled the Session to bethink themselves of some more permanent and satisfactory arrangement. Finally, after many private meetings they resolved to beard the lion in his den and lay before Dr. Girnigo the proposal that Gilbert should be officially called and ordained as the old man's 'colleague and successor.'

It was the ruling elder, called, after the name of his farm, Upper Balhaldie, who belled the cat and made the fateful proposition. In so doing that shrewd and cautious man was considered to have excelled himself. But Dr. Girnigo was far from being appeased.

'Sirs,' he said, 'I have been sole minister of the parish of Rescobie for forty years, and sole minister of it I shall die!'

'Mr. Denholm will be to you as a son!' suggested Balhaldie.

'I have sons of my body,' said the old minister, looking full at the quiet men before him, who sat on the edges of their several chairs fingering the brims of their hats; 'did I make any of them a minister? Nay, sirs, and for this reason: because the parish of Rescobie has been so near my heart that I would not

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

risk even the fruit of my body coming between me and it!

'We have sounded Mr. Denholm,' said Balhaldie, quietly ignoring the sentimental, 'and you may rest assured that you will not be disturbed in your tenancy of the manse. Mr. Denholm has no thought at present of changing his condition, and is quite content with his lodging — and an eident carfu' woman is his landlady the doctor's weedow!'

'Aye, she is that!' concurred several of the Session, speaking for the first time. It was a relief to have something concrete to which they could assent.

Dr. Girnigo looked at his Session. They seemed to shrink before him. Nervousness quivered on their countenances. They tucked their heavily-booted feet beneath the chairs on which they sat, to be out of the way. The brims of their hats were rapidly wearing out. Surely such men could never oppose him.

But Dr. Girnigo knew better. Underneath that awkward exterior, in spite of those embarrassed manners, that air of anxious self-effacement, Dr. Girnigo was well aware that there abode inflexible determination, shrewd common sense and abounding humour — chiefly, however, of the ironic sort.

'Are ye all agreed on this?' he asked.

'I speak in name of the Session!' said Upper Balhaldie succinctly, looking around the circle. And as he looked each man nodded slightly, without, however, raising his eyes from the pattern on the worn study carpet.

The Doctor sighed a long sigh. He knew that at last his trial was come upon him, and nerved

himself to meet it like a man.

'It is well,' he said; 'I shall offer no objection to the congregation calling Mr. Denholm, and I can only hope that he will serve you as faithfully as I have done! I wish you a very good day, gentlemen!'

And with these words the old minister went out, leaving the Session to find their way into the cold air as best they might.

The day after the interview between the Session and the Doctor, Gilbert Denholm called at the manse. He came bounding up the little avenue between the lilac and rhododendron bushes. Jemima Girnigo heard his foot long ere he had reached the porch. Nay, before he had set foot on the gravel she caught the click of the gate latch, which was loose and would only open one way. This Gibby always forgot and rattled it fiercely till he remembered the trick of it.

Then when she heard the rat-tat-tat of Gibby's ash-plant on the panels of the door, she caught her hand to her heart and stood still among her plants.

There was a bell, but Gibby was always in too great a hurry to ring it.

'Perhaps he has come to,' she did not finish the sentence, but the blood, rising hotly to her poor withered cheeks, finished it for her.

'Oh, Miss Jemima!' cried Gibby, bursting in; 'I came up to tell you first. I owe it all to you — every bit of it. They are going to call me to be colleague — and — and — we can botanise any amount. Isn't it glorious?'

He held her hand while he was speaking; and Jemima had been looking with hope into his frank, enkindled, boyish eyes. Her eyelids fell at his

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

announcement.

'Yes,' she faltered after a pause, 'we can botanise!'

'And they wanted to know if I would like to have the manse — as if I would turn you out, who have been my best friend here ever since I came to Rescobie! Not very likely!'

Gilbert had an honest liking for Jemima Girnigo, a feeling, however, which was not in the least akin to love. Indeed, he would as soon have thought of marrying his grandmother or any other of the relationships in the table of prohibited degrees printed at the beginning of the Authorised Version, which he sometimes looked at furtively when Dr. Girnigo was developing his 'four-teenthly.'

'You are happy where you are?' said Jemima, smiling a little wistfully.

'Oh, yes,' cried Gibby enthusiastically; 'my landlady makes me perfectly comfortable. She thinks I am a lost soul, I am afraid, but in the meantime she comforts me with apples — first-rate they are in dumplings, too, I can tell you!'

While he spoke Jemima Girnigo was much absorbed over a plant in a remote corner, and more than one drop of an alien dew glistened upon its leaves ere she turned again to the window. Gibby's enthusiasm was a little damped by her seeming indifference.

'Are you not glad?' he asked anxiously; 'I came to tell you first. I thought what good times we should have. We must go up Barstobrick Hill for the parsley fern before it gets too late.'

'Oh, yes,' said Jemima Girnigo, holding out her hand, 'I am very glad. No one is as glad as I — I

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

want you to believe that!

'Of course I do!' cried Gibby; 'you always were a good fellow, Jemima! We'll go up to Barstobrick tomorrow. Mind you are ready by nine. I have to be back for a meeting in the afternoon early. It is a hungry place. Put some 'prog' in the vasculum!'

And as from the parlour window she watched him down the gravel, he turned around and wrote '9 A.M.' in large letters on the gravel with his ash plant, tossed his hand up at her in a gay salute, and was gone.

But Gilbert Denholm and Jemima Girnigo did not climb Barstobrick for parsley fern on the morrow, and the '9 A.M.' stood long plain upon the gravel as a monument of the frail and futile intents of man.

For before the morrow's morn had dawned there had fallen upon Rescobie the dreaded scourge of all paper-making villages. Virulent small-pox had broken out. There were already four undoubted cases, all emanating from the rag-house of Coxon's mills.

About the streets and close-mouths stood awe-struck groups of girls, uncertain whether to go on with their work or return home. There was none of the usual horse-play among the lads of the day-shift as they went soberly mill-ward with their cans. Grave elders, machinememen and engineers, shook their heads and recalled the date at which (a fortnight before) a large consignment of Russian rags had been received and immediately put in hand.

It was whispered, on what authority did not

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

appear, that the disease was of the malignant 'black' variety, and that all smitten must surely die. Fear ran swift and chilly up each outside staircase and entered unbidden every 'land' in Rescobie. It was the first time such a terror had been in the village, and those who had opposed the settlement of the mills, staid praisers of ancient quiet, lifted their hands with something of jubilation mixed with their fear. 'Verily, the judgment of God has fallen,' they said, 'even as in a night it fell on Babylon—as in fire and brimstone it came upon the Cities of the Plain.'

Dr. Girnigo retired to his study, feeling that if the Session had allowed him his own way, things would not have been as they were. He had a sermon to write. So he mended a quill pen, took out his sermon-paper (small quarto ruled in blue), and set to work to improve the occasion. He said to himself that since the parish had now a young and active minister, it was good for Gilbert Denholm to bear the yoke in his youth.

And, indeed, none was readier for the work than that same Gilbert. He was shaving when his landlady, the doctor's widow, cried in the information through the panels of his closed door.

'Thank God,' murmured Gibby, 'that I have none to mourn for me if I don't get through this!'

Then he thought of his father, but, as he well knew, that fine old Spartan was too staunch a fighter in the wars of grace to discourage his son from any duty, however dangerous. He thought next of — well, one or two girls he had known — and was glad now that it had gone no further.

He did not know yet what was involved in the outbreak or what might be demanded of him. Gilbert

Denholm may have had few of the peculiar graces of spiritual religion, but he was a fine, manly, upstanding young fellow, and he resolved that he would do his duty as if he had been heading a rush of boarders or standing in the deadly imminent breach. More exactly, perhaps, he did not resolve at all. It never occurred to him that he could do anything else.

As soon as he had snatched a hasty breakfast and thrown on his coat, he hurried up to the house of Dr. Durie. A plain blunt man was John Durie — slim, pale, with keen dark eyes, and a pointed black beard slightly touched with gray. The doctor was not at home. He had not been in all night and the maid did not know where he was to be found.

To the right-about went Gilbert, asking all and sundry as he went where and when they had seen the doctor. Thomas Kyle, with his back against the angle of the Railway Inn, averred that he had seen him 'an 'oor syne gangin' gye fast into Betty McGrath's— but they say Betty is deid or this!' he added, somewhat irrelevantly. Chairles Simson, tilting his bonnet over his brows in order to scratch his head in a new and attractive spot, deponed that about ten minutes before he had noticed 'the tails o' the doctor's coat gaun round the Mill-lands' corner like stoor on a windy day.'

Gibby tried Betty McGrath's first. Yes, Dr. Durie had ordered everybody out except the sick woman, who was tossing on her truckle bed, calling on the Virgin and all the saints in a shrill Galway dialect, and her daughter Bridget, a heavy-featured girl of twenty, who stood disconsolately looking out at the window as if hope had wholly forsaken her heart.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Gibby inquired if the doctor had been there recently.

'Oh, yes,' said Bridget; 'as ye may see if ye'll be troubled lookin' in the corner. He tore down all thim curtains off the box-bed. It'll break the ould woman's heart, that it will, if ever the craitur gets over this.'

At the door Gibby met Father Phil Kavannah, a tall young man with honest peasant's eyes and a humorous mouth.

'You and I, surr, will have to see this through between us,' said Father Phil, grasping his hand.

'It is a bad business,' responded Gilbert; 'I fear it will run through the mills.'

'Worse than ye think,' said the priest very gravely, 'ten times worse—three-fourths of the workers have no relatives here, and there will be no one to nurse them. They've talked lashin's about the new village hospital, and raised all Tipperary about where it is to stand and what it is to cost, but that's all that's done about it yet.'

Gilbert whistled a bar of 'Annie Laurie,' which he kept for emergencies.

'Well,' he said slowly, 'it will be like serving a Sunday-school picnic with half a loaf and one jar of marmalade— but we'll just need to see how far we can make ourselves go round!'

'Eight!' said Father Phil with a wave of his hand as he stood with his fingers on the latch of Betty McGrath's door.

Gilbert found the doctor in the great 'saal' at the mills. He had his coat off and was scraping at bared arms for dear life. At each door stood a pair of stalwart sentinels, and several hundred mill workers

were grouped about talking in low-voiced clusters. Only here and there one more diligent than the rest, or with quieter nerves, deftly passed sheets of white paper from hand to hand as if performing a conjuring trick.

The doctor spied Gilbert as he entered. They were excellent friends. 'Man,' he cried across the great room, looking down again instantly to his work, 'run up to the surgery for another tube of vaccine like this. It is in B cabinet, shelf 6. And as you come back, wire for half-a-dozen more. You know where I get them!'

And Gilbert sped upon his first errand. After that he deserted his own lodgings, and he and Dr. Durie took hasty and informal meals when they could snatch a moment from work. Sundry cold edibles stood permanently on the doctor's oaken sideboard, and of these Gilbert and his host partook without sitting down. Then on a couch, or more often on a few rugs thrown on the floor, one or the other would snatch a hurried sleep.

There were twenty-six cases on Saturday — fifty-eight by the middle of the following week. Within the same period nine had terminated fatally, and there were others who could not possibly recover. Nurses came in from the great city hospitals, as they could be spared, but the demand far exceeded the supply and Gilbert was indefatigable. Yet his laugh was cheery as ever, and even the delirious would start into some faint consciousness of pleasure at the sound of his voice.

But one day the young minister awoke with a racking head, a burning body, a dry throat, and the chill of ice in his bones.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'This is nothing — I will work it off,' said Gibby; and, getting up, he dressed with haste and went out without touching food. The thought of eating was abhorrent to him, Nevertheless, he did his work all the forenoon, and went here and there with medicine and necessaries. He relieved a nurse who had been two nights on duty, while she slept for six hours. Then after that he set off home to catch Dr. Durie before he could be out again. For he had heard his host come in and throw himself down on the couch while he was dressing.

As he passed the front of Rescobie Manse, he looked up to wave a hand to Jemima, as he never forgot to do. Her father was still 'indisposed,' and Miss Girnigo was understood to be taking care of him. Yes, there she was among her flowers, and Gibby, hardly knowing what he did — being light-headed and racked with pain — openly kissed his hand to her within sight of half-a-score of Rescobie windows.

Then, his feet somehow tangling themselves and his knees failing him, he fell all his length in the hot dust of the highway.

When Gilbert Denholm came to himself he found a white-capped nurse sitting by the window of a room he had never before seen. There was a smell of disinfectants all about, which somehow seemed to have followed him through all the boundless interstellar spaces across which he had been wandering.

'Where am I?' said Gibby, as the nurse came toward the bed. 'I have not seen Betty McGrath this

morning, and I promised Father Phil that I would.'

'You must not ask questions,' said the nurse quietly. 'Dr. Durie will soon be here.'

And after that with a curious readiness Gibby slipped back into a drowsy dream of gathering flowers with Jemima Girnigo; but somehow it was another Jemima — so young she seemed, so fair. Crisp curls glanced beneath her hat brim. Young blood mantled in changeful blushes on her cheeks. Her pale eyes, which had always been a little watery, were now blue and bright as a mountain tarn on a day without clouds. He had never seen so fair and joyous a thing.

'Jemima,' he said, or seemed to himself to say, 'what is the matter with you? You are different somehow.'

'It is all because you love me, Gilbert,' she answered, and smiled up at him. 'Ever since you told me that, I have grown younger every hour; and, do you know, I have found the Grass of Parnassus at last. It grows by the Gate into the Upper Garden.'

'Hello, Denholm, clothed and in your right mind, eh? That's right!'

It was the cheerful voice of his friend, Dr. Durie, as he stood by Gibby's bedside.

'What has been the matter with me, Durie?' said Gilbert, though in his heart he knew.

'You have had bad small-pox, my boy; and have had a hot chance to find out whether you have been speaking the truth in your sermons.'

Gibby could hardly bring his lips to frame the next question. He was far from vain, but to a young

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

man the thought was a terrible one.

'Shall I be much disfigured?'

'Oh, a dimple or two — nothing to mar you on your marriage day. You have been well looked after.'

'You have saved my life, doctor.'

And Gibby strove to reach a feeble hand outward, which, however, the doctor did not seem to see.

'Not I — you owe that to some one else.'

'The nurse who went out just now?' queried Gibby.

'No, she has just been here a few days, after all danger had passed.'

Gilbert strove to rise on his elbow and the red flushed his poor face.

The doctor restrained him with a strong and gentle hand.

'Lie back,' he said, 'or I will go away and tell you nothing.'

He sat down by the bedside, and with a soft sponge touched the convalescent's brow. As he did so he spoke in a low and meditative tone as though he had been talking to himself.

'There was once a foolish young man who thought that he could take twenty shillings out of a purse into which he had only put half a sovereign. He fell down one day on the street. A woman carried him in and nursed him through a fortnight's delirium. A woman caught him as he ran, with only a blanket about him, to drown himself in the Black Pool of Rescobie Water. Night and day she watched him, sleepless, without weariness, without murmuring.'

'And this woman — who saved my life — what was — her name?'

Gibby's voice was very hoarse.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Jemima Girnigo!' said the doctor, sinking his voice also to a whisper.

'Where is she — I want to see her — I want to thank her!' cried Gibby. He was actually upon his elbow now.

Dr. Durie forced him gently back upon the pillows.

'Yes, yes,' he said soothingly, 'so you shall — if all tales be true; but for that you must wait.'

'Why — why?' cried impatient Gibby. 'Why cannot I see her now? She has done more for me than ever I deserved.'

'That is the way of women,' said the doctor, 'but you cannot thank her now. She is dead.'

'Dead — dead!' gasped Gilbert, stricken to the heart; 'then she gave her life for me!'

'Something like it,' said the doctor, a trifle grimly. For though he was a wise man, the ways of women were dark to him. He thought that Gilbert, though a fine lad, was not worth all this.

'Dead,' muttered Gibby, 'and I cannot even tell her — make it up to her.'

'She left you a message,' said the doctor very quietly.

'What was it?' cried Gibby, eagerly.

'Oh, nothing much,' said Dr. Durie; 'there was no hope from the first, and she knew it. Her mind was clear all the three days, almost to the last. She may have wandered a little then, for she told me to tell you.'

'What — what — oh, what? Tell me quickly. I cannot wait.'

'That the flowers were blooming in the Upper Garden, and that she would meet you at the Gate!'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

The Reverend Gilbert Denholm never married. He bears a scar or two on his open face — a face well beloved among his people. There is a grave in Rescobie kirk-yard that he tends with his own hands. None else must touch it.

It is the resting-place of a woman whom love made young and beautiful, and about whose feet the flowers of Paradise are blooming, as, alone but not impatient, she waits his coming by the Gate.

6. THE TROUBLER OF ISRAEL

Unless you happen to have made one of a group of five or six young men who every Sunday morning turned their steps towards the little meeting-house in Lady Nixon's Wynd, it is safe to say that you did not know either it or the Doctor of Divinity. That is to say, not unless you were born in the Purple and expert of the mysteries of the Kirk of the Covenants.

The denomination was a small one, smaller even and poorer than is the wont of Scottish sects. By the eternal process of splitting off, produced by the very faithfulness of the faithful, and the remorseless way in which they carried out their own logic, by individual pretestings and testifyings, by the yet sadder losses inflicted by the mammon of unrighteousness, when some, allured by social wealth and position, turned aside to worship in some richer or more popular Zion, the Kirk of the Covenants worshipping in Lady Nixon's Wynd had become but the shadow of its former self.

Still, however, by two infallible signs you might know the faithful. They spoke of the 'Boady' and of the 'Coavenants' with a lengthening of that o which in itself constituted a shibboleth, and their faces — grim and set mostly — lit up when you spoke of the 'Doctor.'

But one — they had but one — Dr. Marcus Lawton of Lady Nixon's Wynd. He was their joy, their pride, their poetry; the kitchen to their sour

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

controversial bread, the mellow glory of their denomination. (Again you must broaden the a indefinitely.) He had once been a professor, but by the noblest of self-denying ordinances he had extruded himself from his post for conscience' sake.

There was but one fly in their apothecary's ointment-pot when my father grew too stiff to attend the Kirk of the Covenants even once a year, and that was that the Doctor, unable to live and bring up a family on a sadly dwindling stipend (though every man and woman in the little kirk did almost beyond their possible to increase it), had been compelled to bind himself to spend part of the day in a secular pursuit.

At least to the average mind his employment could hardly be called 'secular,' being nothing more than the Secretaryship of the Association for the Propagation of Gospel Literature; but to the true covenant man this sonorous society was composed of mere Erastians, or what was little better, ex-Erastians and common Voluntaries. They all dated from 1689, and the mark of the beast was on their forehead — that is to say, the seal of the third William, the Dutchman, the revolutionary Gallic. Yet their Doctor, with his silver hair, his faithful tongue, his reverence, wisdom, and weight of indubitable learning, had to sit silent in the company of such men, to take his orders from them, and even to record their profane inanities in black and white. The Doctor's office was at the corner of Victoria Street, as you turn down towards the Grassmarket. And when any of his flock met him coming or going thither, they turned away their heads — that is, if he had passed the entrance to Lady Nixon's Wynd when

they met him. So far it was understood that he might be going to write his sermon in the quiet of the vestry. After that there was no escape from the damning conclusion that he was on his way to the shrine of Baal — and other Erastian divinities. So upon George Fourth Bridge the Covenant folk turned away their heads and did not see their minister.

Now this is hardly a story — certainly not a tale. Only my heart being heavy, I knew it would do me good to turn it upon the Doctor. Dr. Marcus Lawton was the son of Dr. Marcus Lawton. When first he succeeded his father, which happened when he was little more than a boy, and long before I was born, he was called 'young Maister Lawton.' Then it was that he lectured on 'The Revelation' on Sabbath evenings, his father sitting proudly behind him. Then the guttering candles of Lady Nixon's looked down on such an array as had never been seen before within her borders. College professors were there, ministers whose day's work was over — as it had been, Cretes and Arabians, heathen men and publicans. Edward Irving himself came once, in the weariful days before the great darkness. The little kirk was packed every night, floor and loft, aisle and pulpit stairs, entrance hall and window-sill, with such a crowd of stern, grave-visaged men as had never been gathered into any kirk in the town of Edinburgh since a certain little fair man called Rutherford preached there on his way to his place of exile in Aberdeen.

So my father has often told me, and you may be sure he was there more than once, having made it a duty to do his business with my lord's factor at a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

time when his soul also might have dealings with the most approved factors of Another Lord.

These were great days, and my father (Alexander McQuharr of Drumquhat) still kindles when he tells of them. No need of dubious secretaryships then, or of the turning away of faithful heads at the angle of the Candlemaker-row. No young family to be provided for, Doctorate coming at the Session's close from his own university, Professorship on the horizon, a united Body of the devout to minister to! And up there in the pulpit a slim young man with drawing power in the eyes of him, and a voice which even then was mellow as a blackbird's flute, laying down the law of his Master like unto the great of old who testified from Cairntable even unto Pentland, and from the Session Stane at Shalloch-on-Minnoch to where the lion of London Hill looks defiant across the green flowe of Drumclog.

But when I began to attend Lady Nixon's regularly, things were sorely otherwise. The kirk was dwindled and dwindling — in membership, in influence, most of all in finance. But not at all in devotion, not in enthusiasm, not in the sense of privilege that those who remained were thought worthy to sit under such faithful ministrations as those -of the Doctor. There was no more any 'young Maister Lawton.' Nor was a comparison pointed disparagingly by a reference to 'the Auld Doctor, young Dr. Marcus's farther, ye ken.'

From the alert, keen-faced, loyal-hearted precentor (no hireling he) to the grave and dignified 'kirk-officer' there were not two minds in all that little body of the faithful.

You remember MacHaffie — a steadfast man

Haffie — no more of his name ever used. Indeed, it was but lately that I even knew he owned the prefatory Mac. He would give you a helpful hint oftentimes (after you had passed the plate), 'It's no himsel' the day!' Or more warningly and particularly, 'It's a student.' Then Haffie would cover your retreat, sometimes going the length of making a pretence of conversation with you as far as the door, or on urgent occasions (as when the Doctor was so far left to himself as to exchange with a certain 'popular preacher') even taking you downstairs and letting you out secretly by a postern door which led, in the approved manner of romances, into a side street down which, all unseen, you could escape from your fate. But Haffie always kept an eye on you to see that you did not abstract your penny from the plate. That was the payment he exacted for his good offices; and as I could not afford two pennies on one Sunday morning, Haffie's 'private information' usually drove me to Arthur's Seat, or down to Granton for a smell of the salt water; and I can only hope that this is set down to Haffie's account in the books of the recording angel.

But all this was before the advent of Gullibrand. You have heard of him, I doubt not — Gullibrand of Barker, Barker, & Gullibrand, provision merchants, with branches all over the three kingdoms. His name is on every blank wall.

Gullibrand was not an Edinburgh man. He came, they say, from Leicester or some Midland English town, and brought a great reputation with him. He had been Mayor of his own city, a philanthropist almost by profession, and the light and law giver of his own particular sect always. I have often

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

wondered what brought him to Lady Nixon's Wynd. Perhaps he was attracted by the smallness of our numbers, and by the thought that, in default of any congregation of his own peculiar sect in the northern metropolis, he could 'boss' the Kirk of the Covenants as he had of a long season 'bossed' the Company of Apocalyptic Believers.

It was said, with I know not what truth, that the first time Mr. Gullibrand came to the Kirk of the Covenants, the Doctor was lecturing in his ordinary way upon Daniel's Beast with Ten Horns. And, if that be so, our angelical Doctor had reason to rue to the end of his life that the discourse had been so faithful and soul-searching. Though Gullibrand thought his interpretation of the ninth horn very deficient, and told him so. But he was so far satisfied that he intimated his intention of 'sending in his lines' next week.

At first it was thought to be a great thing that the Kirk of the Covenants in Lady Nixon's Wynd should receive so wealthy and distinguished an adherent.

'Quite an acquisition, my dear,' said the hard-pressed treasurer, thinking of the ever-increasing difficulty of collecting the stipend, and of the church expenses, which had a way of totalling up beyond all expectation.

'Bide a wee, Henry,' said his more cautious wife; 'to see the colour o' the man's siller is no to ken the colour o' his heart.'

And to this she added a thoughtful rider.

'And after a', what does a bursen Englishy craitur like yon ken aboot the Kirk o' the Coavenants?'

And as good Mistress Walker prophesied as she took her douce way homeward with her husband

(honorary treasurer and unpaid precentor) down the Middle Meadow Walk, even so in the fulness of time it fell out.

Mr. Jacob Gullibrand gave liberally, at which the kindly heart of the treasurer was elate within him. Mr. Jacob Gullibrand got a vacant seat in the front of the gallery which had once belonged to a great family from which, the faithful dying out, the refuse had declined upon a certain Sadducean opinion calling itself Episcopacy; and from this highest seat in the synagogue Mr. Jacob blinked with a pair of fishy eyes at the Doctor.

Then in the fulness of time Mr. Jacob became a 'manager,' because it was considered right that he should have a say in the disposition of the temporalities of which he provided so great a part. Entry to the Session was more difficult. For the Session is a select and conservative body — an inner court, a defenced place set about with thorns and not to be lightly approached; but to such a man as Gullibrand all doors in the religious world open too easily. Whence cometh upon the Church of God mockings and scorn, the strife of tongues — and after the vials have been poured out, at the door One with the sharp sword in His hand, the sword that hath two edges.

So after presiding at many Revival meetings and heading the lists of many subscriptions, Jacob Gullibrand became an elder in the Kirk of the Covenants and a power in Lady Nixon's Wynd.

He had for some time been a leading Director of the Association for the Propagation of Gospel Literature; and so in both capacities he was the Doctor's master. Then, having gathered to him a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

party, recruited chiefly from the busybodies in other men's matters and other women's characters, Jacob Gullibrand turned him about, and set himself to drive the minister and folk of the Kirk of the Covenant as he had been wont to drive his clerks and shop-assistants.

He went every Sabbath into the vestry after service to reprove and instruct Dr. Marcus Lawton. His sermons (so he told him) were too old-fashioned. They did not 'grip the people.' They did not 'take hold of the man on the street.' They were not 'in line with the present great movement.' In short, they 'lacked modernity.'

Dr. Marcus answered meekly. Man more modest than our dear Doctor there was not in ail the churches — no, nor outside of them.

'I am conscious of my many imperfections,' he said; 'my heart is heavy for the weakness and unworthiness of the messenger in presence of the greatness of the message; but, sir, I do the best I can, and I only ask Him who hath the power, to give the increase.'

'But how,' asked Jacob Gullibrand, 'can you expect any increase when I never see you preaching in the market-place, proclaiming at the street-corners, denouncing upon a hundred platforms the sins of the times? You should speak to the times, my good sir, you should speak to the times.'

'As worthy Dr. Leighton, that root out of a dry ground, sayeth,' murmured our Doctor with a sweet smile, 'there be so many that are speaking to the times, you might surely allow one poor man to speak for eternity.'

But the quotation was thrown away upon Jacob

Gullibrand.

I do not know this Leighton — and I think I am acquainted with all the ministers who have the root of the matter in them in this and in other cities of the kingdom. And I call upon you, sir, to stir us up with rousing evangelical addresses instead of set sermons. We are asleep, and we need awakening.'

I am all too conscious of it,' said the Doctor; 'but it is not my talent.'

Then, if you do know it, if your conscience tells you of your failure, why not get in some such preachers as Boanerges Simpson of Maitland, or even throw open your pulpit to some earnest merchant-evangelist such as — well, as myself?'

But Mr. Gullibrand had gone a step too far. The Doctor could be a Boanerges also upon occasion, though he walked always in quiet ways and preferred the howe of life to the mountain tops.

'No, sir,' he said firmly; 'no unqualified or unlicensed man shall ever preach in my pulpit so long as I am minister and teaching elder of a Covenant-keeping Kirk!'

'We'll see about that!' said Jacob Gullibrand, thrusting out his under lip over his upper half-way to his nose. Then, seizing his tall hat and unrolled umbrella, he stalked angrily out.

And he kept his word. He did see about it. In Lady Nixon's Wynd there was division. On the one side were ranged the heads of families generally, the folk staid and set in the old ways — 'gospel-hardened' the Gullibrandites called them. With the Doctor were the old standards of the Kirk, getting a little dried,

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

maybe, with standing so long in their post-holes, but, so far as in them lay, faithful unto death.

But the younger folk mostly followed the new light. There were any number of Societies, Gospel Bands, Armies of the Blue Ribbon, and of the White — all well and better than well in their places. But being mostly imported wholesale from England, and all without exception begun, carried on, and ended in Gullibrand, they were out of keeping with the plain-song psalms of the Kirk of the Martyrs. There were teas also at 'Mount Delectable,' the residence of Gullibrand, where, after the singing of many hymns and the superior blandishments of the Misses Gullibrand, it was openly said that if the Kirk in Lady Nixon's Wynd was to be preserved, the Doctor must 'go.' He was in the way. He was a fossil. He had no modern light. He took no interest in the 'Work.' He would neither conduct a campaign of street-preaching nor allow an unordained evangelist into his pulpit. The Doctor must go. Mr. Gullibrand was sure that a majority of the congregation was with him. But there were qualms in many hearts which even three cups of Gullibrand's Coffee Essence warm could not cure.

After all, the Doctor was the Doctor — and he had baptized the most part of those present. Besides, they minded that time when Death came into their houses — and also that Noble Presence, that saintly prayer, that uplifted hand of blessing; but in the psychological moment, with meet introduction from the host, uprose the persecuted evangelist.

'If he was unworthy to enter the pulpits of Laodicean ministers, men neither cold nor hot, whom every earnest evangelist should,' (here he

continued the quotation and illustrated it with an appropriate gesture) 'he at least thanked God that he was no Doctor of Divinity. Nor yet of those who would permit themselves to be dictated to by self-appointed and self-styled ministers.'

And so on, and so on. The type does not vary.

The petition or declaration already in Gullibrand's breast pocket was then produced, adopted,- and many signatures of members and adherents were appended under the influence of that stirring appeal. Great was Gullibrand. The morning light brought counsel—but it was too late. Gullibrand would erase no name.

'You signed the document, did you not? Of your own free will? That is your handwriting? Very well then!'

The blow fell on the Sabbath before the summer communion, always a great time in the little Zion in Lady Nixon's Wynd.

A deputation of two, one being Jacob Gullibrand, elder, waited on Dr. Marcus Lawton after the first diet of worship. They gave him a paper to read in which he was tepidly complimented upon his long and faithful services, and informed that the undersigned felt so great an anxiety for his health that they besought him to retire to a well-earned leisure, and to permit a younger and more vigorous man to bear the burden and the heat of the day. (The choice of language was Gullibrand's.) No mention was made of any retiring allowance, nor yet of the manse, in which his father before him had lived all his life, and in which he himself had been born. But these things were clearly enough

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

understood.

'What need has he of a manse or of an allowance either?' said Gullibrand. 'His family are mostly doing for themselves, and he has no doubt made considerable savings. Besides which, he holds a comfortable appointment with a large salary, as I have good reason to know.'

'But,' he added to himself, 'he may not hold that very long either. I will teach any man living to cross Jacob Gullibrand!'

The Doctor sat in the little vestry with the tall blue scroll spread out before him. The light of the day suddenly seemed to have grown dim, and somehow he could hardly see to smooth out the curled edges.

'It is surely raining without,' said the Doctor, and lighted the gas with a shaking hand. He looked down the list of names of members and adherents appended to the request that he should retire. The written letters danced a little before his eyes, and he adjusted his glasses more firmly.

'William Gilmour, elder,' he murmured; 'ah, his father was at school with me; I mind that I baptized William the year I was ordained. He was a boy at my Bible-class, a clever boy, too. I married him; and he came in here and grat like a bairn when his first wife died, sitting on that chair. I called on the Lord to help William Gilmour — and now — he wants me away.'

'Jacob Gullibrand, elder.'

The Doctor passed the name of his persecutor without a comment.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

‘Christopher Begbie, manager. He was kind to me the year the bairns died.’

(Such was Christopher's testimony. The year before I went to Edinburgh the Doctor had lost a well-beloved wife and two children, within a week of each other. He preached the Sabbath after on the text, ‘All thy waves have gone over me!’ Christopher Begbie, manager, had been kind then. Pass, Christopher !)

‘Robert Armstrong, manager. Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted,’ said the Doctor, and stared at the lozenges of the window till coloured spots danced before his kind old eyes. ‘Robert Armstrong, for whose soul I wrestled even as Jacob with his Maker; Robert Armstrong that walked with me through the years together, and with whom I have had so much sweet communion, even Robert also does not think me longer fit to break the bread of life among these people!’

Pass, Robert! There is that on the blue foolscap which the Doctor hastened to wipe away with his sleeve. But it is doubtful if such drops are ever wholly wiped away.

‘John Malcolm — ah, John, I do not wonder. Perhaps I was over faithful with thee, John. But it was for thy soul's good. Yet I did not think that the son of thy father would bear malice!’

‘Margaret Fountainhall, Elizabeth Fountainhall — the children of many prayers. Their mother was a godly woman indeed; and you, too, Margaret and Elizabeth, would sit under a younger man. I mind when I prepared you together for your first communion!’

The Doctor sighed and bent his head lower upon

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the paper. 'Ebenezer Redpath, James Bannatyne, Samuel Gardiner' — he passed the names rapidly, till he came to one — 'Isobel Swan.'

The Doctor smiled at the woman's name. It was the first time he had smiled since they gave him the paper and he realised what was written there.

'Ah, Isobel,' he murmured, 'once in a far-off day you did not think as now you think!'

And he saw himself, a slim stripling in his father's pew, and across the aisle a girl who worshipped him with her eyes. And so the Doctor passed from the name of Isobel Swan, still smiling—but kindly and graciously, for our Doctor had it not in him to be anything else.

He glanced his eye up and down the list. He seemed to miss something.

'Henry Walker, treasurer—I do not see thy name, Henry. Many is the hard battle I have had with thee in the Session, Henry. Dost thou not want thine old adversary out of thy path once and for all? And Mary, thy wife? Tart is thy tongue, Mary, but sweet as a hazel-nut in the front of October thy true heart!'

Thomas Baillie — where art thou, true Thomas? I crossed thee in the matter of the giving out of the eleventh paraphrase, Thomas. Yet I do not see thy name. Is it possible that thou hast forgotten the nearer ill and looked back on the days of old, when Allan Symington with Gilbert his brother, and thou and I, Thomas Baillie, went to the house of God in company? No, these things are not forgotten. I thank God for that. The name of Thomas Baillie is not here.'

And the Doctor folded up the blue crackling paper and placed it carefully between the 'leds' of the great

pulpit Bible.

'It is the beginning of the week of Communion,' he said; 'it is not meet that I should mingle secular thoughts with the memory of the broken body and the shed blood. On your knees, Marcus Lawton, and ask forgiveness for your repining and discriminating among the sheep of the flock whom it is yours to feed on a coming Lord's day; and are they not all yours — your responsibility, your care, aye, Marcus — even — even Jacob Gullibrand?'

It was the Sabbath of High Communion in the Kirk of the Covenants. Nixon's Wynd, ordinarily so grim and bare, so gritty underfoot and so narrow overhead, now seemed to many a spacious way to heaven, down which walked the elect of the Lord in a way literally narrow, and literally steep, and literally closed with a gate at which few, very few, went in.

A full hour too soon they began to arrive, strange quaint figures some of them, gathered from the nooks and corners of the old town. They arrived in twos and threes — the children's children of the young plants of grace who saw Claverhouse ride down the West Bow on his way to Killiecrankie. As far as Leith walk you might know them, bent a little, mostly coopers in the Trongate, wrights in the Kirk Wynd, ships' carpenters at the Port. They had their little 'King's Printer' Bibles in the long tails of their blue coats — for black had not yet come in to make uniform all the congregations of every creed. But the mistress, walking a little behind, carried her Bible decently wrapped in a white napkin along with a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

sprig of southern-wood.

All that Sabbath day there hung, palpable and almost visible, about Nixon's Wynd a sweet savour as of 'Naphtali,' and the Persecutions, and Last Testimonies in the Grassmarket; but in the shrine itself there was nothing grim, but only graciousness and consolation and the sense of the living presence of the Hope of Israel. For our Doctor was there sitting throned among his elders. The sun shone through the narrow windows, and just over the wall, if it were your good fortune to be near those on the left-hand side, you could see the top of the Martyrs' monument in the kirkyard of Old Greyfriars.

It was great to see the Doctor on such days, great to hear him. Beneath, the white cloths glimmered fair on the scarred bookboards, bleached clean in honour of the breaking of holy bread. The silver cups, ancient as Drumclog and Shalloch, so they said, shone on the table of communion, and we all looked at them when the Doctor said the solemn and mysterious words, 'wine on the lees well refined.'

For there are no High Churchmen so truly high as the men of the little protesting covenanting remnants of the Reformation Kirk of Scotland; none so jealous in guarding the sacraments; none that can weave about them such a mantle of awe and reverence.

The Doctor was concluding his after-table address. Very reverend and noble he looked, his white hair falling down on his shoulders, his hands ever and anon wavering to a blessing, his voice now rising sonorous as a trumpet, but mostly of flute-like sweetness in keeping with his words. He never spoke of any subject but one on such a day. That

was, the love of Christ.

'Fifty-one summer communions have I been with you in this place,' so he concluded, 'breaking the bread and speaking the word. Fifty-one years today is it since my father took me by the hand and led me up yonder to sit by his side. Few there be here in the flesh this day who saw that. But there are some. Of such I see around me three — Henry Walker, and Robert Armstrong, and John Malcolm. It is fitting that those who saw the beginning should see the end.'

At these words a kind of sough passed over the folk. You have seen the wind passing over a field of ripe barley. Well, it was like that. From my place in the gallery I could see set faces whiten, shoulders suddenly stoop, as the whole congregation bent forward to catch every word. A woman sobbed. It was Isobel Swan. The white faces turned angrily as if to chide a troublesome child.

'It has come upon me suddenly, dear friends,' the Doctor went on, 'even as I hope that Death itself will. Sudden as any death it hath been, and more bitter. For myself I was not conscious of failing energies, of natural strength abated. But you, dear friends, have seen clearer than I the needs of the Kirk of the Covenants. One hundred and six years Marcus Lawtons have ministered in this place. From today they shall serve tables no more. Once — and not so long ago, it seems, looking back — I had a son of my body, a plant reared amid hopes and prayers and watered with tears. The Lord gave. The Lord took. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

There ensued a silence, deep, still — yet somehow also throbbing, expectant. Isobel Swan did not sob

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

again. She had hidden her face.

'And now my last word. After fifty-one years of service in this place, it is hard to come to the end of the hindmost furrow, to drop the hand from the plough, never more to go forth in the morning as the sower sowing precious seed.'

'No — no — no!'

It was not only Isobel Swan now, but the whole congregation. Here and there, back and forth, subdued, repressed, ashamed, but irresistible, the murmur ran; but the Doctor's voice did not shake.

'Fifty-one years of unworthy service, my friends — what of that? — a moment in the eternity of God. Never again shall I meet you here as your minister; but I charge you that when we meet in That Day you will bear me witness whether I have loved houses or lands, or father or mother, or wife or children better than you! And now, fare you well. The memory of bygone communions, of hours of refreshment and prayer in this sacred place, of death-beds blessed and unforgotten in your homes shall abide with me as they shall abide with you. The Lord send among you a worthier servant than Marcus Lawton, your fellow-labourer and sometime minister. Again, and for the last time, fare you well!'

It was a strange communion. The silver cups still stood on the table, battered, but glistening. The plates of bread that had been blessed were beside them. The elders sat around. A low inarticulate murmur of agony travelled about the little kirk as the Doctor sat down and covered his face with his hands, as was his custom after pronouncing the

benediction.

Then in the strange hush uprose the tall angular form of William Gilmour from the midst of the Session, his bushy eye-brows working and twitching.

'Oh, sir,' he said, in forceful jerks of speech, 'dinna leave us. I signed the paper under a misapprehension. The Lord forgive me! I withdraw my name. Jacob Gullibrand may dischairge me if he likes!'

He sat down as abruptly as he had risen.

Then there was a kind of commotion all over the congregation. One after another rose and spoke after their kind, some vehemently, some with shamed faces.

'And I!' 'And I!' 'And I!' cried a dozen at a time. 'Bide with us, Doctor! We cannot want you! Pray for us!'

Then Henry Walker, the white-haired, sharp-featured treasurer and precentor of Nixon's Wynd, stretched out his hand. The Doctor had been speaking, as is the custom, not from the pulpit, but from the communion table about which the elders sat. He had held the Gullibrand manifesto in his hand; but ere he lifted them up in his final blessing he had dropped it

Henry Walker took it and stood up.

'Is it your will that I tear this paper? Those contrary keep their seats — those agreeable, STAND UP!'

As one man the whole congregation stood up.

All, that is, save Jacob Gullibrand. He sat a moment, and then amid a silence which could be felt, he rose and staggered out like a man suddenly

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

smitten with sore sickness. He never set foot in Nixon's Wynd again.

Henry Walker waited till the door had closed upon the Troubler of Israel, the paper still in his hand. Then very solemnly he tore it into shreds and trampled them under foot.

He waited a moment for the Doctor to speak, but he did not

'And you, also, will withdraw your resignation and stay with us?' he said.

The Doctor could not answer in words; but he nodded his head. It was, indeed, the desire of his heart. Then in a loud and surprising voice — jubilant, and yet with a kind of godly anger in it, Henry Walker gave out the closing psalm.

'All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice; Him serve with mirth, His praise forthtell, Come ye before Him and rejoice!'

7. CARNATION'S MORNING JOY

This is the story of the little white-washed cottage at the top of the brae a mile or so before you come into Cairn Edward. It is a love story, a simple and uneventful one, quickly told.

The cottage is not now what it was — I fear to say how many years ago — when I was wont to drive in to the Cameronian Kirk on summer Sabbaths in the red farm cart. Then not only I, but every one used to watch from far for the blue waft of reek going up as we sighted the white gable-end far away.

'Carnation's Cottage!' we used to call it, and even my father, Cameronian elder as he was, smiled when he passed it.

It was so named because a girl once lived there whose fame for worth and beauty had travelled very far. Her name was Carnation Maybold, a combination which at once tells its tale of no countryside origin. Carnation's father was a railroad engineer who had come from England and married a farmer's daughter in a neighbouring parish. Then when Carnation's mother died in childbirth, he had called his one daughter by the name of his wife's favourite flower.

'What for do ye no caa' her Jessie like her mither?' said the ancient dame who had come to keep his house.

'Because I never want to hear that name again!' Engineer Maybold had said. For he had been wrapped up in his wife.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Carnation Maybold lost her father, the imaginative man and second-rate engineer, when she was thirteen, a tall slim slip of a girl, with a face like a flower and a cheek that already had upon it the blush of her name. Old Tibbie Lockhart dwelt with her, and defenced the orphan maid about more securely than a city set with walls. The girl went a mile to the Cairn Edward Academy, where she was already in the first girls' class, and John Charles Morrison carried the green bag which held her books. In addition to this, being strongly built, he thrashed any boy who laughed at him for doing so. John Charles was three years older than his girl friend, and had the distinct beginnings of a moustache in days when Carnation still wore her hair in a long plaited tail down her back — for in those days Gretchen braids were the fashion.

It is curious to remember that, while all the other girls were Megs and Katies, Madges and Jennies, Carnation Maybold's first name knew no diminutive. She was, and has remained, just Carnation. That is enough. She was fifteen when John Charles was sent to college. After that she carried her own books both ways. She had offers from several would-be successors to the honourable service, but she accepted none. Besides, she was thinking of putting her hair up.

When John Charles came home in the windy close of the following March, the first thing he did was to put the little box which contained his class medal into his vest pocket, and hasten down the road to meet Carnation. His father was at market. His mother (a peevish, complaining, prettyish woman) was in bed with sick headache, and not to

be disturbed. But there remained Carnation. The returned scholar asked no better.

The heart of John Charles beat as he kept the wider side of the turns of the road that he might the sooner spy her in front of him. She was only a slip of a schoolgirl and he a penniless student — but nevertheless his heart beat.

Did he love her? No, he knew that he had never uttered the word in her hearing, and that if he had, she was too young to know its meaning. She was just Carnation— and — and, how his heart beat!

But still the wintry trees stood gaunt and spectral on either hand. He passed them as in a dream, his soul bent on the next twist of the red-gray sandy ribbon of road, that was flung so unscientifically about among the copses and pastures.

There she was at last — taller, lissomer than ever, her green bag swinging in her hand and a gay lilt of a tune upon her lips.

‘Carnation!’

She did not answer him by any word. Instead, she stood silent with the song stilled mid-flight upon her lips. She smiled happily, however, as he came near.

‘Carnation!’ he cried again. And there was something shining in the lad’s eyes which she had never seen there before.

She held out the green bag. Then she turned her elbow towards him with a certain defensive instinct.

‘Here, take my books, John Charles!’ she said, as if he had never been away; and with no more than that they began to walk homeward together.

‘Are you not glad to see me?’ he asked presently.

‘Oh, yes, indeed — very glad!’ she answered, looking at the ground; ‘you will be able to carry my

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

books again, you see!

'Who has carried them while I have been away?'

'Carried them myself.'

'For true?'

'Honour!'

John Charles breathed so long a breath that it was almost a sigh. Carnation looked at him curiously.

'Why, you have grown a moustache,' she said, smiling a quick, radiant smile.

'And you — you are different, too. What is it?' he returned, gazing openly at her, as indeed he had been doing ever since they met. She turned her face piquantly towards him. It was like a flower. A faint perfume seemed to breathe about the boy, making his brain whirl.

'Not grown a moustache, anyway,' Carnation said, tauntingly.

And she roguishly twirled imaginary tips between her finger and thumb.

'Let me see!' said John Charles, drawing nearer as if to examine into the facts.

'Oh, no,' said Carnation hastily, fending him off with a glance, 'I'm grown up now, and it's different! Besides...'

And she glanced behind her along the red-gray ribbon of dusty road, along which for lack of company the March dust was dancing little jigs of its own.

'Why different?' began John Charles, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

'Well, don't you see, stupid?' she gave her head a pretty coquettish turn, 'I've got my hair up!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

After this they walked somewhat moodily along a while. Or, at least the young man was moody and silent, while Carnation only smiled sedately, and something, perhaps a certain bitter easting in the wind, made her cheeks more flowerlike and reminiscent of her name than ever.

‘Carnation,’ he said at last, ‘why are we not to be friends any more? Why have you grown away from me? You are three years younger — and yet — you seem older somehow today — years and years older.’

‘Well, what more do you want — aren't you carrying my bag?’

‘Tell me about yourself — what have you been doing?’ He changed the subject.

‘Going to school — let me see, six twenties are a hundred and twenty. Coming back another hundred and twenty times. Two hundred and forty trudges, and the bag growing heavier all the time! It is quite time you came back, John Charles.’

‘Carnation, dear,’ with trepidation he ventured the adjective, ‘I have something to show you that nobody has seen — what will you give me if I show it you?’

‘I shan't give you anything; but you can show me and see,’ was the somewhat inconsequent reply.

‘Come here then, by the end of the house.’

They had arrived at Carnation's cottage, and the consciousness of the eye of Tibbie Lockhart out of the kitchen window was upon the youth.

‘I shan't — show it to me here!’ said Carnation, swinging the bag of books through the open front door in a casual and school-girlish manner.

‘I can't. I don't want Tibbie to know about it —

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

nobody but you must see it!

'Are you sure nobody has seen it — no girl in Edinburgh — nobody in Cairn Edward?'

'No one at all — not even my mother, not since I got it. I kept it for you, Carnation.'

'Is it very pretty?'

'Yes, very pretty! Come in here; you will be sorry if you don't!'

'Well, I will come — just for a moment!'

They went round to the gable of the cottage where, being sheltered from the wind, a couple of sentinel Irish yews grew tall and erect. Between them there was a little bower. John Charles took the little flat box out of his pocket and opened it.

A gold class medal lay within, not fitting very well on account of a thin blue ribbon which the proprietor had strung through a clasp at the top.

'Oh,' said Carnation with a gasp, 'it is lovely. Is it gold? Why, it has your name on. It is the medal of the class. How proud your father and mother will be!'

And she clasped her hands and gazed, but did not offer to take it in her fingers.

'No, indeed, that they won't,' said John Charles grimly; 'they won't ever know, and if they did they wouldn't care. I am not going to tell them or any one. I won it for you. All the time I was working I kept saying to myself, 'If I win the medal I shall give it to Carnation to wear round her neck on a blue ribbon — because blue is her colour''

'Oh, but I could not!' cried the girl, going back a step or two, 'I dare not! Any one might see and read — what is written on it.'

'You needn't wear it outside, Carnation,' he

pleaded, in a low tone.; 'see, I put the ribbon through it that you might.'

'It is pretty' — her face had a kind of inner shining upon it, and her eyes glittered darkly — 'it was very nice of you to think about me — not that I believe for a moment you really did. But, indeed, indeed, I can't take it.'

The face of John Charles Morrison fell. His jaw, a singularly determined one, began to square itself.

