

Wilson's Tales of the Borders and of Scotland, Volume XXIII eBook

Wilson's Tales of the Borders and of Scotland, Volume XXIII

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Wilson's Tales of the Borders and of Scotland, Volume XXIII eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	8
Page 1.....	9
Page 2.....	10
Page 3.....	12
Page 4.....	13
Page 5.....	15
Page 6.....	17
Page 7.....	18
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	22
Page 11.....	23
Page 12.....	25
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	28
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	30
Page 17.....	31
Page 18.....	32
Page 19.....	33
Page 20.....	34
Page 21.....	35
Page 22.....	36

Page 23.....	37
Page 24.....	38
Page 25.....	39
Page 26.....	40
Page 27.....	41
Page 28.....	42
Page 29.....	43
Page 30.....	44
Page 31.....	45
Page 32.....	46
Page 33.....	47
Page 34.....	48
Page 35.....	50
Page 36.....	51
Page 37.....	52
Page 38.....	54
Page 39.....	56
Page 40.....	57
Page 41.....	58
Page 42.....	59
Page 43.....	60
Page 44.....	61
Page 45.....	62
Page 46.....	63
Page 47.....	65
Page 48.....	67

Page 49.....	68
Page 50.....	69
Page 51.....	70
Page 52.....	71
Page 53.....	73
Page 54.....	75
Page 55.....	77
Page 56.....	78
Page 57.....	79
Page 58.....	80
Page 59.....	81
Page 60.....	82
Page 61.....	83
Page 62.....	84
Page 63.....	85
Page 64.....	86
Page 65.....	88
Page 66.....	89
Page 67.....	91
Page 68.....	92
Page 69.....	94
Page 70.....	95
Page 71.....	96
Page 72.....	97
Page 73.....	98
Page 74.....	99

Page 75.....	101
Page 76.....	103
Page 77.....	104
Page 78.....	105
Page 79.....	107
Page 80.....	108
Page 81.....	110
Page 82.....	112
Page 83.....	113
Page 84.....	115
Page 85.....	116
Page 86.....	117
Page 87.....	118
Page 88.....	120
Page 89.....	121
Page 90.....	122
Page 91.....	124
Page 92.....	126
Page 93.....	127
Page 94.....	128
Page 95.....	129
Page 96.....	130
Page 97.....	131
Page 98.....	132
Page 99.....	133
Page 100.....	134

Page 101.....	135
Page 102.....	136
Page 103.....	137
Page 104.....	139
Page 105.....	141
Page 106.....	142
Page 107.....	143
Page 108.....	144
Page 109.....	146
Page 110.....	148
Page 111.....	149
Page 112.....	151
Page 113.....	152
Page 114.....	153
Page 115.....	154
Page 116.....	156
Page 117.....	158
Page 118.....	160
Page 119.....	162
Page 120.....	164
Page 121.....	165
Page 122.....	167
Page 123.....	169
Page 124.....	171
Page 125.....	173
Page 126.....	174

Page 127.....	175
Page 128.....	177
Page 129.....	178
Page 130.....	179
Page 131.....	180
Page 132.....	181
Page 133.....	182
Page 134.....	183
Page 135.....	184
Page 136.....	185
Page 137.....	186
Page 138.....	187
Page 139.....	188
Page 140.....	189
Page 141.....	190
Page 142.....	191
Page 143.....	192

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
THE LAWYER'S TALES.		1
THE ORPHAN.		19
THE BURGHER'S TALES.		23
GLEANINGS OF THE COVENANT.		40
THE STORY OF MARY BROWN.		44
TIBBY FOWLER.		56
THE CRADLE OF LOGIE.		60
THE DEATH OF THE CHEVALIER DE LA BEAUTE.		81
THE STORY OF THE PELICAN.		85
THE WIDOW'S AE SON.		92
THE LAWYER'S TALES.		95
THE TWIN BROTHERS.		105
THE STORY OF THE GIRL FORGER.		125
THE BURGHER'S TALES.		135
THE FAITHFUL WIFE		140
END OF VOL. XXIII.		143

Page 1

THE LAWYER'S TALES.

LORD KAMES'S PUZZLE.