'Very well,' he said, flirting the ribbon out of the clasp and throwing the box on the ground, 'do you see that pond down there? As sure as daith' (he used the old school-boy oath of asseveration) 'I'll throw it in that pond if ye dinna tak' it!'

Something very like a sob came into the lad's throat.

'And I worked so hard for it. And I thought you would have liked it!'

'I do like it — I do — I do!' cried Carnation, agonised and affrayed.

'No, you don't!'

'Give it me, then — don't look!'

She turned her back upon him, and for a long moment her fingers were busy about her neck.

'Now!'

She faced about, the light of a showery April in her eyes. She was smiling and blushing at the same time. There was just a faint gleam of blue ribbon where the division of the white collar came in front of her throat.

John Charles recognised that the moment for which he had striven all through the winter had come. He stooped and kissed her where she stood. Then he turned on his heel and walked silently

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

away, leaving her three times Carnation and a school-girl no more.

She watched him out of sight, the vivid blush slowly fading from her face, and then went demurely within.

'Where gat ye that ribbon wi' the wee guinea piece at the end o't?' said guardian Tibbie that night, suggestively.

'I know; but I promised not to tell!' quoth the witch, who, indeed, twisted the shrewish-tongued old woman round her finger.

'But I think I can guess,' said Tibbie shrewdly; 'gin that blue ribbon wasna coft in Edinbra toon, I'se string anither gowden guinea upon it!'

But Carnation Maybold only smiled and pouted her lips, as if at a pleasant memory.

From sixteen to twenty-six is more than a full half of the period of life to which we give the name of girlhood. But at twenty-six Carnation Maybold was Carnation Maybold still. Yet there had been no breaking off, no failure in the steadfastness of that early affection which had sent John Charles along the dusty road to carry the school-bag of green baize.

But the medallist never returned to college. During the early falling twilight of the next Hint o' Hairst (or end of harvest), his father, Gawain Morrison, driving homeward from market all too mellow, brake neck-bone over the crags of the Witch's pool.

So, his mother being a feeble woman, though still young and buxom, John Charles had perforce to

bide at home and shoulder the responsibilities of a farm of two thousand pastoral acres and a rent of £800, payable twice a year in Cairn Edward town.

It was a sore burden for such young shoulders, but John Charles had grit in him, and, what made his heart glad, he could do most of his work, by lea rig and pasturage, within sight of a certain cottage where dwelt the maid with a ribbon of blue about her neck.

There was no possibility of any marriage, nor, indeed, talk of any between them, and that for two good reasons: Gawain Morrison had died in debt. He was 'behindhand at the Bank,' and his farm and stock were left to his widow at her own disposition, unless she should marry again, in which case they were willed to his son John Charles Morrison, presently student of arts in the University of Edinburgh. The will had been made during the one winter that son had spent away from home.

John Charles' bitter hour in the bank at Cairn Edward was sweetened by the sympathy and kindness of Henry Marchbanks, who, being one of the best judges of character in Scotland, saw cause to give this young man a chance to discharge his father's liabilities.

At twenty-five John Charles was once more a free man, and there was a substantial balance to his mother's credit in the bank of Cairn Edward. Penny of his own he had not received one for all his five years' work.

But Mrs. Morrison was that most foolish of women-kind— an old woman striving to appear young. She had taken a strong dislike to the girl mistress of the white cottage at her gates, and was

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

never tired of railing at her pretensions to beauty, at her lightheadedness, and at the suitors who stayed their horses for a word or a flower from across the cropped yew hedge of Carnation Maybold's cottage.

But John Charles, steadfast in all things, was particularly admirable in his silences. He let his mother rail on, and then, at the quiet hour of e'en stole down to the dyke-side for a 'word.' He never entered Carnation's dwelling, nor did he even pass the girdling hedge of yew and privet. But there was one place where the defences were worn low. Behind the well curb occurred this breach of continuity in the dead engineer's hedges, and to this place night after night through the years, that quiet steadfast lover, John Charles Morrison, came to touch the hand of his mistress.

She did not always meet him. Sometimes she had girl friends with her in the cottage, sometimes she had been carried off to a merry-making in Cairn Edward, to return under suitable escort in the evening.

But even then Carnation had a comfortable sense of safety, for ever since one unforgotten night, Carnation knew that in any danger she had only to raise her voice to bring to her rescue a certain tall broad-shouldered ghost, which with attendant collies haunted the gray hillsides.

That night was one on which a tramp, denied an alms, had seized the girl by the arm within half a mile of her home. And at the voice of her sharp crying, a different John Charles from any she had ever seen had swung himself over the hillside dyke, and descended like an avenging whirlwind upon the assailant.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Yet so secretive is the country lover, that few save an odd shepherd or two of his own suspected the comradeship which existed between these two. Carnation was in great request at concerts and church bazaars in the little neighbouring town; she even went to a local 'assembly' or two every winter, under the sheltering wing of a school friend who had married early.

John Charles did not dance, so he was not asked to these. He was thought, indeed, to be rather a grave young fellow, busied with his farm and his books. No one connected his name with that of his fair and sprightly neighbour.

Yet somehow, in spite of many opportunities, Carnation Maybold did not marry. She was bright, cultivated, winsome, and certainly the prettiest girl for miles around.

'Are you waiting for a prince?' little Mrs. George Walter, her friend of the assemblies, had said to her more than once.

'Yes,' smiled Carnation, 'the true Prince!'

'I suppose that is why you always wear a ribbon of true blue?' retorted her friend. 'Do let me see what is at the end of it — ah, you will not? I think you are very mean, Carnation. All is over between us from this moment. I'm sure I came and told you as soon as ever George spoke!'

'But perhaps,' said Carnation quietly, 'my George has not yet spoken!'

'Well, if he hasn't, why don't you make him,' said her friend with vehemence, 'or else why have eyes like those been thrown away upon you?'

'I have worn this nearly ten years,' said Carnation, a little wistfully.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Carnation Maybold,' said her friend indignantly, 'you ought to be ashamed! And so it was for the sake of that school-girl's split sixpence that you refused Harry Foster, whose father has an estate of his own, and Kenneth Walker, the surveyor, as well as — oh, I have no patience with such silly sentiment!'

Carnation smiled even more quietly than usual.

'Gracie,' she said, 'if I am content, I don't see what difference it can make to you.'

'You ought to be married—you oughtn't to live alone with only an old woman to look after you. You are wasting the best years of your life.'

'Gracie, dear,' said Carnation, 'you mean to be kind; but I ask you not to say any more about this. There are worse things that may happen to a woman, than that she should wait and wait — aye, even if she should die waiting!'

It was the evening of the August day on which Mrs. Walter had spoken thus to Carnation that John Charles came cottage-wards slowly and gloomily. He had been thinking bitter thoughts, and at last had taken a resolve that was likely to cost him dear.

In the warm light of evening the girl, who stood at the farther side of the gap, seemed wondrously beautiful. The school-girl look had long since passed away. Only the fresh rose on the cheeks, the depths in the eyes (as if a cloud shadowed them), the lissom bend of the young body towards him, were the same. But the hair was waved and plaited about the head in a larger and nobler fashion. The contours were a little fuller, and the lips, perfect as ever in shape, were stiller, and the smile on them at once more

assured and more sedate.

‘Carnation, I cannot hold you any longer to your promise!’

‘And why not, John; are you tired of me?’

‘I am not one of those who grow tired, dear,’ the young man's voice was so low none could hear it but the one listener. ‘I will never grow tired — you know that. But I waste the best years of your life. You are beautiful, and the time is passing. You might marry any one.’

‘Have you any particular one in your mind?’

The question at once spurred and startled him. He moved his feet on the soft grass of the meadow with a certain embarrassment.

‘Yes, Carnation; my mother was speaking to me tonight of Harry Foster of Carnsalloch. His father has told her of his love for you. She says I am keeping you from accepting him. I have come to release you from any promise, Carnation, spoken or implied.’

‘There is no promise. John — save that I love you, and will never marry anyone else.’

‘But if I went away you might — you might change your mind. I am thinking of West Australia. I am making nothing of it here. All is as much my mother's as it was the day my father died! I can get her a good ‘grieve’ to take charge, and go in the spring!’

The girl winced a little, but did not speak for a while.

‘Well,’ she said at last, ‘you must do as you think best. I shall wait all the same. Thank God, there is no law against a woman waiting.’

‘Carnation, do you mean it?’

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

The gap was a gap still; but both the lovers were on one side of it, and the night was dark about them. Indeed, they were so close each to the other that there was no need of light.

'If I go, I shall make a home for you!'

'However long it is, I shall be ready when you want me!'

'Carnation!'

'John!'

And so, as it was in the beginning, the old, old tale was retold beneath the breathing rustle of the orchard trees.

Yet their hearts were sore when they parted, because the springtime was so near, and the home they longed for seemed so very far.

Carnation slept in a little garret room with a gable window. She had chosen it, because she liked to look down on John Charles' fields and on the low place in the hedge where he always stood waiting for her.

The waning moon had risen late, and Carnation undressed without a candle. Having said her prayers, she stole into bed. But sleep would not come, and, her heart being right sore within her, the tears forced up her eyelids instead, as it is woman's safety that they should.

She lay and sobbed her heart out because John was going away. But through the tears that wet her pillow certain words she had been singing in the choir on Sunday forced themselves:

'Weeping may endure for a night, But joy cometh in the morning.'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Nevertheless, Carnation must have sobbed herself to sleep, for it was nigh the dawn when she was awakened by something that flicked her lattice at regular intervals.

It could not be a bird. It was too sharp and regular for that.

Could it be?

Impossible!

He had never come before at such a time! If it were indeed he, there must be some terrible news to tell.

Carnation rose hastily, and threw a loose cloak about her shoulders. Then she went and opened the little French lattice with the criss-cross diamond panes. The dawn was coming slowly up out of the east, and the gray fields were turning rosy beneath her.

A dark figure filled up the low place in the hedge.

‘Carnation, I had something to tell you!’

‘Is it bad news? I cannot bear it, if it is.’

‘No, the best of news! I am not going at Whitsunday to Australia. My mother told me last night that she is to be married at the New Year. He is a rich man — Harry Foster's father. She is going to live at Carnsalloch.’

‘Well?’ said Carnation, doubtfully, not seeing all that this sudden change meant to them both.

‘Why, then, dearest,’ the voice of John Charles Morrison shook with emotion, ‘we can be married as soon as we like after that. The farm and everything on it is ours—yours and mine!’

Carnation's brain reeled, and she found herself without a word to say. Only the sound of the happy singing ran in her head:

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Joy cometh in the morning — joy cometh in the morning!'

'Why don't you speak, Carnation? Are you not glad?'

The voice down at the gap was anxious now.

'I am too far away from you to say anything, but I am glad, very glad, dear John!'

'You will be ready by Whitsunday?'

'I shall be ready by Whitsunday!'

There was a pause. The light came clearer in the east. John Charles could see the girl's fresh complexion thrown up by the dark cloak, an edging of lace, white and dainty, just showing beneath.

'Carnation, I wish I could kiss you!' he said.

'Will this do instead?' she answered him, smiling through the wetness of her eyes.

And she lifted up the old worn class medal she had carried so long on its blue ribbon, and kissed it openly.

And that had perforce to 'do' John Charles — at least, for that time of asking.

8. JAIMSIE

As I drove home the other day I saw that old lazybones Jacob Irving seated in the sun with a whole covey of boys round him. He had his pocket-knife in his hand, and was busy mending a 'gird.' The 'gird,' or wooden hoop, belonged to Will Bodden, and its precedence in medical treatment had been secured by Will's fists. There was quite a little hospital ward behind, of toys all awaiting diagnosis in strict order of primacy.

Here was Dick Dobie with a new blade to put into his shilling knife. A shilling knife, Jacob assured him, is not fitted for cutting down fishing-rods. It is, however, excellent as a saw when used on smaller timber. Next came Peter Cheesemonger, who was in waiting with a model schooner, the rigging of which had met with an accident. And there, hurrying down from the cottage on the Brae, was one of the younger Allan lasses with her mother's 'wag-at-the-wa' clock. The pendulum had wagged to such purpose that it had swung itself out of its right mind.

After I had left behind me this vision of old Jacob Irving seated on the wall of the boys' playground at the village school, I fell into a muse upon the narrowness of the line which, in our Scottish parishes, divides the 'Do-Everythings' from the 'Do-Nothings.'

I could give myself the more completely to this train of thought that I had finished my rounds for the day, and had now nothing to do except to look

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

forward to seeing Nance, and to the excellent dinner for which the shrewd airs of the moorland were providing internal accommodation of quite a superior character.

The conditions of Scottish life are generally so strenuous, and the compulsions of 'He that will not work, neither shall he eat' so absolute, that we cannot afford more than one local Do-Nothing in a village or rural community. Equally certainly, however, one is necessary. The business of the commonwealth could not be carried on without him. Besides, he is needed to point the indispensable moral.

'There's that guid-for-naething Jacob Irvin' sittin' wi' a' the misleared boys o' the neighbourhood about him!' I can hear a douce goodwife say to her gossip. 'Guid peety his puir wife and bairns! Guidman, lay ye doon that paper an' awa' to your wark, or ye'll sune be nae better — wi' your Gledstane and your speeches and your smokin'! Think shame o' yersel', guidman.'

As the community grows larger, however, there is less and less room for the amiable Do-Nothing. He is, indeed, only seen to perfection in a village or rural parish. In Cairn Edward, for instance, which thinks itself quite a town, he does not attain the general esteem and almost affectionate reprobation which, in my native Whinnyliggate, follow Jacob Irving about like his shadow.

In a town like Cairn Edward a local Do-Nothing is apt to attach himself to a livery stable, and there to acquire a fine coppery nose and a permanent 'dither' about the knees. He is spoken of curtly and even disrespectfully as 'that waister Jock Bell.' In cities

he becomes a mere matter for the police, and the facetious reporter chronicles his two-hundredth appearance before the magistrate.

But in Whinnyliggate, in Dullarg, in Crosspatrick, and in the surrounding parishes, the conditions for the growth of the Do-Nothing approach as near perfection as anything merely mundane can be expected to do. Jacob Irving is hardly a typical specimen, for he has a trade. The genuine Do-Nothing should have none. It is true that Jacob's children might reply, like the boy when asked if his father were a Christian, 'Yes, but he does not work at it much!'

Jacob is a shoe-maker — or rather shoe-mender. For I have never yet been able to trace an entire pair of Jacob's foot-gear on any human extremities. It does not fit his humour to be so utilitarian. He has, however, made an excellent toy pair for the feet of little Jessie Lockhart's doll, with soles, heels, uppers, tongues, and lacing gear all complete. He spent, to my personal knowledge, an entire morning in showing her (on the front step of her father's manse) how to take them off and put them on again. And in the future he will never meet Jessie on the King's highway without stopping and gravely asking her if any repairs are yet requisite. When such are necessary they will, without doubt, receive his best attention.

I had not, however, made a study of Jacob Irving for any considerable period without exploding the vulgar opinion that the parish Do-Nothing is an idle or a lazy man. Nay, to repeat my initial paradox, the Do-Nothing is the only genuine Do-Everything.

When on a recent occasion I gave Jacob, in return

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

for the pleasure of his conversation, a 'lift' in my doctor's gig, he talked to me very confidentially of his rounds. At first I imagined in my ignorance that, like the tailors of the parishes round about, he went from farm to farm prosecuting his calling and cobbling the shoes of half the country-side. I was buttressed in this opinion by his expressed pity or contempt for wearers of 'clogs.'

'Here's anither puir body wi' a pair o' clogs on his feet,' Jacob would say; 'and to think that for verra little mair than the craitur paid for them, I wad fit him wi' as soond a pair o' leather-soled shoon as were ever ta'en frae amang tanners' bark!'

I had also seen him start out with a thin-bladed cobbler's knife and the statutory piece of 'roset' or resin wrapped in a palm's-breadth of soft leather. But, alas, all was a vain show. The knife was to be used in delicate surgical work upon the deceased at a pig-killing, and the resin was for splicing fishing-rods.

After a while I began by severe study to get at the bottom of a Do-Nothing's philosophy. To do the appointed task for the performance of which duty calls, man waits, and money will be paid : that is work to be avoided by every means — by procrastination, by fallacious promise, by prevarication, and (sad to have to say it) by the plainest of plain lying.

Whatever brings in money in the exercise of a trade, whatever must be finished within a given time, that needs the co-operation of others or prolonged and consecutive effort on his own part, is merely anathema to the Do-Nothing.

On the other hand, no house in the parish is too

distant for him to attend at the 'settin' o' the yaird' (the delving must, however, be done previously). On such occasions the Do-Nothing revels in long wooden pins with string wrapped mysteriously about them. He can turn you out the neatest-shaped bed of 'onions' and 'syboes,' the straightest rows of cabbages, and potato drills so level that the whole household feels that it must walk the straight path in order not to shame them. The wayfaring man, though a fool, looks over the dyke and says: 'Thae dreels are Jacob's — there's nane like them in the countryside!'

This at least is Jacob's way of it.

But though all this is by the way of introduction to the particular Do-Nothing I have in my eye, it is not of Jacob that I am going to write. Jacob is indeed an enticing subject, and from the point of view of his wife, might be treated very racily. But, though I afterwards made Margate living's acquaintance (and may one day put her opinions on record), I have other and higher game in my mind.

This is none other than the Reverend James Tacksman, B.A., licentiate of the Original Marrow Kirk of Scotland. In fact, a clerical Do-Nothing of the highest class.

Now, to begin with, I will aver that there is no scorn in all this. 'Jaimsie' is more to me than many worthy religious publicists, beneficed, parished, churched, stipended, and sustentationed to the eyes. He was not a very great man. He was in no sense a successful man, but — he was 'Jaimsie.'

I admit that my zeal is that of the pervert. It was not always thus with me when 'Jaimsie' was alive, and perhaps my enthusiasm is so full-bodied from a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

sense that it is impossible for the gentle probationer to come and quarter himself upon Nance and myself for (say) a period of three months in the winter season, a thing he was quite capable of doing when in the flesh.

In the days before I was converted to higher views of human nature as represented in the person of 'Jaimsie,' I was even as the vulgar with regard to him. I admit it. I even openly scoffed, and retailed to many the story of Jaimsie and my father, Saunders McQuhirr of Drumquhat, with which I shall conclude. I used to tell it rather well at college, the men said. At least they laughed sufficiently. But now I shall not try to add, alter, amend, or extenuate, as is the story-teller's wont with his favourites. For in sackcloth and ashes I have repented me, and am at present engaged in making my honourable amend to 'Jaimsie.'

For almost as long as I can remember the Reverend James Tacksman, B. A., was in the habit of coming to my father's house, and the news that he was in view on the 'far brae-face' used to put my mother into such a temper that 'dauded' heads and cuffed ears were the order of the day. The larger fry of us cleared out promptly to the barn and stackyard till the first burst of the storm was over. Even my father, accustomed as he was to carry all matters ecclesiastical with a high hand, found it convenient to have some harness to clean in the stable, or the lynch-pin of a cart to replace in the little joiner's shop where he passed so much of his time.

'T'll no hae the craitur aboot the hoose,' my mother would cry; 'I telled ye sae the last time he

was here — sax weeks in harvest it was — and then had maist to be shown the door. (Haud oot o' my road, weans! Can ye no keep frae rinnin' amang my feet like sae mony collie whaulps? Tak' ye that!) Hear ye this, guidman, if ye willna speak to the man, by my faith I wull. Mary McQuhirr is no gaun to hae the bread ta'en oot o' the mooths o' her innocent bairns (Where in the name o' fortune, Alec, are ye gaun wi' that soda bannock? Pit it doon this meenit, or I'll tak' the tings to ye!) Na, nor I will be inn aff my feet to plesure ony sic useless, guid-for-naething seefer as Jaimsie Tacksman!'

At this moment a faint rapping made itself audible at the front door, never opened except on the highest state occasions, as when the minister called, and at funerals.

My mother (I can see her now) gave a hasty 'tidy' to her gray hair and adjusted her white-frilled 'mutch' about her still winsome brow.

'And hoo are ye the day, Maister Tacksman, an' it's a lang, lang season since we've had the pleasure of a veesit frae you!'

Could that indeed be my mother's voice, so lately upraised in denunciation over a stricken and cowering world? I could not understand it then, and to tell the truth I don't quite yet. I have, however, asked her to explain, and this is what she says:

'Weel, ye see, Alec, it was this way,'(she is pleased when I require any points for my 'scribin', though publicly she scoffs at them and declares it will ruin my practice if the thing becomes known), 'ye see I had it in my mind to the last minute to deny the craitur. But when I gaed to open the door, there stood Jaimsie wi' his wee bit shakin' hand oot an'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

his threadbare coatie hingin' laich aboot his peetifu' spindle shanks, and his weel-brushit hat, an' the white neck-claith that wanted doin' up. And I kenned that naebody could laundry it as weel as me. My fingers juist fair yeukit (itched) to be at the starchin' o't. And faith, maybes there was something about the craitur too — he was sae cruppen in upon himsel', sae weebookit, sae waesome and yet kindly about the e'en, that I juist couldna say him nay.'

That is my mother's report of her feelings in the matter. She does not add that the ten minutes or quarter of an hour in which she had been able to give the fullest and most public expression to her feelings had allowed most of the steam of indignation to blow itself off. My father, who was a good judge, gave me, early in my married life, some excellent advice on this very point, which I subjoin for the edification of the general public.

'Never bottle a woman up, Alec,' he said meditatively. 'What Vesuvius and Etna and the either volcanoes are to this worl', the legetimate exercise o' her tongue is to a woman. It's a naitural function, Alec. Ye may bridle the ass or the mule, but — gie the tongue o' a woman (as it were) plenty o' elbow-room! Gang oot o' the hoose — like Moses to the backside o' the wilderness gin ye like, and when ye come in she will be as quait as pussy; and if ever ye hae to contradick your mairried wife, Alec, let it be in deeds, no in words. Gang your road gin ye hae made up your mind, immovable like the sun, the mune, and the stars o' heeven in their courses — but, as ye value peace dinna be aye cryin' 'Aye,' when your wife cries 'No!'

Which things may be wisdom. But to the tale of

our Jaimsie.

Sometimes, moreover, even the natural man in my kindly and long-suffering father uprose against the preacher. Jaimsie knew when he was comfortable, and no mere hint of any delicate sort would make him curtail his visit by one day. I can remember him creeping about the farm of Drumquhat all that summer, a book in his hand, contemplating the works of God as witnessed chiefly in the growth of the 'grosarts.' (We always blamed him — quite unjustly, I believe — for eating the 'silver-gray' gooseberries on the sly.) Now he would stand half an hour and gaze up among the branches of an elm, where a cushat was tirelessly coo-rooing to his mate. Anon you would see him apparently deeply engaged in counting the sugar-plums in the orchard. After a little he would be found seated on the red shaft of a cart in the stackyard, jotting down in a shabby note-book ideas for the illustrations of sermons never to be written; or if written, doomed never to be preached. His hat was always curled up at the back and pulled down at the front, and till my mother made down an old pair of my father's Sunday trousers for him (and put them beside his bed while he slept), you could see in a good light the reflection of your hand on the knees of his 'blacks.' It is scarcely necessary to say that Jaimsie never referred to the transposition, nor, indeed, in all probability, so much as discovered it.

Jaimsie was used to conduct family worship morning and evening in the house of his sojourn, as a kind of quit-rent for his meal of meat and his prophet's chamber. To the ordinary reading of the Word he was wont to subjoin an 'exposection' of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

some disputed or prophetic passage. The whole exercises never took less than an hour, if Jaimsie were left to the freedom of his own will — which, as may be inferred, was extremely awkward in a busy season when the corn was dry in the stock or when the scythes flashed rhythmically like level silver flames among the lush meadow grass.

Finally, therefore, a compromise had to be effected. My father took the morning diet of worship, but Jaimsie had his will of us in the evening. I can see them yet — those weariful sederunts, when even my father wrestled with sleep like Samson with the Philistines, while my mother periodically nodded forward with a lurch, and, recovering herself with a start, the next moment looked round haughtily to see which of us was misbehaving. Meanwhile the kitchen was all dark, save where before Jaimsie the great Bible lay open between two candles, and on the hearth the last peat of the evening glowed red.

Many is the fine game of draughts I have had with my brother Rob and Christie Wilson, our herd lad, by putting the 'dam-brod' behind the chimney jamb where my father and mother could not see it, and moving the pieces by the light of the red peat ash. I am ashamed to think on it now, but then it seemed the only thing to do which would keep us from sleep.

And meantime Jaimsie prosed on, his gentle sing-song working its wicked work on my mother like a lullaby, and my father sending his nails into the palms of his hands that he might not be shamed before us all.

I remember particularly how Jaimsie addressed us for a whole week on his favourite text in the Psalms, 'The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan —

an high hill, as the hill Bashan.'

And in the pauses of crowning our men and scuffling for the next place at the draught-board, we could catch strange words and phrases which come to me yet with a curious wistful thrilling of the heart. Such are 'White as snow on Salmon'— 'That mount Sinai in Arabia' — 'Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offering.'

And as a concluding of the whole matter we sang this verse out of Francis Roos's psalter:

'Ye mountains great, wherefore was it that ye did skip like rams? And wherefore was it, little hills, that ye did leap like lambs?'

It was all double-Dutch to me then, but now I can see that Jaimsie must have been marshalling the mountains of Scripture to bear solemn witness against an evil and exceedingly somnolent generation.

Once when my mother snored audibly Jaimsie looked up, but at that very moment she awoke, and with great and remarkable presence of mind promptly cuffed Rob, who in his turn knocked the draught-board endways, just as I had his last man cornered, to our everlasting disgrace.

My mother asked us next day pointedly where we thought we were going to, and if we were of opinion that there would be any dam-brods in hell. I offered no remarks, but Rob—who was always an impudent boy — got on the other side of the dyke from my mother and answered that there would be no snorers there either.

From an early age he was a lad of singularly sound judgments, my brother Rob. He stayed out in

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the barn till after my mother was asleep that night.

At last, however, even my father grew tired of Jaimsie. He stayed full three months on this occasion. Autumnal harvest fields were bared of stocks, the frost began to glisten on the stiff turnip shaws, the wreathed nets were put up for the wintering sheep, and still the indefatigable Jaimsie stayed on.

I remember yet the particular morning when, at long and last, Jaimsie left us. All night almost there had been in the house the noise as of a burn running over hollow stones, with short solid interruptions like the sound of a distant mallet stricken on wood. It came from my father's and mother's room. I knew well what it meant. The sound like running water was my mother trying to persuade my father to something against his will, and the far-away mallet thuds were his monosyllabic replies.

This time it was my mother who won.

After the harvest bustle was over, Jaimsie had resumed his practice of taking worship in the mornings, but any of us who had urgent work on hand could obtain, by proper representation, a dispensing ordinance. These were much sought after, especially when Jaimsie started to tackle the Book of Daniel 'in his ordinary,' as he phrased it.

But this Monday morning, to the general surprise, my father sat down in the chair of state himself and reached the Bible from the shelf.

'I will take family worship this morning, Mr. Tacksman,' he said, with great sobriety.

Then we knew that something extraordinary was coming, and I was glad I had not 'threeped' to my

mother that I had seen some of the Nether Neuk sheep in our High Park — which would have been quite true, for I had put them there myself on purpose the night before.

It was during the prayer that the blow fell. My father had a peculiarly distinct and solemn way with him in supplication; and now the words fell distinct as hammer strokes on our ear.

He prayed for the Church of God in all covenanted lands; for all Christian peoples of every creed (here Jaimsie, faithful Abdiel, always said 'Humph'); for the heathen without God and without hope; for the family now present and for those of the family afar off. Then, as was his custom, he approached the stranger (who was no stranger) within our gates.

'And do Thou, Lord, this day vouchsafe journeying mercies to Thy servant who is about to leave us. Grant him favourable weather for his departure, good speed on his way, and a safe return to his own country!'

A kind of gasping sigh went all about the kitchen. I knew that my mother had her eye on my father to keep him to his pledged word of the night season. So I dared not look round.

But we all ached to know how Jaimsie would take it, and we all joined fervently in the supplication which promised us a couple of hours more added to our day.

Then came the Amen, and all rose to their feet. Jaimsie seemed a little dazed, but took the matter like a scholar and a gentleman.

He held out his hand to my father with his usual benevolent smile.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'I did not know that I had mentioned it,' he said, 'but I was thinking of leaving you today.'

And that was all he said, but forthwith went upstairs to pack his shabby little black bag.

My father stood a while as if shamed; then, when we heard Jaimsie's feet trotting overhead, he turned somewhat grimly to my mother. On his face was an expression as if he had just taken physic.

'Well,' he said, 'you will be easier in your mind now, Mary.' This he said, well knowing that the rat of remorse was already getting his incisors to work upon his wife's conscience. She stamped her foot.

'Saunders McQuhirr,' she said in suppressed tones, 'to be a Christian man, ye are the maist aggravatin'.'

But at that moment my father went out through the door, saying no further word.

My mother shooed us all out of the house like intrusive chickens, and I do not know for certain what she did next. But Rob, looking through the blind of the little room where she kept her house-money, saw her fumbling with her purse. And when at last Jaimsie, having addressed his bag to be sent with the Carsphairn carrier into Ayrshire (where dwelt the friends next on his visiting list), came out with his staff in one hand, he was dabbing his eyes with a clean handkerchief.

Then, after that, all that I remember is the pathetic figure of the little probationer lifting up a hand in silent blessing upon the house which had sheltered him so long; and so taking his lonely way over the hillside towards the northern coach road.

When my father came in from the sheep at midday, he waited till grace was over, and then,

looking directly at my mother, he said: 'Weel, Mary, how mony o' your pound notes did he carry away in his briest-pocket this time?'

I shall never forget the return and counter retort which followed. My mother was vexed — one of the few times that I can remember seeing her truly angered with her husband.

'I would give you one advice, Saunders McQuhirr,' she said, 'and that is, from this forth, to be mindful of your own business.'

'I will tak' that advice, Mary,' he answered slowly; 'but my heart is still sore within me this day because I took the last advice you gied me!'

And it was destined to be yet sorer for that same cause. Jaimsie never was within our doors again. He abode in Ayrshire and the Upper Ward all that winter and spring, and it was not till the following back-end, and in reply to a letter and direct invitation from my conscience-stricken father, that he announced that, all being well and the Lord gracious, he would be with us the following Friday.

But on the Thursday night a great snow storm came on, and the drift continued long unabated. We all said that Jaimsie would doubtless be safely housed, and we did not look for him to arrive upon the day of his promise. However, by Monday, when the coach was again running, my mother began to be anxious, and all the younger of us went forth to try and get news of him. We heard that he had left Carsphairn late on the Thursday forenoon, meaning to stop overnight at the shepherd's shieling at the southern end of Loch Dee. But equally certainly he had never reached it.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

It was not till Tuesday morning early that Jaimsie was found under a rock near the very summit of the Dungeon hill, his plaid about him and his frozen hand clasping his pocket Bible. It was open, and his favourite text was thrice underscored.

'The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan — an high hill, as the hill of Bashan.'

Well, there is no doubt that the little forlorn 'servant of God' has indeed gotten some new light shed upon the text, since the dark hour when he sat down to rest his weary limbs upon the snow-clad summit of the Dungeon of Buchan.

9. BEADLE AND MARTYR

I sometimes give it as a reason for a certain lack of uniformity in church attendance, that I cannot away with the new-fangled organs, hymns, and chaunts one meets with there. I love them not, in comparison, that is, with the old psalm tunes. They do not make the heart beat quicker and more proudly, like Kilmarnock and Coleshill, Duke Street and Old 124th.

Nance, however, is so far left to herself as to say that this is only an excuse, and that my real reason is the pleasure I have in thinking that all the people must perforce listen to a sermon, while I can put my feet upon another chair and read anything I like. This, however, is rank insult, such as only wives long wedded dare to indulge in. Besides, it shows, by its imputation of motives, to what lengths a sordid and ill-regulated imagination will go.

Moreover, I have never grown accustomed to the hours of town churches, and I consider, both from a medical and from a spiritual point of view, that afternoon services in town churches are directly responsible for the spread of indigestion, as well as of a spirit of religious infidelity throughout our beloved land.

(Nance is properly scandalised at this last remark, and says that she hopes people will understand that I only believe about half of what I put down on paper when I get a pen in my hand. She complains that she is often asked to explain

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

some of my positions at afternoon teas. I say it serves her right for attending such gatherings of irresponsible gossip, tempered with boiled tannin. It is easy to have the last word with Nance — here.)

But after all the chief thing that I miss when I go to church is just Willie McNair.

The sermon is nowadays both shorter and better. The singing is good of its kind, and I can always read a psalm or a paraphrase if the hymn prove too long, or, as is often the case, rather washy in sentiment. The children's address is really designed for children, and the prayers do not exceed five minutes in length. But — I look in vain for Willie McNair.

Alas! Willie lies out yonder on the green knowe, his wife Betty by his side, and four feet of good black mould over his coffin-lid.

Willie was just our beadle, and he had a story. When I am setting down so many old things, if I forget thee, Willie McNair, may my right hand forget his cunning.

Ah, Willie, though you never were a 'church-officer,' though you never heard the Word, it is you, you alone, that I miss. I just cannot think of the kirk without you. Grizzled, gnarled, bow-shouldered of week-days, what a dignity of port, what a solemnising awe, what a processional tread was thine on Sabbaths! We had only one service in the Kirk on the Hill in my youth. But, speaking in the vulgar tongue, that one was a 'starcher.'

It included the 'prefacing' of a psalm, often extending over quite as long a period of time as an ordinary modern sermon, a 'lecture,' which as a rule (if 'himsel' was in fettle) lasted about three quarters

of an hour. Then after that the sermon proper was begun without loss of time.

Now I cannot say, speaking 'from the heart to the heart'(a favourite expression of Willie's), that I regret the loss of all this. I was but a boy, and the torment of having to sit still for from two hours and a half to three hours on a hard seat, close-packed and well-watched to keep me out of mischief, has made even matrimony seem light and easy. How mere Episcopalians and other untrained persons get through the sorrows and disappointments incident to human life I do not know.

It was not till the opening of the Sabbath-school by Mr. Osbourne, however, that I came to know Willie well. Hitherto he had been as inaccessible and awe-striking as the minister's neckcloth. And of that I have a story to tell. I think what made me a sort of advanced thinker in these early days, was once being sent by my father to the lodgings of the minister who was to 'supply' on a certain Sabbath morning. The manse must have been shut for repairs and 'himsel' on his holidays. At any rate, the minister was stopping with Miss Bella McBriar in the little white house below the Calmstone Brig. Miss Bella showed me in with my missive, and there, on the morning of the Holy Day, before a common unsanctified glass tacked to a wall, with a lathery razor in his hand, in profane shirtsleeves, stood the minister, shaving himself! His neck-cloth, that was to appear and shine so glorious above the cushions of the pulpit, hung limp and ignominious over the back of a chair. A clay pipe lay across the ends of it.

This was the beginning of the mischief, and if I ever take to a criminal career, here was the first and

primal cause.

Shortly after I went to Sabbath-school, and having been well trained by my father in controversial divinity, and drilled by my mother in the Catechism, I found myself in a fair way of distinguishing myself; but for all that, I cannot truly say that I ever got over the neckcloth on the back of Miss McBriar's chair. When I aired my free-thinking opinions before my father, and he shut me off by an appeal to authority, I kept silence and hugged myself.

'That may be a good enough argument,' I said to myself, 'but — I have seen a minister's neckcloth hung over the back of a chair, and shaving-soap on his chafts on Sabbath morning. How can you believe in revealed religion after that?'

But I had so much of solid common-sense, even in these my salad days, that I refrained from saying these things to my father. Indeed, I would not dare to say them now, even if I believed them.

Willie McNair regarded the Sabbath-school much as I did. To both of us it was simply an imposition.

Willie thought so for two reasons — first and generally, because it was an innovation; and secondly, because he had to clean up the kirk after it. I agreed with him, because I was compelled to attend — the farm cart being delayed a whole hour in order that I might have the privilege of religious instruction by the senior licensed grocer of the little town. This gentleman had only one way of imparting knowledge. That was with the brass-edged binding of his pocket Bible. Even at that time I preferred the limp Oxford morocco. And so would you, if something so unsympathetic as brass corners were

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

applied to the sides of your head two or three times every Sunday afternoon.

After several years of this experience, I passed into Henry Marchbank's class and was happy. But that is quite another chapter, and has nothing to do with Willie McNair.

Now, Sabbath-school was over about three o'clock, and our conveyance did not start till four. That is the way I became attached to Willie. I used to stay and help him to clean the kirk. This is the way he did it.

First, he unfrocked himself of his broadcloth dignity by hanging his coat upon a nail in the vestry. Then he put on an apron which covered him from gray chin-beard to the cracks in the uppers of his shining shoes. Into the breast of this envelope he thrust a duster large enough for a sheet. It was, in fact, a section of a departed pulpit swathing.

Then, muttering quite scriptural maledictions, and couching them in language entirely Biblical, Willie proceeded to visit the pews occupied by each class, restoring the 'buiks' he had previously piled at the head of each seat to their proper places on the book-board in front, and scrutinising the woodwork for inscriptions in lead-pencil. Then he swept the crumbs and apple-cores carefully off the floor and delivered judgment at large.

'I dinna ken what Maister Osbourne was thinkin' on to begin sic a Popish whigmaleery as this Sabbath-schule! A disgrace an' a mockin' in the hoose o' God! What kens the like o' Sammlle Borthwick about the divine decrees? When I, mysel', that has heard them ticated on for forty year under a' the Elect Ministers o' the Land, can do no more

than barely understand them to this day! And a wheen silly lasses, wi' gum-floo'ers in their bonnets to listen to bairns hummerin' ower 'Man's Chief End!' It's eneuch to gar decent Doctor Symington turn in his grave!' Man's Chief End' — faith — it's wum-man's chief end that they're thinkin' on, the madams; they think I dinna see them shakin' their gum-floo'ers and glancing their e'en in the direction o' the onmarriet teacher bodies.'

'And such are all they that put their trust in them!' concluded Willie, somewhat irrelevantly.

'Laddie, come doon out o' the pulpit. I canna lippen (trust) ony body to dust that, bena mysel! Gang and pick up the conversation lozengers aff the floor o' the Young Weemen's Bible Cless!'

Printed words can give small indication of the intense bitterness and mordant satire of Willie's speech as he uttered these last words.

Yet Willie was far from being a hater of womenkind. Indeed, the end of all his moralising was ever the same.

'There's my ain guid wife — was there ever a woman like her? Snod as a new preen, yet nocht gaudy, naeth-ing ken-speckle. If only the young weemen nooadays were like Betty, they wad hae nae need o' gum-floo'ers an' ither abominations. Na, nor yet Bible clesses! Faith, set them up! It wad better become them to sit them doon wi' their Bibles in their laps and the grace o' God in their hearts, an' tak' a lesson to themsel's oot o' Paaal!'

Here Willie dusted the pulpit cushions, vigorously shaking them as a terrier does a rat, and then carefully brushing them all in one direction, in order that, as he said, 'the fell may a' lie the yae way.'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Willie was no eye servant. No spider took hold with her hands and was in the Palace of Willie's King. Dust had no habitation there, and if a man did not clean his boots on the mat before entering, Willie went to him personally and told him his probable chances of a happy hereafter. These were but few and evil.

Then having got the 'shine' to fall as he wanted it, and the dark purple velvet overhang, pride of his heart, to sit to a nicety, Willie lifted up the heavy tassels, and at the same time resumed the thread of his discourse, standing there in the pulpit with the very port of a minister, and in his speech a point and pith that was all his own.

'Aye, Paul' (he always pronounced it Paaal) — 'aye, Paaal, it's a peety ye never marriet and left nae faim'ly that we ken o'. For we hae sair need o' ye in thae days. But ye kenned better than to taigle yersel' wi' silly lasses. It was you that bade the young weemen to be keepers at hame — nae Bible clesses for Paaal — na, na!

'And you mind Peter — oh, Peter was juist as soond on gum-floo'ers an' weemen's falderals as Paaal, Whose adorning, let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, and putting on of apparel, but the ornament of a meek and quiet speerit.'

He stopped in the height of his discourse and waggled his hand down at me.

'Here, boy!' he cried, 'what did ye do wi' thae conversation lozengers?'

I indicated that I had them still in my pocket, for I had meant to solace the long road home with the cleaner of them.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Let me see them!'

Somewhat unwillingly I handed them up to Willie as he stood in the pulpit, a different Willie, an accusing Willie, Nathan the Prophet with a large cloth-brush under his arm.

'When this you see, remember me.'

He read the printed words through his glasses deliberately.

'Aye,' he sneered, 'that wad be Mag Kinstrey. I saw Rob Cuthberts smirkin' ower at her when the minister was lookin' up yon reference to Melchisadek. Aye, Meg, I'll remember ye—I'll no forget ye. And if ye mend not your ways.'

Willie did not conclude the sentence, but instead, he shook his head in the direction of the door of the Session house.

He picked out another.

'The rose is red — the violet's blue, But fairer far, my love, are you.'

Willie opened the door of the pulpit.

'Preserve me, what am I doin'? It's fair profanation to be readin' sic balderdash in a place like this. Laddie, hear ye this, whatever ye hae to say to a lass, gang ye and say it to hersel', by yoursel'. For valenteens are a vain thing, and conversation lozengers a mock and an abomination.'

Willie threatened me a moment with uplifted finger, and then added his stereotyped conclusion: 'And so are all such as put their trust in them!'

And through life I have acted strictly on Willie's advice, and I am bound to admit that I have found it good.

About this period, also, I began to take tea not infrequently, with Willie, and occasionally, but not

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

often, I saw his wife, the incomparable Betty, whose praises Willie was never tired of singing. I am forced to say that, after these harangues, Betty disappointed me. She sat dumb and appeared singularly stupid, and this to a lad accustomed to a housewife like my mother, with her woman's wit keen as a razor, and a speech pointed to needle fineness, appeared more than strange.

But Willie's affection was certainly both lovely and lovable. He was a gnarled gray old man with a grim mouth, but for Betty he ran like a young lover, and served her with meat and drink, as it had been on bended knee. His smile was ready whenever she looked at him, and he watched her with anxious eyes, dwelling on her every word and movement with a curious perturbation. If she happened not to be in when he came to the door, he would fall to trembling like a leaf, and the bleached look on his face was sad to see.

Willie McNair dwelt in a rickety old house at the bottom of the kirk hill, separated from the other village dwellings by the breadth of a field. There was a garden behind it, and a heathery common behind that, with whins growing to the very dyke of Willie's kailyard.

The first time that Betty was not in the house when we went home, it was to the hill behind that Willie ran first. Under a broom bush he found her, after a long search, and lifting her up in his arms he carried her to the house.

'Poor Betty,' he cried over his shoulder as he went before me down the walk; 'she shouldna gang oot on sic a warm day. The sun has been ower muckle for her. See, boy, rin doon to the Tinkler's well for some

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

caller water. The can's at the gable end.'

When I returned Betty was quietly in bed; and Willie had made the tea with ordinary water. He was somewhat more composed, but I could see his hand shake when he tried to pour out the first cup. He 'skailed' it all over the cloth, and then was angered with himself for what he called his 'trimlin' auld banes.'

But I never knew or suspected Willie's secret till that awful Sabbath day, when the cross that he had borne so long hidden from the eyes of men, was suddenly lifted high in air.

Then all at once Willie towered like a giant, and the bowed shoulders seemed to support a gray head about which had become visible an apparent aureole.

It was the day of High Communion, and the solemn services were drawing to a yet more solemn close. The elements had been dispensed and the elders were back again in their places. Mr. Osbourne had Dr. Landsborough of Portmarnock assisting him that day — a tall man with a gracious manner, and the only man who could give an after-communion address without his words being resented as an intrusion.

'It is always difficult,' he said, 'to disturb the peculiarly sacred pause which succeeds the act of communion by any words of man.'

He had got no farther when he stopped, and the congregation regarded him with the strained attention which a beautiful voice always compels. The beadle was sitting in all the reasonable pride of his dignity in the first pew to the right of the Session. When Dr. Landsborough stopped, the

congregation followed the direction of his eyes.

The door at the back of the kirk was seen to be open and a woman stood there, dishevelled, wild-eyed, a black bottle in her shaking hand, a red shawl about her head.

It was Betty McNair.

'Willie!' she cried aloud in the awful silence, 'Willie, come forth—you that lockit me in the back kitchen, an' thocht to stop me frae the saicrament — I hae deceived ye, Willie McNair, clever man as ye think yersel!'

I was in the corner pew opposite Willie (being, of course, a non-communicant at that date), so that I could see his face. At the first sound of that voice his countenance worked as if it would change its shape, but in a moment I saw him grip the book-board and stand up. Then he went quietly down the aisle to where his wife stood, gabbling wild and wicked words, and laughing till it turned the blood cold to hear her in that sacred place, and upon that solemn occasion.

Firmly, but very gently, Willie took the woman by the arm, and led her out. She went like a lamb. He closed the door behind him, and after a quaking and dreadful pause, Dr. Landsborough took up the interrupted burden of his discourse.

I was a great lad of twelve or thirteen at the time and unused to tears for many years. But I know that I wept all the time till the service was ended, thinking of Willie and wondering where he was and what he would be doing.

That same night I heard my father telling my mother about what came next.

The Session were in their little square room after

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the service, counting the tokens. The minister was sitting in his chair waiting to dismiss them with the benediction, when a rap came to the door. My father opened it, being nearest, and there without stood Willie McNair.

'I wish to speak with the Session,' he said firmly.

'Come in — come your ways in, William,' said the minister, kindly, and the elders resumed their seats, not knowing what was to happen.

'Moderator and ruling elders of this congregation,' said Willie, who had not served tables so long without knowing the respect due to his spiritual superiors, 'I have come before you in the day of my shame to demit the office I have held so long among you. Gentlemen, I do not complain, I own I am well punished. These twenty years I have lived for my pride. I have lied to each one of you—to the minister, to the elders, and to the hale congregation, making a roose of my wife, and sticking at nothing to hide the shame of my house.

'Sirs, for these lying words, it behoves that ye deal strictly with me, and I will submit willingly. But believe me, sirs, it was through a godly jealousy that I did it, that the Kirk of the New Testament might not be made ashamed through me and mine. But for a' that I have done wrong, grievous wrong. I aye kenned in my heart that it would come — though, God helping me, I never thocht that it would be like this!

'But noo I maun gang awa',' here he broke into dialect, 'for I never could bear to see anither man carry up the Buiks and open the door for you, sir, to enter in.

Forty years has William McNair been a hewer of

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

wood and a drawer of water in this tabernacle. Let there be pity in your hearts for him this day. He hath borne himself with pride, and for that the Lord hath brought him very low. And, oh! sirs, pray for her— flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone, come to what ye saw this day! Tell me that He will forgie — be sure to tell me that He will forgie Betty — for what she has dune this day!’

The minister reassured him in affectionate words, and the whole Session tried to get Willie to withdraw his decision. But in vain. The old man was firm.

‘No,’ he said, ‘Betty is noo my chairge. The husband of a drunkard is not a fit person to serve tables in the clean and halesome sanctuary. I will never leave Betty till the day she dees!’

And neither he did. It was not long. Willie nursed his wife with unremitting tenderness, breaking himself down as he did so. I did not see him again till the day of Betty's funeral. I went with my father, feeling very important, as it was the first function I had been at in my new character of a man.

When they were filling in the grave, Willie stood at the head with his hat in his hand, and his gray locks waving in the moderate wind. His lips were tremulous, but I do not think there were tears in his eyes.

I went up to try to say something that might comfort him. I knew no better then. But I think he did not wish me to speak about Betty, for with a strange uncertain kind of smile he lifted up his eyes till they rested upon the golden fields of ripening corn all about the little kirkyard.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'I think it will be an early harvest,' he said, in a commonplace tone.

Then all suddenly he broke into a kind of eager sobbing cry — a heart-prayer of ultimate agony.

'Oh, my God ! my God ! send that it be an early harvest to puir Willie McNair.'

And it was, for before a sheaf of that heartsome yellow corn was gathered into barn, they laid Willie beside the woman he had watched so long, and sheltered so faithfully behind the barriers of his love.

10. THE BLUE EYES OF AILIE

When first I went to Cairn Edward as a medical man on my own account, I had little to do with the district of Glenkells. For one thing, there was a resident doctor there, Dr. Campbell — Ignatius Campbell — and in those days professional boundaries were more strictly observed than they have been in more recent years. But in time, whether owing to the natural spread of my practice, or through some small name which I got in the countryside, owing to a successful treatment of tubercular cases, I found myself oftener and oftener in the Glenkells. And, indeed, ever since I began to be able to keep a stated assistant, it has been my custom to take day about with him on the Glenkells round.

But in what follows I speak of the very early years when I had still little actual connection with the district. The Glenkells folk are always in the habit of referring to themselves as a community apart. They may, indeed, in extreme cases include the rest of the United Kingdom — but, as it were, casually. Thus, 'If the storm continues it will be a sair winter in Glenkells, and the rest o' the country!'

Or when some statesman conspicuously blundered, or a foreign nation involved themselves in superfluous difficulties, you could not go into a farmhouse or traverse the length of the main street of the Clachan without hearing the words: 'The like o' that could never hae happened i' the Glenkells!'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

So there arose a proverb which, though of local origin, was not without a certain wider acceptance: 'As conceity as Glenkells,' or, in a more diffuse form: 'Glenkells cocks craw aye croosest an' on a muckler midden!'

But Glenkells wooted little of such slurs, or if it minded at all took them for compliments with a solid and irrefutable foundation. On the other hand, it retorted upon the rest of the world in characteristic fashion, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. As thus: 'Tak' care o' him. He's no to be trustit. His grand-father cam' frae Borgue!' Or, more allusively: 'Aye, a Nicholson aye needs watchin'. They a' come frae Kirkcudbright, where the jail is!'

One peculiarity of the speech of this country within a country struck me more than all the others — perhaps because it came in the line of my own profession.

More than once an applicant for my services would say, in answer to my question: 'Have you called in the doctor?' 'Oh, no, it has no been so serious as that!' Succeedantly I would find that Dr. Ignatius Campbell had been in attendance for some time, and that I ought to have consulted with him before, as it were, jumping his claim.

Dr. Campbell was a queer, dusty, smoky old man who, when seen abroad, sat low in a kind of basket-phaeton — as it were, on the small of his back, and visited his patients in a kind of dreamy exaltation which many put down to drink. They were wrong. The doctor was something much harder to cure—an habitual opium-eater. Somehow Dr. Campbell had never taken the position in the Glenkells to which

his abilities entitled him. He came from the North, and that was against him. More than that, he sent in his bills promptly, and saw that they were settled. Worst of all, he took no interest in imaginary diseases.

He openly laughed at calomel — which in the Glenkells was looked upon as a kind of blaspheming of the Trinity. But he was a duly certified graduate of Edinburgh like myself. His name was on the Medical List, and only his unfortunate habit and the dreamy idleness engendered by it kept him from making a very considerable name for himself in his profession. I found, for instance, after his death (he left his books, papers, and instruments to me) that he had actually anticipated in his vague theoretical way some of the most applauded discoveries of more recent times, and that he was well versed in all the foreign literature of such subjects as interested him.

But Dr. Ignatius Campbell, with his great pipe, his low-crowned hat, his seedy black clothes with the fluff sticking here and there upon them, was not the man to impress the Glenkells. For in Galloway the minister may go about in fishing-boots, shooting-jacket, and deerstalker if he will — nobody thinks the worse of him for it. The lawyer may look as if he bought his clothes from a slopshop. The country gentleman may wear a suit of tweeds for ten years, till the leather gun-patch on the shoulder threatens to pervade the whole man, back and front. But the doctor, if he would be successful, must perforce dress strictly by rule. Sunday and Saturday he must go buttoned up in his well-fitting surtout. His hat must be glossy, no matter what the weather may be (for myself I always kept a spare one in the

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

box of the gig), and the whole man upon entering a sick-room must bring with him the fragrance of clean linen, good clothes, and personal exactitude. And though naturally a little rebellious at first, I hereby subscribe to the Galloway view of the case.

Nance converted me.

'Is that a clean collar? — no, sir, you don't! Take it off this instant! I think this tie will suit you better. It is a dull day and something light becomes you. I have ironed your other hat. See that you put it on! Let me look at your cuffs. Mind that you turn down your trousers before you come in sight of the house. John' (this to my driver), 'see that Dr. McQuhirr turns down his trousers and puts on his hat right side first. There is a dint at the back that I cannot quite get out!'

It is no wonder that I succeeded in Galloway, having such a — I mean being endowed with such professional talents!

I had not, however, been long in Glenkells before I found out that there was another medical adviser on the scene — a kind of Brownie who did Dr. Campbell's work while he slept or dreamed his life away over his pipe and his coloured diagrams, whose very name was never mentioned, to me at least — perhaps from some idea that as an orthodox professional man I might resent the Brownie's intrusion.

But matters came to a head one day when I found the bottle of medicine I had sent up from the Cairn Edward apothecary standing untouched on the mantelpiece, while another and wholly unlicensed phial stood at the bed-head with a glass beside it, in which lingered a few drops of something which I

knew well that I had not prescribed.

'What is this?' I demanded. 'Why have you not administered the medicine I sent you?'

The woman put her apron to her lips in some embarrassment.

'Oh, doctor — ye see the way o't was this,' she said. 'Jeems was ta'en that bad in the nicht that I had to caa' in — a neebour o' oors — an' he brocht this wi' him.'

I lifted my hat.

'Good morning, Mrs. Landsborough,' I said, with immense dignity; 'I am sorry that I must retire from the case. It is impossible for me to go on if you disregard my instructions in that manner. No doubt Dr. Campbell.'

The good woman lifted up her hands in amazement and appeal. Even Jeems turned on his bed in quick alarm.

'Deed, Dr. Ma Whurr!' she cried, 'it wasna Dr. Campbell ava. We wadna think on sic a thing.'

'Your faither's son will never gang oot o' a Mac-Landsborough's hoose in anger, surely?' said Jeems, making the final Galloway appeal to the clan spirit.

This was conjuring with a name I could not disavow, and strongly against my first intentions I continued to attend the case. Jeems got rapidly better, and my bottle diminished steadily day by day. But whether it went down Jeems's throat or mended the health of the back of the grate, it was better, perhaps, that I did not inquire too closely. On my way home I considered my own prescription, and recalled the ingredients which by taste and smell I discovered in the intruding bottle.

I am not sure but what — well, it might have

been better. I wonder who the man is?' This was as much as I could be brought to admit in those days, even to myself. The doctor who in the first years of his practice does not think more of the sacredness of his diagnosis than of his married wife and all his family unto cousins six times removed, is not fit to be trusted — not so much as with the administering of one Beecham's pill.

Yet I own the matter troubled me. I had a rival who — no, he did not understand more of the case than myself. But all the same, I wanted to find him out— in the interests of the Medical Register.

But the riddle was resolved one day about a week afterwards in a rather remarkable manner. I was proceeding up the long main street of the Clachan, looking for a house in which Dr. Campbell (with whom of late I had grown strangely intimate) had told me that he would be found at a certain hour.

As I went I noticed, what I had never seen before, a little house, white and clean without, the creepers clambering all over it. This agreed, so far, with the doctor's description. I turned aside and went up two or three carefully reddened steps. A brass knocker blinked in the evening sunshine. I lifted it and knocked.

'Is the doctor in?' I said to a tall gaunt woman who opened the door an inch or two. As it was I could only see a lenticular section of her person, so that in describing her I draw upon later impressions. She hesitated a second or two, and then, rather grudgingly as I thought, opened the door.

'Come in,' she said.

With no more greeting than that she ushered me into a small room crowded with books and

apparatus. The table held a curious microscope, evidently home-made in most of its fittings. Pieces of mechanism, the purpose of which I could not even guess, were strewn about the floor. Castings were gripped angle-wise in vices, and at the end of an ordinary carpenter's bench stood a small blacksmith's furnace, with bellows and anvil all complete. In the recess, half hidden by a screen, I could catch a glimpse of a lathe. There was no carpet on the floor.

The door opened and a small spare man stood before me, the deprecation of an offending dog in his beautiful brown eyes. He did not speak or offer to shake hands, but only stood shyly looking up at me. It was some time before I could find words. Nance often tells me that I need a push behind to enable me to take the lead in any conversation — except with herself, that is, and then I never get a chance.

'I beg your pardon, doctor,' said I, 'I was seeking my friend Campbell. I did not know you had settled amongst us, or I should have been to call on you before this.'

I held out my hand cordially, for the man appealed to me somehow. But he did not seem to notice it.

'No, not 'doctor,' he said, speaking in a quick agitated way. 'Mister — Roger is my name.'

'I beg your pardon, I am sure,' I stammered; 'in that case I do not know how to excuse my intrusion. I asked for the doctor, meaning Dr. Campbell, and your servant.'

'My mother, sir!'

There was pride as well as challenge in the brown eyes now, and I found myself liking the young man

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

better than ever.

'I beg your pardon — Mrs. Roger showed me in by mistake, I fear.'

'It was no mistake — I am sometimes called so in this place, though not by my own will; I have no right to the title!'

'Well,' I said, as I looked round the room, 'won't you shake hands with me? You don't know what a pleasure it is to meet a man of science, as it is evident you are, here in these forlorn uplands!'

'Will you pardon me a moment till I inform you exactly of my status?' he said, 'and when you clearly understand, if you still wish to shake my hand — well, with all my heart.'

He stood silent a moment, and then, suddenly recollecting himself, 'Will you not sit down?' he said. 'Pray forgive my discourtesy.'

I sat down, displacing as I did so a box of tools which had been planted on the green rep of the easy-chair cover.

'You may well be astonished that I wish to speak to you, Dr. McQuhirr,' he said, beginning restlessly to pace the room, mechanically avoiding the various obstacles on the floor as he did so; 'but I have long wished to put myself right with a member of the profession, and now that chance has thrown us together, I feel that I must speak.'

'But there is Dr. Campbell— surely it cannot be that two men of such kindred tastes, in a small place like this, should not know each other!'

He flushed painfully, and turning to a stand near the window, played with the flywheel of a small model, turning it back and forward with his finger.

'Dr. Campbell is the victim of a most unfortunate

prejudice,' he murmured softly, and for a space said no more. It was so still in the room that through the quiet I could hear the tall eight-day clock ticking half-way up the stairs.

He resumed his narrative and his pacing to and fro at the same moment. 'I am,' he went on, 'at heart of your profession. I have attended all the classes and earned the encomiums of my professors in the hospitals. I stood fairly well in the earlier written examinations, but at my first oral I broke down completely — a kind of aphasia came over me. My brain reeled, a dreadful shuddering took hold of my soul, and I fell into a dead faint. For months they feared for my reason, and though ultimately I recovered and completed my course of study, I was never able to sit down at an examination-table again. After my father's death my mother settled here, and gradually it has come about that in any emergency I have been asked to visit and prescribe for a patient. I believe the poor people call me 'doctor' among themselves, but I have never either countenanced the title, or on any occasion failed to rebuke the user. Neither have I ever accepted fee or reward, whether for advice or medicine!'

I held out my hand.

'I care not a brass farthing about professional etiquette,' said I; 'it is my opinion that you are doing a noble work. And I know of one case, at least, where your diagnosis was better than mine.'

More I could not say. He flushed redly and took my hand, shaking it warmly. Then all at once he dropped the somewhat strained elevation of manner in which he had told his story, and began to speak with the innocent confidence and unreserve of a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

child. He was obviously much pleased at my inferred compliment.

'Ah!' he said, 'I know what you mean. But then, you see, you did not know James MacLandsborough's life history. He was my father's gardener. I knew his record and the record of his father before him. It was nothing but an old complaint, for which I had treated him over and over again — working, that is, on the basis of a recent chill. In your place and with your data I should have done what you did. In fact, I admired your treatment greatly.'

We talked a long while, so long, indeed, that I forgot all about Dr. Campbell, and it was dusk before I found myself at Mr. Roger's door saying 'Good-night.'

'If I might venture to say so,' he stammered, holding my hand a moment in his quick nervous grasp, 'I would advise you not to mention your visit here to your friend, Dr. Campbell.'

'I am afraid I must,' I replied; 'I had an appointment with him which I have unfortunately forgotten in the interest of our talk!'

'Then I much fear that it is not 'Good-night' but 'Good-bye' between us!' he murmured sadly, and went within.

And even as he had prophesied so it was.

'Sir,' said Dr. Campbell, 'I shall be sorry to lose your society, but you must choose between that house and mine. I have special and family reasons why I cannot be intimate with any visitor to Mr. ah, Roger!'

I had found the doctor lying on his couch, as a custom, his curious Oriental tray beside him, and an acrid tang in the air; but at my first words about my visit he shook off his dreamy abstraction and sat up.

'To tell you the truth, Campbell,' I said as calmly as possible, for, of course, I could not allow any one (except Nance) to dictate to me, 'I was singularly interested in the young man, and — he told his tale, as it seemed to me, quite frankly. If I am not to call upon him, I must ask you as to your reasons for a request so singular.'

'It is not a request, McQuhirr,' said the doctor, passing his hand across his brow as if to clear away moisture. 'It is only a little information I give you for your guidance. If you wish to visit this young man — well, I am deeply grieved, but I cannot receive you here, or have any intercourse with you professionally.'

'That is saying too much or too little,' I replied; 'you must tell me your reasons.'

Then he hesitated, looking from side to side in a semi-dazed way.

'I would rather not — they are family reasons!' he stammered, as he spoke.

'There is such a thing as the seal of the profession,' I reminded him.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I will tell you. That young man is my nephew, the son of my elder brother. His name is not Roger, but Roger Campbell. His mother was my poor brother's housekeeper. He married her some time after his first wife's death. This boy was their child, and, like a cuckoo in the nest, he tried from the first to oust his elder brother — the child of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the dead woman. Indeed, but for my interference his mother and he would have done it between them; for my brother was latterly wholly in their hands.

‘Finally this lad went to college, and coming here one summer after the breaking up of the classes he must needs fall in love with Ailie — my daughter, that is. What? — You never knew that I had a daughter! Ah, Alec, I was not always the man you see me—I too have had ambitions. But after — well, what use is there to speak of it? At any rate, young Roger Campbell fell in love with my Ailie, and she, I suppose, liked it well enough, but like a sensible girl gave him no immediate answer. Then after that came his half-brother, who was heir to the little property on Loch Aweside, and he too fell in love with Ailie. There was no girl like her in all the Glen of Kells; and as for him, he was a tall, handsome, fair lad, not crowled and misshapen like this one. Well, Ailie and he fell in love, and then Roger's mother moved heaven and earth to disinherit Archie. It was for this cause that I went up to Inchtaggart and watched, my brother during the last weeks of his life. The woman fought like a wild cat for her son, but I and Archie watched in turns. It was I who found the will by which Archie inherited all. In three months Ailie and he were married. Roger Campbell failed in his examinations the same year, and the next mother and son came back here to her native village to live on their savings.

The mere choice of this place showed their spite against me, but that is not the worst. Ever since that day they have devoted themselves to discrediting me in my profession. And you, who know these people, know to what an extent they

have succeeded. My practice has shrunk to nothing — almost. Even the patients I have, when they do call me in, send secretly for my enemy before my feet are cold off the doorstep. Yet I have no redress, for I have never been able to bring a case of taking fees home to him. Ah! if only I could!

Dr. Ignatius fell back exhausted, for towards the last he had been talking with a vehemence that shook the casements and set the prisms of the little old chandelier a-tingling.

‘And that is why I say you must choose between us,’ he said. ‘Is it not enough? Have I asked too much?’

‘It is enough for me,’ I said; ‘I will do as you wish!’

Now I did not see anything in his story very much against the young man; but, after all, the lad was nothing to me, and I had known Dr. Ignatius a long time.

So I asked him how it came that the young man was called Roger and not Campbell.

‘Oh!’ he said, ‘that is the one piece of decent feeling he has shown in the whole affair. He called himself Campbell Roger when he came here. You are the only person who knows that he is my nephew.’

I was glad afterwards that I had made him the promise he asked for. I never saw him in life again. Dr. Ignatius Campbell died two days after, being found dead in bed with his tiny pipe clutched in his hand. I went up that same day, and in conjunction with Dr. John Thoburn Brown of Drumfern, found that our colleague had long suffered from an acute form of heart disease, and that it was wonderful how

he had survived so long.

The body was lying at the time in the room where he died. The maid-servant had gone to stay with relatives in the village, not being willing to remain all night in the house alone; for which, all things considered, I did not greatly blame her. I asked if there was anything I could do, but was informed that all arrangements for the funeral had been made. It was to be on the Friday, two days after.

I drove up the glen early that morning, and found a tall young man in the house, opening drawers and rummaging among papers. I understood at once that this was Mr. Archibald Campbell of Inchtaggart. I greeted him by that name, and he responded heartily enough.

'You are Dr. McQuhirr,' he said; 'my father-in-law often spoke about you and how kind you were to him. You know that he has left all his books, papers, and scientific apparatus to you?'

'I did not know,' I said; 'that is as unexpected as it is undeserved, and I hope you will act precisely as if such a bequest had not existed. You must take all that either you or your wife would care to possess.'

'Oh!' he cried lightly, 'Ailie could not come. She has been ill lately, and as for me, I would not touch one of the beastly things with a ten-foot pole. Come into the garden and have a smoke.'

There Mr. Archibald Campbell told me that he had arranged for a sale of the doctor's house and all his effects as soon as possible.

'Better to have it over,' he said, 'so you had as well bring up a conveyance and cart off all the scientific rubbish you care about. I want all settled up and done with within the month.'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

He departed the night after the funeral, leaving the funeral expenses unpaid. He was a hasty though well-meaning young man, and no doubt he forgot. When I came up on the Monday of the week following, I discovered that the account had been paid.

After I had made my selection of books and instruments, besides taking all the manuscripts (watched from room to room by the Drumfern lawyer's sharp eye), I strolled out, and my steps turned involuntarily towards the little house covered with creepers where I had seen the young man Roger. I felt that death had absolved me from my promise, and with a quick resolve I turned aside.

The same woman opened the door an inch or two. I lifted my hat and asked if her son was in.

She held the door open for me without speaking a word and ushered me into the model-strewn little parlour. I cast my eyes about. On the table lay the discharged account for the funeral expenses of Dr. Ignatius Campbell!

In another moment the door opened and the young man came in, paler than before, and with the slight halt in his gait exaggerated.

'How do you do, Mr. Campbell?' I said quietly, holding out my hand.

He gave back a step, almost as if I had struck him. Then he smiled wanly. 'Ah! he told you. I expected he would; and yet you have come?' He spoke slowly, the words coming in jerks.

I held out my hand and said heartily: 'Of course I came.'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

I did not think it necessary to tell him anything about my agreement with Dr. Campbell. He, on his part, had quietly possessed himself of John Ewart's bill for the funeral expenses. We had a long talk, and I stayed so late that Nance had begun to get anxious about me before I arrived home. But not one word, either in justification of himself or of accusation against his uncle, did he utter, though he must have known well enough what his uncle had said of him.

Nor was it till a couple of months afterwards that Roger Campbell adverted again to the subject. I had been to the churchyard to look at the headstone which had been erected, as I knew, at his expense. He had asked me to write the inscription for it, and I had done so.

Coming home, he had to stop several times on the hill to take breath. When we got to the door he said: 'I have but one thing to pray for now, Dr. McQuharr, and that is that I may outlive my mother. Give me your best skill and help me to do that.'

His prayer was answered. He lived just two days after his mother. And I was with him most of the time, while Nance stayed with my people at Drumquhat. It was a beautiful Sabbath evening, and the kirk folk were just coming home. Most who suffer from his particular form of phthisis imagine themselves to be getting better to the very last, but he knew too much to have any illusions. I had put the pillows behind him, and he was sitting up making kindly comment on the people as they passed by, Bible in hand. He stopped suddenly and looked at me.

'Doctor,' he said, 'what my uncle told you about me never made any difference to you?'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'No,' I said, rather shamefacedly, 'no difference at all!'

'No,' he went on, meditatively, 'no difference. Well, I want you to burn two documents for me, lest they fall into the wrong hands — as they might before these good folk go back kirkward again.'

He directed me with his finger, at the same time handing me a key he wore upon his watchchain.

'Even my poor mother up there,' he said, pointing to the room above, 'has never set eyes on what I am going to show you. It is weak of me; I ought not to do it, doctor, but I will not deny that it is some comfort to set myself right with one human soul before I go.'

I took out of a little drawer in a bureau a miniature, a bundle of letters, and a broadly folded legal-looking document.

I offered them to Roger, but he waved them away.

'I do not want to look upon them — they are here!' He touched his forehead. 'And one of them is here.' He laid his hand on his heart with that freedom of gesture which often comes to the dying, especially to those who have repressed themselves all their lives.

I looked down at the miniature and saw the picture of a girl, very pretty, beautiful indeed, but with that width between the eyes which, in fair women, gives a double look.

'Ailie, my brother's wife!' he said, in answer to my glance. 'These are her letters. Open them one by one and burn them.'

I did as he bade me, throwing my eyes out of focus so that I might not read a word. But out of one fluttered a pressed flower. It was fixed on a card with a little lock of yellow hair arranged about it for a frame, fresh and crisp. And as I picked it up I

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

could not help catching the prettily printed words:

'TO DARLING ROGER, FROM HIS OWN AILIE.'

There was also a date.

'Let me look at that!' he said quickly. I gave it to him. He looked at the flower — a quick painful glance, but as he handed me back the card he laughed a little.

'It is a 'Forget-me-not,' he said. Then in a musing tone he added: 'Well, Ailie, I never have.'

So one by one the letters were burnt up, till only a black pile of ashes remained, in ludicrous contrast to the closely packed bundle I had taken from the drawer.

'Now burn the ribbon that kept them together, and look at the other paper.'

I unfolded it. It was a will in holograph, the characters clear and strong, signed by Archibald Ruthven Campbell, of Inchtaggart, Argyleshire, devising all his estate and property to his son Roger, with only a bequest in money to his elder son!

I was dazed as I looked through it, and my lips framed a question. The young man smiled.

'My father's last will,' he said, 'dated a month before his death. She never knew it.' (Again he indicated the upper room where his mother's body lay.) 'They never knew it.' (He looked at the girl's picture as it smiled up from the table where I had laid it.) 'My brother Archie succeeded on a will older by twenty years. But when I lost Ailie, I lost all. Why should she marry a failure? Besides, I truly believe that she loves my brother, at least as well as ever she loved me. It is her nature. That she is infinitely happier with him, I know.'

'Then you were the heir all the time and never

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

told it — not to any one!’ I cried, getting up on my feet. He motioned me towards the grate again.

‘Burn it,’ he said, ‘I have had a moment of weakness. It is over. I ought to have been consistent and not told even you. No, let the picture lie. I think it does me good. God bless you, Alec! Now, good-night; go home to your Nance.’

He died the next forenoon while I was still on my rounds. And when I went in to look at him, the picture had disappeared. I questioned the old crone who had watched his last moments and afterwards prepared him for burial.

‘He had something in his hand,’ she answered, ‘but I couldna steer it. His fingers grippit it like a smith’s vice.’

I looked, and there from between the clenched fingers of the dead right hand the eyes of Ailie Campbell smiled out at me — blue and false as her own Forget-me-not.

11. LOWE'S SEAT

Elspeth did not mean to go to Lowe's Seat. She had indeed no business there. For she was the minister's daughter, and at this time of the day ought to have been visiting the old wives in the white-washed 'Clachan' on the other side of the river, showing them how to render their patchwork quilts less hideous, compassionating them on their sons' ungrateful silence (letters arrive so seldom from the 'States'). Yet here was Elspeth Stuart under the waving boughs, seated upon the soft grassy turf, and employed in nothing more utilitarian than picking a gowan asunder petal by petal. It was the middle of an August afternoon, and as hot as it ever is in Scotland.

Why then had Elspeth gone to Lowe's Seat? It seemed a mystery. It was to the full as pleasant on the side of the river where dwelt her father, where complained her maiden aunt, and where after their kind racketed and stormed her roving vagabond bird-nesting brothers. On the Picts' Mound beside the kirk (an ancient Moothill, so they say, upon which justice of the rudest and readiest was of old dispensed) there were trees and green depths of shade. She might have stayed and read there — the 'Antiquary' perhaps, or 'Joseph Andrews,' or her first favourite 'Emma,' all through the long sweet drowsing summer's afternoon. But somehow up at Lowe's Seat, the leaves of the wood laughed to a different tune and the Airds woods were dearer than all sweet Kenside.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

So in spite of all Elspeth Stuart had crossed in her father's own skiff, which he used for his longer ministerial excursions 'up the water,' and her brothers Frank and Sandy for perch-fishing and laying their 'ged' lines. There was indeed a certain puddock in a high state of decomposition in a locker which sadly troubled Elspeth as she bent to the oars. And now she was at Lowe's Seat.

It is strange to what the love of poetry will drive a girl. Elspeth tossed back the fair curls which a light wind persisted in nicking ticklingly over her brow. With a coquettish, blushful, half-indignant gesture she thrust them back with her hand, as if they ought to have known better than to intrude upon a purpose so serious as hers in coming to Lowe's Seat.

'Here was the place,' she murmured to herself, explanatorily, 'where the poor boy hid himself to write his poem—a hundred years ago. Was it really a hundred years ago?'

She looked about her, and the wind whispered and rustled and laughed a little down among the elms and the hazels, while out towards the river and on a level with her face the silver birches shook their plumes daintily as a pretty girl her wandering tresses, bending saucily towards the water as they did so. Then Elspeth said the first two verses of 'Mary's Dream' over to herself. The poem was a favourite with her father, a hard stern man with a sentimental base, as is indeed very common in Scotland.

'The moon had climbed the highest hill, That rises o'er the source of Dee, And from the eastern summit shed Her silver light on tower and tree. When Mary laid her down to sleep, Her thoughts on Sandy far at

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

sea, There soft and low a voice was heard, Saying, Mary, weep no more for me!'

Elspeth was young and she was not critical. Lowe's simple and to the modern mind somewhat obvious verse seemed to her to contain the essence of truth and feeling. But on the other hand she looked adorable as she said them. For, strangely enough, a woman's critical judgment is generally in inverse ratio to her personal attractions— though doubtless there are exceptions to the rule.

As has been said, she did not go to Lowe's Seat for any particular purpose. She said so to herself as many as ten times while she was crossing in the skiff, and at least as often when she was pulling herself up the steep brae-face by the supple hazels and more stubborn young oaks.

So Elspeth Stuart continued to hum a vagrant tune, more than half of the bars wholly silent, and the rest sometimes loud and sometimes soft, as she glanced downwards out of her green garret high among the leaves.

More than once she grew restive and pattered impatiently with her fingers on her lap as if expecting someone who did not come. Only occasionally she looked down towards the river. Indeed, she permitted her eyes to rove in every direction except immediately beneath her, where through a mist of leaves she could see the Dee kissing murmuringly the rushes on its marge.

A pretty girl — yes, surely. More than that, one winsome with the wilful brightness which takes men more than beauty. And being withal only twenty years of her age, it may well be believed that Elspeth Stuart, the only daughter of the parish minister of

Dullarg, did not move far without drawing the glances of men after her as a magnet attracts steel filings.

Yet a second marvel appeared beneath. There was a young man moving along by the water's edge and he did not look up. To all appearance Lowe's Seat might just as well not have existed for him, and its pretty occupant might have been reading Miss Austen under the pines of the Kirk Knowe on the opposite side of Dee Water.

Elspeth also appeared equally unconscious. Of course, how otherwise? She had plucked a spray of bracken and was peeling away the fronds, unravelling the tough fibres of the root and rubbing off the underleaf seeds, so that they showed red on her fingers like iron rust. Wondrous busy had our maid become all suddenly. But though she had not smiled when the youth came in sight, she pouted when he made as if he would pass by without seeing her. Which is a strange thing when you come to think of it, considering that she herself had apparently not observed him.

Suddenly, however, she sang out loudly, a strong ringing stave like a blackbird from the copse as the sun rises above the hills. Whereat the young man started as if he had been shot. Hitherto he had held a fishing-rod in his hand and seemed intent only on the stream. But at the sound of Elspeth's voice he whirled about, and catching a glimpse of bright apparel through the green leaves, he came straight up through the tangle with the rod in his hand. Even at that moment it did not escape Elspeth's eye that he held it awkwardly, like one little used to Galloway burn-sides. She meant to show him better

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

by-and-by.

Having arrived, the surprise and mutual courtesies were simply overpowering. Elspeth had not dreamed — the merest impulse had led her — she had been reading Lowe's poem the night before. It was really the only completely sheltered place for miles, where one could muse in peace. He knew it was, did he not?

But we must introduce this young man. If he had possessed a card it would have said: 'The Rev. Allan Syme, B.A.'

He was the new minister of the Cameronian Kirk at Cairn Edward. He had just been 'called,' chiefly because the other two on the short leet had not been considered sufficiently 'firm' in their views concerning an 'Erastian Establishment,' as at the Kirk on the Hill they called the Church of Scotland nationally provided for by the Revolution Settlement.

In his trial discourses, however, Mr. Syme had proved categorically that no good had ever come out of any state-supported Church, that the ministers of the present establishment were little better than priests of the Scarlet Woman who sitteth on the Seven Hills, and that all those who trusted in them were even as the moles and the bats, children of darkness and travellers on the smoothly macadamised highway to destruction.

Nevertheless, at that free stave of Elspeth's carol Allan Syme went up hill as fast as if he had never preached a sermon on the text, 'And Elijah girded up his loins and ran before Ahab unto the entering in of Jezreel.'

At half-past eleven by the clock the minister of the Cameronian Kirk sat down beside this daughter

of an Erastian Establishment.

Have you heard the leaves of beech and birch laugh as they clash and rustle? That is how the wicked summer woods of Airds laughed that day about Lowe's Seat.

Half a mile down the river there is a ferry-boat which at infrequent intervals pushes a flat duck's bill across Dee Water. It is wide enough to take a loaded cart of hay, and long enough to accommodate two young horses tail to tail and yet leave room for the statutory flourishing of heels.

Bess MacTaggart could take it across with any load upon it you pleased, pushing easily upon an iron lever. They use a wheel now, but it was much prettier in the old days when all for a penny you could watch Bess lift the toothed lever with a sharp movement of her shapely arm, wet and dripping from the chain, as it slowly dredged itself up from the river bed.

It was half-past four when, in reply to repeated hails, the boat left the Dullarg shore with a company of three men on board, and in addition the sort of person who is called a 'single lady.'

Two of the men stood together at one end of the ferryboat, and after Bess had bidden one of them sharply to 'get out of her road,' she called him 'Drows' to make it up, and asked him if he were going over to the lamb sale at Nether Airds.

'If it's the Lord's wull!' Drows replied, with solemnity.

Both he and his companion had commodious, clean shaven 'horse' faces, with an abundance of

gray hair standing out in a straggling semi circular aureole underneath the chin. Cameronian was stamped upon their faces with broad strong simplicity. The blue bonnet, already looking old-world among the universal 'felts' common to most adult manhood — the deep serious eyes, as it were withdrawn under the penthouse of bushy brows, and looking upon all things (even lamb sales) as fleeting and transitory—the long upper lip and the mouth tightly compressed—these marked out John Allanson of Drows and Matthew Garment of Craigs as pillars of that Kirk which alone of all the fragments of Presbytery is senior to the Established Church of Scotland.

On the other side of the boat and somewhat apart stood Dr. Murdo Stuart, gazing gloomily at the black water as it rippled and clattered under the broad lip of the ferry-boat. A proud man, a Highland gentleman of old family, was the minister of Dullarg. He kept his head erect, and for any notice he had taken of the Cameronian elders, they might just as well not have been on the boat at all. And in their turn the elders of the Cameronian Kirk compressed their lips more firmly and their eyes seemed deeper set in their heads when their glances fell on this pillar of Erastianism. For nowhere is the racial antipathy of north and south so strong as in Galloway. There, and there alone, the memory of the Highland Host has never died out, and every autumn when the hills glow red with heather from horizon to horizon verge, the story is told to Galloway childhood of how Lag and Clavers wasted the heritage of the Lord, and how from Ailsa to Solway all the west of Scotland is 'flowered with the

blood of the Martyrs.'

The thin nervous woman kept close to the minister's elbow.

'I tell you I saw her cross the water, Murdo,' she was saying as Dr. Stuart looked ahead, scanning keenly the low sandy shores they were nearing.

'The boat is gone and she has not returned. It is a thing not proper for a young lady and a minister's daughter to be so long absent from home!'

'My daughter has been too well brought up to do aught that is improper!' said Dr. Stuart, with grave sententious dignity. 'You need not pursue the subject, Mary!'

There was just enough likeness between them to stamp the pair as brother and sister. As the boat touched the edge of the sharply sloping shingle bank, the hinged gang-plank tilted itself up at a new angle. The passengers paid their pennies to Bess MacTaggart and stepped sedately on shore. The boat-house stands in a water-girt peninsula, the Ken being on one side broad and quiet, the Black Water on the other, sulky and turbulent. So that for half a mile there was but one road for this curiously assorted pair of pairs.

And as they approached them the woods of Airds laughed even more mockingly, with a ripple of tossing birch plumes like a woman when she is merry in the night and dares not laugh aloud. And the beeches responded with a dryish cackle that had something of irony in it. Listen and you will hear how it was the next time a beech-tree shakes out his leaves to dry the dew off them.

The two elders came to a quick turn of the road. There was a stile just beyond. A moment before a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

young man had overleaped it, and now he was holding up his hands encouragingly to a girl who smiled down upon him from above. It was a difficult stile. The dyke top was shaky. Two of the bottom steps were missing altogether. All who have once been young know the kind of stile — verily, a place of infinite danger to the unwary.

So at least thought Elspeth Stuart, as for a long moment she stood daintying her skirts about her ankles on the perilous copestone, and drawing her breath a little short at the sight of the steep descent into the road.

The elders also stood still, and behind them the other pair came slowly up. And surely some wicked trick-some Puck laughed unseen among the beech leaves.

Elspeth Stuart had taken the young man's hand now. He was lifting her down. There — it was done And — yes, you are right — something else happened—just what would have happened to you and me, twenty, thirty, or is it forty years ago?

Then with a clash and a rustle the beeches told the tale to the birches over all the wooded slopes of the hill of Airds.

'Elspeth!'

'Elspeth Stuart!'

'Maister Syme!'

The names came from four pairs of horrified lips as the parties to the above mentioned transaction fell swiftly asunder, with sudden stricken horror on their faces. The first cry came shrill and keen, and

was accompanied by an out-throwing of feminine hands. The second fell sternly from the mouth of one who was at ouce a parent and a minister of the Establishment outraged in his tenderest feelings. But indubitably the elders had it. For one thing, they were two to one, and as they said for the second time with yet deeper gravity 'Maister Syme,' it appeared at once that they, and only they, were able adequately to deal with the unprecedented situation. But the others did what they could.

Mistress Mary Stuart, the minister's maiden sister, flew forward with an eager cry, the 'scaich' of a desperate hen when she is on the wrong side of the fence and sees the 'daich' disappearing down a hundred hungry throats.

She clutched her niece by the arm.

'Come away this moment!' she cried. 'Do you know who this young man is?'

But Elspeth did not answer. She was looking at her father, Dr. Stuart, whose eyes were bent upon the young man. Very stern they were, the fierce sudden darkness of Celtic anger in them. But the young Cameronian minister knew that he had far worse to face than that, and met the frown of paternal severity with shame indeed mantling on his cheek and neck, but yet with a certain quiet of determination firming his heart within him.

'Sir,' he said, 'that of which you have been witness was no more than an accident — the fault of impulse and young blood. But I own I was carried away. I ask the young lady's pardon and yours. I should have spoken to you first, but now I will delay no longer. Sir, I love your daughter!'

Then came for the first time a slight smile upon

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the pale face of his fellow-culprit. She said in her heart, 'Ah, Allan, if ye had spoken first to my father, feint a kiss would ye ever have gotten from Elspeth Stuart!'

But at the manful words of the young Cameronian the face of her father grew only the more stern, the two elders watching and biding their time by the roadside.

They knew that it would come before long.

At last after a long silence Dr. Stuart spoke.

'Sir,' he said grimly, 'I do not bandy words with a stranger upon the public highway. I myself have nothing to say to you. I forbid you ever again to speak to my daughter. Elspeth, follow me!'

And with no more than this he turned and stalked away. But his daughter also had the high Highland blood in her veins. She shook off with one large motion of her arm the stringy clutch of her aunt's fingers.

'Heed you not, Allan,' she said, speaking very clearly, so that all might hear; 'when ye want her, Elspeth Stuart will come the long road and the straight road to speak a word with you.'

It was a bold avowal to make, and a moment before the girl had not meant to say anything of the kind. But they had taken the wrong way with her.

'Oh, unmaidenly — most unmaidenly!' cried her aunt, 'come away — ye are mad this day, Elspeth Stuart — he has but a hunder a year of stipend, and may lose that ony day!'

But Elspeth did not answer. She was holding out her hand to Allan Syme. He bent quickly and kissed it

This young man had had a mother who taught

him gracious ways, not at all in keeping with the staid manners of a son of the covenants.

‘And now, sir,’ said John Allanson of Drows, turning grimly upon his minister, who stood watching Elspeth’s girlish figure disappear round the curve of the green-edged track, ‘what have you to say to us?’

Then Allan Syme’s pulses leaped quick and light, for he knew that of a surety the time of his visitation was at hand. Yet his heart did not fail within him. At the last it was glad and high. ‘For after all’ (he smiled as he thought it), ‘after all — well, they cannot take that from me.’

‘Sir,’ said Matthew Garment, in a louder tone, ‘heard ye the quastion that your ruling elder hath pitten till ye?’

‘John and Matthew,’ said the young man, gently, ‘ye are my elders, and I will not answer you as I did Dr. Stuart.’

‘The priest of Midian!’ said Matthew Garment.

‘The forswearer of covenants!’ said John Allanson.

‘But I will speak with you as those who have been unto me as Aaron and Hur for the upholding of mine hands.’

‘Say, rather,’ said John Allanson, sternly, ‘as Phineas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest who thrust through the Midianitish woman in sight of all the congregation of Israel, as they stood weeping before the door of the tabernacle!’

‘So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel,’ quoted Matthew Garment, gravely, finishing his friend’s sentence.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Allan Syme winced. The words had been his Sunday's text.

'I tell you, gentlemen,' he said quickly, 'since God gave Eve to Adam there has not been on earth a sweeter, truer maid than this. You have heard me declare my love for her. Well, I love her more than I dare trust my tongue to utter!'

'And how about your love for the Covenants? And for the Faithful Remnant of the persecuted Kirk of the Martyrs?' said Drows, with a certain dreary persistence that wore on Allan Syme like prolonged toothache.

Then Matthew Garment, who, though slower than the ruling elder, was not less sure, gave in his contribution.

'Like unto Eve,' said ye? A true word — verily, a most true word! For did not we with our own eyes see ye with her partake of the forbidden fruit? But there is a difference — your eyes, young man, have not yet been opened!'

Allan Syme began to grow angry.

'I am a free agent,' he said fiercely. 'I am not a child under bonds. You are not my tutors and governors by any law, human or divine. Nor am I answerable to you whom I shall woo, or whom I shall wed!'

'Ye are answerable to God and the Kirk!' cried the two with one voice.

And to this Matthew Garment again added his say. The three were now walking slowly in the direction of the lamb sale.

'Sir, I mind how ye well described the so-called ministers of the establishment — 'locusts on the face of our land,' these were your words, instruments of

inefficiency, the plague spot upon the nation, the very scorn of Reformation, and a scandal to Religion! Ye said well, minister; and the spawn of Belial is like unto Belial!

Allan Syme was now angry exceedingly.

‘God be my judge,’ he cried, ‘she whom I love is more Christian than the whole pack of you. Never has she spoken an ill word of any, ever since I have known her!’

‘And wherefore should she?’ said John Allanson of Drows, as dispassionately as a clerk reading an indictment. ‘Hath she not been clothed in fine linen and fared sumptuously every day? Hath she not eaten of the fine flour and the honey and the oil? Hath she not been adorned with broidered work and shod with badger skin, and, even as her sisters Aholah and Aholibah of old, hath not power been given unto her to lead even the hearts of the elect captive?’

Then Allan Syme broke forth furiously.

‘Your tongues are evil!’ he said, ‘ye are not fit to take her name on your lips. She is to me as the mother of our Lord — yes, as Mary, the wife of Joseph the carpenter!’

‘And indeed I never thocht sao muckle o’ that yin either,’ said Matthew of Craigs, — ‘the Papishes make ower great a to-do about her for my liking!’

‘Matthew Garment and John Allanson, I bid you hearken to me,’ cried the young minister.

‘Aye, Allan Syme, we will hearken!’ they answered, fronting him eye to eye.

‘God judge between you and me,’ he said. ‘He hath said that for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife. Now, I

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

know well that if ye like, you two can take from me my kirk and all my living. But I have spoken, and I will adhere. I have promised, and I will keep. Take this my parting message. Do your duty as it is revealed to you. I will go forth freely and willingly. Naked I came among you — naked will I go. The hearts of my people are dearer to me than life. Ye can twine them from me if you will. Ye can out me from my kirk, send me forth of my manse — cast me upon the world as a man disgraced. But, as I am a sinner answerable to God, there are two things you cannot do, ye cannot make me break my plighted word nor make me other than proud of the love I have won from God's fairest creature upon earth.'

And with these words he turned on his heel and strode straight up hill away from them in the direction of his distant home.

The two men stood looking after him. Drows stroked his shaggy fringe of beard. Matthew Garment put his hand to his eyes and gazed under it as if he had been looking into the sunset. There was a long silence. At last the two turned and looked at each other.

'Weel, what think ye?' said Drows, ruling elder and natural leader in debate.

There was a still longer pause, for Matthew Garment was a man slow by nature and slower by habit.

'He's a fine lad!' he said at last.

Drows broke a twig elaborately from the hedge and chewed the ends.

'So I was thinkin'!' he answered.

'I had it in my mind at the time he was speakin',' began Matthew, and then hesitated.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

‘Aye, what was in your mind?’

‘I was thinkin’ on the days when I courted Jean!’

‘Aye, man!’

There was another long silence.

It was Drows who broke it this time, and he said:
‘I — I was thinkin’ too, Mathy! Aye, man, I was thinkin’!’

‘Aboot Marget?’ queried Matthew Garment.

‘Na, no aboot Marget!’

They were silent again. The ruling elder settled to another green sprig of hedge-thorn. It seemed palatable. He got on well with it.

‘Man,’ he said at last, ‘do ye ken, Mathy — when he turned on us like yon, I was kind o’ prood o’ him. My heart burned within me. It was maybe no verra like a minister o’ the Kirk. But, ah man, it was awesome human!’

‘Then I judge we’ll say nae mair aboot it!’ said Matthew Garment, turning towards the farm where the lamb sale was by this time well under way. ‘Hoo mony are ye thinkin’ o’ biddin’ for the day, Drows?’

12. THE SUIT OF BOTTLE GREEN

At the Manse of Dullarg things did not go over well. Dr. Stuart, being by nature a quick, passionate, and imperious Celt, had first of all ordered his daughter to promise never again to hold any communication with the young Cameronian minister of Cairn Edward. It was thus that he himself had been taught to understand family discipline. He was the head of the clan, as his father had been before him. He claimed to be Providence to all within his gates. His hand of correction was not withheld from his boys, Frank and Sandy, until the day they ran away from home to escape him. He could not well adapt this plan to the present case, but when Elspeth refused point blank to give any promise, her father promptly convoyed his daughter to her own room and locked her up there. She would stay where she was till she changed her mind. Her aunt would take up her meals, and he himself would undertake to inform her as to her duties and responsibilities at suitable intervals. There was not the least doubt in the mind of Dr. Stuart as to the result of such a course of treatment. Had he not willed it? That was surely enough.

But his sister was not so sure, though she did not dare to say so to the Doctor more than once.

'She is a very headstrong girl, Murdo,' she said tremulously, as she gathered Elspeth's scanty breakfast on a tray next morning, 'it might drive her to some rash act!'

'Nonsense,' retorted her brother, sharply, 'did not

our father do exactly the same to you, to keep you from marrying young Campbell of Luib?’

Mary Stuart's wintry-apple face twitched and flushed.

‘Yes — yes,’ she fluttered, with a quaver in her voice, as if deprecating further allusion to herself, ‘but Elspeth is not like me, Murdo. She has more of your spirit.’

‘Let me hear no more of the matter,’ said her brother, turning away, ‘I wish it, and besides, I have my sermon to write.’

But when the maiden aunt knocked at the door and entered with Elspeth's breakfast, she was astonished to find the girl sitting by the window dressed exactly as she had been on the previous evening. Her face was very pale, but her lips were compressed and her eyes dry.

‘Elspeth,’ she said uncertainly, her woman's intuition in a moment detecting that which a man might not have discovered at all, ‘you have not had off your clothes all night. You have never been to bed!’

‘No, Aunt Mary!’

‘But what will the Doctor say — think of your father.’

‘I do not care what he will say. Let him come and compel me if he can. He can thrash me as he does Frank.’

‘But —oh, Elspeth — Elspeth, dear,’ the old lady trembled so much that she just managed to lay the tray down on the untouched bed opposite the window, ‘what will God say?’

‘Like as a father pitieth his children,’ isn't that what it says?’ The words came out of the depths of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the bitterness of that young heart. 'Well, if that be true, God will say nothing; for if He is like my father, He will not care!'

The old lady sat down on an old rocking-chair which Elspeth liked to keep in the window to sit in and read, half because it had been her mother's, and half (for Elspeth was not usually a sentimental young woman) because it was comfortable.

She put her hands to her face and sobbed into them. Then for the first time Elspeth looked at her. Hitherto she had been staring straight out at the window. So she had seen the day pass and the night come. So she had seen and not seen, heard and not heard, the shadow of night sweep across the broad river, the stars come out, the cue owls mew as they flashed past silent as insects on the wing, and last of all, the rooks clamour upwards from the tall trees at break of day.

Now, however, she watched her aunt weeping with that curious sense of detachment which comes to the young along with a first great sorrow.

'Why should she weep?' Elspeth was asking herself; 'she had nothing to cry for. There can be no sorrow in the world like my sorrow and shame — and his, that is, if he really cares. Perhaps he does not care. They say in books that men often pretend. But no — he at least never could do that. He is too true, too simple, too direct — and he loves me!'

So she watched her aunt rock to and fro and sob without any pity in her heart, but only with a growing wonderment — much as a condemned man might look at a companion who was complaining of toothache. The long vigil of the night had made the girl's heart numb and dead within her. At twenty

sorrow and joy alike arrive in superlatives.

Then quite suddenly a spasm of pity of a curious sort came to Elspeth Stuart. After all, it was worth while to love. He was suffering too. Aunt Mary had no one to love her — to suffer with her. Poor Aunt Mary! So she went quickly across and laid her hand on the thin shoulder. It felt angular even through the dress. The sobs shook it.

‘Do not cry, auntie,’ she said, softly and kindly. ‘I am sorry I vexed you. I did not know.’

The old lady looked up at her niece. Elspeth started at the sight of a tear stealing down a wrinkle. Tears on young faces are in place. They can be kissed away, but this seemed wrong somehow.

She patted the thin cheek, which had already begun to take on the dry satiny feel of age, which is so different from the roseleaf bloom of youth.

‘Then you will obey your father?’

The words came tremulously. The pale lips ‘wickered.’ The tear had trickled thus far now, but Aunt Mary did not know it. It is only youth that tastes its own tears. And generally rather likes the flavour.

Elspeth did not stop petting her aunt. She stroked the soft hair, thinning now and silvering. Then she smiled a little.

‘No, she said, ‘I will not obey my father, Aunt Mary. I am no child to be put in the corner. I am a woman, and know what I want.’

Yet it was only during the past night watches that she had known it for certain. But yesterday her desire to see Allan Syme had been no more than a little ache deep down in her heart. Now it had become all her life. So fertile a soil wherein to grow

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

love is injudicious opposition.

'But at any rate you will take your breakfast?'

'To please you I will try, aunt!'

Aunt Mary plucked up heart at once. This was better. She had made a beginning. The rest would follow.

When she went downstairs her brother came out of his study to get the key of his daughter's room. She told him how that Elspeth had never gone to bed, and had barely picked at her breakfast.

Dr. Stuart made no remark. He turned and went into his study again to work at his sermon. He too thought that all went well. He held that belief which causes so much misery in the world, that woman's will must always bend before man's.

So it does — provided the man is the right man.

On the third day of her confinement Elspeth Stuart wrote a letter. It began without ceremony, and ended without signature:

'You told me that you loved me. Tell it me again — on paper. I am very unhappy. My father keeps me locked up to make me promise never to speak to you or write to you. I do not mind this, except that I cannot go to Lowe's Seat. But I must be assured that you continue to love me. I know you do, but all the same I want to be told it. If you address, 'Care of the Widow Barr, at the Village of Crosspatrick,' Frank will bring it safely.'

It was a simple epistle, without lofty aspirations or wise words. But it was a loving letter, and admirably adapted to prove satisfactory to its recipient. And had Allan Syme known what was on

its way to him he would have lifted up his heart. He was completing his pastoral visitation, and with a sort of fixed despair awaiting the next meeting of Session. For neither his ruling elder nor yet that slow-spoken veteran, Matthew Garment, had passed a word more to him concerning the vision they had seen upon the fringes of the Airds woods, on the day that had proved such a day of doom to his sweetheart and himself.

Frank Stuart, keenly sympathetic with Elspeth's sufferings though notably contemptuous of their cause, willingly performed what was required of him. Being as yet untouched by love, he thought Elspeth extremely silly. He had no interest in ministers. If Elspeth had fallen in love with a soldier now—he meant to be a sailor himself, but a soldier was at least somebody in the scheme of things. Of course, his father was a minister — but then people must have fathers. This was different. However, it was not his business: girls were all silly.

And on this broad principle Master Frank took his stand. With equal breadth of view he conveyed the letter to the 'Weedow's' at Crosspatrick, en route for the Cameronian manse at Cairn Edward.

But before he set out, he must have his grumble. He was beneath the window of his sister's room at the time. His father had been under observation all the morning, and was now safely off on his visitations. By arrangement with Aunt Mary, Elspeth was allowed the run of the whole upper storey of the Dullarg Manse during Dr. Stuart's daily absences. So, on parole, she came to this little window in the

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

gable end, where Frank and she could commune without fear of foreign observation.

'What for could ye no have promised my father onything — and then no done it!'

The suggestion betrayed Master Frank's own plan of campaign, and renders more excusable the Doctor's frequent appeal to the argument of the hazel.

After this there ensued for Elspeth a long and weary time. Every day Frank, detaching himself from the untrustworthy Sandy, slid off down the waterside to Crosspatrick. Every day he returned empty-handed and contemptuous.

This it was to love a minister, and one who was not even a 'regular.' Why had not Elspeth, if she must fall in love, chosen a sailor?

In those days there was no regular postal delivery in the remoter country districts. The mails came in an amateurish sort of way by coach to Cairn Edward, and thereafter distributed themselves, as it were, automatically. When the postage was paid, the authorities had no more care in the matter. Yet there was a kind of system in the thing, too.

It was understood that any one being in Cairn Edward on business should 'give a look in' at the Post Office, and if there were any letters for his neighbourhood, and he happened to have in his pocket the necessary spare 'siller' at the moment, he would pay the postage and bring them to the 'Weedow Barr's' shop in the village of Crosspatrick.

It may be observed that there were elements of uncertainty inseparable from such an arrangement.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

And these told hard on our poor prisoner of fate during these great endless midsummer days. She pined and grew pale, like a woodland bird shut suddenly in a close cage at that season when mate begins to call to mate through all the copses of birch and alder.

‘He does not love me — oh, he cannot love me!’ she moaned. But again, as she thought of the stile on the way to Lowe’s Seat — ‘But he does love me!’ she said.

Then, sudden as a falling star, Fear fell on that green summer world. There came a weird sough through all the valley, a crying of folk to each other across level holms, shrill answerings of herd to herd on the utmost hills. The scourge of God had come again! The Cholera— the Cholera! Dread word, which we in these times have almost forgot the thrill of in our flesh. Mysteriously and inevitably the curse swept on. It was at Leith— at Glasgow — at Dumfries — at Cairn Edward. It was coming! coming! coming! Nearer, nearer — ever nearer!

And men at the long scythe, sweeping the lush meadow hay aside with that most prideful of all rustic gestures, fell suddenly chill and shuddered to their marrows. The sweat of endeavour dried on them, and left them chill, as if the night wind had stricken them. Women with child swarfed with fear at their own door cheeks, and there was a crying within long ere the posset-cup could be made ready. Neighbour looked with sudden suspicion at neighbour, and men at friendly talk upon the leas manoeuvred to get to windward of each other.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Death was coming — had come! And in his study, and unmoved, Dr. Murdo Stuart sat preparing his Sabbath's sermon on the text, 'Therefore . . . because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!'

But in the shut chamber above Elspeth waited and watched, the hope that is deferred making her young heart sicker and ever sicker. Still she had not heard. No answering word had reached her, and it was now the second week. He did not love her — he could not.

But still!

They had told her nothing, and, indeed, during that first time of fear and uncertainty, they knew nothing for certain, away up by themselves in the wide wild moor parish of Dullarg. There were no market days in Cairn Edward any more. So much the farmers knew. The men of the landward parishes set guards with loaded guns upon every outgoing road. There was no local authority in those days, and men in such cases had to look to themselves. The infected place, be it city, town, or village, farmstead or cottage, was completely and bitterly isolated. None might come out or go in. Provisions, indeed, were left in a convenient spot; but secretly and by night. And the bearer shot away again, bent half to the ground with eagerness, fear, and speed, a cloth to his mouth, for the very wind that passed over him was Death. It was not so much a disease as a certain Fate. Whoso was smitten was taken. In fact, to all that rustic world it was the Visitation of Very God.

In the main street of Cairn Edward grass grew; yet the place was not unpopulous. With the revival

of trade and industry during the later years of the great war a cotton mill had been erected in a side street.

The houses of the work folk were strung out from it. Then parallel with this there was a more ancient main street of low beetle-browed houses, many of them entering by a step down off the uneven causeway. At the upper end, near the Cross, were some better-class houses, some of them of two storeys, a change-house or two, and down on the damp marshy land towards the loch, the cluster of huts which had formed the original nucleus of the village — now fallen into disrepute and disrepair, and nominated, from the nationality of many of its inhabitants, 'Little Dublin.'

In ten days a third of the inhabitants of this suburb had died. There was but one minister within the strait bounds of the straggling village. The parish church and manse lay two miles away out on a braeface overlooking yellowing widths of corn-land. And the minister thereof abode in his breaches, every day giving God thank that he was not shut up within those distant white streets, from which, day by day, the housewifely reek rose in fewer and fewer columns.

But Allan Syme was within, and could not pause to marry or to give in marriage, to preach or to pray, so full of his Master's business was he. For he must nurse and succour by day and bury by night, week day and Holy Day. He it was who upheld the dying head. He swathed the corpse while it was yet warm. He tolled the death-bell in the steeple. He harnessed the horse to the rude farm-cart. Sometimes all alone he dug the grave in the soft marshy flowe, and laid

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the dead in the brown peat-mould. For it was no time to stand upon trifles this second time that the Scourge of God had come to Cairn Edward.

To the outer limit of the cordon of watchers came the carriers and the farmers, the country lairds' servants, and less frequently the bien well-stomached meal millers. In silence they deposited their goods, for the most part with no niggard hand. In silence they took the fumigated pound notes, smelling of sulphur, or the silver coin of the realm, with the crumbles of quick-lime still sticking to the milling of the edges.

So across a kind of neutral zone, fearful country and infected town stood glowering at each other like embattled enemies, musket laid ready in the crook of elbow.

And when one mad with the Fear tried to cross, he was hunted like a wild beast, or shot at like a rabbit running for its burrow. And the townsmen did in like manner. For ill as it might fare with them, there was deadlier yet to fear. In Cairn Edward they had the White Cholera, as it was called. The Black was at Dumfries — so, at least, the tale ran.

And as he went about his work, Allan Syme called upon his God, and thought of Elspeth. But her letter never reached him, and he knew nothing of her vigils. The day before he might have known the Fear fell, and the door was shut.

It was on Saturday afternoon that the tidings came to Elspeth Stuart, lonely watcher and loving heart. It was her brother Sandy who brought them. He knew nothing of Elspeth's matters, being young

and by nature unworthy of trust. He had been down to Crosspatrick on some errand, and now, having arrived back within hailing distance, he was retailing his experiences to his brother Frank.

'I got you letter back frae the Weedow — an', as I wasna gangin' hame, I gied it to my faither.'

'What letter?'

Elspeth could hear the sudden angry alarm in Frank's voice; but she herself had no premonition of danger.

'The letter ye took doon to Crosspatrick for Elspeth ten days syne. Ye'll catch it, my man!'

The girl's heart sank, and then leapt again within her.

Her father had her letter — he would read it. It was plainly addressed in her handwriting to Allan Syme. What should she do?

But wait — there was something else. With a quick back-spang came the countering joy.

'But then he has never got my letter. He knows nothing of my unhappiness. He has not forgotten me. He loves me still. What care I for aught else but that?'

There came up from the courtyard a sound of blows, and then Sandy's wail.

'I'll tell my faither on ye, that I will. How was I to ken about Elspeth's letter? And they say the minister-man it was wrote to is dead, at ony rate!'

Elspeth heard unbelievably. Dead — Allan dead! And she not know. Absurd! It was only one of Sandy's lies to irritate his brother because he had been thrashed. She knew Sandy. Nevertheless she threw up the window. Sandy was again at his parable.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'They buried twenty-five yesterday in the moss. The minister was there wi' the last coffin, and fell senseless across it. He never spoke again. He is to be buried the morn if they can get the coffin made!'

Then, so soon as she was convinced that Sandy was not inventing, and that he had only repeated the gossip of the village, a kind of cold calmness took hold of Elspeth. She called Frank in to her, and when he came, lo! his face was far whiter than hers.

She made him tell her all they had kept from her — of the dread plague that had fallen so sudden and swift upon the townlet to which Allan had carried her heart. Then she thought a while fiercely, not wavering in her purpose, but only trying this way and that, like one who thrusts with his staff for the safest passage over a dangerous bog. Frank watched her keenly, but could make nothing of her intent. At last she spoke:

'Go and get me the key of your box.'

'What do ye want with the key of my box?' queried her brother, astonished.

'Never heed that,' said Elspeth, clipping her words imperiously, as, in seasons of stress, she had a way of doing; 'do as I bid you!'

And being accustomed to such obediences, and albeit sorry for her, Frank went out, only remarking ominously that he would have a job, for that Aunt Mary carried it on her bunch.

He came back in exactly ten minutes, and threw the key on the floor.

'Easier than I expected,' he said triumphantly; 'the old buzzer was asleep!'

'Give me the key,' said Elspeth, still in a brown study by the window.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

But this was too much for Frank.

'Pick it up for yourself, Els,' he said, 'and mind you are to swear you found it on the floor!'

Frank knew very well that if one is going to lie back and forth (as he intended to do when questioned), it is well to be prepared with occasional little scraps of truth. They cheer one up so.

Elsbeth took the key, and hid it in her pocket. 'Now you can go,' she said, and sat down on the bed, staring out at the broad river quietly slipping by.

'Well, you might at least have said thank you,' began Frank. But catching the expression of her face, he suddenly desisted, and went out without another word.

No, Allan Syme was not dead. But he staggered home that night certainly more dead than alive. All day long he had moved in an atmosphere of the most appalling pestilence. The reek of mortality seemed to solidify in his nostrils, and his heart for the first time fainted within him.

He knew that there would be no welcome for him in the dark and lonely manse; no meal, no comfort, no living voice; not so much as a dog to lick his hand. His housekeeper, a mere hireling, had fled at the first alarm.

It was dusk as he thrust the key into the latch, as he did so staggering against the lintel from sheer weariness. He stood a little while in the passage, shuddering with the oncomings of mortal sickness. Then with flint, steel, and laborious tinder box he coaxed a light for the solitary taper on the hall table. This done, he turned aside into the little sitting-

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

room on the right hand, where he kept his divinity books.

A slight figure came forward to meet him, with upturned face and clasped petitionary hands. The action was a girl's, but the dress and figure were those of a boy. Upon the threshold the minister stopped dead. He thought that this was the first symptom of delirium — he had seen it in so many, and had watched for it in himself.

But the lad still came forward, and laid a hand on his arm. He wore a suit of bottle green with silver buttons, a world too wide for his slim form. Knee breeches and buckled shoes completed his attire. Allan Syme stared wide-eyed, uncomprehending, his hand pressed to his aching brow in the effort to see truly.

'You are not dead. Thank God!' said the boy, in a voice that took him by the throat.

'Who — who are you?' The words came dry and gasping from the minister's parched lips.

'I am Elspeth — do you not know me?'

'Elspeth — Elspeth — why did you come here — and thus?'

'They told me you were dead — and my father locked me up! And — what chance had a girl to pass the guards? They fired at me — see!'

And lifting a wet curl from her brow, she showed a wound.

'Elspeth — Elspeth — what is all this? What have they done to you?'

'Nothing — nothing — it is but a scratch. The man almost missed me altogether.'

'Beloved, what have you done with your hair?'

'I cut it off, that I might the better deceive them!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Elspeth — you must go back! This is no place for you!'

'I will not go back home. I will die first!'

'But, Elspeth, think if any one saw you—what would they say?'

'That I came to help you — to nurse you! I do not care what they would say.'

'My dear — my dear, you cannot bide here. I would to God you could; but you cannot. I must think how to get you away. I must think — I must think!'

The minister, sick unto death, stood with his hand still pressed to his brow. At sight of him, and because, after all she had gone through for him, he had given her neither welcome nor kiss, a swift spasm of anger flashed up into Elspeth's eyes.

'You are ashamed of me, Allan Syme — let me go. I will never see you more. You do not love me! I will not trouble you. Open the door!'

'God knows I love you better than my soul!' said Allan; 'but let me think. Father in heaven — I cannot think! My brain runs round.'

He gave a slight lurch like a felled ox, and swayed forward.

Instantly, as a lamp that the wind blows out, all the anger went out of Elspeth Stuart's eyes. She caught Allan in her strong young arms and laid him on the worn couch, displacing with a sweep of her hand a whole score of volumes as she laid him down.

He lay a moment stiff and still. Then a spasm of pain contorted his features. He opened his eyes, and looked into his sweetheart's eyes. Then, with the swift astonishing clearness of the mortally stricken,

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

he saw what must be done.

'Allan, Allan, what is the matter — what shall I do for you?' she mourned over him.

'Do this,' answered the minister. 'Take the cloak out of that cupboard there. I have never worn it. Go straight to John Allanson. He is my Ruling Elder. He bides at his daughter's house close by the cotton mill. Tell him all, and bid him come to me.'

'The dreadful man who was so angry — that day at Lowe's Seat!' she objected, not fearing for herself, but for him.

'He is not a dreadful man. Do as I bid you, childie; I am sick, but I judge not unto death!'

'But you may die before I return!'

'Do as I bid you, Elspeth,' said the minister, waving her away; 'not a hundred choleras can deprive me of one minute God has appointed mine!'

She bent over quickly, and kissed him on lips and brow.

'There — and there! Now if you die, I will die too. Remember that! And I do not care now. I will go!'

Saying this, she rushed from the room.

It was a strange visitor who came to the house of the Elder's daughter that evening, as the gloaming fell darker, her feet making no sound on the deserted and grass-grown streets.

'A young laddie wants to see you, father,' said John Allanson's married daughter, with whom he had been lodging for a night when the plague came, in a single hour putting a great gulf between town and country. Then, finding his minister alone, he was not the man to leave him to fight the battle single-handed.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Shamefacedly Elspeth crept in. The old man and his daughter were by themselves, the husband not yet home from the joiner's shop, where the hammers went tap-tap at the plain deal coffins all day and all night.

'The minister is dying — come and help him or he will die!' she cried, as they sat looking curiously at her in the clear, leaping red of the firelight.

'Who are you, laddie?' said the elder.

'I am no laddie,' said Elspeth, redder than the peat ashes. 'Oh, I am shamed — I am shamed! But I could not help it. And I am not sorry! They told me he was dead. I am Elspeth Stuart, of the Dullarg Manse.'

The elder sat gazing at her, open-mouthed, leaning forward, his hands on his knees. But his daughter, with the quick sympathy of woman, held out her arms.

'My puir lassie!' she said. She had once lost a bairn, her only one.

And Elspeth wept on her bosom.

The daughter waved her father to the door with one hand.

'She will tell me easier!' she said.

And straightway the old man went out into the dark.

It did not take long to tell, with Allan Syme lying so near to the gates of death. Almost in less time than it needs to write it, Elspeth was arrayed, so far at least as outer seeming went, in the garments of her sex. A basket was filled with the necessities which were kept ready for such an emergency in

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

every house.

'Come, father,' the loving wife cried at the door; 'I will tell you as we gang.'

And before she had won third way through her story, John Allanson had taken Elspeth's hand in his.

'My bairn! my bairn!' he said.

In this manner Elspeth came the second time to the Manse of Allan Syme.

But the third time was as the mistress thereof. For she and the elder's daughter nursed Allan Syme through into safety. For the very day that Allan was stricken, a great rain fell and a great wind blew. The birds came back to the gardens of Cairn Edward, and the plague lifted. In time, too, Dr. Stuart submitted with severe grace to that which he could not help.

'Indeed, it was all my fault, father,' Elspeth said; 'I made Allan come back by the stile. I had made up my mind that he should. I knew he would kiss me there!'

'Then I can only hope,' answered her father, severely, lifting up his gold-knobbed cane and shaking it at her to emphasise his point, 'that by this time your husband has learned the secret of making you obey him. It is more than ever your father did!'

13.A SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

(Being some Hitherto Unobserved Phenomenn of Feminine Psychology from the notebook of A. McQuhirr, M.D. Edin.)

These papers of mine have been getting out of hand of late. I am informed from various quarters that they are becoming so exceedingly popular and discursive in their character, that they are enough to ruin the reputation of any professing man of science. I will therefore be severe with myself (and, incidentally, with my readers), and occupy one or two papers with a consideration of some of the minor characteristics common to the female sex. Indeed, upon a future occasion I may even devote an entire work to this subject.

I have mentioned before that my wife's younger sister was called the 'Hempie,' which, being interpreted, signifies a wild girl. This had certainly been her character at one time; and though she deserves the name less now than of yore, all her actions are still marked by conspicuous decision and independence.

For instance, the year after Nance and I were married, the Hempie abruptly claimed her share of her mother's money, and departed to Edinburgh 'to get learning.'

(Some of the earlier and less reputable of the 'Hempie's' adventures may be found in a certain

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

unscientific work entitled 'Lad's Love.')

Now it was a common thing enough in our part of the country for boys to go out on such a quest. It was unheard of in a girl. And the parish would have been shocked if the emigrant had been any other than the Hempie. But Miss Elizabeth Chrystie, daughter of Peter of Nether Neuk, was a young woman not accustomed to be bound by ordinary rules. In person she had grown up handsome rather than pretty, and was so athletic that she stood in small need of the ordinary courtesies which girls love — hands over stiles, and so forth. Eyes and hair of glossy jet, the latter cringing naturally close to her head, a healthy colour in her cheeks, an ironic curl to her firm fine lips, —that is how our Hempie came back to us.

Of her career in the metropolis, of the boarding-school dames, strait-laced and awful, whom she scandalised, the shut ways of learning which somehow were opened before her, I have no room here to tell. It is sufficient to say that out of all this the Hempie came home to Nether Neuk, and at once established herself as the wonder of the neighbourhood.

Nance was gone, Grace going; Clemmy Kilpatrick, the unobtrusive little woman whom Peter Chrystie had married as a kind of foot-warmer, had been laid aside for six weeks with an 'income' on her knee. The maidservants naturally took advantage. Every individual pot and pan in the house cumbered the back kitchen unwashed and begrimed. In the byres you did not walk — you waded. The ploughmen hung about the house half the morning, gossiping with the half-idle maidens. The very herds on the

hill eluded Peter's feeble judicature, and lay asleep behind dyke-backs, while the week-weaned lambs, with many tail-wagglings, rejoined their mothers on the pastures far below.

Upon this confusion enter the New Hempie. And with her gown pinned up and a white apron on that met behind her shapely figure, she set to and helped the servants.

In six days she had the farm town of Nether Neuk in such a state of perfection as it had not known since my own Nance left it. For Grace, though a good girl enough, cared not a jot for house-work. Her sphere was the dairy and cheese-room, where in an atmosphere of simmering curds and bandaged cheddars she reigned supreme.

So much to indicate to those who are not acquainted with Miss Elizabeth Chrystie the kind of girl she was.

For the rest, she despised love and held woers in contempt, as much as she had done in the old days when she ascended the roofs of the pigstyes, and climbed into the beach-tree tops in the courtyard of Nether Neuk, rather than meet me face to face as I went to pay my court to her eldest sister.

'Love,' she said scornfully, when I questioned her on the subject the first time she came to see us at Cairn Edward, 'love — have Nance and you no got ower sic nonsense yet? Love' (still more scornfully); 'as if I hadna seen as much of that as will serve me for my lifetime, wi' twa sisters like Grace and Nance there!'

It did not take us much by surprise, therefore, when one morning, while we sat at breakfast, the Hempie dropped in with the announcement that she

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

could not stand her father any longer, and that she had engaged herself to be governess in the house of a certain Major Randolph Fergus of Craignesslin.

To a young lady so determined there was no more to be said. Besides which, the Hempie was of full age, perfectly independent as far as money went, and more than independent in character.

'Now,' she said, 'I have just fifteen minutes to catch my train: how am I to get my bag up to the station?'

'If you wait,' I said, 'the gig will be round at the door in seven minutes. I have a case, or I should go up with you myself.'

'Who is driving the gig?'

'Tad Anderson,' said I.

The Hempie picked up a pair of tan gloves and straightened her tall lithe figure.

'Good-morning,' she said; 'give me a lift with my box and wraps to the door. I would not trust Tad Anderson to get to the station in time if he had seven hours to do it in!'

At the door a boy was passing with a grocer's barrow. The Hempie swung her box upon it with a deft strong movement.

'Take that to the station, boy,' she commanded, 'and tell Muckle Alec that Elizabeth Chrystie of the Nether Neuk will be up in ten minutes.'

'But—but,' stammered the boy, astonished, 'I hae thae parcels to deliver.'

'Then deliver them on your road down!' said the Hempie. And her right hand touched the boy's left for an instant.

'A! richt, mem!' he nodded, and was off.

'Don't trouble, Alec. Nance, bide where you are —

I have three calls to make on the way up. Good-morning!’

And the Hempie was off. We watched her through the little oriel window, Nance nestling against my coat sleeve pleasantly, and, in the shadow of the red stuff curtain, even surreptitiously kissing my shoulder — a thing I had often warned her against doing in public. So I reprovèd her.

‘Nance, mind what you are about, for heaven's sake! Suppose any one were to see you. It is enough to ruin my professional reputation to have you do that on a market day in your own front window.’

‘Well, please may I hold your hand?’ (Then, piteously, and, if I might call it so, ‘Nancefully’) ‘You know I shall not see you all day.’

‘The Hempie would not do a thing like that!’ I answer severely.

Nance watches the supple swing of her sister's figure, from the stout-soled practical boots to the small erect head, with its short black curls and smart brown felt hat with the silver buckle at the side.

‘No,’ she said, ‘she wouldn't.’ Then, after a sigh, she added, ‘Poor Hempie!’

That was the last we saw of our sister for more than a year. Elizabeth Chrystie did not come back even for Grace's marriage to the laird of Butterhole.

‘I am of more use where I am,’ she wrote. ‘Tell Grace I am sending her an alarm clock!’

Whether this was sarcasm on the Hempie's part, I am not in a position to say. Grace had always been the sleepy-head of the family. If, however, it was meant ironically, the sarcasm was wasted, for Grace was delighted with the present.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'It is so useful, you know,' the Mistress of Butterhole told Nance. 'I set it every morning for four o'clock, It is so nice to turn over and know that you do not need to get up till eight!'

As suddenly as she had gone away, so suddenly the Hempie returned, giving reasons to no man. I am obliged to say that even I would never have known the true story of the adventures which follows had I not shamefully played the eavesdropper.

It happened this way.

My study, where I try upon occasion to do a little original work and keep myself from dropping into the rut of the pill-and-potion practitioner so common in rural districts, is next the little room where Nance sits reading, or sewing at the garmentry, white and mysterious, which some women seem never to be able to let out of their reach. Here I have a small wall-press, in which I keep my microscopes and preparations. It is divided by a single board from a similar one belonging to Nance on the other side. When both doors are open you can hear as well in one room as in the other. I often converse with Nance without rising, chiefly as to how long it will be till dinner-time, together with similar important and soul-elevating subjects. But it never seems to strike her that I can hear as easily what is said in her room when I am not expected to hear.

Now, if you are an observant man, you have noticed, I daresay, that so soon as women are alone together, they begin to talk quite differently from what they have done when they had reason to know

of your masculine presence. Yes, it is true — especially true of your nearest and dearest. Men do something of the same kind when women go out after dinner. But quite otherwise. A man becomes at once broader and louder, more unrestrained in quotation, allusion, illustration, more direct in application. His vocabulary expands. In anecdote he is more abounding and in voice altogether more natural. But with women it is not so. They do not look blankly at the tablecloth or toy with the stem of a wine-glass, as men do when the other sex vanishes. They glance at each other. A gentle smile glimmers from face to face, in which is a world of irony and comprehension. It says, 'They are gone — the poor creatures. We can't quite do without them; but oh, are they not funny things?' Then they exchange sighs equally gentle. If you listen closely you can hear a little subdued rustle. That is the chairs being moved gently forward nearer each other — not dragged, mark you, as a man would do. A man has no proper respect for a carpet.

'Well, dear?'

'Well?'

And then they begin really to talk. They have only 'conversed' so far. How do I know all this? Well, that's telling. As I say, I eavesdropped part of it — in the interests of science. But the facts are true, in every case.

The Hempie came in one Saturday morning. It was in August, and a glorious day. There was nothing pressing. I had been out early at the only case which needed to be seen to till I went on my afternoon round.

Nance was upstairs giving a wholly

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

supererogatory attention to a certain young gentleman who had already one statutory slave to anticipate his wants. He was getting ready to be carried into the garden. I could detect signs from the basement that cook also was tending nursery-wards. The shrine would have its full complement of devout worshippers shortly.

It was thus that I came to be the first to welcome the Hempie upon her return. She opened the glass door and walked in without ceremony, putting her umbrella in the rack and hanging her hat on a peg like a man, not bringing them in to cumber a bedroom as a woman does. These minor differences of habit in the sexes have never been properly collated and worked out. As I said before, I think I must write a book on the subject.

At any rate, the Hempie's action was the exception which proved the rule.

Then she strolled nonchalantly into my study and flung herself into a chair without shaking hands. I leaped to my feet.

'Hempie,' I cried, 'I am dreadfully glad to see you.' And I stooped to kiss her.

To my utter astonishment she took the salute as a matter of course, a thing she had never done before. Yes, somehow the Hempie was startlingly different.

'What,' she said, 'are you as glad as all that? What a loving brother!'

But I think she was pleased all the same.

'Where's Nance?' The question was shot out rather than asked.

I indicated the upper regions of the house with my thumb, and inclined my ear to direct her

attention.

A high voice of wonderful tone and compass (if a little thin) was lifted up in a decimating howl. Ensued a gentle confused murmur: 'Didums, then. Was it, then?' together with various lucid observations of that kind.

A change passed over the Hempie's face.

'Now we are in for it,' I thought. 'She will leave the house and never enter it again. The Hempie hates babies. She has always been particularly clear on that point.'

'Why did you never tell me, Alec?'

'Because — because — we thought you would not care to hear. I understood you didn't like...'

'Is it a boy or a girl?'

'Boy.'

There was a sudden uprising from the depths of the easy-chair, a rustle of skirts, the clang of a door, hasty footsteps on the stairs, a clamour of voices from which, after a kind of confused climax as the hope of the house blared his woes like a young bull of Bashan, there finally emerged the following remarkable sentiments:

'Oh, the darling! Isn't he a pet? Give him to me. Was they bad to him? Then — well then! They shan't — no, indeed they shan't! Now, then! Didums, then!'

And da capo.

I could not believe my ears. The words were the words of Nance, but the voice was undoubtedly the voice of the Hempie. It was half an hour and more before they descended the stairs, the Hempie still carrying young 'Bull of Bashan,' now pacifically sucking his thumb and gazing serenely through and behind his nurse in the disconcerting way which is

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

common to infants of the human species — and cats.

The Hempie passed out across the little strip of garden we had at the back. The sunlight checkered the grass, and the new nurse carried her charge as if she had never done anything else all her life. Every moment she would stop to coo at him. Then she would duck her head like a turtle-dove bowing to his mate; and finally, as if taken by some strange contortive disease, she would bend her neck suddenly and nuzzle her whole face into the child's, as a pet pony does into your hand — a hot, fatiguing, and wholly unscientific proceeding on an August day.

I called Nance back on pretext of matters domestic.

'What's the matter with the Hempie?' I said.

'Matter with the Hempie?' repeated Nance, trying vainly to look blank. 'Why, what should be the matter with the Hempie?'

'Don't try that on me, you little fraud. There is something! What is it?'

'I have not the least idea.'

'Have you kissed her?'

'No, she never looked at me — only at the baby, of course.'

'Then go and kiss her.'

Nance went off obediently, and the sisters walked a while together. Presently the baby took the red thumb out of his mouth, and through the orifice thus created issued a bellow. The nurse came running. Nance took him in her arms, replaced the thumb, and all was well. Then she handed him back to the Hempie and kissed her as she did so. The

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Hempie raised her head into position naturally, like one well accustomed to the operation.

Nance came slowly back and rejoined me. She was unusually thoughtful.

‘Well?’ I said.

She nodded gravely and shook her head.

‘It is true,’ she murmured, as if convinced against her will; ‘there is something. She is different.’

‘Nance,’ said I, triumphantly, for I was pleased with myself, ‘the Hempie is in love at last. You must find out all about it and tell me.’

She looked at me scornfully,

‘I will do no such thing,’ she began.

‘It is not curiosity—as you seem to think,’ I remarked with dignity. ‘It is entirely in the interests of science,’ I said.

‘Rats!’ cried Nance, rudely.

As I have had occasion to remark more than once before, she does not show that deference to her husband to which his sterling worth and many merits entitle him. Indeed, few wives do — if any.

‘Well, I will find out for myself,’ I said carelessly.

‘You?’

Scorn, derision, challenge were never more briefly expressed.

‘Yes, I.’

‘I’ll wager you a new riding-whip out of my house money that you don’t find out anything about it!’

‘Done!’ said I.

For I remembered about the little wall-press where I kept my microscope. Not that I am by nature an eavesdropper; but, after all, a scientific purpose — and a new riding-whip, make some difference.

I was busy mounting my slides when I heard

them come in. Instantly I needed some Canada balsam out of the wall-press — in the interests of science. I heard Nance go to the door to listen 'if baby was asleep.' I have often represented to her that she does not require to do this, because the instant baby is awake he advertises the fact to the whole neighbourhood, as effectually as if he had been specially designed with a steam whistle attachment for the purpose. But I have never succeeded.

'You think you are a doctor, Alec,' is the answer, 'but you know nothing about babies! You know you don't!'

Which shows that I must have spent a considerable part of my medical curriculum in vain.

There ensued the soft muffled hush of chairs being pushed into the window. Then came the first click-click, jiggy-click, of a rocking-chair, which Nance had bought for me 'when you are tired, dear'—and has used ever since herself. I did not regret this, for it left the deep-seated chintz-covered one free. They are useless things, anyway: a man cannot go to sleep on a rocking-chair, or strike a match under the seat, or stand on it to put up a picture — or, in fact, do any of the things for which chairs are really designed.

Now when a woman goes to sleep in a chair, she always wakes up cross. All that stuff in romances about kissing the beloved awake in the dear old rose-scented parlour, and about the lids rising sweetly from off loving and happy eyes, is, scientifically considered, pure nonsense. Believe me, if she greets you that way the lady has not been asleep at all, and was waiting for you to do it.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

But when she, on the other hand, wakes with a start and opens her eyes so promptly that you step back quickly (having had experience) ; when she speaks words like these, 'Alec, I have a great mind to give you a sound box on the ear — coming waking me up like that, when you know I didn't have more than an hour's good sleep last night!' — this is the genuine article. The lady was asleep that time. The other kind may be pretty enough to read about, but that is its only merit.

It was Nance who spoke first. I heard her drop the scissors and stoop to pick them up. I also gathered from the tone of her first words that she had a pin in her mouth. Yet she goes into a fit if baby tries to imitate her, and wonders where he can learn such habits. This also is incomprehensible.

'Have you left Craignesslin for good?' said Nance, using a foolish expression for which I have often reproved her.

'I am going back,' said the Hempie. I am not so well acquainted with the nuances of the Hempie's voice and habit as I am with those of her sister, but I should say that she was leaning back in her chair with her hands clasped behind her head, and staring contentedly out at the window.

'I thought perhaps the death of the old major would make a difference to you,' said Nance. I knew by the mumbling sound that she was biting a thread.

'It does make a difference,' said the Hempie, dreamily, 'and it will make a greater difference before all be done!'

Nance was silent for a while. I knew she was hurt at her sister's lack of communicativeness. The

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

rocking-chair was suddenly hitched sideways, and the stroking rose from fifty in the minute to about sixty or sixty-five, according, as it were, to the pressure on the boiler.

Still the Hempie did not speak a word.

The rocking-chair was doing a good seventy now — but it was a spurt, and could not last.

'Elizabeth,' said Nance, suddenly, 'I did not think you could be so mean. I never behaved like this to you.'

'No?' said the Hempie, with serene interrogation, but did not move, so far as I could make out. The rocking-chair ceased. There was a pause, painful even to me in my little den. The strain on the other side of the wall must have been enormous.

When Nance spoke it was in a curiously altered voice. It sounded even pleading. I wish the Hempie would teach me her secret.

'Who is it? — tell me, Hempie,' said Nance, softly.

I did not catch the answer, though obviously one was given. But the next moment I heard the unbalanced clatter of the abandoned rocker, and then Nance's voice saying: 'No, it is impossible!'

Apparently it was not, however, for presently I heard the sound of more than one kiss, and I knew that my dear Mistress Impulsive had her sister in her arms.

'Then you know all about it now, Hempie?'

'All about what?'

'Don't pretend,— about love. You do love him very much, don't you?'

'I don't know. I have never told him so!'

'Hempie!'

'It is true, Nance!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Then why have you come home?'

'To get married!' said the Hempie, calmly.

14. THE HEMPIE'S LOVE STORY

This is the somewhat remarkable story the Hempie told my wife as she sat sewing in the little parlour overlooking the garden, the day Master Alexander McQuhirr, Tertius, cut his first tooth. (*This, however, was not discovered till afterwards, and was then acclaimed as the reason why he cried so much on the arrival of his aunt Elizabeth. To his nearest relative on the father's side, however, the young gentleman's performances seemed entirely normal. — A. McQ.*)

Elizabeth Chrystie was a free-spoken young woman, and she told her tale generally in the English of the schools, but sometimes in the plain country-side talk she had spoken when, a barefoot bare-legged lass, she had scried the hills, the companion of every questing collie and scapegrace herd lad, 'twixt the Bennan and the Butt o' Benerick.

'When I first got to Craignesslin,' said the Hempie, 'I thought I had better turn me about and come right back again. And if it had not been for pride, that is just what I should have done.'

'Were they not kind to you?' asked Nance.

'Kind? Oh, kind enough — it was not that I could easily have put an end to any unkindness by walking over the hill. But I could not. To tell the truth, the place took hold of me from the first hour.

'Craignesslin, you know, is a great house, with many of the rooms unoccupied, sitting high up on

the hills, a place where all the winds blow, and where the trees are mostly scrubby scrunts of thorn, turning up their branches like skeleton hands asking for alms, or shrivelled birches and cowering firs all bent away from the west.

'When first I saw the place I thought that I could never bide there a day — and now it looks as if I were going to live there all my life.

The hired man from the livery stables in Drumfern set my box down on the step of the front door, and drove off as fast as he could. He had a long way before him, he said, the first five miles with not so much as a cottage by the wayside. He meant a public-house.

'He was a rude boor. And when I told him so he only laughed and said: 'For a' that ye'll maybe be glad to see me the next time I come — even if I bring a hearse for ye to ride to the kirkyaird in!'

'And with that he cracked his whip and drove out of sight. I was left alone on the doorstep of the old House of Craignesslin. I looked up at the small windows set deep in the walls. Above one of them I made out the date 1658, and over the door were carven the letters, W.F.

Then I minded the tales my father used to tell in the winter forenights, of Wicked Wat Fergus of Craignesslin, how he used to rise from his bed and blow his horn and ride off to the Whig-hunting with Lag and Heughan, how he kept a tally on his bedpost of the men he had slain on the moors, making a bigger notch all the way round for such as were preachers.

'And while I was thinking all this, I stood knocking for admission. I could not hear a living

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

thing move about the place. The bell would not ring. At the first touch the brass pull came away in my hands, and hung by the wire almost to the ground.

Yet there was something pleasant about the place too, and if it had not been for the uncanny silence, I would have liked it well enough. The hills ran steeply up on both sides, brown with heather on the dryer knolls, and the bogs yellow and green with bracken and moss. The sheep wandered everywhere, creeping white against the hill-breast or standing black against the skyline. The whaups cried far and near. Snipe whinnied up in the lift. Magpies shot from thorn-bush to thorn-bush, and in the rose-bush by the door-cheek a goldfinch had built her nest.

Still no one answered my knocking, and at last I opened the door and went in. The door closed of its own accord behind me, and I found myself in a great hall with tapestries all round, dim and rough, the bright colours tarnished with age and damp. There were suits of armour on the wall, old leathern coats, broad-swords basket-hilted and tasselled, not made into trophies, but depending from nails as if they might be needed the next moment. Two ancient saddles hung on huge pins, one on either side of the antique eight-day clock, which ticked on and on with a solemn sound in that still place.

I did not see a single thing of modern sort anywhere except an empty tin which had held McDowall's Sheep Dip.

Nance, you cannot think how that simple thing reassured me. I opened the door again and pulled my box within. Then I turned into the first room on the right. I could see the doors of several other

rooms, but they were all dark and looked cavernous and threatening as the mouths of cannon.

‘But the room to the right was bright and filled with the sunshine from end to end, though the furniture was old, the huge chairs uncovered and polished only by use, and the great oak table in the centre hacked and chipped. From the window I could see an oblong of hillside with sheep coming and going upon it. I opened the lattice and looked out. There came from somewhere far underneath, the scent of bees and honeycombs. I began to grow lonesome and eerie. Yet somehow I dared not for the life of me explore further.

‘It was a strange feeling to have in the daytime, and you know, Nance, I used to go up to the muir or down past the kirkyaird at any hour of the night.

I did not take off my things. I did not sit down, though there were many chairs, all of plain oak, massive and ancient, standing about at all sorts of angles. One had been overturned by the great empty fireplace, and a man's worn riding-glove lay beside it.

‘So I stood by the mantelpiece, wondering idly if this could be Major Fergus's glove, and what scuffle there had been in this strange place to overturn that heavy chair, when I heard a stirring somewhere in the house. It was a curious shuffling tread, halting and slow. A faint tinkling sound accompanied it, like nothing in the world so much as the old glass chandelier in the room at Nether Neuk, when we danced in the parlour above.

The sound of that shuffling tread came nearer, and I grew so terrified, that I think if I had been sure that the way to the door was clear, I should have

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

bolted there and then. But just at that moment I heard the foot trip. There was a muffled sound as of some one falling forward. The jingling sound became momentarily louder than ever, to which succeeded a rasping and a fumbling. Something or some one had tripped over my box, and was now examining it in a blind way.

I stood turned to stone, with one hand on the cold mantelpiece and the other on my heart to still the painful beating.

Then I heard the shuffling coming nearer again, and presently the door lurched forward violently. It did not open as an intelligent being would have opened a door. The passage was gloomy without, and at first I saw nothing. But in a moment, out of the darkness, there emerged the face and figure of an old woman. She wore a white cap or 'mutch,' and had a broad and perfectly dead-white face. Her eyes also were white — or rather the colour of china ware — as though she had turned them up in agony and had never been able to get them back again. At her waist dangled a bundle of keys; and that was the reason of the faint musical tinkling I had heard. She was muttering rapidly to herself in an undertone as she shuffled forward. She felt with her hands till she touched the great oaken table in the centre.

'As soon as she had done so, she turned to the window, and with a much brisker step she went towards it. I think she felt the fresh breeze blow in from the heather. Her groping hand went through the little hinged lattice I had opened. She started back.

'Who has opened the window?' she said. 'Surely he has not been here! Perhaps he has escaped!

Walter - Walter Fergus — come oot!' she cried. 'Ah, I see you, you are under the table!'

'And with surprising activity the blind old woman bent down and scrambled under the table. She ran hither and thither like a cat after a mouse, beating the floor with her hands and colliding with the legs of the table as she did so.

'Once as she passed she rolled a wall-white eye up at me. Nance, I declare it was as if the week-old dead had looked at you!

Then she darted back to the door, opened it, and with her fingers to her mouth, whistled shrilly. A great surly-looking dog of a brown colour lumbered in.

'Here, Lagwine, he's lost. Seek him, Lagwine! Seek him, Lagwine!'

'And now, indeed, I thought, 'Bess Chrystie, your last hour is come.' But though the dog must have scented me — nay, though he passed me within a foot, his nose down as if on a hot trail — he never so much as glanced in my direction, but took round the room over the tumbled chairs, and with a dreadful bay, ran out at the door. The old woman followed him, but most unfortunately (or, as it might be, fortunately) at that moment my foot slipped from the fender, and she turned upon me with a sharp cry.

'Lagwine, Lagwine, he is here! He is here!' she cried.

'And still on all fours, like a beast, she rushed across the floor straight at me. She laid her hand on my shoe, and, as it were, ran up me like a cat, till her skinny hands fastened themselves about my throat. Then I gave a great cry and fainted.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'At least, I must have done so, for when I came to myself a young man was bending over me, with a white and anxious face. He had on velveteen knickerbockers, and a jacket with a strap round the waist.

'Where is that dreadful old woman?' I cried, for I was still in mortal terror.'

'I should have died,' said Nance. And from the sound of her voice I judged that she had given up the attempt to continue her seam in order to listen to the Hempie's tale, which not the most remarkable exposition of scientific truth on my part could induce her to do for a moment.

'It's all my fault — all my fault for not being at home to meet the trap,' I heard him murmur, as I sank vaguely back again into semi-unconsciousness. When I opened my eyes I found myself in a pleasant room, with modern furniture, and engravings on the wall of the 'Death of Nelson' and 'Washington crossing the Delaware.'

'As soon as I could speak I asked where I was, and if the horrible old woman with the white eyes would come back. The young man did not answer me directly, but called out over his shoulder, 'Mother, she is coming to.'

'And the next moment a placid, comfortable-looking lady entered, with the air of one who has just left the room for a moment.

'My poor lassie,' she said, bending over me, 'this is a rough home-coming you have got to the house of Craignesslin. But when you are better I will tell you all. You are not fit to hear it now.'

'But I sat up and protested that I was — that I

must hear it all at once, and be done with it.'

'Of course,' cried Nance, 'you felt that you could not stay unless you knew. And I would not have stopped another minute — not if they had brought down the Angel Gabriel to explain.'

'Not if Alec had been there?' queried the Hempie, smiling.

'Alec!' cried Nance, in great contempt. 'Indeed, if Alec had been in such a place, I would have made Alec come away inside of three minutes — yes, and take me with him if he had to carry me out on his back! Stop there for Alec's sake? No fear!'

That is the way my married wife speaks of me behind my back. But, so far as I can see, there is no legal remedy.

'Go on, Hempie; you are dreadfully slow.'

'So,' continued the Hempie, placidly, 'the nice matronly woman bade me lie down on a sofa, and put lavender-water on my head. She petted me as if I had been a baby, and I lay there curiously content — me, Elizabeth Chrystie, that never before let man or woman lay a hand on me.'

'Exactly,' said Nance; 'was he very nice-looking?'

'Who?'

'The young man in the velveteen suit, of course.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I mean, was he better-looking than Alec?'

'Better-looking than Alec? Why, of course; Alec isn't a bit.'

'Hempie!'

There was a pause, and then, to relieve the strain, the Hempie laughed. 'Are you never going to get over it, Nance?'

'Get on with your story, and be sensible.' I could

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

hear a thread bitten through.

'So the lady began to talk to me in a quiet hushed tone, like a minister beside a sick-bed. She told me how some years ago her poor husband, Major Fergus, had had a dreadful accident. He was not only disfigured, but the shock had affected his brain.

'At first,' she said, 'we thought of sending him to an asylum, but we could not find one exactly suited to his case. Besides which, his old nurse, Betty Hearse-man, who had always had great influence with him, was wild to be allowed to look after him. She is not quite right in the head herself, but most faithful and kind. She cried out night and day that they were abusing him in the asylum. So at last he was brought here and placed in the old wing of the house, into which you penetrated by misadventure to-day.'

'But the dog?' I asked; 'do they hunt the patient with a fierce dog like that?'

'Ah, poor Lagwine,' she sighed, 'he is devoted to his old master. He would not hurt a hair of his head or of anybody's head. Only sometimes, when he finds the door open, my poor Roger will slip out, and then nobody else can find him on these weariful hills.'

'Then I asked her of the younger children whom I had been engaged to teach.

'They are my grandchildren,' she said; 'you can hear them upstairs.'

'And through the clamour of voices, that of the young man I had seen rang loudest of all.

'They are playing with their father?' I said.

'She shook her head. 'They are the children of my

daughter Isobel,' she said. 'She married Captain Fergus, of the Engineers, her own cousin, and died on her way out to the West Indies. So Algernon brought them home, and here they are settled on us. And what with my husband's wastefulness before he was laid aside, and the poor rents of the hill farms nowadays, I know not what we shall do. Indeed, if it were not for my dear son Harry we could not live. He takes care of everything, and is most scrupulous and saving.'

'So when she had told me all this, I lay still and thought. And the lady's hand went slower and slower across my head till it ceased altogether.

'I cannot expect you to remain with us after this, Miss Chrystie,' she said, 'and yet I know not what I shall do without you. I think we should have loved one another.'

'I told her that I was not going away — that I was not afraid at all.

'But, to tell you the truth, my dear,' she said, 'I do not rightly see where your wages are to come from.'

'That does not matter in the least, if I like the place in other ways,' I said to her.

'He must be very good-looking!' interjected Nance.

'So I told her I would like to see the children. She went up to call them, and presently down they came — a girl of six and a little boy of four. They had been having a rough-and-tumble, and their hair was all about their faces. So in a little we were great friends. They went up to the nursery with their grandmother, and I was following more slowly, when all at once, Harry — I mean the young man — came hurrying in, carrying a tray. He had an apron tied about him, and the bottom hem of it was tucked into

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the string at the waist. As soon as he saw me he blushed, and nearly dropped the tray he was carrying. I think he expected me to laugh, but I did not.'

'Of course not,' coincided Nance, with decision.

'I just opened the top drawer in the sideboard and took out the cloth and spread it, while he stood with the tray still in his arms, not knowing, in his surprise, what to do with it.

'I thought you had gone upstairs with my mother,' he said. 'Old John Harseman is out on the hill with the lambs, and we have no other servants except the children's little nurse.'

'And so — and so,' said the Hempie, falteringly, 'that is how it began.'

I could hear a little scuffle — which, being interpreted, meant that Nance had dropped her workbasket and sewing on the floor in a heap and had clasped her sister in her arms.

'Darling, cry all you want to!' My heart would know that tone through six feet of kirkyard mould — aye, and leap to answer it.

'I am not crying— I don't want to cry.' It was the Hempie's voice, but I had never heard it sound like that before. Then it took a stronger tone, with little pauses where the tears were wiped away.

'And I found out that night from the children how good he was — how helpful and strong. He had to be out before break of day on the hills after the sheep. Often, with a game-bag over his shoulder, he would bring in all that there was for next day's dinner. Then when Betsy, the small maid, was busy with his mother, he would bathe Algie and Madge, and put them to bed. For Mrs. Fergus, though a kind woman

in her way, had been accustomed all her life to be waited on, and accepted everything from her son's hands without so much as 'Thank you.'

'So I did not say a word, but got up early next morning and went downstairs. And what do you think I found that blessed Harry doing — blacking my boots!'

There was again a sound like kissing and quiet crying, though I cannot for the life of me tell why there should have been. Perhaps the women who read this will know. And then the Hempie's voice began again, striving after its kind to be master of itself.

'So, of course, what could I do when his father died? He and I were with him night and day. For Betty Harseman being blind could not handle him at all, and Harry's mother was of no use. Indeed, we did not say anything to alarm her till the very last morning. No, I cannot tell even you, Nance, what it was like. But we came through it together. That is all.'

Nance had not gone back to her sewing. So I could not make out what was her next question. It was spoken too near the Hempie's ear. But I heard the answer plainly enough.

'A month next Wednesday was what we thought of. It ought to be soon, for the children's sake, poor little things.'

'Oh, yes,' echoed Nance, meaningly, 'for the children's sake, of course.'

The Hempie ignored the tone of this remark.

'Harry is having the house done up. The old part is to be made into a kitchen. Old John and Betty Harseman are to have a cottage down the glen.'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'And you are to be all alone,' cried Nance, clapping her hands, 'with only the old lady to look after? That will be like playing at house.'

'Yes,' said the Hempie, ironically, 'it would — without the playing. Oh no, I am going to have a pair of decent moorland lasses to train to my ways, and Harry will have a first-rate herd to help him on the hill.'

Then she laughed a little, very low, to herself.

'The best of it is that he still thinks I am poor,' she said. 'I have never told him about mother's money, and I mean to ask father to give me as much as he gave you and Grace.'

'Of course,' said Nance, promptly. 'I'll come up and help you to make him.'

There was a cheerful prospect in front of Mr. Peter Chrystie, of Nether Neuk, if he did not put his hand in his breeches' pocket to some purpose.

'Will Alec let you come?' queried the Hempie, doubtfully. 'He will miss you.'

'Oh, I'll tell him it is for the sake of baby's health,' said Nance; 'and, besides, husbands are all the better for being left alone occasionally. They are so nice when they get you back again.'

'What!' cried the Hempie, 'you don't mean to say that Alec has fits of temper? I never would have believed it of him.'

'Hush!' said Nance. There was again that irritating whispered converse, from which emerged the Hempie's clear voice:

'Oh, but my Harry will never be like that.'

'Wait — only wait,' said Nance. 'Hempie, they are all alike. And besides, they write you such nice letters when they are away. I suppose you get one

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

every day? Yes, of course. What, he walks six miles over the hill to post it? That is nice of him. Alec once came all the way from Edinburgh, and went back the next day, just because he thought I was cross with him.'

'Oh, but my Harry never, never...'

(Left speaking.)

15. THE LITTLE FAIR MAN

ONE - SEED SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE

Notable among my father's papers was one bundle quite by itself which he had always looked upon with peculiar veneration. The manuscripts which composed it were written in crabbed handwriting on ancient paper, very much creased at the folds, and bearing the marks of diligent perusal in days past. My father could not read these, but had much reverence for them because of the great names which could be deciphered here and there, such as 'Mr. D. Dickson,' 'Mr. G. Gillespie,' and in especial 'Mr. Samuel Rutherford.'

How these came into the possession of my father's forbears, I have no information. They were always known in the family as 'Peden's Papers,' though so far as I can now make out, that celebrated Covenanter had nothing to do with them — or, at least, is never mentioned in them by name. On the other hand I find from the family Bible, written as a note over against the entry of my great-grandmother's death, 'Aprile the seventeene, 1731,' the words, 'Cozin to Mr. Patrick Walker, chapman, of Bristo Port, Edinburgh.'

The letters and narratives are in many hands and vary considerably in date, some being as early as the high days of Presbytery, about 1638, whilst others in a plainer hand have manifestly been copied or rewritten in the first decade of last century.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Now after I came from college and before my marriage, I had sometimes long forenights with little to do. So having got some insight into ancient handwriting from my friend Mr. James Robb, of the College of Saint Mary, an expert in the same — a good golfer also, and a better fellow — I set me to work to decipher these manuscripts both for my own satisfaction and for the further pleasure of reading them to my father on Saturday nights, when I was in the habit of driving over to see my mother at Drumquhat on my way from visiting my patients in the Glen of Kells.

That which follows is from the first of these documents which I read to my father. He was so much taken by it that he begged me to publish it, as he said, 'as a corrective to the sinful compliances and shameless defections of the times.' And though I am little sanguine of any good it may do from a high ecclesiastic point of view, the facts narrated are interesting enough in themselves. The manuscript is clearly written out in a tall copy-book of stout bluish paper, without ruled lines, and is bound in a kind of gray sheepskin. The name 'Harry Wedderburn' is upon the cover here and there, and within is a definitive title in floreated capitals, very ornately inscribed:

The story of the turning of me, Harry Wedderburn, from Darkness to Light, by the means and instrument of Mr Samuel Rutherford of Anwoth, Servant of God.

Then the manuscript proceeds: 'The Lord hath spared me, Harry Wedderburn, these many years, delaying the setting of my sun till once more the grass grows green where I saw the blood lie red, and I wait in patience to lay my old head beneath the sod

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

of a quiet land.

This is my story writ at the instance of good Mr. Patrick Walker, and to be ready at his next coming into our parts. The slack between hay and harvest of the Year of Deliverance, 1689, is the time of writing.

I, Harry Wedderburn, of Black Craig of Dee, in the country of Galloway, acknowledging the mercies of God, and repenting of my sins, set these things down in my own hand of write. Sorrow and shame are in my heart that my sun was so high in the heavens before I turned me from evil to seek after good.

We were a wild and froward set in those days in the backlands of the Kells. It was not long, indeed, since the coming of a law stronger than that of the Strong Hand. Our fathers had driven the cattle from the English border — yea, even out of the fat fields of Niddisdale, and over the flowe of Solway. And if a man were offended with another, he went his straightest way home and took gun and whinger to lie in wait for his enemy. Or he met him foot to foot with quarter-staff on the highway, if he were of ungentle heart and possessed neither pistol nor musketoon.

I mind well that year 1636, more than fifty years bygone — I being then in the twenty-second year of my age, a runagate castaway loon, without God and without hope in the world. My father had been in his day a douce sober man, yet he could do little to restrain myself or my brother John, who was, they said, 'ten waur's' than I. For there was a wild set in the Glen of Kells in those days, Lidderdale of Slogarie and Roaring Raif Pringle of Kirkchrist being enough to poison a parish. We four used to forgather

to drink the dark out and the light in, two or three times in the week, at the change house of the Clachan. Elspeth Vogie kept it and no good name it got among those well-affected to religion — aye, or Elspeth herself either.

‘But these are vain thoughts, and I have had of a long season no pleasure in them. Yet will I not deny that Elspeth Vogie, though in some things sore left to herself, was a heartsome quean and well-favoured of her person.

‘So at Elspeth's some half-dozen of us were drinking down the short dark hours of an August night. It was now the lull between the hay-winning and the corn-shearing. For hairst was late that year, and the weather mostly backward and dour. There had come, however, with the advent of the new month, a warm drowsy spell of windless days, the sun shining from morn to even through a kind of unwholesome mist, and the corn standing on the knowes with as little motion as the gray whinstane tourocks and granite cairns on the hilltaps. The farmers and cottiers looked at their scanty roods of plough-land, and prayed for a rousing wind from the Lord to winnow away the still dead easterly mist, and gar the corn reestle ear against ear so that it might fill and ripen for the ingathering.

‘But we that were hand-fasted to sin and bonded to iniquity, young plants of wrath, ill-doers and forlorn of grace, cared as little for the backward year as we did for the sad state of Scotland and the strifes that were quickly coming upon that land. So long as our pint-stoup was filled, and plack rattled on plack in the pouch, sorrow the crack of the thumb we cared for harvest or sheep-shearing, king

or bishop, Bible or incense-pot.

To us sitting thus on the Sabbath morning (when it had better set us to have been sleeping in our naked beds) there came in one Rab Aitkin of Auchengask, likeminded with us. Rab was seeking his 'morning' or eye-opening draught of French brandy, and to us bleared and leaden-eyed roisterers, he seemed to come fresh as the dew on the white thorn in the front of May. For he had a clean sark upon him, a lace ruffle about his neck, and his hair was still wet with the good well water in which he had lately washen himself.

'Whither away, Rab?' we cried; 'is it to visit fair Meg o' the Glen so early i' the mornin'?'

'He is on his way to holy kirk!' cried another, daffingly.

'If so — 'tis to stand all day on the stool of repentance!' declared another. Then in the precentor's whining voice he added: 'Robert Aitkin, deleted and discerned to compear at both diets of worship for the heinous crime of — and so forth!' This was an excellent imitation of the official method of summoning a culprit to stand his rebuke. It was Patie Robb of Ironmannoch who said this. And this same Patie had had the best opportunities for perfecting himself in the exercise, having stood the Session and received the open rebuke on three several occasions—two of them in one twelve-month, which is counted a shame even among shameless men.

'No, Patie,' said Rab in answer, 'I am indeed heading for the kirk, but on no siccan gowk's errand as takes you there twice in the year, my man. I go to hear the Gospel preached. For there is to be a

stranger frae the south shore at the Kirk of Kells this day, and they say he has a mighty power of words; and though ye scoff and make light o' me, I care not. I am neither kirk-goer nor kirk-lover, ye say. True, but there is a whisper in my heart that sends me there this day. I thank ye, bonny mistress!

He took the pint-stoup, and with a bow of his head and an inclination of his body, he did his service to Mistress Elspeth. For that lady, looking fresh as himself, had just come forth from her chamber to relieve Jean McCalmont, who, poor thing, had been going to sleep on her feet for many weary hours.

Then Roaring Raif Pringle cried out, 'Lads, we will all gang. I had news yestreen of this ploy. The new Bishop, good luck to him, has outed another of the high-flying, prating cushion-threshers. This man goes to Edinburgh to be tried before his betters. He is to preach in Kells this very morn on the bygoing, for the minister thereof is likeminded with himself. We will all gang, and if he gets a hearin' for his rebel's cant — why, lads, you are not the men I tak' you for!'

'So they cried out, 'Weel said, Roaring Raif!' and got them ready to go as best they could. For some were red of face and some were ringed of eye, and all were touched with a kind of disgust for the roisterous spirit of the night. But a dabble in the chill water of the spring and a nib of the rough-spun towel brought us mostly to some decent presentableness. For youth easily recovers itself while it lasts, though in the latter end it pays for such things twice over.

'We partook of as mickle breakfast as we could

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

manage, and that was no great thing after such a night. But we each drank down a stirrup-cup and with various good-speeds to Elspeth Vogie and Jean her maid, we wan to horseback and so down the strath to the Kirk of Kells. It sits on the summit of a little knowe with the whin golden about it at all times of the year, and the loch like a painted sheet spread below.

'We could see the folk come flocking from far and near, from their mailings and forty-shilling lands, their farm-towns and cothouses in half-a-dozen parishes.

'We are in luck's way, lads,' cried Lidderdale, called Ten-tass Lidderdale because he could drink that number of stoups of brandy neat; 'it is a great gathering of the godly. Lads, the shutting of this man's mouth will make such a din as will be heard of through all Galloway!'

'And so to our shame and my sorrow we made it up. We were to go the rounds of the meeting, and gather together all the likely lads who would stand with us. There were sure to be plenty such who had no goodwill to preachings. And with these in one place we could easily shut the mouth of this fanatic railer against law and order. For so in our ignorance and folly we called him. Because all this sort (such as I myself was then) hated the very name of religion, and hoped to find things easier and better for them when the king should have his way, and when the bishops would present none to parishes but what we called 'good fellows' — by which we meant men as careless of principle as ourselves — loose-livers and oath-swearers, such as in truth they mostly were themselves.

But when we arrived that August morning at the Kirk of Kells, lo! there before us was outspread such a sight as my eyes never beheld. The Kirk Knowe was fairly black with folk. A little way off you could see them pouring inward in bands like the spokes of a wheel. Further off yet, black dots straggled down hillsides, or up through glens, disentangling themselves from clumps of birches and scurry thorns for all the world like the ants of the wise king gathering home from their travels.

Then we were very well content and made it our business to go among the gay young blades who had come for the excitement, or, as it might be, because all the pretty lasses of the country-side were sure to be there in their best. And with them we arranged that we should keep silence till the fanatic minister was well under way with his treasonable paries. Then we would rush in with our swords drawn, carry him off down the steep and duck him for a traitorous loon in the loch beneath.

To this we all assented and shook hands upon the pact. For we knew right sickerly what would be our fate, if in the battle which was coming on the land, the Covenant men won the day. Perforce we must subscribe to deeds and religious engagements, attend kirks twice a day, lay aside gay colours, forswear all pleasant daffing with such as Elspeth Vogie and Jean her maid (not that there was anything wrong in my own practice with such — I speak only of others). The merry clatter of dice would be heard no more. The cartes themselves, the knowledge of which then made the gentleman, would be looked upon as the 'deil's picture-books.' A good broad oath would mean a fine as broad.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Instead of chanting loose catches we should have to listen to sermons five hours long, and be whipt for all the little pleasing transgressions that made life worth living.

'So 'Hush,' we said — 'we will salt this preacher's kail for him. We will drill him, wand-hand and working-hand, so that he cannot stir. We will make him drink his fill of Kells Loch this day!'

'All this while we knew not so much as the name of the preacher — nor, indeed, cared. He came from the south, so much we knew, and he had a great repute for godliness and what the broad-bonnets called 'faithfulness' which, being interpreted, signified that he condemned the king and the bishops, and held to the old dull figments about doctrine, free grace, and the authority of Holy Kirk.

'The man had not arrived when we reached the Kirk of Kells. Indeed, it was not long before the hour of service when up the lochside we saw a cavalcade approach. Then we were angry. For, as we said, 'This spoils our sport. These are doubtless soldiers of the king who have been sent to put a stop to the meeting. We shall have no chance this day. Our coin is spun and fallen wise between the stones. Let us go home!'

'But I said: 'There may be some spirity work for all that, lads. Better bide and see!'

'So they abode according to my word.

'But when they came near we could see that these were no soldiers of the king, nor, indeed, any soldiers at all, though the men were armed with whingers and pistolets, and rode upon strong slow-footed horses like farmers going to market. There was a gentleman at the head of them, very tall and

stout, whom Roaring Raif, in an undertone, pointed out as Gordon of Earlstoun, and in the midst, the centre of the company, rode a little fair man, shilpit and delicate, whom all deferred to, clad in black like a minister. He rode a long-tailed sheltie like one well accustomed to the exercise and bore about with him the die-stamp of a gentleman.

This was the preacher, and these other riders were mostly his parishioners, come to convoy him through the dangerous and ill-affected districts to the great Popish and Prelatic city of Aberdeen, where for the time being he was to be interned.

Then Roaring Raif whispered amongst us that we had better have our swords easy in the sheath and our pistols primed, for that these men in the hodden gray would certainly fight briskly for their minister.

'Gordon of Cardoness is there also,' he said, 'a stout angry carle. Him in the drab is Muckle Ninian Mure of Cassencarry. Beyond is Ugly Peter of Rusco, and that's Bailie Fullerton o' Kirkcudbright, the man wi' the wame swaggin' and the bell-mouthed musket across his saddle-bow. There will be a rare tulzie, lads. This is indeed worth leavin' Elspeth's fireside for. We will let oot some true blue Covenant bluid this holy day!'

'And when the Little Fair Man dismounted there was a rush of the folk and some deray. But we of the other faction kept in the back part and bided our time.

Then the Little Fair Man went up into the pulpit, which was a box on great broad, creaking, ungreased wheels, which they had brought out from the burial tool-house as soon as they saw that the mighty concourse could in no wise be contained in

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the kirk — no, not so much as a tenth part of them!

'After that there was a great hush which lasted at least a minute as the minister kneeled down with his head in his hands. Then at last he rose up and gave out the psalm to be sung. It was the one about the Israelites hanging their harps on the trees of Babylon. And I mind that he prefaced it with several pithy sayings which I remembered long afterwards, though I paid little heed to them at the time. 'This tree of Babylon is a strange plant,' he said; 'it grows only in those backsides of deserts where Moses found it, or by Babel streams where men walk in sorrow and exile. It is an ever-burning bush, yet no man hath seen the ashes of it.'

'Then the people sang with a great voice, far-swalling, triumphant, and the Little Fair Man led them in a kind of ecstasy. I do not mind much about his prayer. I was no judge of prayers in those days. All I cared about them was that they should not be too long and so keep me standing in one position. But I can recall of him that he inclined his face all the time he was speaking towards the sky, as if Some One Up There had been looking down upon him. At that I looked also, following the direction of his eyes. And so did several others, but could see nothing. But I think it was not so with the Little Fair Man.

'Now it was not till the sermon was well begun that we were to break in and 'skail' the conventicle with our swords in our hands. I could hear Lidderdale behind me murmuring, 'How much longer are we to listen to this treason-monger?'

'Let us give him five minutes by the watch, lads!' I said, 'the same as a man that is to be hanged hath

before the topsman turns him off. And after that I am with you.'

Then Roaring Raif said in my ear, 'We have them in the hollow of our hand. This will be a great day in the Kells. We will put the broad bonnets to rout, so that no one of them after this shall be able to show face upon the causeway of Dumfries. There are at least fifty staunch lads, good honest swearing blades, in and about the kirkyard of Kells this day!'

'For even so we delighted to call ourselves in our ignorance and headstrong folly—as the Buik sayeth, glorying in our shame.

'And according to my word we waited five minutes on the minister. He had that day a text that I will always mind, 'God is our refuge and our strength,' from the 46th Psalm — one that was ever afterwards a great favourite with me. And when at first he began, I thought not muckle about what he said, but only of the great ploy and bloody fray that was before me. For we rejoiced in suchlike, and called it among ourselves a 'bloodletting of the whey-faced knaves!'

Then the Little Fair Man began to warm to his work, and just when the five minutes drew on to their end, he was telling of a certain Friend that he had, One that loved him and had been constantly with him for years — so that his married wife was not so near and dear. This Friend had delivered him, he said, from perils of great waters and from the edge of the sword. He had also put up with all the evil things he had done to Him. Ofttimes he had cast this Friend off and buffeted Him, but even then He would not go away from him or leave him desolate.

'So, as I had never heard of such strange

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

friendship, I was in a great sweat to find out who this Friend might be, so different from the comrades I knew, who drew their swords at a word and gave buffet for buffet as quick as drawing a breath.

'So I whispered again, 'Give him another five minutes!'

'And I could hear them growl behind me, Tam Morra of the Shields, called Partan-face Tam, Glaikit Gib Morrison, and the others — 'What for are ye waitin'? Let the gray-breeks hae it noo!'

'But since I was by much the strongest there, and in a manner the leader, they did not dare to counter me, fearing that I might give them 'strength-o'-airm' as I did once in the vennel of Dumfries to Matthew Aird when he withstood me in the matter of Bonny Betty Coupland — a rencontre which was little to my credit from any point of view.

'And then the Little Fair Man threw himself into a rapture like a man going out of the body, and his voice sounded somehow uncanny and of the other world. For there was a 'scaich' in it like the snow-wind among the naked trees of the wood at midnight. Yet for all it was not unpleasant, but only eerie and very affecting to the heart.

'He told us how that he had shamed and grieved his Friend, how he had oftentimes wounded Him sore, and once even crucified Him

'Then when he said that I knew what the man was driving at, and if I had been left to myself I would have fallen away and thought no more of the matter. But at that moment, with a sudden calm, there fell a hush over the people. They seemed to be waiting for something. Then the Little Fair Man leaned out of the pulpit and stretched his arm

towards me, where I stood like Saul, taller by a head than any about me.

'There is a great strong young man there,' he said, 'standing by the pillar, that hitherto has used his strength for the service of the devil, but from this forward he shall use it for the' Lord. Even now he is plotting mischief. He, too, hath wounded my Friend, even Jesus Christ, and smitten Him on the cheekbone. But today he shall stand in the breach and fight for Him. Young man, I bid you come forward!'

'And with that he continued, pointing at me with his finger a little crooked. At first I was angry, and could have made his chafts ring with my neive had I been near enough. But presently something uprose in my heart — great, and terrible, and melting all at once. I took a step forward. But my companions held me back. I could feel Lidderdale and Roaring Raif with each a hand on a coat tail.

'Harry,' they said, 'do not mind him — cry the word and we will fall on and pull the wizard down by the heels!'

'Come hither!' said the Little Fair Man again, in a stronger voice of command. 'Come up hither, friend. Thou didst come to this place to do evil; but the Spirit hath thee now by the head, though well do I see that a pair of black deils have thee yet by the tail. Come hither, friend, resist not the Spirit!'

Then there arose a mighty flame in my heart, the like of which I never felt before. It was a very gale of the Spirit — a breaking down of dams that imprisoned waters might flow free. And before I knew what I did I took my hand and dealt a buffet right and left, so that Roaring Raif roared amain.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

And as for Jock Lidderdale, I know not what became of him, for they carried him over the heads of the crowd and laid him under a tree to come to himself again.

'Thou shalt know a Friend today, young man,' the minister said, when, being thus enlarged, I came near. 'Thou shall be the firstfruits to the Lord in the Kells this day. There is to be a great ingathering of sheaves here, though some of them shall yet have bloody shocks. But thou, young sir, shalt be the first of all and shalt stand the longest!'

Then on the outskirts of the crowd there arose a mighty turmoil. For all those that had been of my party made a rush forward, that they might rescue me from what they thought was rank witchcraft.

'Overturn! Overturn!' they cried. 'Ding doon the wizard! He hath bewitched 'Harry Strength-o'-Airm!' Fight, Harry — for thine own hand, and we will rescue thee!'

'And so ardent was their onset that they had well-nigh opened a way to where the Little Fair Man stood, as unmoved and smiling as if he had been sitting in his own manse. So great became the crowd that the very preaching-box rocked. The men of the cavalcade drew their swords and met the assailants hand to hand. In another minute there had been bloodshed.

'But by some strange providence there came into my hand the pole of a burying bier, whereon men bear coffins to the kirkyard. I know not how it came there, unless, peradventure, they had used it to roll out the preaching box. But, in any case, it made a goodly and gruesome weapon.

'Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and I

shouted aloud: 'I am on the Little Fair Man's side — and on the side of his Friend! Peace! Peace!'

'And with that I laid about me as the Lord gave me strength, and I heard more than one sword snap, and more than one head crack.

'Then, again, I cried louder than before: 'Let there be peace — and God help ye if ye come in Harry Wedderburn's road, this day — all ye that are set on mischief!'

'And lo! by means of the bier-pole, a way was opened, a large and an effectual, before me; and, like Samson, I smote and smote, and stayed not, till I was weary. For none could stand against me, and such as could, ran out to their horses. But the most part of them, I, with my grave-pole, caused to remain — that they, too, might be turned to the Lord by the Word of the preacher.

'So they came back, and I bade the Little Fair Man preach to them, while I kept guard. And at that he smiled and said: 'Did I not say that thou also shouldst be a soldier of God? Thine arm this day hath been indeed an arm of flesh. But thou shalt yet wield in thy time the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God!'

And of a truth, there was a great work and an effectual that day in the Kells. For they say that more than four score turned them from their evil way, and many of these blessed me thereafter for the breaking of their heads — yes, even upon their dying beds.

'Now I have myself backslidden since that, but have not altogether fallen away or shamed my first love. And when the cavalcade rode away up the muir road, I heard them tell that the Little Fair Man, who had called me out of my heady folly, was no other

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

than the famous Mr. Samuel Rutherford, minister of Anwoth, on his way to his place of exile in Aberdeen, for conscience' sake.

'That these things are verity I vouch for with my soul. The truth is thus, neither less nor more. Which is the testimony of me, Harry Wedderburn, written in this year of Grace and a freed Israel, 1689.'

TWO -THE HUMBLING OP STRENGTH-O'-AIRM

(The continuation of the Adventure of Mr. Harry Wedderburn, called 'Strength-o'-Airm,' written by himself, and transcribed by Alexander McQuhirr, M.D.)

'All this fell out exceeding well, and the fact was much bruited abroad throughout all the south-land of Galloway, how that with the tram of a bier I convertit thirty-three men, in and about the kirkyaird of Kells, in one day. But (what was not so good) the first man that I brak the head of was Roaring Raif Pringle of Kirkchrist — and I was engaged in the bands of affection with his sister Rachel, expecting indeed to wed her with the first falling of the leaf.

'Now Roaring Raif was so worshipfully smitten on the pate, that before he could sit up to hearken to the voice of the Little Fair Man, Mr. Rutherford had ridden northwards on his way and all his folk with him. Now when at last Raif sat up and drew his hand across his brow he asked who had done this, and when they told him that it was his friend Harry Wedderburn of the Black Craig who had broke his

own familiar head with the tram of the dead-bier, who but Raif Pringle was a wild man, and swore in his unhallowed wrath to shoot me if ever I came anigh the house of Kirkchrist, either to see his sister or for any other purpose!

‘Now I was not anxious about Rachel herself. I knew that when it came to the point, she cared not a doit either for Roaring Raif or for Slee Tod Pringle, her cunning father. She was a fell clever lass, and had always been a great toast among us—though continually urging me to forswear sitting drinking at the wine with wild runagates in public places and change houses, if I hoped to stand well in her favour. But once, having been with her and Roaring Raif at Dumfries, it was my good fortune to carry her across the ford at Holywood when Nith Water was rising fast, and since that day somehow she had always thought better than well of me. For we left the Roaring One on the Dumfries shore.

‘I will go over and bring him hither on my back,’ said I. And would have plunged in again to do it. For I thought nothing of perils of waters, being tall and a good swimmer to boot. But this Rachel would in no wise permit. She caught me by the arm and would not let me go back.

‘Deed will you do somewhat less, Harry Wedderburn; if Raif thinks so little of his sister as to convoy her home disguised in liquor, e'en let him stand there on the shore, or else take his way home by the Brig of Dumfries!’

‘And this I was very content to do, delivering Rachel into the hands of her uncle, Lancelot Pringle of Quarrelwood, in due time — but a longer time mayhap than in ordinary circumstances it takes to

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

traverse the distance between the fords of Holywood over against Netherholm and the mansion house of Quarrel wood. For the pleasure that I had in carrying of Rachel Pringle through the water had gone to my head some little, and I was perhaps not so clear about my way as I might have been.

'So, minding me on that heartsome and memorable night, together with other things more recent, I was not perhaps very anxious about the affection of Rachel Pringle. For I thought that it would take more than the word of Roaring Raif to change the heart of that little Rachel whom I had carried in my arms over the swellings of Nith Water. I minded me how tight she had held to me, and how, when we got over, she whispered in my ear, before I set her down, 'Harry, I like strong men!' Which saying somewhat delayed my putting of her down, for the ground grew exceedingly boggy and unstable just at that spot.

'So, on the evening of the day after I had forsaken my ill courses at the bidding of the Little Fair Man, I set out from the onsteading of Black Craig of Dee, leaving all there in the keeping of my brother John, a stark upstanding lad, and in those of Gilbert Grier, my chief hired herd. I told them not where I was going, but I think they knew well enough. For John brought me my father's broadsword, which he had sharpened, instead of my own smaller whinger, and Gib the herd took the pistols out of my belt and saw to their priming anew. They were always very loyal and sib to my heart, these two, and sped me on my love adventures without a word.

'Now the turn or twist that I gat at the outdoor service before the Kirk of Kells was strange enough.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

It may seem that the conduct of a man can only be turned by the application of reason or argument. But it was not so with me. The Little Fair Man crooked his finger and said: 'Come!' and I came. So also was it with the others who were convertit that day, aided maybe somewhat by my black quarter-staff. But I have since read in the Book that even so did Mr. Rutherford's Friend, when on the shores of the sea He called to Him His disciples, 'Come!' He said to the fishermen, and forthwith they left all and followed Him.

'Now my call did not cause me to follow the Little Fair Man. It was not of such a sort. He did not bid me to that of it. But those who have been my neighbours will bear me witness that I never was the same man again, but through many shortcomings and much warring of the flesh against the spirit, have ever sought after better things, during all the fifty-and-one years since that day.

'So out I set on my road to Kirkchrist with a rose in my coat, the covenanted work of reformation in my heart — and my pistols primed. I knew it would need all three to win bonny Rachel Pringle out of the hand of the Slee Tod and his son Raif, the Roaring One.

'Now Kirkchrist is one of the farm-towns of Galloway, many of which in the old days have been set like fortalices high on every defenced hill. Indeed, the ancient tower still stands at one angle of the square of houses, where it is used for a peat-shed. But by an outside stair it is possible to get on the roof and view the country for miles round. On one side the Cooran burn runs down a deep ravine full of hazel copses feathering to the meadow-edges,

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

where big bumblebees have their bykes, and where I first courted Rachel, sitting behind a cole of hay on the great day of the meadow ingathering. On the other three sides the approach to Kirkchrist is as bare as the palm of ray hand, all short springy turf, with not so much as a daisy on it, grazed over by Slee Tod's sheep, and cast up in places by conies, whose white tails are forever to be seen bunting about here and there among the warreny braes.

'Now somehow it never struck me that Roaring Raif would bear malice. What mattered a broken head that he should take offence at his ancient friend? Had I not had my own sponce broke a score of times, and ever loved the breaker better, practising away with John and Gib till I could break his for him in return? Why not thus Raif Pringle? It was true that he had gotten an uncouth clour from the bier-tram of Kells, but I was willing to give him his revenge any day in the week— and, for my part, bore no malice.

'So in this frame of mind I strolled up towards Kirkchrist, when the reek of the peat fires was just beginning to go up into a still heaven from the cothouse in the dell, and the good cottier wives were putting on their pots to make their Four-Hours. I was at peace with all the world, for since the Kirk of Kells there had been a marvellous lightening of my spirit.

'Rachel is yonder, I thought within me, as I went up the hillside towards the low four-square homestead of Kirkchrist. Her hand will be laying the peat and blowing up the kindling. She will be looking out for me somewhere, most likely at yonder window in the gable end.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Yes, so she was. For as I came in view of the yard gate I saw a white thing waved vehemently, and then suddenly withdrawn.

'Dear lass,' I thought, 'she is watching, and thinks thus to bid me welcome. She has doubtless made my peace with the Roaring One.'

'And I smiled within myself, like a vain fool, well-content and secure.

'Also I quickened my steps a little, so that I might arrive in time for the meal, being hunger-sharpened with my travel, and having out of expectance and forgetfulness taken but little nooning provender with me from the Black Craig of Dee.

I watched the window eagerly, as I came nearer, for another glint of the kerchief. But not the beck of a head or the flutter of a little hand intimated that one of the bonniest lasses in Galloway was waiting within. Yet it struck me as strange that there were no clamorous dogs about, or indeed any sound of life whatever. And ever and anon I seemed to hear my name called, but yet, when I stopped and listened, all was still again on the moment.

'Now the entrance into the courtyard or inner square of Kirkchrist was by a 'yett' or strong gate, closed when any raiders or doubtful characters were in the neighbourhood, as well as in the night season. But now this 'yett' stood wide open, and I could see the yellow straw in the yard all freshly spread, the stray ears yet upon it — which last, together with the empty look of the crofts, told me that the oats had been gathered in that day. Where, then, were the men who had done tin-work? It was a thing unheard of that they should depart without making merry in the house-place, and drinking of

the home-brewed ale, laced with a tass of brandy to each tankard.

The sun was low behind my back, and I was looking towards the onstead of Kirkchrist, when suddenly I saw something glisten in one of the little three-cornered wicket-windows of the barn. It was bright, and shone like polished metal — a steel pistol stock belike. But, nevertheless, I went on in the same dead, uncanny silence.

'Suddenly, Blaff! blaff! blaff!' Three or four shots went off in front of me and to the right. I heard the smooth hissing sound of lead bullets and the whistle of slugs. Something struck me on the muscle of the forearm, stunning me like a blow, then I felt a kind of ragged tear or searing of the flesh as with a hot iron. I cannot describe it better — not very painful at first, but rather angering, and inclining me, but for my recent conversion, to stamp and swear like a king's trooper.

This, however, I had small time to do, even if I had wished it; for, after one glance at the barn, through the three-cornered wicks of which, as through the portholes of a ship in action, white wreaths of the smoke of gunpowder were curling, my right arm fell to my side, and I turned to run. Even as I did so, a little cloud of men — perhaps half-a-dozen — came rushing out of the mickle 'yett' with a loud shout, and made for me across the level sward. Foremost of them was Roaring Raif. Then I was advertised indeed that he had not forgiven the clour on the head he had gotten. I knew him by his height and by the white clout that was bound like a mutch about his brows.

'Harry,' said I to myself, when I saw them thus

take after me, 'the Black Craig will never see you more. Ye are as a dead man. You cannot run far with that arm draining the life from you, and there is no shelter within miles.'

Then I heard the brainge of breaking glass behind me, and a voice: 'The linn — the linn, Harry Wedderburn; flee to the linn! It is your only chance. They are mad to kill you, Harry!'

'And even then I was glad to hear the voice of my lass, for to know that her heart and her prayers were with me. So I turned at the word, and ran redwud for the Linn of Kirkchrist — a wild steep place, all cliffs and screes and slithery spouts of broken slate. I felt my strength fast leaving me as I ran, and ever the enemy shouted nearer to my back.

'Kill him ! Shoot him! Put a bullet into him!'

Wondrous stimulating I found such remarks as these, made a hundred or two yards to leeward, with an occasional pistol bullet whistling by to mark the sense, as in a printed book. This made me run as I think I never ran before. For, though I was a changed man, I did not want to die and go straight to that Abraham's bosom, of which the Little Fair Man had spoken as one that had lain there of a long season. I did not surmise that the accommodation would suit me so well. No, not yet awhile, with Rachel Pringle praying for my life half-a-mile behind. So I ran and better ran, till the sweat of my brow ran into my eyes and well-nigh blinded me. Now in those days I was very young and limber. And I am none so stiff yet for my age.

'At all events, when I came to the taking off of tin-linn I saw that there was nothing for it but ray callant's monkey trick of letting myself down like a

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

wheel. I had often practised it on the heathery slopes of the Black Craig of Dee, so I caught myself behind the knees, and, with my head bent like a hoop, flung myself over the edge. Presently I felt myself tearing through the copses and plunging into little darksome dells. I rebounded from tree trunks and bruised myself against rocks. Stones I had started span whizzing about my ears, and I heard the risp and rattle of shot fired after me from the margin of the linn. My wounded arm seemed as if drawn from its socket. Then I felt the cool plash of water, and I knew no more.

'I might very well have been drowned in Kirkchrist Linn that day, but it had not been to be. For it so chanced that I fell into the deepest pool for miles, and was carried downwards by the strongest current into the place that is now called the 'Harry's Jaws.' This is a darksome spot, half-cavern, half-bridge, under the gloomy arch of which the brown peat-water foams white as fresh-poured ale, and the noise of its thundering deafens the ear. When I came to myself I was lying half out of the water and half in, on the verge of a great fall where the burn takes a leap thirty or forty feet into a black pool. I looked over, and there beneath me, with one of my own pistols in his hand, was Roaring Raif, a terrifying sight, with his bloody clout all awry about his head. He was looking at the pistol, dripping wet as it had gone over the fall when I came down like a runaway cart wheel into the Linn of Kirkchrist.

'He's farther doon the water, boys,' I heard him cry, and the sound was sweet to my ear. 'Here's the pistol he has left behind him! Scatter, boys, and a braw sheltie to the man that first puts an ounce o'

lead into him!’

‘A pleasant forgiving nature had this same Roaring One. And I resolved that, though a converted man, I would deal with him accordingly when I gat him into my clutches.

The place where I found me was not uncommodious. To make the most of it I crawled backwards till I came to the end of the rocks. Here was a little strip of sand, and over that a dry recess almost large enough for a cave. Some light filtered in from unseen crevices above, so that I think it was not roofed with solid rock overhead. Rather it was some falling in of the sides of the linn which had made the hiding-place. Here I was safe enough so long as the burn did not rise suddenly, for I knew well from the ‘glet’ on the stones and the bits of stick and dried rushes that the waters of the linn filled all the interior in time of flood.

Then I made what shift I could to bind up my arm. I was already faint from loss of blood, but I bound a band tight about my upper arm, twisting it with a stick till I almost cried out with the greatness of the pain. Then I tied a rag, torn from my shirt, about the wound itself, which turned out to be in the fleshy part, very red and angry. However, it had bled freely, which, though it made me faint at the time, together with the washing in the water of the linn, was probably the saving of me. There was a soft fanning air as the night drew on, and, in my wet clothes, I shivered, now hot, now cold. My head was throbbing and over-full; and I began to see strange lights about me as the cave alternately grew wide and high as the firmament, and anon contracted to the size of a hazel-nut. That was the little touch of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

fever which always comes after a gunshot Wound.

'So after a while fell the darkness, or, rather, if there had not been a full moon, the darkness would have fallen.

But, being thirsty with my wound, I crawled down to the water's edge and bent my head to drink, with the drumming of the fall loud in my ears. And, lo! in the pool I saw the round of the moon reflected. I was at the mouth of the little cave, and there, to the north, the Plough hung as from a nail in the August sky, while a little higher I saw one prong of silvery Cassiopeia's broken-legged 'W.'

The stars looked so remote and lonesome, so safe and careless up there. They minded so little that I was wounded and helpless, that if I had not been a changed man, I declare I could have cursed them in my heart.

'But suddenly from above came a sound that made all my heart beat and quiver. It was a woman's cry. All you who have never heard how soft a woman can make her speech when she fears for her true man's life, take this word. There is no sound so sweet, so low, so far-searching, in the world.

'Harry! Harry Wedderburn!' it said. And I knew that in the midnight Rachel Pringle was searching and calling for me. Though there might be danger, I could not bear that she should pass away from me.

'I am here,' I answered as softly as I could. But the noise of the waterfall drowned my voice, though my ears, grown accustomed to the roar, had caught hers easily enough.

'So, steadying me on the crutch of a tree that grew perilously over the fall, I went out and stood in the full light of the moon, taking my life in my hand

if it had so chanced that any of my enemies were in ambush round about.

'Rachel saw me instantly, and I could see her clasp her hands over her heart as she stood on the margin of the clench, black against the indigo sky of night.

'Harry — Harry Wedderburn!'

'Here — dear love — here! By the waterfall.'

'In an instant she was flying down the slope, having lifted her skirt, and, as we say, 'kilted' it, so that she might go the lighter. She wore a white gown, and I could see her flit like a moth through the covert of birk and hazel to the water-edge. In another moment, without stopping either for direction or to draw breath, she was coming towards me, her face to the precipice, swiftly, fearlessly, clinging to the little ragged rock-rifts, from which scarce a wind-wafted seed would grow or a tuft of gilly-flower protrude about which to clasp her fingers. But Rachel Pringle came as lightly and easily as if she had been ascending the steps of her father's ha'.

'Go back,' she whispered, 'go back, dear love! They may see you. I am coming — I know the way!'

'And with that I stepped back out of the moonlight, obedient to her word. Yet I stood near enough to the wall of the cliff to reach my arm over for her to take, so that she might have something to hold by during the last and most difficult steps of the goats' path, the roaring linn being above, the pool deep and black below.

'Now, either by chance or because it was the one which could reach farthest, I tendered Rachel my wounded arm, and as soon as she clasped my hand

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

so rude a stound ran up my wrist that it seemed as though I had been pierced through and through with a hot iron. So when at last Rachel leaped lightly upon the wet rock, I was ready to droop like a blown windlestrae in a December gale into her arms — yes, I, that was the strong man, called Strength-o'-Airm, laid my head on her shoulder, and she drew me within the shelter of the cave's mouth, crooning over me as wood doves do to their mates, and whispering soft words to me as a mother doth to a bairn that hath fallen down and hurt itself.

But in a little the stound of pain passed away, what with the happiness of her coming, the plash of the nearer waters, and the coolness of the night winds which blew to and fro in our refuge place as through a tunnel.

Then Rachel told me that she had run from the house while they were all searching for me everywhere. Roaring Raif and his brother Peter, together with Gib Maxwell of Slagnaw, Paul Riddick of the Glen, and Black-Browed Macclellane of Gregorie, Will of Overlaw, and Lancelot Lindesay, the tutor of Rascarrel — as bloodthirsty a crew as ever raked the brimstony by-roads of hell.

Very well I knew that if they lighted on us together there was no hope for me. But Rachel allayed my fear a little by telling me that she did not believe that any in the house knew of the cave beneath the tumble of rocks save only herself. It had long been her custom to seek it for quiet, when the Roaring One brought his crew about the house of Kirkchrist, and none had ever tracked her thither.

So she examined my wound in the light of the moon, which shone in at one end as we sat on the

inmost crutch of the tree. Now Rachel had much skill in wounds, for, indeed, her house was never free of them, her brothers, Peter and the Roaring One, never both being skin-whole at the same time. And so, with a handsbreadth torn from her white underskirt, she bathed and bandaged the wound, telling me for my comfort that the shot appeared to have gone through the fleshy part without lodging, so that most likely the wound would come together sweetly and heal by the first intention.

Then, after this was done, we arrived at our first difference. For Rachel vowed that she would in no wise go back to the onstead of Kirkchrist, but would stop and nurse me here in the linn; which thing, indeed, would have been mightily pleasant to the natural man. But, being mindful of that which the Little Fair Man had said, and also of the censorious clatter of the countryside, I judged this to be impossible, and told Rachel so; who, in her turn, received it by no means with meekness, but rose and stamped her little foot, and said that she would go and never return — that she was sorry to her heart she had ever come where she was so little thought of, with many other speeches of that kind, such as spirity maids use when they are affronted and in danger of not getting their own sweet way with the men of their hearts.

Now it went sore against the grain thus to deal with Rachel. And yet I could think of no way of appeasing her, but to feign a dwalm of faintness and pain from my wound. So when I staggered and appeared to hold myself up by the rock with difficulty, she stayed in the full flood of her reproaches, and faltered, 'What is the matter,

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Harry?'

'Then, because I made no answer, she kneeled down beside me, and, taking my head in both of her hands, she kissed my brow.

'I did not mean it—indeed, I did not, Harry,' she said, with that delicious contrition which at all times sat so well on her — even after we were married, which is a strange thing and very uncommon.

'So I touched her cheek with my fingers and forgave her, as a man who has been in the wrong forgives a loving woman who has not. (There is ever a touch of superiority in a man's forgiving — in a woman's there is only love and the desire for peace.)

'Then I may stay with you?' she said.

'And I will not deny but she tempted me sore.

'But swift as the sunbeam that strikes from cloud to hilltop, a thought came to me.

'Listen to me, Rachel,' I said. At the break of day or thereby all will be quiet. The Roaring One and his crew will be snoring in bed.'

'Or on the floor,' said Rachel, with a quick and dainty sniff of distaste.

'Either will suffice,' I said. 'Then will we go down and call up the minister. We will cause him to marry us, and then we will fear neither traitor nor slanderer.'

'But he will not!' she cried. 'Donald Bain is a bishop's hireling, and, besides, our Raif's boon companion.'

'Then I drew my dirk and held it aloft, so that the moonlight ran like molten silver down the blade.

'See,' said I, 'dear Rachel, if this does not gar the curate of Kirkchrist marry us to a galloping tune, Harry Wedderburn kens not the breed, that is all.'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

‘Content!’ said she. ‘I will do what you say, Harry; only I will not go back to Kirkchrist nor will I part from you now when I have gotten you.’

‘Which thing I was most glad to hear from her fair and loving lips. And I thought, smilingly, that Rachel’s manner of speaking these words became her very well.

‘So there in the din of the water-cavern and under the wheeling shafts of silver light as the moon swung overhead, we two abode well content, waiting for the dawn.

‘And so, in this manner, and for all my brave words, the witch got her way.’

But how — we shall see.

THREE - THE CURATE OF KIRKCHRIST

The manse of Kirkchrist parish was less than a mile down the glen. It had only a week or two before been taken possession of by one Donald Bain an ignorant fellow, so they said, intruded upon us by the new bishop. For Mr. Gilbert, our old and tried minister and servant of God, had been removed, even as Mr. Rutherford had been put out of Anwoth, and at about the same time.

Thither, then, we took our way, my dear betrothed and I, with my wounded arm carried across me, the sleeve being pinned to my coat front so that I could not move my hand.

We kept entirely to the thickets by the water-side, Rachel leading the way. For she had played all her life at the game which had now become earnest and

deadly. But we need not have troubled. For as we went, from far away, light as a waft of wind blown athwart a meadow, we heard the chorus of the roisterers in the house of Kirkchrist, and emergent from the servile ruck, the voice of her brother, the Roaring One, urging good fellows all to 'come drink with him.' Somewhat superfluously, indeed, to all appearance, for the good fellows all had apparently been 'come-drinking' all night to the best of their ability and opportunities.

'After this Rae and I went a little more openly and swiftly. This chiefly for my sake, because the uneven ground and the little branches of the hazel-bushes caught and whipped my wounded arm, making me more than once to wince with the pain.

'And Rachel kept a little beneath me on the brae, and bade me lean my well hand on her shoulder, saying that I could not press over-hard, and that the more I did so, the more would she know that I loved her. In this not displeasing fashion we came to the house of the curate that had so lately been intruded upon the manse of godly Mr. Gilbert.

The place was all dark, and the shutters put over the windows for fear of shots from without. Then with my sword hilt I began to knock, and the noise of the blows resounded through the house hollow and loud. For the Highlandman had as yet put little furniture into it, save as they said a sheave or two of rushes for a bed for himself, and another for the wench that kepted house to him — his sister, as he averred.

In no long space of time his reverence set a shock head out of the window to ask what was the din. The which he did in a bold manner, as though he were

the lord and master of the neighbourhood. But I tamed him, for I bade him do his curate's coat upon him, and bring his service book, for that he was to marry two people there and then.

'Who be you that seek to be married so untimeous?' he asked. 'Cannot ye be content till the morning?'

'That is just why we cannot be content,' I answered; 'we must be far away by then!'

'So in a little he rose up grumbling and came down.

'Have you not also a maid in the house?' I asked of him.

'Aye,' said he, very dried like, 'my sister Jean!'

'Bid her rise. We have need of a witness!' I bade him.

'And of some one to hold the candle!' he added.

It was about four of the clock, and the east little more than graying, as we four stood in front of the manse of Kirkchrist. Had any been abroad to see us we had seemed a curious company. The curate in his white gown and black bands, his shambling nightgear peeping out above and under — a red peaked nightcap on his head, the tassel of which nodded continually over his right eye in a most ludicrous manner (only that none thought of mirth that night). Beside him, a dripping candle in her hand, stood his sister, a buxom quean, blowsed with health and ruddy as the cherry.

'Before these two I stood, 'a black towering hulk with one arm in a sling' (Rachel's words), and beside me, my sweet bride, dainty and light as a butterfly at poise on a flower's lip.

'Overhead among the trees the wind began to

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

move, blowing thin and chill before the dawn. And even as the curate thumbed and mumbled beneath the flicker of the candle, I saw the light break behind the Black Craig of Dee, and wondered if ever Rae and I should dwell in peace and content in the lee of it.

'And because neither Rachel nor I knew that form of words, Jean Bain kept us right, prompting us how to kneel here, and what to answer there, here to say our names over, and there promise to love each other — the last not necessary, for if we had not done that already, we had hardly been at the manse of Kirkchrist at four of the August morning in order to be wed by an alien and uncovenanted priest.

'But scarcely had the blessing of Donald Bain made us man and wife, when we heard the roisterers' chorus again abroad on the hills, and Jean Bain came rushing upon us wild with alarm. She guessed well enough who we were. For the searchers had been at the manse the night before swearing to have my life.

'Flee,' she said; 'take to the heather for your lives. They have sworn to kill your husband!'

'This I knew well enough; but the perversity of fate which at that time clung to me, made me ready to faint.

'I cannot go — I am dizzy with my wound!' I said, and would have fallen but that Rachel and the young Highland woman held me up in their arms.

'All this time the shouting and hallooing like the crying of hunters on the hills came nearer, and the day was breaking fast.

'Rachel and I were, indeed, in a strait place. I bethought me on the Little Fair Man, and almost

repented that his counsels had brought me to this. But even then, and in the house of the Philistine, help came.

'Come in with you both,' said Jean Bain in a fierce voice, as if daring contradiction. 'Donald, aff wi' your surplice and on wi' your coat. You must meet them, and hold them in parley. It shall not be said that a bridegroom was slaughtered like an ox upon our doorstep within an hour of his wedding.'

'With that she bustled us upstairs to her own room. Truly enough, there was but one broad pallet of heather covered with rushes spread on the floor, and no other furniture whatever.

'Near the bed-head there was the low door of a little closet or deep cupboard. Into this she bade us enter, and told us that she would hang her clothing over it upon the wooden pegs which were there for the purpose. Since no better might be we entered, for my head was running round with my loss of blood and the pain in my wounded arm. I was glad to lie down anywhere.

'Then through the buzzing bees' byke in my skull I could hear Jean Bain giving her last orders to the curate.

'Hear ye, Donald, lee to them weel. Ye hae seen nocht — ken nocht; and if they offer to bide, tell them that it is the hour when ye engage in family worship. Thai will flit them if nocht else will!'

'And though I could hear the raucous voice of that gomeril brother-in-law of mine at the bottom of the stairs, I could not help laying my head on Rachel's shoulder, and whispering in her ear the words, 'Little wife!' To which she responded with no more than 'Hush!' So there we abode, crouching and

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

cowering in that dark cupboard while a score of raging demons turned the curate's house upside down, crying for jugs of brandy and tasses of aquavity, while Jean Bain shrilly declared that no brandy could they expect in such a poverty-stricken land, but good home-brewed ale — and even that they should not have unless they behaved themselves more seemly.

'But ever as I lay the darkness seemed to stretch far above me, the walls to mount and then swiftly come together again; now I was upheaved on delicious billows of caller air, and anon I fell earthward again through the illimitable vault of heaven. Yet every now and then I would awake for a moment to find my head on a sweeter than Abraham's bosom, and so fall to contemning my folly. But ere I had time to realise my happiness I was off again ranging the universe, or at converse with hundreds and hundreds of mocking spirits that mopped and mowed about my path. For I was just falling into a fever, and my dear lass had to put her skirt about my mouth to keep the man-hunters from hearing me moan and struggle in my phantasy.

'By nine of the clock they had drunken all that was in the curate's house, and poor Donald Bain had gone to convoy them on their way. They were going (so they swore) to the Black Craig o' Dee to rout me out of my den. And this made Rachel very sore afraid, for she knew well that if we were to go back to the damp cave in the linn I would never rise from my bed alive. And now, as she thought, the way was shut to our only port of refuge. Also she feared for John, my brother — not being acquaint with John, and conceiving that they might do him a

mischief, together with the innocent plough lads and herds in the house. But this need not have troubled her, for indeed no one about the Black Craig o' Dee desired anything better than that Roaring Raif and his crew should come near at hand to receive the welcome prepared for him.

'But in the very hour of the storm-breaking there appeared a bieldy dyke-back to shelter two poor lost wandering lambs. For no sooner was Donald Bain out of the house with all the ungodly crew than Jean, his sister, flew upstairs to us, with her gown all pulled awry as she had escaped from the hands of the roisterers.

'Come your ways out, you puir young things,' she cried; 'they are gane, and the foul fiend ride ahint them. May they never come this road again, that kenned neither how to behave themselves seemly in a manse nor how to conduct them before a decent lass. Faith, they little jalloused how near they were to gettin' a durk between the ribs!'

'But by the time Rachel and Jean Bain got me out of that darksome closet I was fairly beside myself. The fever ran high, and I raved about rivers of waters and the sound of great floods, and threeped with them that I saw the Little Fair Man coming on the wings of seraphims and cherubims and lifting me up out of the mire.

'And as soon as Jean Bain heard the yammer and yatter of my foolish running on, she went to the closet for some simple herbs, and put them in a pot over the fire to steam. Then she bade Rachel help me down to the minister's chamber, and between them they undressed me, cutting the sleeve from my coat so as to save the poor wounded arm. They got

me finally between the blankets, and made me drink of this herb-tea and that, willy-nilly. For which, as I heard afterwards, I called them 'witch-wives,' 'black crows of a foul nest,' with many other names. But Jean Bain held me by the arm that was whole, while Rachel fleeced with me through her streaming tears; and so in time they gat me to take down the naughty-tasting brew. Nevertheless, in a little it soothed me as a mother's lullaby doth a fractious wean, and in time I fell on a refreshing sleep.

Yet Rachel would not be comforted, but mourned for me greatly, till Jean Bain told her of the yet sorer case in which she and Donald had but lately been. To which my lass rejoined, proud of her exceedingly recent wife-hood: Ah, but he is your brother — not your man! I would not care what became of Raif, not if they hanged him on the Gallows hill, and the craws pyked his banes!

'For she was angry with her brother.

Then all suddenly Jean Bain set her head between her hands, and began to greet as if her poor heart were near the breaking.

'He is my man — he is my man!' she cried. 'And I wish we were back again in bonny Banff, him a herd laddie an' me a herd lassie, and that we could hear again the waves break amang the rocks at Tarlair!

'Wedded — aye, that are we, firm and staunch,— but Donald daurna let on, or Bishop Sydserf wad turn him awa'. He will hae nae wedded priests amang them that he sets ower his parochins, but, as he says, men kinless and cumberless that are neither feared to stand and fight or mount and ride. It came about this gate. When Donald was comin' awa' to get his lear, I was fair broken-hearted. For

we had herded lang thegither on the gowden braes, and lain mony a simmer day amang the broom wi' our een on the sheep, but our hearts verra close the yin to the ither. The bishop was o' our clan and country-side, and he made Donald graund offers — siccan fat parishes as there were in the Lawlands — stipend— house and gear — guid faith, he dazzled a' the weel-doin' laddies there-aboot. And Donald gied his word to be a curate, for he was weel-learned and had been to the schule as mony as four winters, me gangin' wi' him, and carryin' his books when I could win clear o' my mither.

'So since I couldna bide frae him, Donald brocht me here to this cauld, ill, Gotland place, where we bide amang fremit and unco folk that hate us. But we were married first and foremost by the minister o' Deer, that was a third cousin o' Donald's aunt's — and a solid man that can keep his tongue safe and siccar ahint his teeth.

'But oh — this place that we thocht to be a garden o' a delichts and an orchard o' gowden fruit is hard and unkindly and bare. The gear and plenishin' of this manse are nocht but the heather beds that our ain fingers pu', and the blankets we brocht wi' us. And for meat we hae the fish o' the stream an' the birds that Donald whiles shoots wi' his gun — patricks and wild ducks on the ponds. For no a penny's worth o' steepend will they pay. And the bishop's warrandice runs nae farther than the range o' the guns o' his bodyguard.'

'So, after this explanation, the two women mourned together as they tended me, and presently the poor curate, Donald Bain, came back to find them thus, and, me raving at large, and trying to

tear off the bandages from my arm.

'So here in this house, ill-furnished and cheerless, this kindly couple kept us safely hid till the blast had overblown and the bitterest of the shower slacked. Five weeks we abode there before I could be moved, and even then I was still as weak as water. But for the last fortnight we lived in more comfort. For the curate went over on a sheltie which, as he said, he had fand in a field, to the Black Craig of Dee, and there held a long parley with my brother in the gate, while John had all his work to keep Gib Grier and his herd-laddies from shooting the curate for a black hoodie craw o' Prelacy, as they named him.

'And John came back with his visitor to the manse of Kirkchrist on a beast with store of provend upon it, together with good French wines and other comforts for the upbuilding of the sick.

'I declare I will never speak against a curate again,' said John, when he heard that which we had to tell him. And he kissed his new sister Rachel with great and gracious goodwill, for John was ever fond of a bonnie lass. Besides, we had had no woman body about the Black Craig ever since our mother died, when we were but wild laddies herding the craws off the corn in the long summer days, and hiding lest we should be made to go with the funeral that wimpled over the moor to the Kirkyaird of Kells.

'Likewise also he saluted Jean Bain, or she him — I am not sure which. For Jean was in no wise backward in affection, but of a liberal, willing, softish nature; fond of a talk with a lad over a 'yett,' and fond, too, of a kiss at parting. Which last she gave to John with hearty goodwill, and that, too, in

the presence of the curate.

'And as we went slowly back over the heather, John walked on one side of the horse which carried me, and Rachel rode on the sheltie on the other. John was silent for a long while, and then he all at once said: 'Dod, but I think I could fancy that Heelant lass myself!'

'So Rachel began to tell him how it was with Donald Bain the curate and Jean his wife. For with a woman's love for a fair field and no favour in matters of love, she did not wish John to spend himself on that which could never be his. Then was John very doleful for a space.

'But in time he, too, changed his mind, and was most kind to poor Donald Bain and his wife when in the year 1638 he was outed from his parish in the same month that Sydserf, his master, was set aside by the parliament and the people of Scotland. Then great evil might have befallen him but that, being long fully recovered from my wound, Gib Grier and I set out for the manse of Kirkchrist, and brought them both, Donald and Jean, to the Black Craig of Dee, where in the midst of our great moors and black moss-hags they were safe even as I had been in their house. And in our spare chamber, too, was born to them a babe, a thing which, had it been kenned, would have caused great scandal all over the laud for the wickedness of the curates. But none knew (save John and Gib, who were sworn to secrecy) till we gat them convoyed away to the north again, where they did very well, and Donald became chaplain to my Lord of Sutherland. And every year for long and long the Edinburgh carrier brought us a couple of haunches of venison well smoked, which

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

served us till Yule or Pasch, and very toothsome and sweet it was. This was a memorial from Donald Bain and Jean his wife.

'Douce and sober we lived, Rachel and I, we who had been so strangely joined. For the Slee Tod of Kirkchrist was glad enough to have his daughter wed to one who asked neither dower nor wedding-gift, tocher nor house linen; and as for Roaring Raif, he broke his neck-bone over the linn coming home one night from the rood-fair of Dumfries. But I kept my mind steadfastly set to make my new life atone for the faults of the old — which may be bad theology, but is good sound fact. And Rachel, like a valiant housewife, aided me in that as in all things. So that I became in time a man of mark, and was chosen an elder by the Session of the parish. But nevertheless the old Adam was not dead within me, but only kept close behind bars waiting to be quits with me. For as the years went by I was greatly taken up with my own righteousness, and so in excellent case to backslide.

'Now it chanced that, being one day in the change house of the clachan, I heard one speak lightly of our daughter Anne, that was now of marriageable age, and of a most innocent and merry heart. So anger took hold of me, and, unmindful of my great strength, I dealt the young man such a buffet on the side of his head that he was carried out for dead, and indeed lay long at his father's house between life and death.

'Now this was a mighty sorrow to me and to Rachel my wife. And though little was said because of the provocation I had (which all had heard), I thought it my duty to resign my office of the

eldership, confessing my hastiness and sin to my brethren, and offering public contrition. But for all that I gat no ease, but was under a great cloud of doubt, feeling myself once again without God and without hope in the world.

Then it came to me that if I could but see the Little Fair Man again he would tell me what I should do. I knew that he had been of a long season regent of a college in the town of Sanct Anders. So I gave myself no rest day nor night till my good wife, after vainly trying to settle me by her loving words, made all preparation of provend in saddle-bags, and guineas in pouch, and set me on a good beast at the louping-on stone by our door. It was the first year of the restored King Charles, the Second of that name, and the darkness was just thickening upon the land, a darkness greater than the first, when I set out to see Mr. Rutherford.

For the early part of my travel all went well, but when I was passing through the town of Hamilton, certain soldiers set upon me, asking for my pass, and calling me 'Westland Whig' and 'canting rebel.' They would have taken from me all that I had, having already turned my saddle-bags outside in, and one of them even came near to thrust his hand into my pocket when a coach drove up with six horses and outriders mired to the shoulders. Then a pair of grand servants sprang down from behind, and cried: 'Room for my Lord Bishop!' And at this the soldiers desisted from plundering me to do their obeisance.

Then there came forth first a rosy buxom woman, breathing heavily, and holding out a plump hand to the man-servant.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'But when she saw me with a soldier at either side, she took one long look, and then cried out in a hearty voice: 'What's this — what's this — my friend Harry Wedderburn in the gled's claws? Let be, scullions! Donald, here's our host frae the Black Craig o' Dee!'

And forthwith, the soldiers falling back abashed, the bishop's lady, she that had been poor Jean Bain, came at me in her old reckless way, and flung her arms about my neck, kissing me soundly and heartily — as I had not been kissed of a long season by any save Rachel, me being no more a young man.

'And the bishop was no other than Donald himself, the same who had been curate of Kirkchrist — and a right reverend prelate he looked.

'Then nothing would do Jean and Donald but I must get into the carriage with them, and have one of their men-servants ride my beast into Edinburgh. Neither excuse nor nay-say would my lady bishop take. So in this manner we travelled very comfortably, I sitting beside her, and at Edinburgh we parted, I to Sanct Anders, they to a lodging near my Lord of Sutherland's house, to whose influence with the king they owed their advancement. For they were hand and glove with him. And the morning I was to ride away came their carriage to the door, and lo! my lady again — this time with a safe-conduct and letter of certification from the Privy Council setting forth that I was a person notably well-affected and staunch; that none were to hinder or molest me or mine in body or estate under penalty of the King's displeasure. Which thing, in the troublous times to come, more than once or twice stood me in great stead.

‘But when I came to Sanct Anders, the first thing I heard was that Mr. Rutherford lay a-dying in his college of St. Mary’s. I betook me thither, and lo! a guard of soldiers was about the doors, and would in no wise permit me pass. They were burning a pile of books, and I heard say that it was done by order of the parliament, and that thereafter Mr. Rutherford was to be carried out, alive or dead, and his bed set in the open street. *Lex Rex* was the name of the book I saw them turning this way and that with sticks, so as to make the leaves burn faster. I know not why it was so dour to catch, for out of curiosity I got me a copy afterwards, and the Lord knows it was dry enough — at least to my taste.

‘But after a while, showing the officer my Privy Council letter, I prevailed on him that I had a mandate from government to see Mr. Rutherford, and that I had come directly and of purpose from Edinburgh to oversee the affair, and report on those who were diligent. So at long and last they let me go up the stair.

‘And at the top I found many doors closed, but one open, and the sound of a voice I knew well speaking within.

‘And still it was telling the praises of the Friend — yes, after a lifetime of struggle and suffering. Nor do I think that, save for taking rest in sleep, the voice had ever been silent on that theme.

‘So though none knew me, I passed straight through the little company to the death-bed of the man who spoke. He was the Little Fair Man no longer. But his scant white hair lay soft as silk on the pillow. His face was pale as ivory, his cheeks fallen in; only his eyes glowed like live coals deep-

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

sunken in his head.

'So, friend — you have come to see an old man die,' he said, when his eyes lighted on me; 'what, a bairn of mine, sayst thou — not after the flesh but after the spirit. Aye, I do mind that day at Kells. A gale from the Lord blew about us that day. So you are Harry of the Rude Hand, and you have fallen into sin? Ah, you must not come to me — you must to the Master! You had better have gone to your closet, and worn the whin-stone a little with the knees of your breeks. And yet I ken not None hath been a greater sinner or known greater mercy than Samuel Rutherford. I am summoned by the Star Chamber—I go to the chamber of Stars. I will see the King. I will carry Him your message, Harry. Fear not, the young man you smote will recover. He will yet bless you for laying a hand on him, even as this day you acknowledge the unworthy servant who on the greensward of Kells called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

'Sir, fare you well. Go home to your wife, nothing doubting. This night shall close the door. At five of the morning I will fasten my anchor within the veil.'

'And even as he said so it was. He passed away, and, as for me, secure that he would carry my message to the Alone Forgiver of Sins I returned home to find the youth recovered and penitent. He afterwards became a noted professor and field preacher, and died sealing his testimony with his blood on the victorious field of London Hill.

This is the testimony of me, Harry Wedderburn, sometime called Strength-o'-Airm, who now in the valley of peace and a restored Israel wait the consummation of all things. Being very lonely, I

write these things out to pass the time till I, too, cast mine anchor within the veil. And I cheer myself with thinking that two shall meet me there, one on either side of the gate — Rachel, my heart's dear partner, and the Little Fair Man, who will take by either hand and lead into the presence of the Friend, poor unworthy Harry Wedderburn, sometime bond-slave of sin, but now servant most unprofitable of the Lord.'

NOTE BY MR. JOHN WEDDERBURN. — 'My father departed this life on the morning after finishing this paper, sleeping quietly away about five of the clock.'

16. MY FATHER'S LOVE STORY

When I am putting together family stories, new and old, I may as well tell my father's. Sometimes we of a younger day thought him stiff, silent, out of sympathy with our interests and amusements; but the saving salt of humour that was in him made this only seeming. In reality tolerance and kindest understanding beacons from under the covert of his bushy gray eyebrows.

There was the savour of an infinite discernment in the slow 'Aye?' with which he was wont to receive any doubtful statement. My mother said ever ten words for his one, and it was his wont to listen to her gravely and unsmilingly, as if giving the subject the profoundest attention, while all the time his thoughts were far away — a fact well understood and much resented by his wife.

'What am I talkin' about, Saunders?' she would say, pausing in the midst of a commination upon some new and garish fashion in dress, or the late hours kept by certain young men not a thousand miles away.

'Oh, breaking the second commandment; as usual,' he would reply; 'discoursing of the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth!'

'Havers,' she would reply, her face, however, glancing at him bright as a new-milled shilling, 'your thochts were awa' on the mountains o' vanity! Naething richt waukens ye up but a minister to

argue wi'!

And, indeed, that was a true word. For though an unusually silent man, my father, Alexander (or Saunders) McQuhirr, liked nothing better than a minister to argue with — if one of the Kirk of Scotland, well and good. There was the Revolution Settlement, the Headship of Christ, the Power of the Civil Magistrate. My father enjoyed himself thoroughly, and if the minister chanced to be worthy, so did he. But it took a Cameronian or an Original Secession divine really to rouse within him what my mother called 'his bowels of wrath.'

'There is a distinct Brownist strain in your opinions, Alexander,' Mr. Osbourne would say — his own minister from the Kirk on the Hill. 'Your father's name was not Abel for nothing!'

('Abel,' 'Jacob,' 'Abraham,' were not common names in Scotland, and such as occurred in families daring last century might generally be traced to the time of Cromwellian occupation. David and Samuel were the only really common Old Testament names at that time.)

Mr. Osbourne generally reminded him of this when he had got the worse of some argument on the true inwardness of the Marrow Controversy. He did not like to be beaten, and my father was a dour arguer. Once it is recorded that the minister brought all the way up to Drumquhat on a Communion Friday—the 'off-day' as it were of the Scottish Holy Week — the great Dr. Marcus Lawton himself from Edinburgh. It happened to be a wettish day in the lull between hay and harvest. My father was doing something in the outhouse where he kept his joinering tools, and the two ministers joined him

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

there early in the forenoon. They were well into 'Freewill' before my father was at the end of the board he had been planing. 'Predestination' was the overword of their conversation at the noonday meal, which all three seemed to partake of as dispassionately as if they had been stoking a fire — this to the great indignation of my mother, who, having been warned of the proposed honour, had given herself even more completely to hospitality than was habitual with her.

Mr. Osbourne, indeed, made a pretext of talking to her about the price of butter, and how her hens were laying. But she saw through him even as he spoke.

For, as she said afterwards, describing the scene, 'I saw his lug cockit for what the ither twa were saying, and if it hadna been for the restrainin' grace o' God, I declare I wad hae telled him that butter was a guinea a pound in Dumfries market, and that my hens were laying a score o' eggs apiece every day — he never wad hae kenned that I was tellin' him a leel'

All day the great controversy went on. Even now I can remember the echoes of it coming to me through the wet green leaves of the mallows my mother had planted along the south-looking wall. To this day I can hear the drip of the water from the slates mingling with such phrases as 'the divine sovereignty,' the 'Covenant of Works,' 'the Adamic dispensation.' I see the purple of the flowers and smell the sweet smell of the pine shavings. They seemed to my childish mind like three Titans hurling the longest words in the dictionary at each other. I know nothing wherewith to express the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

effect upon my mind of this day-long conflict save that great line in the fifth book of Paradise Lost:

‘Thrones, dominations, principedoms, vertues, powers!’

It was years after when first I read it, but instantly I thought of that wet summer day in Lammastide, when my father wrestled with his peers concerning the deep things of eternity, and was not overcome.

My mother has often told me that he never slept all that night — how waking in the dawn and finding his place vacant, she ‘had hastily thrown on a gown and gone out to look for him. He was walking up and down in the little orchard behind the barn, his hands clasped behind his back. And all he said in answer to her reproaches was: ‘It’s vexin’, Mary, to think that I only minded that text in Ephesians about being sealed unto the day of redemption after he was ower the hill. It wad hae ta’en the feet clean frae him if I had gotten haud o’ it in time.’

‘What can ye do wi’ a man like that?’ she would conclude, summing up her husband’s character, mostly in his hearing.

‘But remember, Mary, the pit from which I was digged!’ he would reply, reaching down the worn old leather-bound copy of Boston’s Fourfold State out of the wall-press and settling himself to re-peruse a favourite chapter.

My father’s father, Yabel McQuhirr, was a fierce hard man, and seldom showed his heart, ruling his house with a rod of iron, setting each in his place, wife, child, manservant and maid-servant, ox and

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

ass — aye, and the stranger within his gates.

My father does not talk of these things, but my mother has often told me of that strange household up among the granite hills, to which, as a maid of nineteen, she went to serve. In those days in all the Galloway farm-towns, master and servant sat down together to meals.

The head of the house was lawgiver and potentate, priest and parent, to all beneath his roof. And if Yabel McQuhirr of Ardmannoch did not exercise the right of pit and gallows, it was about all the authority he did not claim over his own.

Yabel had a family of strong sons, silent, dour — the doctrine of unquestioning obedience driven into them by their father's right arm and oaken staff. But their love was for their mother, who drifted through the house with a foot light as a falling leaf, and a voice attuned to the murmuring of a hill stream. There was no daughter in the household, and Mary McArthur had come partly to supply the want. She had brought a sore little heart with her, all because of a certain ship that had gone over the sea, and the glint of a sailor lad's merry blue eyes she would see no more.

She had therefore no mind for love-making, and Thomas and Abel, the two eldest sons, got very short answers for their pains when they 'tried their hand' on their mother's new house-lass. Tom, the eldest, took it well enough, and went elsewhere; but Abel was a bully by nature, and would not let the girl alone. Once he kissed her by force as, hand-tied, she carried in the peats from the stack. Whereupon Alexander, the silent third brother, found out the reason of Mary's red eyes, and interviewed his

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

brother behind the barn to such purpose that his face bore the marks of fraternal knuckles for a week. Also Alexander had his lip split.

'Ye hae been fechtin' again, ye blakes,' thundered their father. 'Mind ye, if this happens again I will break every bane in your bodies. I will have you know that I am a man of peace! How did you get that black eye, Yabel?'

'I trippit ower the shaft o' a cairt!' said Abel, lying glibly in fear of consequences.

'And you, Alexander — where gat ye that lip?'

'I ran against something!' said the defender of innocence, succinctly. And stuck to it stubbornly, refusing all amplification.

'Well,' said their father, grimly, 'take considerably more heed to your going, both of ye, or you may run against something more serious still!'

Then he whistled on his dogs, and went up the dyke-side towards the hill.

After this, Alexander always carried in the peats for Mary McArthur, and, in spite of the taunts and gibes of his brothers, did such part of her work as lay outside the house. On winter nights and mornings he lighted the stable lantern for her before she went to milk the kye, and then when she was come to the byre he took his mother's stool and pail and milked beside her cow for cow.

All these things he did without speaking a word of love, or, indeed, saying a word of anything beyond the commonplaces of a country life. He never told her whether or no he had heard about the sailor lad who had gone over seas.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Indeed, he never referred to the subject throughout a long lifetime. All the same, I think he must have suspected, and with natural gentleness and courtesy set himself to ease the girl's heartsore burden.

Sometimes Mary would raise her eyes and catch him looking at her —that was all. And more often she was conscious of his grave staid regard when she did not look up. At first it fretted her a little. For, of course, she could never love again — never believe any man's word. Life was ended for her — ended at nineteen! So at least Mary McArthur told herself.

But all the same, there — a pillar for support, a buckler for defence, was Alexander McQuhirr, strong, undemonstrative, dependable. One day she had cut her finger, and he was rolling it up for her daintily as a woman. They were alone in the shearing field together. Alexander had the lint and the thread in his pocket. So, indeed, he anticipated her wants silently all his life.

It had hurt a good deal, and before he had finished the tears stood brimming in her eyes.

'I think you must get tired of me. I bring all my cut fingers to you, Alec!' she said, looking up at him.

He gave a kind of gasp, as if he were going to say something, as a single drop of salt water pearly itself and ran down Mary's cheek; but instead he only folded the lint more carefully in at the top, and went on rolling the thread round it.

'She is learnin' to love me!' he thought, with some pleasure, but he was too bashful and diffident to take advantage of her feeling. He contented himself with making her life easier and sweeter in that hard upland cantonment of more than military discipline,

from whose rocky soil Yabel and his sons dragged the bare necessities of life, as it were, at the point of the bayonet.

All the time he was thinking hard behind his broad forehead, this quiet Alexander McQuhirr. He was the third son. His father was a poor man. He had nothing to look for from him. In time Tom would succeed to the farm. It was clear, then, that if he was ever to be anything, he must strike out early for himself. And, as many a time before and since, it was the tears in the eyes of a girl that brought matters to the breaking point.

Yes, just the wet eyes of a girl — that is, of Mary McArthur, as she looked up at him suddenly in the harvest-field among the serried lines of stocks, and said: 'I bring all my cut fingers to you, Alec!'

Something, he knew not exactly what, appealed to him so strongly in that word and look, that resolve came upon him sudden as lightning, and binding as an oath — the man's instinct to be all and to do all for the woman he loves.

He was unusually silent during the rest of the day, so that Mary McArthur, walking beside him down the loaning to bring home the cows, said: 'You are no vexed wi' me for onything, Alec?'

But it was the man's soul of Saunders McQuhirr which had come to him as a birthright—born out of a glance. He was a boy no longer. And that night, as his father, Yabel, stood looking over his scanty acres with a kind of grim satisfaction in the golden array of corn stocks, his son Alexander went quietly up to him.

'Father,' he said, 'next week I shall be one-and-twenty!' In times of stress they spoke the English of

the schools and of the Bible.

His father turned a deep-set irascible eye upon him. The thick over-brooding brows lowered convulsively above him. A kind of illuminating flash like faint sheet lightning passed over the stern face. A week ago, nay, even twenty-four hours ago, Saunders McQuhirr would have trembled to have his father look at him thus. But — he had bound up a girl's finger since then, and seen her eyes wet.

'Well, what of that?' The words came fiercely from Yabel, with a rising anger in them, a kind of trumpet blare heralding the storm.

'I am thinking of taking a herd's place at the term!' said Alexander, quietly.

Yabel lifted his great body off the dyke-top, on which he had been leaning with his elbows. He towered a good four inches above his son, though my father was always considered a tall man.

'You — you are going to take a herd's place — at the term — you?' he said slowly and incredulously.

'Yes,' answered his son; 'you will not need me. There is no outgate for me here, and I have my way to make in the world.'

'And what need have you of an outgate, sir?' cried his father. 'Have I housed you and schooled you and reared you that, when at last you are of some use, you should leave your father and mother at a word, like a, day-labourer on Saturday night?'

'A day-labourer on Saturday night gets his wages — I have not asked for any!'

At this answer Yabel stood tempestuously wrathful for a moment, his hand and arm uplifted and twitching to strike. Then all suddenly his mood changed. It became scornfully ironic.

'I see,' he said, dropping his arm, 'there's a lass behind this — that is the meaning of all the peat-carrying and byre-milking and handfasting in corners. Well, sirrah, I give you this one night. In the morning you shall pack. From this instant I forbid you to touch aught belonging to me, corn or fodder, horse or bestial. Ye shall tramp, lad, you and your madam with you. The day is not yet, thank the Lord, when Abel McQuhirr is not master in his own house!'

But the son that had been a boy was now a man. He stood before his father, giving him back glance for glance. And an observer would have seen a great similarity between the two, the same attitude to a line, the massive head thrown back, the foot advanced, the deep-set eye, the compressed mouth.

'Very well, father!' said Alexander McQuhirr, and he went away, carrying his bonnet in his hand.

And on the morning that followed the sleepless night of thinking and planning, Alexander McQuhirr went forth to face the world, his plaid about his shoulders, his staff in his hand, his mother's blessing upon his head — and, what was most of all to a young man, his sweetheart's kiss upon his lips.

For in this part of his mandate Yabel had reckoned without his host. His wife, long trained to keep silence for the sake of peace, had turned and openly defied him— nay, had won the victory. The 'Man of Wrath' knew exactly how far it was wise to push the doctrine of unquestioning wifely obedience. Mary McArthur was to bide still where she was, till— well, till another home was ready for her. And

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

though her eyes were red, and there was no one to tie up her cut fingers any more, there was a kind of pride upon her face too. And the image of the young sailor-man over seas utterly faded away.

At ten by the clock, Yabel McQuhirr, down in his harvest-field, saw his son set out. He gave no farewell.

He waved no hand. He said no word. All the same, he smiled grimly to himself behind the obedient backs of Tom and Abel the younger.

'There's the best stuff o' the lot in that fule laddie,' he growled; 'even so for a lass's sake left I my father's house!'

And of all his children, this dour, hard-mouthed, gnarl-fisted man loved best the boy who for the sake of a lass had outcasted himself without fear and without hesitation.

It was to a herd's house, shining white on a hillside, a burnie trilling below, the red heather surging about the garden dyke on all sides, that Alexander McQuhirr took his wife Mary, a year later. And there in the fulness of time my brother Willie was born — the child of the cothouse and of the kailyaird. In time followed other, if not better, things — first a small holding, then a farm — then I, Alexander the second. And still, thank God, we, the children of Mary McArthur, run with our cut fingers to that steadfast, loving, silent man, Saunders McQuhirr, son of Yabel, the Man of Violence and Wrath.

17. THE MAN OF WRATH

A man of wrath was my grandfather, Yabel McQuhirr, from his youth up. And I am now going to tell the story of how by a strange providence he was turned aside from the last sin of Judas, and how he became in his latter days a man of peace and a lover of young children.

He was my father's father, and I have already told how that son of his to whom I owe my life, went forth to make a new hearthstone warm and bright for the girl who was to be my mother. But after the departure of that third son, darker and darker descended the gloom upon the lonely uplying farm. Fiercer and ever fiercer fell the angers of Yabel McQuhirr upon his remaining children, Thomas and Abel — the latter named after his father, but whose Christian name never acquired the antique and preliminary 'Y' that marks the borderline between the old and the new.

One dismal Monday morning in the back-end of the year there were bitter words spoken in the barn at the threshing, between Thomas and his father. Retort followed retort, till, with knotted fist, the father savagely felled the youth to the ground. There was blood upon the clean yellow straw when he rose. Thomas went indoors, opened his little chest, took from it all the money he had, shook hands silently with his mother, and took his way over the Rig of Bennanbrack, never to be heard of more.

And after this ever closer and closer Yabel

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

McQuhirr shut the door of his heart. He hardened himself under the weight of his wife's gentle sufferance and reproachful silences. He gripped his hands together when, with the corner of an eye that would not humble itself to look, he saw the tear trickling down the wasted cheek. He uttered no word of sorrow for the past, nor did the name of either of his departed sons pass his lips.

Nevertheless, he grew markedly kinder in deed to Abel, the one son who remained — not much kinder in word perhaps, for still that loud and angry voice could be heard coming from field and meadow, barn or byre, till the fearful mother would steal silent-footed to the kitchen-door lest the last part of her threefold sorrow should indeed have come upon her. But not in this manner was the blow to fall.

Abel was the least worthy but greatly the handsomest of the sons of Yabel McQuhirr. He had a large visiting acquaintance among the farm-towns, and often did not seek his garret-bed till the small hours of the morning. Then his mother, awake and vigilant, would incline her ear on the pillow to hear whether her husband was asleep beside her.

Now, oftentimes Yabel, her husband, slept not, yet for his wife's sake, and perhaps because Abel, with his bright smile and clean-limbed figure, reminded him of a wild youth he had long put behind him, he bore with the lad, even to giving him in one short year more money to spend than had been his brothers' portion during all the time they had faithfully served their father.

And this was not good for a young man.

So that early one spring, the wild oat crop that Abel had been sowing began to appear with braird

and luxuriant shoot. A whisper overran the parish swifter than the moor-burn when the heather is dry on the moors. Two names were coupled not unto honour. And on a certain wild March morning, Yabel McQuhirr, having called his son three times, clambered fiercely up to the little garret stair to find an open skylight, a pallet-bed not slept in, and a home that was now childless from flagged hearth to smoke-browned roof-tree.

Yabel rode to market upon Mary Gray, his old rough-fetlocked mare, once badger-gray, but now white as the sea-gulls that fluttered and settled upon his springtime furrows. He heard no word of the story of Abel his son and the gypsy lass, for none durst tell him — till one Rob Girmory of Barscob, bolder or drunker than the rest, blurted it out with an oath and a scurvy jest. The next moment he was smitten down, and Yabel McQuhirr stood over him with his riding-whip clubbed in his hand, the fierce irascible eyebrows twitching, and wide nostrils blown out with the breath of the man's wrath.

But certain good friends, strong-armed men of peace, held him back, and got Girmory away to a quiet cart-shed, where, on a heap of straw, he could sleep off his stupor and awake to wonder what had given him that lump, great as a hen's egg, over his right eye.

As for Yabel McQuhirr he saddled Mary Gray and took the road homeward lest any should bring the story first to his wife. For Jen, his Jen, was the kernel of that rough-husked, hard-shelled heart. And as he rode, he cursed Girmory with the slow

studied anathema of the Puritan — which is not swearing, but something sterner, solemnner, more enduring. Sometimes he would cheat himself by saying over and over that there was nothing in the story. Abel had gone in his best clothes to a neighbouring town — he knew the lad had a pound or two that burnt a hole in his spendthrift pocket. He would return penitent when it was finished. And the old man found himself already 'birsing' with anger, and thinking of what he would say to the returned prodigal when he caught sight of him — a greeting which would certainly not have run upon the lines of the parable.

Yet, as he went on and on, fear began to enter in, and he set his spurless heels grimly to Mary Gray's well-padded ribs. Never had that sober steed gone home at such a pace, and on brown, windy braefaces ploughmen stood wiping their brows and watching and wondering. Shepherds, high on the hills, set their palms horizontally above their brows and murmured, 'What's takin' auld Yabel haine at sic a pelt this day, as if the ill Yin himsel' were after him?'

But for all his haste, some one had forestalled him. The busybody in other men's matters, the waspish gossip to whom the carrying of ill tidings is a chief joy, had been before him. Mary Gray had sweated in vain. There was no one to be heard stirring as he tramped eagerly in—no one flitting softly to and fro in milk-house or dairy.

But within Yabel McQuhirr found his wife fallen by the bake-board near the window, where she had been at work when the Messenger of Evil entered to do her fell work. Her eyes were closed, her hands

limp and numb. With a hoarse inarticulate cry of rage Yabel raised his wife and carried her to the neatly-made bed with the patchwork quilt upon it. There he laid her down.

'Jen,' he said, more gently than one could have believed the rough harsh Man of Wrath could have spoken, 'Jen, waken, lassie. It's maybe no true. I tak' it on my soul it's no true!'

But on his wife's face there remained a strange fixed smile, and her eyes, opening slowly, began to follow him about wistfully, and seemed somehow to beckon him. Then with infinite care Yabel removed his wife's outer garments, cutting that which would not loosen otherwise, till the stricken woman reposed at ease beneath the coverlet.

'Now, Jen,' he said, 'I maun ride to the town for a doctor. Will I tell Allison Brown to come and look after you?'

The wistful following eyes expressed neither yea nor nay.

'Then will I send in Jean Murray frae the Boreland?'

The eyes were still indifferent. There was no desire for the help of any of human kind in the stricken woman's heart.

Her husband watched her keenly.

'Or wad ye like Martha Yeatman ower frae the Glen?'

Then all suddenly the dull eyes flashed, glowed, almost flamed, so fierce was the 'No' that was in them.

Yabel shut down his upper lip upon his nether. He nodded his head.

'Then I will bring the doctor, and nurse you

mysel', he answered. But within him he said: 'So it was Martha o' the Glen. For this thing will I reckon with Martha Yeatman.'

It was fortunate for Mary Gray that the distance was not long, for, like Jehu the son of Nimshi, Yabel McQuhirr drove furiously. But at the bend of the highway called the Far-away Turn, just at the point at which the road dives down under a tangle of birch and alder, the old white mare was pulled suddenly up. For there was Dr. Brydson, riding cautiously on his little round-barrelled sheltie, his saddle-bags in front of him, and a silver-headed Malacca cane held in his hand like a riding-whip.

It was no long time before the good old doctor was raising the lax head of Yabel McQuhirr's wife. The strange distant smile was still in her eyes, and the left corner of her mouth twitched.

'She has had a shock,' said Dr. Brydson, slowly, when Yabel and he had withdrawn a little. He was pulling his chin meditatively, and not thinking much of the husband.

'A stroke!' said Yabel, and the tone of his voice was so strange and terrible that the doctor turned quickly — 'but not unto death! You can cure her — surely you can cure her?'

And he caught the doctor by the arm and shook it vehemently.

'Take your hands away, sir, and calm yourself!' said the physician. 'If I am to do anything, we must have none of this.'

'Say that she will not die!' he cried. And the deep-set angry eyes flamed down upon the physician, the great fists of iron were clenched.

Dr. Brydson was a little man, but a long course of

being deferred to had given him great local dignity.

'I will say nothing of the kind, sir,' he retorted. 'I will do what I can; but this thing is the visitation of God, and human skill avails but little. Stand away from my patient, sir.'

But at that moment a sudden and wondrous change passed over the face of Yabel McQuhirr. The physician was startled. It was like an earthquake rifting and changing a landscape while one looks. In the twinkling of an eye the fashion of Yabel's countenance was altered. He would have wept, yet stood gasping like one who knows not the way to weep. Instead he uttered a hoarse and terrible cry, and flung himself upon his knees by the bed.

'Jen,' he cried, 'Jen — speak to me, Jen—to your ain man Yabel! Say that this man lies! Tell me ye are no gaun to dee, Jen — Jen, my Jen!'

And at the voice of that strange crying the doctor stood back, for he knew that no earthly physician had power to stay a soul's agony.

Then, like a tide that wells up full to the floodmark, the slow love rose in the eyes of his wife. Her lips moved. He bent his head eagerly. They seemed to form his name.

'Yes, yes,' he said eagerly, 'Yabel, Yabel, I hear that! What mair? Tell me — oh, tell me, ye are no gaun to leave me!'

He bent his head lower, holding his breath and laying his hand on his own heart as if to still its dull, thick beating. But though the pallid lips seemed to move, no words came, and Yabel McQuhirr heaved up his head and struck his palm upon his brow.

'I canna hear!' he wailed. 'She will dee, and no

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

‘speak to me!’ Then he turned fiercely upon the doctor, as if he did not know him. ‘Who are you that spies on my grief, standing there and doing nothing? Get oot o’ my hoose, lest I do ye a hurt.’

And the indignant little man went at the word, mounting his sheltie and riding away across the moors without once turning his head, the ‘Penang lawyer’ tapping unwontedly upon the rounded indignant flank of his little mare.

When Yabel turned again to his wife there were tears in her eyes, and the heart of the Man of Wrath was softened within him.

‘I am a fool,’ he said, ‘an angry fool. I have driven him away that came to do her good. I will call him back.’

But though he made the hills to echo, and the startled sheep to run together into frightened bunches, the insulted little doctor upon the sheltie never turned in his saddle.

‘Vain is the help of man,’ said Yabel, as he turned to go in, ‘and if God will not help me, I will renounce Him also.’

He sat a while by Janet's side, and it was very quiet, save for the clock ticking out the moments of a woman's life. A hen cackled without in the yard with sudden joy over an egg safely nested. Yabel started up angrily and laid his hand on his gun in the rack above the smoked mantel-board.

But the woman's eyes called him to desist, and he sat down again beside her with a sigh.

‘What is it, Jen? Can ye no speak to me?’ The eyes seemed to compel him yet lower — upon his knees.

‘To pray — I canna pray, Jen; I winna pray. If the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Lord tak's you, I will arise and curse Him to His face.'

The direction of the gaze changed. It was upon the family Bible on the shelf, where it lay with Boston's Fourfold State and a penny almanack, the entire family library.

'Am I to read?' said Yabel, reaching it down. 'What am I to read?' He ran down the table of contents with his great stub-nailed fingers, 'Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus.' But the speaking eyes did not check him till he came to the Psalms.

He turned them over till he came to the twenty-third. The will in his wife's glance stopped him again. He read the psalm slowly, kneeling on his knees by the bedside.

At the fourth verse his voice changed. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

And at the sound of these words the unstricken left hand of his wife wavered upward uncertainly. It lay a moment, with something in its touch between a caress and a blessing, upon his head. Then it dropped lightly back upon the coverlet.

Yabel McQuhirr sat till the gloaming by the side of his dead wife, a terrible purpose firming itself in his heart. His children had risen up against him. God had cast him off. Well, he, Yabel McQuhirr, would cast Him off. At His very Judgment Seat he would dare Him, and so be thrown unrepentling into the pit prepared for the impenitent.

He had done that which was needful to the body of his helpmeet of many years. There was no more to

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

do — save one thing. He rose and was going out, when his bloodshot eye fell on the great family Bible from which he had read eve and morn for forty years. A spasm of anger fierce as a blast from a furnace came over the man. That Book had lied! It had deceived him. He lifted it in one strong hand and threw it upon the fire.

Then he walked across the yard to the stable to get a coil of cart rope. He stumbled rather than stepped as he went, the ground somehow meeting his feet unexpectedly. He could not find the rope, and found himself exclaiming savagely at the absent and outcast Abel who had mislaid it.

At last he found it among some stable litter, lying beneath the peg on which it ought to have hung. Gathering the coils up in his hand, he crossed the straw-strewn yard again to the barn. There were sound open beams in the open space between mow and mow.

'It had best be done there,' he muttered.

There was a rustling among the straw as he pushed back the upper half of the divided door — rats, as he would have thought at another time. Now he only wondered if he could reach the beams by standing on the corn bushel.

As he made the knot firm and noosed the rope through the loop, his eyes fell on the further door of the baru — the one through which, in bygone golden Septembers, he had so often pitchforked the sheaves of corn.

There was something moving between him and the orchard door. In the dull light it looked like a young child. And then the heart of Yabel McQuhirr, who was not afraid to meet God face to face, was

filled with a great fear.

A faint moaning whimper came to his ear. He dropped the coil of rope and ran back to the house for the stable lantern. He lighted the candle with a piece of red peat-ash, tossing the unconsumed Bible off the fire. Only the rough calf-skin cover was singed, and its smouldering had filled the house with a keen acrid smell.

Yabel went out again with the lantern in his hand. Without entering, he held it over the lower half of the barn door, which had swung to after him. A young woman, clad in the habit of a 'gypsy' or 'gaun body,' lay huddled on the straw, while over her, whimpering and nosing like a puppy, crawled the most beautiful child Yabel had ever seen. As the light broke into the darkness of the barn the little fellow stood up, a golden-haired boy of two years of age. He smiled and blinked, then, with his hands outstretched, came running across the floor to Yabel.

'Mither willna speak to Davie,' he said. 'Up — up, Mannie, tak' wee Davie up!'

A sob, or something like it, rose in the stern old man's throat. He could forfeit life, he could defy God, he could abandon all his possessions; but to leave this little shining innocent to starve — no, he could not do it.

He opened the door and went in. The child insisted fearlessly on being taken in his arms. He lifted him up, and the boy hid his face gladly on his shoulder. Yabel put his hand on the woman's breast; she was stone-cold, and had been so for hours. Death had been busy both without and within the little hill-farm that snell March afternoon.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

He covered her decently up with a pair of cornsacks, and as he did so a scrap of paper showed between her fingers, white in the light of the lantern.

'Mither will soon be warm, noo,' said the child, from the safe covert of Yabel's shoulder. And in the clasping of the baby fingers the evil spirit passed quite out of the heart of Yabel McQuhirr.

And when by the open door of the lantern he smoothed out the paper that had been in the dead woman's fingers, he read these words:—

This is to bear testimony that I, Abel McQuhirr the younger, take Alison Baillie to be my wedded wife. Done in the presence of the undersigned witnesses.

'Abel McQuhirr. May 3rd, 18—.

Witnesses 'ROB GRIER.' 'JOHN LORRAINE.'

So in the day when Yabel McQuhirr defied his Maker and hardened his heart, God sent unto him His mercy in the shape of a young child. Then, after the grave had claimed its dead, the heart of Yabel was wondrously softened, and these two dwelt on in the empty house in great content. And in the rescued Book, with its charred calf-skin cover, the old man reads to the boy morning and evening the story of One Other who came to sinful men in the likeness of a Young Child. But though his heart takes comfort in the record, Yabel never can bring himself to read aloud that verse which says: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these . . . ye did it unto Me.'

'I am not worthy. He can never mean Yabel McQuhirr,' he says, and shuts the Book.

18. THE LASS IN THE SHOP

In Galloway, if you find an eldest son of the same name as his father, search the mother's face for the marks of a tragedy. An eldest son is rarely called by his father's Christian name, and when he is, usually there is a little grave down in the kirkyard or a name that is seldom spoken in the house — a dead Abel or a wandering Cain, at any rate a first-born that was — and is not.

Now I am called Alexander McQuhirr. My father also is Alexander McQuhirr. And the reason is that a link has dropped out. I remember the day I found out that you could make my mother jump by coming quietly behind her and calling 'Willie.' It was Willie McArthur I was after — he had come over from Whinnyliggate to play with me. We were busy at 'hide-and-seek.'

'Willie!' I cried, sharp as one who would wake an echo.

My mother dropped a bowl and caught at her side.

It is only recently that she told me the whole story.

The truth was that with twelve years between our ages and Willie away most of the time, I had no particular reason to remember my elder brother. For years before I was born my mother had been compassionated with by the good wives of the neighbourhood, proud nursing mothers of ten or eleven, because she could boast of but one chicken

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

in her brood. She has confessed to me what she suffered on that account. And though now I have younger brothers and the reproach was wiped away in time, there are certain Job's comforters whom my mother has never forgiven.

She would be sure to spoil Willie, — one child in a house was always spoilt. So the tongues went ding-dong. It was foolish to send him to school at Cairn Edward, throwing away good siller, instead of keeping him at home to single the turnips. Thus and thus was the reproach of my mother's reluctant maternity rubbed in — and to this day the rubbers are not forgotten. It will be time enough to forgive them, thinks my mother, when she comes to lie on her death-bed.

Yet from all that I can gather there was some truth in what they said, and probably this is what rankles in that dear, kindly, ever vehement bosom. Willie was indeed spoilt. He was by all accounts a handsome lad. He had his own way early, and what was worse — money to spend upon it. At thirteen he was bound apprentice to good honest Joseph Baillieson of the Apothecaries' Hall in Cairn Edward. Joseph was a chemist of the old school, who, when a more than usually illegible line occurred in the doctors' prescriptions of the day, always said: 'We'll caa' it barley-water. That'll hairm nae-body.' All Joseph's dispensing was of the eminently practical kind.

To Mr. Baillieson, therefore, Willie was made apprentice, and if he would have profited, he could not have been in better hands, and this story never had been written. But the fact was, he was too early away from home. He was my mother's eye-apple,

and as the farm was doing well during these years, an occasional pound note was slipped him when my mother was down on Market Monday. Now this is a part of the history she has never told me. I can only piece it together from hints and suggestions. But it is a road I know well. I have seen too many walk in it.

Mainly, I do not think it was so much bad company as thoughtlessness and high spirits. Sweetmeats and gloves to a girl more witty than wise, neckties and a small running account yonder, membership of the rowing club and a small occasional stake upon the races — not much in themselves, perhaps, but more than enough for an apprentice with two half-crowns a week of pocket money. So there came a time when honest Joseph Baillieson, with many misgivings and grave down-drawings of upper lip, as I doubt not, took my father into the little back shop where the liniments were made up and the pills rolled.

What they said to each other I do not know, but when Alexander McQuhirr came out his face was marvellously whitened. He waited for Willie at his lodgings, and brought him home that night with him. He stayed just a week at the farm, restlessly scouring the hills by day and coming in to his bed late at night.

After a time, by means of the minister, a place was found for him in Edinburgh, and he set off in the coach with his little box, leaving what prayerful anxious hearts behind him only those who are fathers and mothers know.

He was to lodge with a good old woman in the Pleasance, a regular hearer of Dr. Lawton's of Lady

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Nixon's Wynd. For a small wage she agreed to mend his socks and keep a motherly eye on his morals. He was to be in by ten, and latch-keys were not allowed.

Now I do not doubt that it was lonely for Willie up there in the great city. And in all condemnation, let the temptation be weighed and noted.

May God bless the good folk of the Open Door who, with sons and daughters of their own, set wide their portals and invite the stranger within where there is the sound of girlish laughter, the boisterous give-and-take of youthful wit, and — yes, as much as anything else, the clatter of hospitable knives and forks working together.

Such an Open Door has saved many from destruction, and in That Day it shall be counted to that Man (or, more often, that Woman) for righteousness.

For consider how lonely a lad's life is when first he comes up from the country. He works till he is weary, and in the evening the little bedroom is intolerably lonely and infinitely stuffy. If the Door of Kindness be not opened for him — if he lack the friend's hand, the comrade's slap on the back, the modest uplift of honest maidenly eyes — take my word for it, the Lad in the Garret will soon seek another way of it. There are many that will show him the guide-posts of that road. Other doors are open. Other laughter rings, not mellow and sweet, but as the crackling of thorns under a pot. If a youth be cut off from the one, he will have the other — that is, if the blood course hot and quick in his veins.

And so, good folk of the city, you bien and comfortable householders, you true mothers in Israel, fathers and mothers of brisk lads and

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

winsome lasses, do not forget that you may save more souls from going down to the Pit in one year than a score of ministers in a lifetime. And I, who write these things, know.

Many a foot has been stayed on the Path called Perilous simply because 'a damsel named Rhoda' came to answer a knock at a door. The time is not at all bygone when 'Given to hospitality' is also a saving grace. And in the Day of Many Surprises, it shall be said of many a plain man and unpretending housewife: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me!'

But so it was not with Willie my brother. There was none to speak the word, and so he did after his kind. How much he did or how far he went I cannot tell. Perhaps it is best not to know. But, at all events, I can remember his home-coming to Drumquhat one Saturday night after he had been a year or fifteen months in Edinburgh. He came unexpectedly, and I was sleeping in a little crib set across the foot of my parents' bed in the 'ben' room.

My mother was a light sleeper all her days, and, besides, I judge her heart was sore. For never breeze tossed the trees or rustled the beech-leaves, but she thought of her boy so far away. In a moment she was up, and I after her, all noiseless on my bare feet, though the tails of my night-gear flapped like a banner in the draughty passage. The dogs upon the hearthstone never so much as growled.

'Wha's there?'

'It's me, mither!'

'Willie!'

It was indeed Willie, a tall lad with a white face, a bright colour high-set on his cheek-bone, a dancing

light in his eyes, and, at sight of his mother, a smile on his lips. He was dressed in what seemed to me a style of grandeur such as I had never beheld, probably no more than a suit of town-cut tweeds, a smart tie, and a watch-chain. But then my standard was gray home-spun and home-dyed — as often as not home-tailored too. And Solomon in all his glory did not seem to be arrayed one half so nobly as my elder brother Willie.

I do not mind much about the visit, except that Willie let me wear his watch-chain, which was of gold, for nearly half-an-hour, and promised that the next time he came back he would trust me with the watch as well. But the following afternoon something happened that I do remember. After dinner, which was at noon, as it had been ever since the beginning of time, my father sat still in his great corner chair instead of going to the barn. My mother sent me out to play.

'And bide in the yaird till I send for ye, mind — and dinna let me see your face till tea-time!' was her command, giving me a friendly cuff on the ear by way of speeding the parting guest.

By this I knew that there was something she did not want me to hear. So I went about the house to the little window at which my father said his prayers. It stood open as always, like Daniel's, towards Jerusalem. I could not hear very well; but that was no fault of mine. I did my best.

Willie was speaking very fast, telling his father something— something to which my mother vehemently objected. I could hear her interruptions rising stormily, and my father trying to calm her. Willie spoke low, except now and then when his

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

voice broke into a kind of scream. I remember being very wae for him, and feeling in my pocket for a dirty half-sucked brandy ball which I resolved to give him when he came out. It had often comforted me in times of trouble.

‘Siclike nonsense I never heard!’ cried my mother, ‘a callant like you! A besom — a designing madam, nocht else — that’s what she is: I wonder to hear ye, Willie!’

‘Wheesh, wheest — Mary!’

I could hear my father’s voice, grave and sober as ever. Then Willie’s vehement rush of words went on till I heard my mother break in again.

‘Marriage! Marriage! Sirce, heard ye ever the like? A bairn to speak to me o’ mairrying a woman naebody kens ocht about — a Lass in a shop,’ ye say; aye, I’se warrant a bonny shop!’

Then there came the sound of a chair pushed vehemently back, the crash of a falling dish. My father’s voice, deep and terrible so that I trembled, followed. ‘Sir, sit down on your seat and compose yourself! Do not speak thus to your mother.’

‘I will not sit down — I will not compose myself — I will never sit down in this house again — I will marry Lizzie in spite of you all!’

And almost before I could get round to the front yard again Willie had come whirling all disorderedly out of the kitchen door, shutting it to with a clash that shook the house. Then with wild and angry eyes he strode across the straw-littered space, taking no notice of me, but leaping the gate and so down the little loaning and up towards the heather like a man walking in his sleep.

I remember I ran after him, calling him to come

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

back; but he never heeded me till I pulled him by the coat tails. It was away up near the march dyke, and I could hardly speak with running so fast. He stared as if he did not know me.

'Oh, dinna — dinna — come back!' I cried (and I think I wept); 'dinna vex my mither! — And — there's 'rummelt tawties' to the supper!'

(Rummelt tawties, are a sort of puree of potatoes, made in the pot in which they have been boiled, with sweet milk, batter, and sometimes a little flavouring of cheese. All hands are expected to assist in the operation of 'champing,' that is, pounding and stirring them to a proper consistency of toothsome-ness.)

But Willie would not stop for all I could say to him.

However, he patted me on the head.

'Bide at harne and be Jacob,' he said; 'they have cast out this Esau.'

For he had been well learned in the Bible, and once got a prize for catechism at the day school at Whinnyliggate. It was 'Boston's Fourfold State,' so, though there were three copies in the house, I never tried to read it.

So saying, he took the hillside like a goat, while I stood open-mouthed, gazing at the lithe figure of him who was my brother as it grew smaller, and finally vanished over the heathery shoulder of the Rig of Drumquhat.

That night I heard my father and mother talking far into the morning, while I made a pretence of sleeping.

'I will never own him!' said my father, who was now the angry one.

'I'm feared he doesna look strong!' answered my

mother in the darkness.

'He shall sup sorrow for the way he spoke to the father that begat him and the mother that bore him!' said my father.

'Dinna say that, guidman!' pled my mother; 'it is like cursin' oor ain firstborn. Think how proud ye were the time he grippit ye by the hand comin' up the loanin' an' caa'ed ye 'Dadda!'.

After this there was silence for a space, and then it was my mother who spoke.

'No, Alexander, you shallna gang to Edinbra to bring him hame. Gin yin o' us maun gang, let it be me. For ye wad be overly sore on the lad. But oh, the madam — the Jezebel, her that has wiled him awa' frae us, wait till I get my tongue on her!'

And this is how my mother carried out her threat, told in her own words.

'Oh, that weary toon!' she said afterward. 'The streets sae het and dry, the blawin' stoor, the peetifu' bairns in the gutter, and the puir chapman's joes standin' at the close-mouths wi' their shawls about their heads! I wondered what yin o' them had gotten haud o' my Willie. But at last I cam' to the place where he lodged. It was at a time o' the day when I kenned he wad be at his wark. It was a hoose as muckle as three kirks a' biggit on the tap o' yin anither, an' my Willie bode, as it were, in the tapmaist laft.

'It was an auld lame woman wi' a mutch on her head that opened the door. I askit for Willie.

'He's no here,' says she; 'an' what may ye want wi' him?'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'I'm his mither,' says I, and steppit ben. She was gye thrawn at the first, but I sune tamed her. She was backward to tell me ocht about Willie's onganin's, but nane backward to tell me that his 'book' hadna been payit for six weeks, and that she was sore in need o' the siller. So I countit it doon to her shillin' by shillin', penny by penny.

'An' noo,' says I, 'tell me a' ye ken o' this madam that has bewitched my bairn, her that's costin' him a' this siller — for doubtless he is wearin' it on the Jezebel — an' breakin' his anther's heart.'

Then the landlady's face took on anither cast and colour. She hummed an' hawed a whilie. Then at last she speaks plain.

'She's nane an ill lass,' she says, "deed, she comes o' guid kin, and — she's neither mair nor less than sister's bairn to mysel!'

'Wi' that I rises to my feet. 'If she be in this hoose, let me see her. I will speak wi' the woman face to face. Oh, if I could only catch them thegither I wad let her ken what it is to twine a mither and her boy!'

The auld lame guidwife opens the door o' a bit closet wi' a bed in it and a chair or twa.

'Gang in there,' she says, 'an' ye shall hae your desire. In a quarter o' an hour Lisbeth will be comin' hame frae the shop where she serves, and it's mair than likely that your son will be wi' her!'

'And wi' that she snecks the door wi' a brainge. For I could see she was angry at what I had said about her kith an' kin. And I liked her the better for that.

'So there I sat thinkin' on what I wad say to the lass when she cam' in. And aye the mair I thocht, the faster the words raise in my mind, till I was fair

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

feared I wad never get time to utter a tenth-part o' my mind. It needna hae troubled me, had I only kenned.

'Then there was the risp o' a key in the lock, for in thae rickles o' stane an' lime that they rin up noo a days, ye can hear a cat sneeze ower a hale 'flat.' I heard footsteps gang by the door o' the closet an' intil the front room. And I grippit the handle, bidin' my time to break oot on them.

'But there was something that held me. A lassie's voice, fleechin' and fleechin' wi' the lad she loves as if for life or death. Hoo did I ken that? — Weel, it's nae business o' yours, Alec, hoo I kenned it. But yince hear it and ye'll never forget it.

'Willie,' it said, 'tak' the siller, I dinna need it. Put it back before they miss it — and oh, never, never gang to thae races again!'

I sat stane-cauld, dumb-stricken. It was an awesome thing for a mither to hear. Then Willie answered.

'Lizzie,' he said, and I kenned he had been greeting, 'Lizzie, I canna tak' the money. I would be a greater hound than I am if I took the siller ye hae saved for the house and the marriage brows — and...'

'Oh, Will,' she cried, and I kenned fine she was greetin' too, an' grippin' him aboot the neck, 'I dinna want to be mairried — I dinna want a hoose o' my ain — I dinna want ony weddin' brows, if only ye will tak' the siller — and — be my ain guid lad and never break your mither's heart — an' mine! Oh, promise me, Willie! Let me hear ye promise me!'

'Aye, she said that — an' me hidin' there ready to speak to her like a tinkler's messan.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'So I opens the door an' gaed in. Willie had some pound notes grippit in his hand, and the lassie was on her knees thankin' God that he had ta'en her hard-earned savin's as she asked him, and that he promised to be a guid boy.

'Mither!' says Willie, and his lips were white.

'And at the word the lassie rises, and I could see her legs tremble aneath her as she cam' nearer to me.

'Dinna be hard on him,' she says; 'he has promised.'

'What's that in your hand?' says I, pointing at the siller.

'It's money I have stolen!' says Willie, wi' a face like a streikit corpse.

'Oh no, no,' cries the lass, 'it's his ain — his an' minel!'

'And if ever there was a lee markit doon in shinin' gold in the book o' the Recordin' Angel it was that yin. She was nae great beauty to look at — a bit slip o' a fair-haired lass, wi' blue een an' a ringlet or twa peepin' oot where ye didna expect them. But she looked bonny then — aye, as bonny as ever your Nance did.

'Gie the pound notes back to the lass!' says I, 'and syne you and me will gang doon and speak with your maister that ye hae robbit!'

'And wi' that the lass fell doon at my feet and grippit me, and fleeced on me, and kissed my hands, and let the warm tears rin drap — drap on my ringers.

'Oh dinna, dinna do that,' she cried, 'let him pit them back. He only took them for a loan. Let him pit them back this nicht when his maister is awa hame

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

for his tea. He is a hard man, and Willie is a' I hae!

'Weel,' my mother would conclude, 'may be it wasna juist richt—but I couldna resist the lass. So Willie did as she said, and naething was kened. But I garred him gie in his notice the next day, and I took him hame, for it was clear as day that the lad was deein' on his feet. And I brocht the lass hame wi' me too. And if Willie had leev'd—but it wasna to be. We juist keepit him to November. And the last nicht we sat yin on ilka side o' the bed, her haudin' a hand and me haudin' a hand, neither jealous o' the ither, which was a great wonder. An' I think he kind o' dovered an' sleepit — whiles wanderin' in his mind and syne waukin' wi' a strange look on his face. But ower in the sma' hours when the wind begins to rise and blaw caulder, and the souls o' men to slip awa', he started up. It was me he saw first, for the candle was on my side.

'Mither,' he said, 'where's Lizzie?'

'And when he saw her sit by him, he drew away the hand that had been in mine and laid it on hers.

'Lizzie,' he said, 'dinna greet, my bonnie: I promise! I will be your ain guid lad!'

'And the lass?' I queried.

'Oh, she gaed back to the shop, and they say she has chaarge o' a hale department noo, and is muckle thocht on. But she has never mairried, and, though we hae askit her every year, she wad never come back to Drumquhat again!

'And that,' said my mother, smiling through her

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

tears, 'is the story how my Willie was led astray by the Lass in the Shop.'

19. THE RESPECT OF DROWDLE

Most folk in the West of Scotland know the parish of Drowdle, at least by repute. It is a great mining centre, and the inhabitants are not counted among the peaceable of the earth.

'If ye want your head broken, gang doon to Drowdle on a Saturday nicht' is an advice often given to the boastful or the bumptious. Drowdle is a new place too, and the inhabitants, instead of being, like ordinary Scottish Geordies, settled for generations in one coal-field and with whole streets of relatives within stonethrow, are composed of all the strags and restless ne'er-do-weels of such as go down into the earth, from Cornwall even to the Hill-o'-Beith.

Most, I say, know Drowdle by repute. I myself, indeed, once acted as *locum tenens* for the doctor there during six hot and lively summer weeks, and gained an experience in the treatment of contusions, discolorations, and abrasions of the skull and frontal bones which has been of the greatest possible use to me since. The younger Drowdleites, however, had at that time a habit of stretching a cord across the threshold about a foot above the step, which interfered considerably with professional dignity of exit — that is, till you were used to it. But after one has got into the habit of scouting ahead with a spatula ground fine and tied to a walking-stick on darkish nights, Drowdle began to respect you.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Still better, if (as I did) you can catch a couple of the cord-stretchers, produce an occipital contusion or two on your own account, and finish by kicking the jesters bodily into Drowdle Water. Then the long rows of slated brick which constitute the mining village agree that 'the new doakter kens his business — a smart lad, yon! Heard ye what he did to thae trwa deils, Jock Lee an' Cockly Nixon? He catchit them trippin' him wi' a cairt rape at Betty Forgan's door, and, faith, he threw them baith into Drowdle Water!'

Such being the way to earn the esteem of Drowdle, it would have saved the telling of this story if, when young Dairsie Gordon received a call to be minister of the recently established mission church there, he had had any one to enlighten him on the subject.

He was so young that he was ashamed when any one asked him his age. They had called him 'Joanna' at college, and sent him recipes along the desk for compelling a beard and moustache to grow under any conditions of soil and climate, however unfavourable.

Dairsie Gordon was very innocent, very learned, very ignorant, and — the only son of a well-to-do mother, who from a child had destined him for the ministry. The more was the pity!

As a child he was considered too delicate for the rough-and-tumble of school. He had a tutor, a mild-faced young man who seldom spoke above his breath, and never willingly walked more than a mile at a time, and then with a book in his hand and a flute in his tail pocket. Under his instruction, however, Dairsie became an excellent classic, and

his verse gained the approval of Professor Jupiter Olympus when he went up to the University of Edinburgh, where Latin verse was a rare accomplishment in those days, and Greek ones as extinct as the dodo.

When her son went to college, Mrs. Gordon came up herself from the country to settle Dairsie in the house of a friend of her own, the widow of a deceased minister who had married an old maid late in life. This excellent lady possessed much experience of bazaars and a good working knowledge of tea-meetings, but she knew nothing of young men.

So, being placed in authority over Dairsie, she insisted that he should come straight back to Rose Crescent from his classes, take dinner in the middle of the day alone with his hostess, and then — as a treat — accompany her while she made a call or two on other clerical widows who had married late in life. Then she took him home to open his big lexicons and pore over crabbed constructions till supper-time. This feast consisted of plain bread and butter with the smallest morsel of cheese, because much cheese is not good for the digestion at night. A glass of milk accompanied these delicacies. It also was plain and blue, because the cream (a doubtful quantity at best) had been skimmed off it for Mrs. McSkirmish's tea in the morning.

After that Dairsie was sent to bed. He was allowed ten minutes to take off his clothes and say his prayers. Then the gas was turned out at the meter. If he wanted time for more study and reading he could have it in the morning. It is good for youth to rise betimes and study the Hebrew Scriptures with

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

cold feet and fingers that will not turn the leaves of Gesenius till they are blown upon severally and individually. In this fashion, varying in nothing, save that on alternate Sundays there was something hot for supper, because Mrs. McSkirmish's minister — a severe and faithful divine — came to interview Dairsie and report on his progress to his mother, the future pastor passed seven winter sessions.

Scholastically his victories were many. Bursaries seemed purposely created for him to take — and immediately resign in favour of his proxime accessit, who needed the money more. The class never queried as to who would be first in the 'exams' but only wrangled concerning who would come next after Gordon — and how many marks below.

In summer Dairsie went quietly down to his mother's house in the country, where his neck was fallen upon duly, and four handmaids (with little else to do) worshipped him — especially when for the first time he took the 'Book' at family worship. There was a wood before the door, in which he passed most of his time lying on his back reading, and his old tutor came to stay with him for a month at a time.

Thus was produced the Reverend Dairsie Gordon, B.D., without doubt the first student of his college, Allingham Fellow, and therefore entitled to go to Germany for a couple of years by the terms of his Fellowship.

But by one of these interpositions of Providence, which even the most orthodox denominate 'doubtful,' there was at this time a vacancy in the pastoral charge of the small Mission Church at Drowdle. The late minister had accepted a call to a

moorland congregation of sixty members, where nothing had happened within the memory of man more stirring than the wheel coming off a cart of peats opposite the manse.

Dairsie Gordon preached at Drowdle. His voice was sweet and cultivated and musical, so that it fell pleasantly on the ears of the kirk-goers of Drowdle, over whose heads had long blared a voice like to the trumpets at the opening of the seventh seal in the book of the Revelation.

So they elected him unanimously. Also he was 'well-to-do,' and it was understood in the congregation that his salary would not be a consideration. The minister-elect immediately resigned his fellowship, considering this a direct call to the work.

In this fashion Dairsie Gordon went to his martyrdom. Ignorant of the world as the child of four, never having been elbowed and buffeted and browbeaten by circumstances, never cuffed at school, snubbed at college, and so variously and vicariously licked and kicked into shape, he found himself suddenly pitchforked into the spiritual charge of one of the most difficult congregations in Scotland.

The new minister was introduced socially at a tea-meeting on the evening of the ordination, and then and there he had his first taste of the Drowdelian quality. There were plenty of douce and sober folk in the front pews of the little kirk, but at the back reckless, unmarried Geordies were sandwiched between a militant and ungodly hobbledehoyhood. Paper bags that had contained fruit exploded in the midst of the most solemn addresses. Dairsie's own

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

remarks were fairly punctuated with these explosions, and by the flying shells of Brazil nuts. Bone buttons at the end of knitting needles clicked and tapped at windows, and a shutter fell inward with a crash. It was thus that Dairsie returned thanks:

'My dear people' (a penny trumpet blew an obligate accompaniment under the book-board of a pew), 'I have been led to the oversight of this flock' (pom-pom-pom) 'after prayer and under guidance. I shall endeavour to teach you' - ('Catch - the - Ten!' 'All-fours!' 'Quoits!') 'some of those things which I have devoted my life to acquiring. I am prepared for some little difficulty at first, till we know one another.'

The remainder of the address was inaudible owing to the cries of, 'Rob Kinstry has stole my bag!' 'Ye're a liar!' All which presently issued in the general turmoil of a free fight towards the rear of the church.

Mrs. Gordon had come up to be present on the occasion of her son's ordination, and that night in the little manse mother and son mingled their tears. It all seemed so wrong and pitiful to them.

But Dairsie, with a fine hopefulness on his delicate face, lifted his head from his mother's shoulder, smiling like a girl through his own tears.

'But after all, this is the work to which I have been called, mother. And you know if it is His will that I am to labour here, in time He will give the increase.'

So somewhat heartened, mother and son kneeled down together, prayed, and went to bed.

On the forenoon of the next day two of the elders,

decent pitmen, who happened to be on the night-shift, called in to give their verdict and to drop a word of advice.

'A graund meetin',' said Pate Tamson, the oversman of No. 4; 'what for didna ye tak' your stick and gie some o' the vaigabonds a clour on the lug? It wad hae served them weel!'

'I could not think of doing such a thing,' said Dairsie. 'I desire to wield a spiritual, not a carnal, influence!'

'Carnal influence here, carnal influence there,' cried Robin Naysmith, stamping his foot till the little study trembled, 'if ye are to succeed in this village o' Drowdle, ye maun pit doon your fit — like that, sir, like that!'

And he stamped on the new Brussels carpet till the plaster began to come down in flakes from the ceiling. Dairsie tried to imagine himself stamping like that, but could not. For one thing, he had always worn single-soled shoes, with silk ties and woollen 'socks' (which he had promised his mother to take out and dry whenever he came in), a fact which has more bearing on the main question than appears on the surface.

'A man has to assert hissel' in this toon, or he is thocht little on,' said Pate Tamson, the oversman. 'Noo, there's MacGrogan, the Irish priest — I dinna agree wi' his releegion, an' dootless he will hae verra little chance at the Judgment. But, faith, when he hears that there's ony o' his fowk drinkin' ower lang about Lucky Moat's, in he gangs wi' a cudgel as thick as your airm, and the great solemn curses, fair rowlin' aff the tongue o' him — and faith, he clears Lucky's faster than a hale raft of polissmen! Aye, he

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

does that!'

'Aye,' assented the junior elder, Robin Naysmith, he whose feet had put the plaster in danger, 'what we need i' Drowdle is a man o' poo'er — a man o' wecht!'

'Quit ye like men — be strong!' saith the Scripture,' summed up the oversman. Then both of them waited for Dairsie, to see what he had got to say.

'I — I am sure I shall endeavour to do my best,' said the young minister, 'but I fear I have underestimated the difficulties of the position.'

The oversman shook his head as he went, out through the manse gate.

'And I am some dootfu' that we hae made a mistak!'

'If we hae,' rejoined Naysmith, the strong man, 'we maun keep it frae the knowledge o' Drowdle. But the lad is young — young. And when he has served his 'prenticeship to sorrow, he will maybes come oot o' the furnace as silver that is tried!'

Now, neither Drowdle nor its inhabitants meant to be unkind. In case of illness or accident among themselves, none gave material help more liberally. What belonged to one was held in a kindly communism to be the right of all. But Drowdle was not to be handled delicately. It was a nettle to be grasped with gloves of untanned leather.

Dairsie Gordon opened his first Sunday-school at three in the afternoon. At a quarter to four, as he stood up on the platform to give his closing address, he found boys scuttling and playing 'tig' between his

legs. He laid down his hymn book, and on lifting it to read the closing verses, discovered that a certain popular bacchanalian collection entitled 'Songs of the Red, White, and Blue' had mysteriously taken its place.

The young minister had other and graver trials also. The pitmen passed him on the road with a surly grunt, and he did not know it was only because they were trudging home dog-tired from their long shift. The hard-driving managers and sub-managers, men without illusions and as blatantly practical as a Scottish daily paper, passed him by contemptuously, as if he had been a tract thrust under their doors. The schoolmaster, a cleverish machine-made youth of inordinate conceit, openly scoffed. He was a weakling, this minister, and he had better know it.

And, indeed, in these days, Dairsie gave them plenty of scope for complaint. His sermons might possibly have edified a company of the unfallen angels, if we can fancy such being interested in heathen philosophy and the interpretation of the more obscure Old Testament Scriptures. But to this gritty, ungodly, crass-natured, rasp-surfaced village of Drowdle, the young man merely babbled in his pulpit as the summer brooks do over the pebbles.

An itinerant evangelist, who shook the fear of hell-fire under their noses with the fist of a pugilist, and claimed in ancient style the power to bind and the power to loose, might conceivably have succeeded in Drowdle, but as it was, Dairsie Gordon proved a failure of the most absolute sort. And Drowdle, having no false modesty, toid him plainly of it. At informal meetings of Session the question of

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

their minister's shortcomings was discussed with freedom and point, only the oversman and Robin Nay smith pleading suspension of judgment on account of the young man's years.

For there were sympathetic hearts here and there among the folk of Drowdle. Women with the maternal instinct yet untrampled out of them came to their doors to look after the tall slim laddie who was so like the sons they had dreamed of when the maiden's blush still tinged their cheeks.

'He's a bonny laddie to look on,' they said to each other as, palm on hip, they stood looking after him. 'It's a peety that he is sae feckless!'

Yet Dairsie was always busy. He was no neglecter of duty. He worked with eager strained hopefulness. No matter how deep had been his depression of the evening, the morning found him contemplating a day of work with keen anticipation and unconquerable desire to succeed.

Today, at last, he would begin to make an impression. He would visit the remainder of Dickson's Row, and perhaps — who knew? — it might be the turning of the tide. So he sat down opposite his mother at breakfast, smiling and rubbing his hands.

'Today I am going to show them, mother,' he would say.

'Show them what, Dairsie dear?'

'That I am a man.'

But within him he was saying, 'Work while it is day!' And yet deeper in his heart, so deep that it became almost a prayer for release, he was wont to add — 'The night cometh when no man can work!' Then to this he added, as he took his round soft hat

and went out, 'O Lord, help me to do something worthy before I die — something to make these people respect me.'

It was a hot September afternoon. Drowdle was a-drowse from Capersknowe to the Back Raw. Here and there could be heard a dull recurring thud, which was the dunt dunt of the roller on the dough of the bake-board as some housewife languidly rolled out her farles of oatcake. For the rest, there was no sound save the shout of a callant fishing for minnows in the backwaters of Drowdle, and the buzz of casual bluebottles on the dirty window-panes.

Suddenly there arose a cry, dominant and far-reaching. No words were audible, but the tone was enough. Women blanched and dropped the crockery they were carrying. The men of the night-shift, asleep on their backs in the hot and close-curtained wall-beds, tumbled into their grimy moleskins with a single movement.

'Number Four pit's On fire! The pit's on fire! Number Fower!'

It was a mile to the particular colliery where the danger was. The rows of houses emptied themselves simultaneously upon the white dusty road, women running with men and barefooted children speeding between, a little scared, but, on the whole, rather enjoying the excitement.

As they came nearer, the great high-mounted head-wheels of pit Number Four were spinning furiously, and over the mounds which led to it little ant-like figures were hurrying. A thin far-spreading

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

spume of brownish smoke rose sluggishly from the pithead. At sight of it women cried out: 'Oh God, my Jock's doon there!' And more than one set her hand suddenly upon her side and swung away from the rush into the hedge-root.

A hundred questions were being fired at the steadfast engineer, men and women all shouting at once. He answered such as he could, but with his hand ever upon the lever and his eye upon the scale which told at what point the cage stood in the long incline of the 'dook.'

'The fire's in the main pit-shaft,' he said. 'They are trying to get doon by the second exit; but it's half fu' o' steam pipes to drive the bottom engine.'

'Wha's gane doon?'

'Pate Tamson and Muckle Greg are in the cage tryin' to put the fire oot wi' the hose.'

'They micht as weel spit on't if it's gotten ony catch!'

'And Robin Naysmith and the minister are tryin' the second exit.'

'The minister,'

The cry was very scornful. The minister, indeed — what good could 'a boy like him' do down there where strong men were dying helplessly?

So for half-an-hour Walter McCartney, the pithead engineer, stood at his post watching the cage index, and listening for the tinkle of the bell which signalled 'up' or 'down.'

Suddenly the faces of such as could see the numbers blanched. And a murmur ran round the crowd at the long t-r-r-r-r-r which told that the cage was coming to the surface.

Had all hope been abandoned, that the rescue

party were returning so unexpectedly? A woman shrieked suddenly on the edges of the crowd.

'Who's that?' queried the manager, turning sharply. And when he was answered, 'Take her away — don't let her come near the shaft!' was his order.

Out of the charred and dripping cage came Pate Tamson and his mate, blackened and wet from head to foot.

'The cage is to be sent empty to the dook-bottom!' they said. 'Somebody has managed to get doon the second exit.'

With a quick switch of levers and a humming hiss of woven wire from the head-wheels, down sank the cage into the belching brown smother of the deadly reek.

Then there was a long pause. The index sank till it pointed to the pit-bottom. The cage had passed through the fire safely. It had yet to be proved that living men could also pass.

'Tinkle tink.'

It was the bell for lifting. Walter McCartney compressed his lips on receiving the signal, and pulled down the shiny cap over his forehead, as if he himself were about to face that whirlwind of fire six hundred feet down in the bowels of the earth. He drew a long breath and opened the lever for 'Full Speed Up.' The cage must have passed the zone of flame like a bird rising through a cloud. The folk silenced themselves as it neared the surface. Then a great cry arose.

The minister sat in the cage with a couple of boys in his arras. The rough wet brattice cloths that had been placed over them were charred almost to a cinder. Dairsie Gordon's face was burnt and

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

blackened.

He handed the boys out into careful hands.

'I am going down again,' he said; 'unless I do the men will not believe that it is possible to come alive through the fire. Are you ready, Walter? Let her go!'

So a second time the young minister went down through the furnace. Presently the men began to be whisked up through the fire, and as each relay arrived at the pit-bank they sang the praises of Dairsie Gordon, telling with Homeric zest how he had crawled half-roasted down the narrow throat of the steam-pipe-filled shaft, how he had argued with them that the fire could be passed, and at last proved it with two boys for volunteer passengers. Dairsie Gordon, B.D., was the last man to leave the pit, and he fainted with pain and excitement when all Drowdle cheered him as they carried him home to his mother.

And when at last he came to himself, swathed in cotton wool to the eyes, he murmured, 'Do you not think they will respect me now, mother?'

20. TADMOR IN THE WILDERNESS

The calm and solemn close of a stormy day — that is the impression which the latter years of the life of Bertram Erskine made on those who knew him best. Though I was young at the time, I well remember his solitary house of Barlochan, a small laird's mansion to which he had added a tiny study and a vast library, turning the whole into an externally curious but internally comfortable conglomerate of architecture. The house stood near a little green depression of the moorland, shaped like the upturned palm of a hand. In the lowest part was the 'lochan' or lakelet from which the place had its name, while the mansion with its whitewashed gables and many chimneys rose on the brow above — and, facing south, overlooked well nigh a score of parishes. There was also a garden, half hidden behind a row of straggling poplars. A solitary 'John' tended it, who, in the time of Mr. Erskine's predecessor, had doubled his part of gardener with that of butler at the family's evening meal.

Few people in the neighbourhood knew much about the 'hermit of Barlochan.' Yet he had borne a great part in the politics of twenty years before. He had been a minister of the Queen, a keen and vehement debater, a dour political fighter, as well as a man of some distinction in letters; he had suddenly retired from all his offices and emoluments without a day's warning.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

The reason given was that he had quite suddenly lost an only and much beloved daughter.

After a few years he had bought, through an Edinburgh lawyer, the little estate of Barlochan, and it was reported that he meant to settle in the district. Upon which ensued a clatter of masons and slaters, joiners and plasterers, all sleeping in stable-lofts, and keeping the scantily peopled moorland parish in a turmoil with their midnight predatory raids and madcap freaks.

Then came waggon-load after waggon-load of books — two men (no less) to look after them and set them in their places on the shelves. After that, the advent of a housekeeper and a couple of staid maid-servants with strange English accents. Last of all arrived Bertram Erskine himself, a tall figure in gray, stepping out of a high gig at his own door, and the establishment of an ex-minister of the Crown was complete.

That is, with one exception — for John McWhan, gardener to the ancient owners of Barlochan, was digging in the garden when Mr. Erskine went out on the first morning after his arrival.

‘Good-morning!’

John looked up from his spade, put his hand with the genuine Galloway reluctance to his bonnet, and remarked, ‘I’m thinkin’ we’ll hae a braw year for grosarts, sir!’

The new proprietor smiled, and as John said afterwards. ‘Then I kenned I was a’ richt!’

‘You are Mr. McCulloch’s gardener?’

‘Na, na, sir; I am your ain gardener, sir,’ answered John McWhan, promptly. ‘Coarnel (Colonel) McCulloch pat everything intil my hand on the day

he gaed awa' to the wars — never to set fit on guid Scots heather mair!

Mr. Erskine nodded quietly, like one who accepts a legal obligation.

'I have heard of you, John,' he said. 'I will take you with the other pendicles of the estate. You are satisfied with your former wages?'

'Aye, sir, aye — a bonny-like thing that I should hae been satisfied wi' thretty pound and a cothoose for five-and-forty year, and begin to compleen at this time o' the day.'

'But I am somewhat peculiar, John,' said Mr. Erskine, smiling. 'I see little company: I desire to see none at all. If you remain with me, you must let nothing pass your lips regarding me or my avocations.'

'Ye'll find that John McWhan can haud his tongue to the full as well as even a learned man like yoursel', sir!'

'I have an uncertain temper, John!'

'Faith, then ye hae gotten the verra man for ye, sir,' cried John, slapping his knee delightedly. 'Lord keep us, ye will be but as a bairn at the schule to what Maister McCulloch was. I tell ye, when the Coarnel's liver was warslin' wi' him, it was as muckle as your life was worth to gang within bowshot o' him. But yet he never hairmed John. He miscaaed him — ay a, he did that — till the ill names cam' back oot o' the wood ower bye, as if the wee green fairies were mockin' the sinfu' angers o' man. But John never heeded. And in a wee, the Coarnel wad be calm as a plate o' parritch, and send me into the hoose for his muckle pipe, saying, 'John, that has dune me guid, I think I'll hae a smoke.' Na,

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

na, ye may be as short in the grain as ye like, but after Coarnel McCulloch.'

At this point of his comparison John felt the inadequacy of further words and could only ejaculate, 'Hoots awa', man!'

So in this fashion John McWhan stayed on as 'man' upon the policies of Barlochan.

That night at dinner it was John who carried in the soup tureen and deposited it before his new master, a very much scandalised table-maid following in the wake of the victor.

'I hae brocht ye your kail, Maister Areskine,' he said, setting the large vessel down with a flourish, 'as I hae dune in this hoose for five-and-forty year. This trimmie (though Guid forgie me, I doubt na that she is a decent lass, for an Englisher) may set the glesses and bring ben the kickshaws, but the kail and the roast are John McWhan's perquisite — as likewise the cleanin' o' the silver. And I wad thank ye kindly, sir, to let the hizzie ken your mind on that same!'

With these words, John stood at attention with his hands at his sides and his lips pursed, gazing solemnly at his master. Mr. Erskine turned round on his chair, his napkin in his hand. His eyes encountered with astonishment a tall figure, gaunt and angular, clad in an ancient livery coat of tarnished blue and gold; knee breeches, black stockings, and a pair of many-clouted buckled shoes completed an attire which was certainly a marvellous transformation from John's ordinary labouring moleskins.

With a word quiet and sedate, Mr. Erskine satisfied John's pride of place, and with another (the

latter accompanied with a certain humorous twinkle of the eye) he soothed the ruffled Jane.

After that the days passed quietly and uneventfully enough at Barlochan. Mr. Erskine's habits were regular. He rose early, he read much, he wrote more. The mail he received, the book packets the carrier brought him, the huge sealed letters he sent off, were the wonder of the country-side — for a month or two. Then, save for the carters who drove the coal from the town, or brought in the firewood for Mr. Erskine's own library fire (for there he burned wood only), and the boxes of provisions ordered from Cairn Edward by his prim housekeeper Mrs. Lambert, Barlochan was silent and without apparent distraction.

All the same there were living souls and busy brains about it. The massive intellect of the master worked at unknown problems in the library. Busy Mrs. Lambert hurried hither and thither contriving household comforts, and developing the scanty resources of a moorland cuisine to their uttermost. Jane and Susan obeyed her beck, while out in the garden John McWhan dug and raked, pruned and planted, his hand never idle, while his brain busied itself with his master.

'It's a mighty queer thing he doesna gang to the kirk,' said John to himself, 'a terrible queer thing — him bein' itherwise sic a kindly weel-learned gentleman, I heard some word he was eddicated for the kirk him-sel'. Oh, that we had amang us a plant o' grace like worthy Master Hobbleshaw doon at the Nine-Mile-Burn, that can whup the guts oot o' a text as gleg and clever as cleanin' a troot. Faith, I wad ask him to come wi' me to oor bit kirk at

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Machermore, had we a man there that could do mair than peep and mutter. I wonder what we hae dune that we should be afflicted wi' siccan a reed shaken wi' the wun' as that feckless bit callant, Hughie Peebles. He can preach nae mair than my cat Tib — and as for unction.'

Here again John's words failed him under the press of his own indignant comminations. He could only drive the 'graip' into the soil of the Barlochan garden, with a foot whose vehemence spoke eloquently of his inward heat. For the pulpit of the little Dissenting kirk which John McWhan supported by his scanty contributions (and abundant criticisms), was occupied every Sabbath day by that saddest of all labourers, a minister who has not fulfilled his early promise, and of whom his congregation desire to be rid.

'No but what we kind o' like the craitur, too,' John explained to his master, as he paused near him in one of his frequent promenades in the garden. 'He has his points. He is a decent lad, and wi' some sma' gift in intercessory prayer. But he gangs frae door to door amang the fowk, as if he were comin' like a beggar for an awmous and were feared to daith o' the dog. Noo what the fowk like is a man that walks wi' an air, that speaks wi' authority, that stands up wi' some presence in the pulpit, and gies oot the psalm as if he war kind o' prood to read words that the guid auld tune o' Kilmarnock wad presently carry to the seeventh heevens!'

'And your minister, John, with whom you are dissatisfied — how came you to choose him?'

'Weel, sir,' said the old man, palpably distressed, 'it was like this — ye see fowk are no what they used

to be, even in the kirk o' the Marrow. In auld days they pickit a minister for the doctrine and smeddom that was in him. 'Was he soond on the fundamentals?' 'Had he a grip o' the fower Heads?' 'Was he faithfu' in his monitions?' Thae were the questions they askit. But nooadays they maun hae a laddie fresh frae the college, that can leather aff a blatter o' words like a bairn's lesson. I'm tellin' ye the truth, sir — Sant Paul himsel', after he had had the care o' a' the churches for a generation, wadna hae half the chance o' a barefaced, aipple-cheekit loon in a black coatie and a dowg-collar. An' as for Peter, he wad hae had juist nae chance ava. He wad never hae gotten sae muckle as a smell o' the short leet.'

'And how would Saint Peter have had no chance? Wherein was his case worse than Paul's?' said Mr. Erskine, smiling.

'Because he was a mairriet man, sir. It's a' thae feckless weemen fowk, sir. A man o' wecht and experience has little chance, though he speak wi' the tongue o' men and o' angels — a mairriet man has juist nae chance ava. It's my solemn opeenion that, when it comes to electin' a new minister, only respectable unmairriet men o' fifty years an' upwards should be allowed to vote. It's the only thing that will stop thae awfu' weemen frae ruling the kirk o' God. Talk o' the Session — faith, it's no the Session that bears rule ower us in things speeritual — na, na, it's juist thae petticoated randies that got us turned oot o' Paradise at the first, and garred me hae to grow your honour's vegetables in the sweet o' my brool'

'But why only unmarried men of over fifty?' said

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Mr. Erskine, humouring his servitor.

'For this reason,' — John laid down the points of his argument on the palm of one hand with the crooked forefinger of the other, his foot holding the 'graip' steady in the furrow all the while. 'The young unmairriet men wad be siccan fules as to do what the young lasses wanted them to do, and the mairriet men o' a' ages (as say the Scriptures) wad necessarily vote as their wives bade them, for the sake o' peace and to keep doon din!'

'Well, John,' said Mr. Erskine, 'I will go down to the kirk with you next Sunday morning, and see what I can advise. It is a pity that in this small congregation and thinly-peopled district you should be saddled with an unsuitable minister!'

'Eh, sir, but we wad be proud to see ye at Machermore Marrow Kirk,' cried John, dusting his hands with sheer pleasure, as if he were about to shake hands with his master on the spot. 'I only wish it had been Maister MacSwatter o' Knockemdoon that was gaun to preach. He fairly revels in Daniel and the Revelations. He can gie ye a screed on the ten horns wi' faithfu' unction, and mak' a maist affectin' application frae the consideration o' the wee yin in the middle. But oor Maister Peebles — he juist haes nae 'fushion' in him, ony mair than a winter-frosted turnip in the month o' Aprile!'

In accordance with his promise to his factotum, on the following Sabbath morning Mr. Erskine walked down to the little Kirk of Machermore. It was a fine harvest day and the folk had turned out well, as is usually the case at that season of the year. John McWhan was too old a servant to dream of walking with his master to the kirk. He had 'mair

mainners,' as he would have said himself. All the same, he had privately communicated with several of the elders, and so ensured Mr. Erskine a reception suited to his dignity.

The ex-minister of State was received at the little kirk door by Bogrie and Muirkitterick, two tenants on a large neighbouring property. These were the leading Marrow men in the district, and much looked up to, as both coming in their own gigs to the kirk. Bogrie it was who opened the inner door for him, and Muirkitterick conducted him to the seat of honour in the mountain Zion, being the manse pew, immediately to the right of the pulpit.

It was not for some time that Mr. Erskine perceived that he did not sit alone. Being a little short-sighted until he got his glasses adjusted, the faces of any audience or congregation were always a blur to him. Then all at once he noticed a slim girlish figure in a black dress almost shrinking from observation in the opposite corner. The service began immediately after he sat down.

The minister was tall, of good appearance and presence, but Mr. Erskine shuddered at the first grating notes of the clerical falsetto, which Mr. Peebles had adopted solely because it had been the fashion at college in his time; but it was not until the short prayer before the sermon that anything occurred to fix the politician's wandering attention.

Then, as he bent forward, he heard a voice near him saying, in an intense inward whisper: 'O God, help my Hughie!'

He glanced about him in astonishment. It was the girl in the black dress. She had knelt in the English fashion when all the rest of the congregation were

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

merely bending forward 'on their hunkers,' or, as in the case of not a few ancient standards of the Faith, standing erect and protestant against all weak-hammed defection.

When the girl arose again Mr. Erskine saw that her lips were trembling and that she gazed wistfully about at the set and severe faces of the congregation. The minister began his sermon.

It was not in any sense a good discourse. Rather, with the best will in the world, the hearer found it feeble, flaccid, unenlivened by illustration, unfirmed by doctrine, unclinched by application. Yet all the time Mr. Erskine was saying to himself: 'What a fool that young man is! He has a good voice and presence — how easily he might study good models, and make a very excellent appearance. It cannot be so difficult to please a few score country farmers and ditchers!' But he ended with his usual Gallio-like reflection that 'After all, it is none of my business;' and so forthwith removed his mind from the vapidness of the discourse, to a subject connected with his own immediate work.

But as he issued out of the little kirk, he passed quite close to the vestry door. The girl who had sat in the pew beside him was coming out with the minister. He could not help hearing her words, apparently spoken in answer to a question: 'It was just beautiful, Hughie; you never preached better in your life.' And in the shadow of the porch, before they turned the corner, Mr. Erskine was morally certain that the young minister gave the girl's arm an impulsive little hug.

But his own heart was heavy, for as he walked away there came a thought into his heart. A

resemblance that had been haunting him suddenly flashed up vividly upon him.

‘If Marjorie had lived she would have been about that girl’s age — and like her, too, pale and slim and dark.’

So all the way to his lonely mansion of Barlochan the ex-minister of the Crown thought of the young girl who had faded from his side, just as she was becoming a companion for the man who, for her sake, had put his career behind him.

In the afternoon Mr. Erskine sat in the arbour, while John in his Sunday best tried to compromise with his conscience as to how much gardening could be made to come under the catechistic heading, ‘Works of Necessity and Mercy.’ He solved this by watering freely, training and binding up sparingly, pruning in a furtive and shamefaced manner (when nobody was looking), but strictly abstaining from the opener iniquities of weeding, digging, or knocking in nails with hammers. In the latter emergency John kept for Sunday use the iron-shod heel of an old boot, and in no case did he ever so far forget himself as to whistle. On that point he was adamant.

At last, after hovering nearer and nearer, he paused before the arbour and addressed his master directly.

‘Thon juist settles it!’

Mr. Erskine slowly put down his book, still, however, marking the place with his finger.

‘I do not understand — what do you mean by thon?’

‘The sermon we had the day, sir. It was fair affrontin’. The Session are gaun up to ask Maister Peebles to consider his resignation. The thing had

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

neither beginning o' days nor end o' years. It was without form and void. It's a kind o' peety, too, for the laddie, wi' that young Englishy wife that he has ta'en, on his hand. I'm feared she is no the kind that will ever help to fill his meal-ark!

'I am very sorry to hear you say so, John,' said Mr. Erskine; 'can nothing be done, think you? Why don't they give the young man another chance? Can no one speak to him? There were some things about the service that I liked very much. Indeed, I found myself feeling at home in a church for the first time for years.'

'Did ye, sir? That's past a' thinkin'! A' Machermore was juist mournin' and lamentin'. What micht the points be that ye liket? I will tell the elders. It micht do some guid to the pair lad!'

Mr. Erskine was a little taken aback. He could not say that what pleased him most in the service had sat in the manse-seat beside him, had worn a plain black dress, and possessed a pair of eyes that reminded him of a certain young girl who had taken walks with him over the hills of Surrey, when the blackbirds were singing in the spring.

Nevertheless, he managed to convey to John a satisfaction and a hopefulness that were all the more helpful for being a little vague. To which he added a practical word.

'If you think it would do any good, John, I might see one or two of the members of Session themselves.'

'Ye needna trouble yoursel', thank ye kindly, sir,' said John, 'I will undertak' the job. Though my infirmity at orra times keeps me frae acceptin' the eldership (I hae been twice eleckit), I may say that

John McWhan's influence in the testifyin' and Covenant-keeping Kirk o' the Marrow at the Cross-roads o' Machermore has to be reckoned wi' — aye, it has to be reckoned wi'!

Nevertheless, the agitation for a change of ministry continued to increase rather than to diminish. It took the form of a petition to the Rev. Hugh Peebles to consider the spiritual needs of the congregation and forthwith to remove himself to another sphere of labour.

Now, John McWhan's Zion was not one of the greater and richer denominations into which Presbytery in Scotland is unhappily divided. It was but a small and poor 'body' of the faithful, and such changes of ministry as that proposed were frequent enough. The operative cause might be inability to pay the minister's 'steepend' if it happened to be a bad year. Or, otherwise, and more frequently, a 'split' — a psalm tune misplaced, an overplus of fervour in prayer for the Royal Family (a very deadly sin), or a laxity in dealing with a case of discipline — and, lo! the minister trudged down the glen with his goods before him in a red cart, to fight his battle over again in another glen, and among a people every whit as difficult and touchy. But one day there was an intimation read out in the Machermore Kirk of the Marrow to the following effect: 'The Annual Sermon of the Stewartry Branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society will be preached in the Townhill Kirk at Cairn Edward, on Sabbath next, at 6 P.M., by the Rev. Hugh Peebles of the Marrow Kirk, Machermore.'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Mr. Peebles read this through falteringly, as if it concerned some one else, and then added a doubtful conclusion: 'In consequence of this honour which has been done me, I know not why, there will be no service here on the evening of next Lord's Day!'

It was observed by the acute that Mrs. Peebles put her face into her hands very quickly as her husband finished reading the intimations.

'Praying for him, was she?' said the Marrow folk, grimly, as they went homeward: 'aye, an' she had muckle need!'

To say that the congregation of Machermore was dumfounded is wholly to underestimate the state of their feelings. They were aghast. For the occasion was a most notable one.

All the wale of the half-dozen central Galloway parishes, which were canvassed as one district by the agents of the Bible Society, would be there — the professional sermon-tasters of twenty congregations. At least a dozen ministers of all denominations (except the Episcopalian) would be seated in an awe-inspiring quadrilateral about the square elders' pew. The Townhill Kirk, the largest in Galloway, would be packed from floor to ceiling, and the sermon, published at length in the local paper, would be discussed in all its bearings at kirk-door and market-ring for at least a month to come.

And all these things must be faced by their 'reed shaken with the wind,' their feckless shadow of a minister, weak in doctrine, ineffective in application, utterly futile in reproof. Hughie Peebles, and he alone, must represent the high ancient liberties of the Marrow Kirk before Free Kirk Pharisee and Erastian Sadducee.

Considering these things, Machermore hung its head, and the wailing of its eldership was heard afar. Only John McWhan, as he had promised, kept his counsel, and went about with a shrewd twinkle in his eye. He continued to bring in the soup at Barlochan — indeed, he now waited all through dinner, and, though there was nothing said that he could definitely take hold upon, John had a shrewd suspicion that it was not for nothing that the young minister had been closeted with his master for two or three hours, six days a week, for the last month. But though it went sorely to his heart that he could not even bid Machermore and the folk thereof — ‘Wait till next Sabbath at six o'clock, an' ye'll maybes hear something!’ he loyally refrained himself.

At last the hour came and the man. Mr. Erskine, having ordered a carriage from the town, drove the minister and his wife down to Cairn Edward in style. John McWhan held the reins, the urban ‘coachman’ sitting, a silent and indignant hireling, on the lower place by his side.

On the front seat within sat Mr. Peebles, very pale, and with his hands gripping each other nervously. But when he looked across at the calm face of Mr. Erskine, a sigh of relief broke from him. The Townhill Kirk was densely crowded. There was that kind of breathing hush over all, which one only hears in a country kirk on a very solemn occasion. Places had been kept for young Mrs. Peebles and Mr. Erskine in the pew of honour near the elders' seat, but the ex-minister of State, after accompanying Mrs. Peebles to her destination, went

and sat immediately in front of the pulpit.

'Wondrous weel the laddie looks,' said one of the judges as Hugh Peebles came in, boyish in his plain black coat, 'though they say he is but a puir craitur for a' that!'

'Appearances are deceitful — beauty is vain!' agreed her neighbour, in the same unimpassioned whisper.

There was nothing remarkable about the 'preliminaries,' as the service of praise and prayer was somewhat slightly denominated by these impatient sermon-lovers.

'Sap, but nae fushion!' summed up Mistress Elspeth Milligan, the chief of these, after the first prayer.

The preliminaries being out of the way, the great congregation luxuriously settled itself down to listen to the sermon. Machermore, which had hidden itself bodily in a remote corner of one of the galleries, begun to perspire with sheer fright.

'They'll throw the psalm-buiks at him, I wadna wunner — siccan grand preachers as they hae doon here in Cairn Edward!' whispered the ruling elder to a friend. He had sneaked in after all the others, and was now sitting on one of the steps of the 'laft.' It was John McWhan who occupied the corner seat beside him.

'Maybe aye, an' maybe no!' returned John, drily, keeping his eye on the pulpit. The hush deepened as Hugh Peebles gave out his text.

'And he built Tadmor in the wilderness.'

Whereupon ensued a mighty rustling of turned leaves, as the folk in the 'airy' and the three 'galleries' pursued the strange text to its lair in the

second book of Chronicles. It sounded like the blowing of a sudden gust of wind through the entire kirk.

Then came the final stir of settling to attention point, and the first words of Hugh Peebles' sermon. Maehermore, elder and kirk-member, adherent and communicant, young and old, bond and free, crouched deeper in their recesses. Some of the more bashful pulled up the collars of their coats and searched their Bibles as if they had not yet found the text. The seniors put on their glasses and stared hard at the minister as if they had never seen him before. They did not wish it to appear that he belonged to them.

But when the first notes of the preacher's voice fell on their astonished ears, it is recorded that some of the more impulsive stood up on their feet.

That was never their despised minister, Hughie Peebles. The strong yet restrained diction, the firmness of speech, the resonance of voice in the deeper notes — all were strange, yet somehow curiously familiar. They had heard them all before, but never without that terrible alloy of weakness, and the addition of a falsetto something that made the preacher's words empty and valueless.

And the sermon — well, there never had been anything like it heard in the Ten, Parishes before. There was, first of all, that great passage where the preacher pictured the Wise King sending out his builders and carpenters, his architects and cunning workmen — those very men who had caused the Temple to rise on Moriah and set up the mysterious twin pillars thereof — to build in that great and terrible wilderness a city like to none the world had

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

ever seen. There was his gradual opening up of the text, and applying it to the sending of the Word of God to the heathen who dwelt afar off — without God and without hope in the world.

Then came the searching personal appeal, which showed to each clearly that in his own heart there were wilderness tracts — as barren, as deadly, as apparently hopeless as the ground whereon Solomon set up his wonder-city— Tadmor, Palmyra, the city of temples and palaces and palm-trees.

And above all, the preacher's application was long remembered, his gradual uprising from the picture of the earthly king, 'golden-robed in that abyss of blue,' to the Great King of all the worlds,' He who can make the wilderness, whether that of the heathen in distant lands and far isles of the sea, or that other more difficult, the wilderness in our own breasts, to blossom as the rose!' These things will never be forgotten by any in that congregation.

Once only Hugh Peebles faltered. It was but for a moment. He gasped and glanced down to the first seat in the front of the church. Then in another moment he had gripped himself and resumed his argument. Some there were who said that he did this for effect, to show emotion, but there were two men in that congregation who knew better — the preacher and Mr. Erskine.

All Machermore went home treading on the viewless air. They hardly talked to each other for sheer joy and astonishment. 'Dinna look as if we were surprised, lads! Let on that we get the like o' that every day in oor kirk!'

That was John McWhan's word, which passed from lip to lip. And Machermore and the Marrow

Kirk thereof became almost insufferably puffed up.

'I'll no say a word mair,' said the ruling elder, 'gin he never preaches anither decent word till the day o' his death.'

This was, indeed, the general sense of the congregation. But Hugh Peebles, though perhaps he never reached the same pinnacle of fame, certainly preached much better than of old. With his wonderful success, too, he had gained a certain confidence in himself; added to which he was almost as often at Barlochan as before the missionary sermon.

His wife came with him sometimes in the evenings to dinner, and then Mr. Erskine's eyes would dwell on her with a kind of gladness. For now she had a colour in her cheek and a proud look on her face, which had not been there on the day when he had first heard her pray: 'O God, help my Hughie!' in the square manse pew.

God had indeed helped Hughie — as He mostly does, through human agency. And Mr. Erskine was happier too. He had found an object in life, and, on the whole, his pupil did him great credit.

He also inserted a clause in his will, which ensures that Hugh and his wife shall not be dependent in their old age upon the goodwill of a faithful but scanty flock.

And as for Hugh Peebles, probable plagiarist, he writes his own sermons now, though he always submits them before preaching to his wise friend up at Barlochan. But it is for his first success that he is always asked when he goes from home. There is a never-failing postscript to any invitation from a clerical brother upon a sacramental occasion: 'The

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

congregation will be dreadfully disappointed if you do not give us 'Tadmor in the Wilderness.'

And Hugh Peebles never disappoints them.

21. PETERSON'S PATIENT

When I go out on the round of a morning I generally take John with me. John is my 'man,' and of course it is etiquette that he should drive me to my patients' houses. But sometimes I tell him to put in old Black Bess for a long round-about journey, and then, in that case, I can drive myself.

For Black Bess is a real country doctor's horse. She will stand at a loaning foot with the reins hitched over a post — that is, if you give her a yard or so of head liberty, so that she may solace herself with the grass and clover tufts on the bank. Even without any grass at all, she will stand by a peat-stack in as profound a meditation as if she were responsible for the diagnosis of the case within. I honestly believe Bess is more than half a cow, and chews the cud on the sly. So whenever I feel a trifle lazy, I take the outer round and Black Bess, leaving the town and what the ambitious might call its 'suburbs' to Dr. Peterson, my assistant. Not that this helps me much in the long run, because I have to keep track of what is going on in Peterson's head and revise his treatment. For, though his zeal and knowledge are always to be counted on, Peterson is apt to be lacking in a certain tact which the young practitioner only acquires by experience.

For instance, to take the important matter of diagnosis, Peterson used to think nothing of standing silent five or ten minutes making up his mind what was the matter with a patient. I once told

him about this.

'Why,' he replied, with, I must say, some slight disrespect for his senior, 'you often do that yourself. You said this very morning that it took you twenty minutes to make up your mind whether to treat Job Sampson's wife for scarlet fever or for diphtheria!'

'Yes,' I retorted, 'I told you so, but I didn't stand agape all the time I was thinking it out. I took the temperature of the woman's armpits, and the back of her neck, and between her toes. I asked her about her breakfast, and her dinner, and her supper of the day before. Then I took a turn at her sleeping powers, and whether she had been eating too many vegetables lately. I inquired if she had had the measles, and the whooping-cough, and how often she had been vaccinated. I was just going to begin on her father, mother, and collateral relatives in order to trace hereditary tendencies, when I made up my mind that it would be safest to treat the woman for scarlet fever.'

'Yes,' said Peterson, drily, 'Job was praising you up to the skies this very day. 'There never was sic a careful doctor,' he swears; 'there wasna a blessed thing that he didna speer into, even unto the third and fourth generation.'

'There, you hear, Peterson,' I said, with sober triumph, 'that is the first step in your profession. You must create confidence. Never let them think for a moment you don't know everything. Why, old Ned Harper sent for me today — said you didn't understand the case, because you declined to prescribe.'

'He is malingering,' cried Peterson, hotly; 'he only wants to draw full pay out of his two benefit

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

societies. The man is a fraud, open and patent. I wouldn't have anything to do with him.'

'Now, Peterson,' I said very seriously, 'once for all, this is my practice, not yours. You are my salaried assistant. That is what you have to attend to. You are not revising auditor of the local benefit societies. If you do as you did with old Harper a time or two, you will lose me my appointment as Society's doctor, and not that one appointment alone. They all follow each other like a flock of sheep jumping through a slap in a dyke. Besides, the Benefit Society officials don't thank you, not a bit! They expect Harper to do as much for them the next time they feel like taking a holiday between the sheets!'

'What would you do then?' cried this furious young apostle of righteousness. 'You surely would not have me become art and part in a swindle?'

I patted him on the shoulder.

'Temper your zeal with discretion, my friend,' I said. 'I have found a rising blister between the shoulder-blades very efficacious in such cases.'

Yet my immaculate assistant, had he only known it, was to go further and fare worse.

Meanwhile to pass the time I told him the story of old Maxwell Bone. Peterson was clearly getting restive, and it is not good for young men of the medical profession to think that they know everything at five-and-twenty. Maxwell was an aged hedger-and-ditcher, who lived in a tumble-down cottage at the upper end of Whinnyliggate. Of that parish I was (and still am) parish doctor, and Maxwell being in receipt of half-a-crown a week as parochial supplement to his scanty earnings, I was,

ipso facto, responsible for Maxwell's state of health, and compelled in terms of my contract to obey any reasonable summons I might receive from him.

Upon several occasions I had prescribed for the old ruffian, chiefly for rheumatism and the various internal pains and weaknesses affected by ancient paupers. When I was going away on one occasion Maxwell asked me for an order on the Inspector of Poor for a bottle of brandy 'for outward application only.' I refused him promptly, telling him with truth that he was far better without it.

'Weel, doctor,' he said, shaking his head, 'dootless ye ken best. But there's nocht like brandy when thae stamback pains come on me. It micht save ye a lang journey some cauld snawy nicht. The guard o' the late train will tak' doon ony message frae the junction, and if I dinna get the brandy to hae at hand to rub my legs wi' ye micht hae a lang road to travel! But gin ye let me hae it, doctor, it micht save ye a heap o' trouble.'

'The old wretch!' cried Peterson. 'Of course you did not let him have it?'

'Peterson,' I replied sententiously, 'I decline to answer you. Wait till you have been a winter here and know what a thirty-mile drive in a raging snowstorm to the head-end of the parish of Whinnyliggate means. Then you will not have much doubt whether Maxwell got his brandy or not.'

Now Peterson was really a very excellent fellow, and when he had run his head against the requisite number of stone walls, and learned to bite hard on his tongue when tempted to over-hasty speech, he made a capital assistant. I shall be sorry to lose him when the time comes.

For one thing Nance is fond of him, especially since he fell in love, and that goes for a great deal in our house. Peterson performed the latter feat quite suddenly and unexpectedly, as he did everything. It happened thuswise.

I had had a hard winter, and Nance was needing a change, so, about Easter, I took her south, for a few weeks in the mild and recuperative air of the Regent Street bonnet shops. I have noted more than once that in Nance's case the jewellers' windows along Bond Street possess tonic qualities, quite unconnected with going inside to buy anything, as also the dark windows of certain merchant tailors in which the patient can see her new dress and hat reflected as in a mirror. As for me, I enjoyed the British Medical Club and the Scientific Museums — which, of course, was what I came for.

But when we went back home we found that Peterson's daily report of cases had not conveyed all the truth. Peterson himself was changed. So far as I could gather, he seemed to have done his work very well and to have given complete satisfaction. He had even added the names of several new patients to my list. One of these was that of a somewhat large proprietor in a neighbouring parish, who was said to be exceedingly eccentric, but of whom I knew nothing save by the vaguest report.

'How did you get hold of old Bliss Bulliston?' I asked my assistant, as I glanced over the list he handed me. We were sitting smoking in the study while Nance was unpacking upstairs and spreading her new things on the bed, amid the rapturous sighs and devotionally clasped hands of Betty Sim, our housemaid.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Peterson turned away towards the mantelpiece for another spill. He appeared to have a difficulty with his pipe.

'Well, I don't exactly know,' he said at last, when the problem was solved; 'it just came about somehow. You know how these things happen.'

'They generally happen in our profession by the patient sending for the physician,' I remarked drily. 'I hope you have not been poaching on any one else's preserves, Peterson. Did Bulliston send for you?'

Peterson stooped for a coal to light his pipe. It had gone out again. Perhaps it was the exertion that reddened his handsome face.

'No,' he said slowly, 'he did not send for me. I went of my own accord.'

I started from my seat.

'Why, man,' I cried, 'you'll get me struck off the register, not to speak of yourself. You don't mean to say that you went to the house touting for custom?'

'Now don't get excited,' he said, smoking calmly, 'and I'll tell you all about it.'

I became at once violently calm. Nevertheless, in spite of this, it took some time to get him under way.

'Well,' he said at last, 'Bulliston has got a daughter.'

'Oh,' said I, 'so you were called in to attend on Mrs. Bulliston?'

'When I say he has a daughter, I mean a grown-up daughter, not an infant!'

Peterson seemed quite unaccountably ruffled by my innocent remark. I thought of pointing out to him the advantages of habitual clearness of speech, but, on the whole, decided to let him tell his story, for I was really very anxious about Bulliston.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Well,' I said soothingly, 'did Miss Bulliston call you in?'

'It might be looked at that way,' he said.

'What was the case?'

'A nest of peregrine's eggs near the top of Carslaw Craig.'

'Peterson!' I exclaimed somewhat sternly, 'don't forget that I am talking to you seriously!'

But he continued smoking.

'I am perfectly serious,' he said, and stopped. After he had thought a while he continued: 'It happened at the end of the first week you were away. I had left John at home. I had old Black Bess with me — you know she will stand anywhere. I took the long round and was coming home a little tired. As I drove past the end of Carslaw Hill, happening to look up I saw something sticking to the sheer face of the cliff like a fly on a wall. At first I could not believe my eyes, for when I came nearer I saw it was a girl. She seemed to be calling for help. So of course I jumped down and tied old Bess to a post by the roadside. Then I began to climb up towards her, but I soon saw that I could not help the girl that way — to do her any good, that is. So I shouted to her to hold on and I would get at her over the top.

I ran up an easier place, where the hill slopes away to the left, and came down opposite where the girl was. She had got to within ten feet of the top, but could not get a bit higher to save her life. It looked almost impossible, but luckily, right on top there was a hazel-bush, and I caught hold of the lower boughs — three or four of them—and lowered my legs down over the edge.

'Catch hold of my ankles,' I shouted, 'and I'll pull

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

you up.'

'Can't; they're too thick!' the girl cried; and from that I judged she must be a pretty cool one.

'Then catch hold of one of them in both hands!' I shouted.

'Right!' she said, and gripped.

'And it was as well that she did not take my first offer, for, as it turned out, I had all I could do to get her up, jamming the toe of my other boot in the crevices and barking my knee against the hazel roots. Still, I managed it finally.'

'Whereupon she promptly fainted away in your arms,' I interjected, 'and you recovered her with some smelling-salts and sal volatile you happened to have brought in your tail-coat pockets in view of such emergencies.'

'Not at all,' said Peterson, quite unabashed; 'she didn't faint — never thought of such a thing. Instead, she got behind the hazel-bush I had been hanging on to.

'Stop where you are a moment,' she spluttered; 'till I get rid of these horrid eggs. Then I'll talk to you.'

'Tears of beauty!' I cried; 'emotion hidden behind a hazel-bush. 'Alfred, you have saved my life — accept my hand.' That was what she really said to you — you know it was, Peterson.'

'Not much,' said Peterson. 'She was back again in a trice, and, if you'll believe me, started in to give it me hot and strong for smashing her blissful birds' eggs.

'Here I've been watching this peregrine for weeks, and I'd got two beauties, and just because I got stuck a bit on the cliff you must come along and jolt

me so that I have broken both of them — one was in my mouth, and the other I had tied up in a handkerchief.'

'But I told the girl that I knew where I could get her another pair and also a rough-legged buzzard's nest, and that did a lot to comfort her. She was a pretty girl, though I don't believe she had ever given it a thought; and she was dead on to getting enough birds' eggs to beat her brother, who had said that a girl could never get as good a collection as a boy, because of her petticoats!'

'And where are you going to get those eggs?' I said to Peterson. 'If you think that hunting falcons' eggs for roving school-girls comes within your duties as my assistant — well, I shall have to explicate your responsibilities to you, that's all, young man!'

Peterson laid his finger lightly on his cheek, not far from the bridge of his nose.

'You know old Davie Slimmon, the keeper up at the lodge? You remember I doctored his foot when he got it bitten with an adder. Well, anyway, he would do anything for me. I've had Davie on the egg-hunt ever since.'

'And the girl thinks you are getting them all yourself,' I said, with some severity. 'Peterson, this is both unbecoming and unscientific. More than that, you are a blackguard.'

'Oh,' said Peterson, lightly, 'it's all right I go regularly to see the old boy. He is a patient properly on the books, and when all is over, you can charge him a swingeing fee. Well, to begin at the beginning, each time I saw the girl I took her all the eggs I could pick up in the interval. I got them properly blown and labelled — particulars, habitat, how many in

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the clutch, whether the nest was oriented due east and west, whether made of sticks or weeds or curl-papers, the size of the shell in fractions of a millimetre.'

'Peterson,' I said sternly, 'I don't believe you have the remotest idea what a millimetre is!'

'No more I have,' answered Peterson, stoutly, not in the least put out; 'but then, no more has she. And it looks well—thundering well!' he added, after a ruminant consideration of the visionary labelled egg. 'You've no idea what a finish these tickets give to the collection.'

'So this was Miss Bulliston,' I said, to bring him back to the point in which I was most immediately interested. 'That's all very well, but what was the matter with old Bliss, her father?'

Peterson looked as if he would have winked if he had dared, but the sternness in my eye checked him.

'Something nervous,' he said, gazing at me blankly. 'Truda kept stirring him up till the poor old boy nearly fretted himself into a fever, and so had me sent for. Oh, I was properly enough called in. You needn't look like that, McQuhirr. You've no gratitude for my getting you a good paying patient. I tell you the old man was so frightened that Truda.'

'It had got to 'Truda, had it?' I interjected bitterly. But Peterson took no notice, going composedly on with his story.

'... Truda ran all the way to the lodge gates, where I was waiting with two kestrels' and a marsh-harrier, unblown, but all done up in cotton wool.'

'What!' I cried, 'the birds?'

'No, the eggs, of course,' said Peterson; 'and she

said: 'What have you got there?' So I told her two kestrels' aud a marsh-harrier. Then she said: 'Is that all? I thought you would have got that kite's you promised me by this time. But come along and cure my father of the cholera, and the measles, and the distemper, and the spavin! He's got them all this morning, besides several other things I've forgot the names of. Come quick! Cousin Jem from London is with him. He'll frighten him worse than anybody. I'll take you up through the shrubbery. Give me your hand!'

'So she took my hand, and we ran up together to the house.'

'Peterson,' I said, 'you and I have a monthly engagement. On this day month I shall have no further occasion for your services. Suppose any one had seen you! What would they have thought of Dr. McQuhirr's assistant?'

'I never gave it a thought,' he said, waving the interruption away; 'and anyway, if all tales are true, you did a good deal of light skirmishing up about Nether Neuk in your own day!'

Now this was a most uncalled-for remark, and I answered: 'That may be true or not, as the case may be. But, at all events, I was no one's locum tenens at that time.'

'Oh,' he said, 'it's no use making a fuss now, McQuhirr. Nobody saw us, and as soon as we got to the open part near the house, Truda said: 'Now I'm going to get these eggs fixed into their cases. So you trot round and physic up the old man. And mind and ask to see his collection of dog-whips. It is the finest in the world. We all collect something here. Pa is crazy about dog-whips. And if you can't find

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

anything else wrong with him, tell him that his corns want cutting. They always do!

'But I haven't a knife with me,' I objected.

'I'll lend you a ripper.' (Truda had an answer ready every time.) 'I keep it edged like a razor. It is a cobbler's leather knife. It will make the shavings fly off dad's old corns, I tell you!'

'But I never pared a corn in my life,' I said.

'Then you've jolly well got to now, my friend,' she said, 'for I've yarned it to him that his life may depend on it, and that only a trained surgeon can operate on his sort. So don't you give me away, or he may let you have the contents of a shot-gun as you go out through the front window. And what will happen to me, I don't know. Now go on!'

'And with that she vanished in the direction of the stables.'

'A most lively young lady!' I cried, with enthusiasm.

'Um-m,' grunted Peterson (I have often had cause to remark Peterson's gruffness). 'Lively, you think? Well, she nearly got me into a pretty mess with her liveliness. The butler put me into a waiting-room out of the hall. It was all sparred round with fishing-rods, and had crossed trophies of dog-whips festooned about the walls. I waited here for a quarter of an hour, listening to the rumbling bark of an angry voice in the distance, and wondering what the mischief Truda had let me in for.

'Presently the girl came round to the open window, and as the sill was a bit high she gave a sort of sidelong jump and sat perched on the ledge outside.

'You are a great donkey,' she said, looking in at

me; 'both the kestrels' are set as hard as a rock — here, take them!'

'And with that she threw the eggs in at me one after another through the open sash of the window. One took me right on the pin of my tie and dripped on to my waistcoat. Smell? Well, rather! Just then the old butler came in, looking like a field-marshal and archbishop rolled in one, and there was I rubbing the abominable yolk from my waistcoat. Truda had dropped off the window-sill like a bird, and the old fellow looked round the room very suspiciously. I think he thought I must have been pocketing the spoons or something.

'Mr. Bliss Bulliston waits!' he said, as if he were taking me into the presence-chamber of royalty. And so he was, by George! I was shown into a large library-looking room where two men were sitting. One was a little Skye-terrier of a man, with bristly gray hair that stood out everyway about his head. He was lying in a long chair, half reclining, a rug over his knees though the day was warm. The other man sat apart in the window, a quiet fellow to all appearance, bald-headed, and rather tired-looking.

'You are the doctor from Cairn Edward my daughter has been pestering me to see?' snapped the elder man. 'My case is a very difficult and complicated one, and quite beyond the reach of an average local practitioner, but I understand from my daughter that you have very special qualifications.' Whereupon I bowed, and said that I was your assistant.'

'Good heavens!' I cried. 'Peterson, had you no sense? Why on earth did you bring my name into the affair? I shall never get over it!'

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

'Oh,' he answered lightly, 'wait a bit. I cleared you sufficiently in the end. Just listen. I was in a tight place, you will admit, but I thought it was best to put on my most impressive manner, and after a look or two at the old fellow, I resolved to treat him for nervous exhaustion. It was a dead fluke, but I had been reading Webb-Playfair's article on Neurasthenia just before I went out, and though men don't often have it, I thought it would do as well for old Bulliston as anything else.

'So I yarned away to him about his condition and symptoms, emaciated physical state, and so forth. Well, when I was getting pretty well warmed up I saw the young man with the hair thin-sown on top rise and go quietly over to another window. I put this down to modesty on his part. He wished to leave me alone with my patient. So I became more and more confidential to old Bulliston.'

('Peterson,' I moaned, 'all is over between us from this moment!')

'But the old ruffian would not allow Mr. Bald-head to remove himself quietly,' said Peterson, continuing his tale calmly.

'James,' he cried sharply, 'stop where you are. All this should be very interesting to you.'

'So it is,' said the young man, smiling in the rummest way, 'very interesting indeed!'

'So, somewhat elated, I went on prescribing rest, massage, the double-feeding dodge, and, above all, no intercourse with his own family. When I got through my rigmarole, the old fellow cocked his head to the side like a blessed dicky-bird, and remarked: 'It shows what wonderful similarity there is between the minds of you men of science. Talk of

the transference of ideas! Why, that is just what my nephew was saying before you came in — almost in the same words. Let me introduce you to my nephew, Dr. Webb-Playfair, of Harley Street.’

‘You could have knocked me down with a straw. I could hardly return the fellow's very chilly nod. I heartily confounded that little bird-nesting minx who had got me into such a scrape. But I had an idea.

‘Perhaps, sir,’ I said, ‘if you would allow me to consult Dr. Webb-Playfair we might be able to assist one another.’

‘Certainly,’ cried the little old man, speaking as sharply as a Skye-terrier yelps; ‘be off into the library. Jem, you know the way!’

I tell you what, McQuhirr, I did not feel particularly chirpy as I followed that fellow's shiny crown into the next room. He sat down on a table, swinging one leg and looking at me without speaking. For a moment I could not find words to begin, but his eyes were on me with a kind of twinkle in them.

‘Well?’ he said, as if he had a right to demand an explanation. That decided me. I would make a clean breast of it.

‘So I told him the whole story — how I had first met Truda, of our bird-nesting, and how Truda wanted me to be able to come often to the house — because of the eggs.

The bald young man began to laugh as I went on with my narrative, though it was no laughing matter to me, I can tell you. And especially when I confessed that I did not think there was anything the matter with his uncle, and that Neurasthenia

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

was the first thing that came into my head, because I had been reading his own article in the Lancet before I came out. He thought that was the cream of the joke. He was all of a good fellow, and no mistake.

'So,' he said, 'to speak plainly, you are in love with my cousin, and you plotted to keep the father in bed in order that you might make love to the daughter! That is the most remarkable recent application of medical science I have heard of!'

'Oh no,' I cried, 'I assure you it was Truda who...'

'Ah,' he said quietly, 'it was Truda, was it? I can well believe that.'

'Then he thought a long while, and at last he said, 'Well, it will do the old man a great deal of good to stay in bed and not worry his own family and the whole neighbourhood with his whimsies. Moreover, milk diet is a very soothing thing. We will let it go at that. You can settle your own affairs with my cousin Gertrude, Dr. Peterson; I have nothing to do with that. Indeed, I would not meddle with that volcanic young person's private concerns for all the wealth of the Indies! Let us go back to my uncle.'

'So,' concluded Peterson, knocking the ashes out of his pipe on the bars of the grate, 'the old fellow has been in bed ever since and has drunk his own weight in good cow's milk several times over. He is putting on flesh every day, and his temper is distinctly improving. He can be trusted with a candlestick beside him on the stand now, without the certainty of his throwing it at his nurse.'

'And Truda,' I suggested, 'what did she say?'

'Well, of course I told her how her cousin had said that I had ordered the father to bed, in order that I might make love to the daughter. She and I were in

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

the waterside glade beyond the pond at the time. You know the place. We were looking for dippers' nests. She stopped and said:

'Jem Playfair said that, did he?'

'Yes, those were his very words,' I said, with a due sense of their heinousness.

'He said you sent my father to bed that you might make love to me?'

'Yes.'

'She looked all about the glade, and then up at me.

'Well did you?' she said.

This is Peterson's story exactly as he told it to me on my return. That is some time ago now, but there is little to add. Mr. Bliss Bulliston is now much better both in health and in temper, and there is every reason to believe that I shall lose my assistant some of these days. The young couple are talking of going out to British Columbia, No complete collection of the eggs of that Colony has ever been made, and Peterson says that the climate is so healthy there, that for some years there will be nothing for him to do but to help Truda with her collecting.

This is all very well now, in the first months of an engagement, but as a family man myself, I have my doubts as to the permanence of such an arrangement.

22.TWO HUMOURISTS

Our gentle humourist is Nathan Monypenny. No man ever heard him laugh aloud, yet as few had ever seen him without a gleam of something akin to kindly humour in his eye. Even now, when the bitterness of life and its ultimate loneliness are upon him, it is a pleasure to be next Nathan, even at a funeral. During that dreadful ten minutes when the black-coated, crinkle-trousered company waits outside for the 'service' to be over, his company is universally considered 'as good as a penny bap and a warm drink.' In former days, within the memory of my father, he had a friend and fellow-humourist in the village, one 'Doog' (that is, Douglas) Carnochan.

The contrast between the two companions was remarkable. They both lived in the same street of our little country hamlet. Indeed, necessarily so, for Whinnyliggate has but one street, strictly so called. The few cottages along the 'Well-road,' and the more pretentious cluster of upstarts which keeps the Free Kirk in countenance on the braeface, have never arrogated to themselves the name of a street.

So at one end of the Piccadilly-cum-Regent-street of Whinnyliggate — the upper end — lived Nathan Monypenny, and at the other end dwelt his rival, Doog, also, though less worthily, denominated 'humourist.' They were thus separated by something considerably less than a quarter of a mile of honest unpaved king's highway. But, though they were personally friends, green oceans and trackless continents lay between their several characters and

dispositions.

Nathan, at the upper end, was a bachelor, hale, fresh, and hearty as when he had finished his 'prenticeship. Doog at forty possessed several children, all that remained of a poor, overworked, downtrodden wife, and a countenance so marled and purpled with drink, that he looked an old man before his time. Nathan's shop was his own, and he was understood to have already a 'weel-filled stocking-fit up the lum,' or, in the modern interpretation, a comfortable balance down at Cairn Edward Bank, and a quiet old age assured to him by a life of industrious self-denial.

Doog never had a penny to bless himself with, later in the week than Tuesday; and, indeed, often enough very few to bless his wife withal even on Saturday nights, when, as was his custom, he staggered homewards with the poor remnants of his week's wage in his pocket.

Nathan's wit was of the kind which goes best with the sedate tapping of a snuffmull, or the tinkling of brass weights into counter-scales — Doog's rang loudest to the jingling of toddy tumblers. Nathan loved to gossip doucely at the door of eventide with the other tradesmen of the village, with Bob Carter the joiner, his apron twisted about his scarred hands, with bluff prosperous Joe Mitchell the mason, and with Peter Miles the tailor, as he sat on the low seat outside his door picking the last basting threads out of a new waistcoat.

Doog's witticisms, on the other hand, were chiefly launched in the 'Golden Lion,' amid the uproarious laughter of Jake McMinn, the 'cattle dealer frae Stranraer,' Leein' Tam, the local horse-doctor

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

(without diploma), and 'Chuckie' Orchison, the village ne'er-do-weel and licensed sponger for drinks upon the neighbourhood.

Yet there existed a curious and inexplicable liking between the two men. There was never a day that Nathan, the douce and respectable, did not leave his quiet white cottage at the head of the brae, where he dwelt all alone with his groceries, and step sedately down, stopping every twenty yards to gossip, or drop a word, flavoured with one of his kindly smiles, with every passer-by. He never seemed to be going anywhere in particular, yet he always visited Doog Carnochan's house before he returned. And many a night did Nathan, finding the husband not at home, pursue and recapture the truant, and bring him back to the tumble-down shanty, where the five ill-fed children and the one weary-faced woman furnished a tragic comment upon the far-renowned convivial humours of the husband and father.

The tale of Nathan and Doog is one which wants not examples in all ages of the earth's history. It is the story of a woman's mistake. Once Dahlia Ogilvy had been a bright frolicsome girl, winding the young fellows of the parish round her fingers with arch mischief, granting a favour here and denying one there, with that pleasant and innocent abuse of power which comes so suddenly to a girl who, in any rank of life, awakes to find herself beautiful.

There was nothing of the wilful beauty now about Dahlia Carnochan. A stronger woman might have mastered her fate, a weaker would have fled from it; but she only accepted the inevitable, and, like one who knows beforehand that her task is hopeless, she did what she could with silent resignation,

waiting clear-eyed for that death which alone would bring her to the end of her pain.

Yet at the time it had seemed natural enough that Dahlia should prefer the handsome debonair Douglas Carnochan, to quiet Nathan Monypenny, who had so little to say for himself, and so seldom said it. Besides, Dahlia had always known that she could with a word send Nathan to the ends of the earth, whilst there were certain wild ways about the other even then, which had, for a foolish ignorant maid, all the attraction of the unknown. She was a little afraid of Doog Carnochan, and there is no better subsoil whereon to grow love in a girl's heart, than just the desire of conquest mixed with a little fear.

So it came to pass that, though Nathan had carried little Dahlia's school-bag and fought her battles ever since she could toddle across from one cottage to the other, it was not he who, in the fulness of time, when the blossom came to its brightest and most beautiful, gathered it and set it on his bosom. It ought to have been, but it was not.

As a young man Doog Carnochan was bright and clever. Most people in the village prophesied a brilliant future for him — that is, those who knew not the 'unstable as water' which was written like a legend across his character. He was the son of a small crofter in the neighbourhood, but he companied habitually with those above him in rank, with the sons of large farmers and rich stock-breeders. Some of these, his cronies and boon companions, would be sure to assist him, so every one said. They would set him up as a 'dealer' — they would put him in charge of a 'led' farm or two.

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

Doog's fortune was as good as made.

So, at least, injudicious flatterers assured him. So he himself believed. So he told the innocent, lily-like Dahlia Ogilvy at the time of year when the Sweet William gave forth his evening perfume, when the dew was on the latest wall-flowers, and the scarlet lightning spangled the ducky places beneath the hedgerows where the lovers were wont to sit. But the blue cowled bells of the poisonous monkshood in the cottage flower-beds they did not see, though with some premonition of fate, Dahlia shivered and nestled to her betrothed as the breeze swept over them chill and bitter from the east.

And Nathan Monypenny, leaning on the gate-post that he might sigh out his soul towards the cottage of his beloved, by chance heard their words; and, therewith being stricken well-nigh to the death, softly withdrew and left them alone.

After that night Nathan sought the company of Doog Carnochan more than ever.

Friends warned him that Doog was no fit companion for such as he. They insisted that he was neglecting his business. They said all those useful and convincing things which friends keep in stock for such occasions. Yet Nathan did not desist, till he had arranged the marriage of Dahlia Ogilvy and Douglas Carnochan beyond all possibility of retractation.

He it was who accompanied the swain to put up the banns. He it was who paid the five-shilling fee that the pair should be thrice cried on one Sabbath day, and the wedding hastened by a whole fortnight.

Perhaps he wished to shorten his own pain. Perhaps, he told himself, when once Dahlia was

Douglas Carnochan's wife, he would think no more of her. At any rate, something strong and moving wrought in the reticent heart of the young tradesman. He approved the house which Doog took for his bride. He also guaranteed the rent. He lent the money for the furniture, and looked after Doog on the day of the marriage, that he might be brought soberly and worthily to the altar.

It was a plain-song altar indeed, for, of course, the pair were married in the little white cottage next to Nathan's, where Dahlia had lived all her life. 'When he saw her in bridal white, Nathan remembered with a sudden gulp a certain little toddling thing in white pinafores, whom he used to lift over the hedge that he might feed her with the earliest ripe gooseberries.

Every one said that they made a handsome pair as they stood up before the minister, who, with his back to the fire, did not know that he was singeing his Geneva gown. For, being yet young to these occasions, he wore that encumbrance because it gave him an opportunity of displaying the hood of his college degree.

The young women smiled covertly at the contrast afforded by the bridegroom and his 'best-man,' as they stood up together. They did not wonder at Dahlia's preference. Any of them would have done the same thing, if she had had the chance.

'What a fine gray suit! — how well it fits!'

'Yes, and that pale blue tie, how it matches the flower in his coat!'

Thus they gossiped, all unaware that it was the hard-earned money of the plain-favoured and shy 'best-man' which had bought all that wedding

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

raiment, paid for that sky-blue tie, and that even the flower in the bridegroom's buttonhole had grown in Nathan Monypenny's garden, and had been plucked and affixed by his hands.

Thus it was that the story began, and this was the reason why Nathan sought carefully day by day, if by any means he might yet withdraw his friend's erring feet out of fearful pit and miry clay.

Never a morning dawned for Nathan, waking, as he had done all his life, with the hum of the ranged beehives under his window in his ear, or else listening to the pattering of the winter storms on his lattice, that he did not bethink himself: 'It is I who am responsible. I must help him.' Then he would add with a sigh: 'And her.'

And so help he did, for the most part in ways hidden and secret. For he dared not give money to Doog. He knew all too well where that would have gone. Neither for very pride's sake, and in reverence for the secret of his heart, could he bring himself to give money to Dahlia. Nevertheless, as by some unseen hand, the tired heartsick woman found her burden in many directions marvellously eased.

Sticks were stacked in the little wood-shed which Doog had set up in the first virtuous glow of husband-hood — and never been inside since. No hens laid like Dahlia's — and the strange thing was that they invariably laid in the night, sometimes a dozen at a time, all in one nest. Her children, playing in the hot dusk of her little garden, had more than once turned up a sovereign or a crown-piece wrapped in paper and run with it to their mother.

From Nathan's shop, also, there came fitches of

bacon which were never ordered by Dahlia Carnochan — flour and meal, too, in times of stress. And it nearly always was a time of stress with Doog.

Twice a year Nathan, with much circumlocution, would extract a reluctant shilling or two from Doog on a flush pay-night, taking care that some of his cronies should hear the colloquy. Then in the morning he would send round the six months' account duly and completely receipted.

But more often than not the crony would put it all round the village that Nathan Monypenny had been dunning poor Doog Carnochan the night before; and so, among the unthinking, Nathan got the reputation of being a hard man.

'He doesna do onything for nocht! Na, sune or syne, Nathan likes to see the colour o' his siller,' was said of him behind his back. And Doog's generous kindness of heart was dwelt upon as a foil to his friend's niggardliness.

'He micht hae letten puir Doog owe him the bit shillin' or twa and never missed it!' represented the general sense of the community.

But Doog himself, be his faults what they might, allowed none to speak ill of Nathan Monypenny.

Did he not half choke the life out of Davie Hoatson for some hinted comment (it was never clearly understood what), till they had to be separated by kindly violence, Doog being yet unappeased? Furthermore, did he not seek the jester for three whole days, all the time breathing fire and fury, with intent to choke the other half of a worthless life out of him?

This was the state of the case when Nathan Monypenny's life temptation came upon him. It was

a grim and notable January night — the fourth day of the great thaw. The rain had gusted and blown and threshed and pelted upon those window-panes of Whinnyliggate which looked towards the west, till there was not a speck of dirt upon them anywhere, except on the inside. The snow had melted fast under the pitiless downpour, and the patient sheep stood about behind dyke-backs, or with the courage of despair pushed through holes in bedraggled hedges, to take a furtive nibble at the brown stubble of last year's cornfields.

It was half-past nine when Nathan went to his door to look out. Nathan Monypenny had built himself a lobby, and so was thought to be 'upsetting.' At that time for a man to wear a white collar on week-days, or to walk with his hands out of his pockets, for a woman to be 'dressed' in the forenoon, or to wear gloves except when actually entering the kirk door, for a householder to whitewash his premises oftener than once in five years, or to erect a porch to his dwelling, was held to be 'upsetting' — that is, he (or she) was evidently setting up to be better than the neighbours — an iniquity as unpopular in Whinnyliggate as elsewhere in the world.

From this 'upsetting' porch, then, Nathan looked out. A dash of rain, solid as if the little house had shipped a sea in a perilous ocean passage, took Nathan about the ankles and rebuked him in a very practical fashion for coming to the door, as is Galloway custom, in his 'stocking-feet.' It had blown in from a broken 'roan' pipe, which Nathan had been intending to mend as soon as the snow went off the roof.

Nathan shut the door and went within. He had seen little through the blackness save the bright lights of the 'Golden Lion,' and heard nothing above the long-drawn whoo of the storm save the noisy chorus of the drinking song which Doog Carnochan was singing. Nathan knew it was Doog's voice. About this he could make no mistake. Had he not listened to it long ago, when Doog sang in the village choir, knowing all the while, full well, that he was singing his Dahlia's heart out of her bosom? Nathan Monypenny sighed and thought of that desolate house down at the other end of the street where that same Dahlia would even then be putting her children to bed. He knew just the faintly wearied look there would be on the face from which the youthful roses had long since faded. He would have given all he possessed in the world to sit and watch her thus, to comfort her in her loneliness; but, resolutely putting the temptation aside, he drew the great Bible that had been his father's off its shelf and laid it on the table.

Then he brought a new candle from the shop and lighted it. But, so great was the storm without that even in that comfortable inner room the draught blew the flame about and the words seemed to dance on the printed page.

Again and again during his reading Nathan lifted his head and listened. The 'wag-at-the-wa' clock struck ten with enormous birr and clatter, beginning with a buzz of anticipation five minutes too soon, and continuing to emit applausive 'curmurrings' of internal satisfaction for full five minutes after the actual stroke of the hour had died on the ear.

Nathan paused in his reading to listen for the

sound of the roisterers' feet going homeward from the 'Golden Lion.' Doog would be one of those, most likely the drunkest and the noisiest. He must be half-way down the street by now, stumbling along with trippings and foul, irresponsible words. Now Dahlia would be opening the door to him — Nathan knew the look on her face. When he shut his eyes he could see it even more clearly. In the middle dark of the night, when he lay sleepless, staring at the ceiling, he could see it most clearly of all.

For this reason he was in no hurry to finish and put out the light; but it had to be done at last. And then with his head on the pillow Nathan Monypenny bethought himself with small satisfaction of his wasted life. Of what use was his house, his money in the bank, his eldership, the praise of men, the satisfactory state of his ledger? After all, he was a lonely man, and out there in the rain, dank and dripping, leafless and forlorn, shivered the hedge over which in golden weather he had lifted Dahlia Ogilvy. At the rose-bush in the corner she had once let him kiss her. Ah! but he must not think of that. She was Dahlia Carnochan, and her drunken husband had just reeled home to her. Yet as he sat and stared at the red peats on the hearth Nathan Monypenny could think of nothing else, and how her hair had had a flower-like scent as he drew her to him that night when (for once in his gray and barren life) the roses bloomed red and smelled sweet.

But there was something else which kept Nathan's nerves on the stretch, something that was not summed up in his thoughts of Dahlia—an apprehension of impending disaster. Even after he had gone to bed he lifted his head more than once

from the pillow, for his heart, stounding and rushing in his ears, shut out all other noises. Then he sat up and listened. He seemed to hear a cry above the roar and swelter of the storm — a man's cry for help in mortal need.

Nathan rose and drew on his clothes hurriedly, yet buttoning with his accustomed carefulness an overcoat closely about him. Then, leaving a lighted candle on the table, he opened the door and stepped out into the darkness. The wind met him like a wall. The rain assailed his cheeks and stunned his ears like a volley of bullets. For a full minute he stood exposed to the broad fury of the tempest, slashed by the driving sleet, beaten and deafened into bewilderment by a turmoil of buffeting gusts. Then, recovering himself a little, he turned aside the lee of the gable of his cottage, which looked towards the northeast. Here he was more sheltered, and though the wind still sang stridently overhead, and the swirls of lashing rain occasionally beat upon him like 'hale water,' he could listen with some composure for a repetition of the sound which had disturbed him.

There — there it was again! A hoarse cry, ending in a curious gasp and gurgle of extinction. 'Nathan almost thought that he could distinguish his own name.

He put his hands to his mouth funnel-wise, to form a sort of rough speaking-trumpet. 'Halloo!' he shouted. 'Where are you?'

But it was an appreciable interval before any voice replied, and then it seemed more like a dying man's moan of anguish than any human tones.

'It's somebody in the water!' Nathan cried, and

rushed down the little strip of garden which separated his cottage from the Whinnyliggate Burn. This was ordinarily a clear little rivulet, running lucidly brown and pleasantly at prattle over a pebbly bed. Boys fished for 'bairdies' in its three-foot-deep pools. Iris and water-lily fringed the swamps where it expanded into broad sedgy ponds. But in spite of its apparent innocence, Whinnyliggate Lane was a stream of a dangerous reputation. Its ultimate source was a deep mountain lake high among the bosoming hills of Girthon, and when the rains descended and the floods came, it sometimes chanced that the inhabitants of the village awoke to find that their prattling babe had become a giant, and that the burn, which the night before had scarce covered the pebbles in its bed, was now roaring wide and strong, thirty feet from bank to bank, crumbling their garden walls, and even threatening with destruction the sacred Midtoon Brig itself, from time immemorial the Palladium of the liberties and the Parliament House of the gossip of the village.

The part of the bank down which Nathan ran was used by the village smith for the important work of 'hooping wheels,' or shrinking the iron 'shods' on the wheels of the red farm-carts. There were always a few rusty spare 'hoops' of solid iron scattered about, while a general debris of blacksmithery, outcast and decrepit, cumbered the burnside.

Before Nathan had gone far he found himself splashing in the rising water.

'Loch Girthon has broken its dam!' he murmured; 'God help the pur soul that fa's intil Whinnyliggate Lane this nicht!'

It was nearly pitch dark, and Nathan Monypenny, standing up to his knees in the swirl of the flood, called aloud, but got no reply from any human voice. The forward hurl of the storm whooping overhead, the roar of the icy torrent fighting with the caving banks beneath, were the only sounds he could distinguish.

He was indeed on the point of leaving the water edge and regaining his comfortable cottage, when, wading through a shallow extension of the stream near the bridge, his foot struck something soft, which carried with it a curiously human suggestion. He stopped and laid his hand on the rough cloth and sodden sock which covered a man's ankle.

Though not great of stature, Nathan Monypenny was both strong and brave. He stooped and endeavoured to disentangle the boot from the iron hoop in which it was caught. Succeeding in this, he next endeavoured to pull the drowning man out of the water. But the head and upper part of the body hung over the bank, and were drawn down by the whole force of the torrent.

Again and again Nathan strove with all his might, but the water wrenched and wrestled till the body was almost snatched from his grasp. More than once, indeed, Nathan came very near going over the verge himself and sharing the fate of the unfortunate whom he was endeavouring to rescue.

At last, however, by dint of exertions almost superhuman, he succeeded in getting the man to the edge of the water, and immediately sank exhausted on the sodden grass. By-and-bye, however, he staggered up, and without ever thinking of going to seek for help, he succeeded in balancing

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

the unconscious burden upon his shoulders and carrying it staggering to his own door.

The candle he had lighted was still burning, though it seemed to Nathan that he must have been a very long time away. He let the body fall upon the settle bed, and then, catching sight of the pale features, dripping ghastly under the flicker of the farthing dip, he sank dismayed on a chair.

It was Doog Carnochan — Dahlia Carnochan's husband. The story was plain enough. Stumbling homeward from the 'Golden Lion,' he had missed his drunken way, and wandered down by the 'hooping' place to the water's edge.

Nathan stared open-mouthed. What should he do? — go for assistance? That perhaps had been wisest—yet, to leave a man in whom there might be some faint spark of life! He rose and stretched Doog's arms out over his head and back again time after time, as he had once seen a doctor do on the ice after a curling accident.

But there was no drawing of breath, nor could he distinguish the least beating of the heart. He took down the little hand-mirror, which had satisfied the frugal demands of his toilet all these years, and put it close to the drowned man's lips.

Yes — no—it could not be, yet it was just possible that there might be a faint dimming of the surface of the mirror.

Then a hot wondrous thought leaped up in Nathan Monypenny's heart — the devil in the garb of an angel of light.

What if he were simply to hold his hand — the man was as good as dead already.

And what then? There rose up before Nathan

Mony-penny a vision of the woman whom he had loved more than life, of a pale and weary face upon which he would rejoice to bring out the roses as in the days of old. Happiness would do it, he knew. And, like all true lovers, he believed that he alone could make that one woman happy. Douglas Carnochan? What was he but a drunkard who had blighted two lives? If a hand were stirred to help him now, he would simply go on and finish the fell work of the years. His Dahlia's face would grow yet more weary, her shoulders more bent, and her eyes would less seldom be raised from the ground till on a thrice-welcome day the grave should be opened before her. Nathan knew it all by heart.

And this man — why did he deserve to live? Had not he (Nathan) afforded him every chance? Had he not obtained situation after situation for him? Had he not, in fact, kept Doog Carnochan and his family for years? Surely God did not require from him this great final sacrifice. It was certainly a chance to do lasting good — a happy woman, a happy man, a happy home! Better, too, (so Nathan told himself) for Douglas Carnochan's children. He would be a father to them — that which this their own father had never been. He would train, instruct, place them in the world. But — he would be a murderer!

After an hour's hard work Doog Carnochan sighed. Five minutes more and he opened his eyes. They twinkled blackly up at his preserver with a kind of ironical appreciation of the situation, and he smiled.

'Ah, Nathan,' he murmured, 'sae it's you that has

THE STICKIT MINISTER'S WOOING

drawn me oot o' the black flood water! Man, ye had better hae let weel alane!'

On this occasion Doog was not a humourist only. He was also a true prophet. For, from every point of view save that of the Eternal Decrees, it would indeed have been infinitely better if Nathan had let well alone, and not wrested back the unstable and degraded spirit of Douglas Carnochan from the rushing waters of Whinnyliggate Lane, that January night when Loch Girthon burst its bounds.

For, as Nathan had forecast, even so it was. Doog promptly returned to his wallowing in the mire, without even making a pretence of amending his restored life. Duly he brought down his wife's too early gray hairs in sorrow to the grave. His children, left to run wild, divided their time between the 'Golden Lion' and the country gaol. Doog drank himself into an unhonoured grave. Only Nathan Monypenny remains, an old man now, yet holding firm-lipped to a conviction that God has explanations of the working of His laws which He refuses to us on this Hither Side, but which will be granted in full to us when we 'know as also we are known.'

After Doog's death Nathan bought and immediately razed to the ground the cottage at the foot of the street where Dahlia Carnochan's life tragedy had been enacted. He has planted a garden of flowers there, to the scorn and scandal of the whole village, which is cut to its utilitarian heart to see so much good potato land wasted — simply wasted.

And every night before Nathan goes to bed he steps quietly to the low place in the privet hedge,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

over which he lifted little Dahlia Ogilvy more than fifty years ago. He does nothing when he gets there. He does not even pray. He has none to pray for, and he wants nothing for himself save God's ultimate gift, easeful death, and that, he knows, cannot long be delayed.

But if you watch him closely, you may see him lift his hand and rest it gently upon the stem of an ancient rose-tree, as if he had laid it in benediction upon a young child's head.

Also available in Galloway Raiders digital format:

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING
OF THE COMPLETE CROCKETT

- 1893 The Stickit Minister and some common men
- 1894 Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills
- 1894 The Play Actress
- 1894 The Raiders
- 1894 The Lilac Sunbonnet
- 1895 Bog Myrtle and Peat
- 1895 A Galloway Herd
- 1895 Men of the Moss Hags
- 1896 Cleg Kelly
- 1896 The Grey Man
- 1896 Sweetheart Travellers
- 1897 Lads' Love
- 1897 Lochinvar
- 1897 Sir Toady Lion
- 1898 The Red Axe
- 1898 The Standard Bearer
- 1899 The Black Douglas
- 1899 Kit Kennedy
- 1899 Ione March
- 1900 Joan of the Sword Hand
- 1900 Stickit Minister's Wooing
- 1900 Little Anna Mark
- 1901 Cinderella
- 1901 The Firebrand
- 1901 Love Idylls
- 1901 The Silver Skull
- 1902 The Dark o' the Moon
- 1902 Flower o' the Corn
- 1903 The Adventurer in Spain

1903 The Banner of Blue
1904 Love of Miss Anne
1904 Strong Mac
1904 Raiderland
1904 Red Cap Tales
1905 Maid Margaret
1905 The Cherry Ribband
1905 Kid McGhie
1905 Sir Toady Crusoe
1906 White Plumes of Navarre
1907 Me and Myn
1907 Little Esson
1907 Vida
1908 Deep Moat Grange
1908 Princess Penniless
1908 Bloom o' the Heather
1908 Red Cap Adventures
1909 The Dew of Their Youth
1909 Men of the Mountain
1909 Seven Wise Men
1909 My Two Edinburghs
1909 Rose of the Wilderness
1910 Young Nick and Old Nick
1911 The Lady of a 100 Dresses
1911 Love in Pernicketty Town
1911 The Smugglers
1912 Anne of the Barricades
1912 Sweethearts at Home
1912 The Moss Troopers
1913 Sandy's Love
1913 A Tatter of Scarlet
1914 Silver Sand

POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
- 1917 The Azure Hand
- 1920 The White Pope
- 1926 Rogues' Island
- 2016 Peter the Renegade

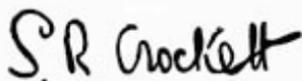
Find out more about Crockett's life literature and legacy at:

www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

www.srcrockett.weebly.com

and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at
www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.