On looking over some Session papers which had belonged to Lord Kames, with the object, I confess, of getting hold of some facts—those entities called by Quintilian the bones of truth, the more by token, I fancy, that they so often stick in the throat—which might contribute to my legends, I came to some sheets whereon his lordship had written some hasty remarks, to the effect that the case Napier *versus* Napier was the most curious puzzle that ever he had witnessed since he had taken his seat on the bench. The papers were fragmentary, consisting of parts of a Reclaiming Petition and some portion of a Proof that had been led in support of a brieve of service; but I got enough to enable me to give the story, which I shall do in such a connected manner as to take the reader along with me, I hope pleasantly, and without any inclination to choke upon the foresaid bones.

Without being very particular about the year, which really I do not know with further precision than that it was within the first five years of Lord Kames's senator-ship, I request the reader to fancy himself in a small domicile in Toddrick's Wynd, in the old city of Edinburgh; and I request this the more readily that, as we all know, Nature does not exclude very humble places from the regions of romance, neither does she deny to very humble personages the characters of heroes and heroines. Not that I have much to say in the first instance either of the place or the persons; the former being no more than a solitary room and a bed-closet, where yet the throb of life was as strong and quick as in the mansions of the great, and the latter composed of two persons—one, a decent, hard-working woman called Mrs. Hislop, whose duty in this world was to keep her employers clean in their clothes, wherein she stood next to the minister, insomuch as cleanliness is next to godliness—in other words, she was a washerwoman; the other being a young girl, verging upon sixteen, called Henrietta, whose qualities, both of mind and body, might be comprised in the homely eulogy, "as blithe as bonnie." So it may be, that if you are alarmed at the humility of the occupation of the one—even with your remembrance that Sir Isaac Newton experimented upon soap-bubbles—as being so intractable in the plastic-work of romance, you may be appeased by the qualities of the other; for has it not been our delight to sing for a thousand years, yea, in a thousand songs, too, the praises of young damsels, whether under the names of Jenny or Peggy, or those of Clarinda or Florabella, or whether engaged in herding flocks by Logan Waters, or dispensing knights' favours under the peacock? But we cannot afford to dispose of our young heroine in this curt way, for her looks formed parts of the lines of a strange history; and so we must be permitted the privilege of narrating that, while Mrs. Hislop's *protegee* did

Page 2

not come within that charmed circle which contains, according to the poets, so many angels without wings, she was probably as fair every whit as Dowsabell. Yet, after all, we are not here concerned with beauty, which, as a specialty in one to one, and as a universality in all to all, is beyond the power of written description. We have here to do simply with some traits which, being hereditary, not derived from Mrs. Hislop, have a bearing upon our strange legend: the very slightest cast in the eyes, which in its piquancy belied a fine genial nature in the said Henney; and a classic nose, which, partaking of the old Roman type, and indicating pride, was equally untrue to a generosity of feeling which made friends of all who saw her—*except one*. A strange exception this *one*; for who, even in this bad world, could be an enemy to a creature who conciliated sympathy as a love, and defied antipathy as an impossibility? Who could *he* be? or rather, who could *she* be? for man seems to be excluded by the very instincts of his nature. The question may be answered by the evolution of facts; than which what other have we even amidst the dark gropings into the mystery of our wonderful being?

Mrs. Hislop's head was over the skeil, wherein lay one of the linen sheets of Mr. Dallas, the writer to the signet, which, with her broad hands, she was busy twisting into the form of a serpent; and no doubt there were indications of her efforts in the drops of perspiration which stood upon her good-humoured, gaucy face, so suggestive of dewdrops ('bating the poetry) on the leaves of a big blush peony. In this work she was interrupted by the entrance of Henney, who came rushing in as if under the influence of some emotion which had taken her young heart by surprise.

"What think ye, minny?" she cried, as she held up her hands.

"The deil has risen again from the grave where he was buried in Kirkcaldy," was the reply, with a laugh.

"No, that's no it," continued the girl.

"Then what is it?" was the question.

"He's dead," replied Henney.

"Who is dead?" again asked Mrs. Hislop.

"The strange man," replied the girl.

And a reply, too, which brought the busy worker to a pause in her work, for she understood who the *he* was, and the information went direct through the ear to the heart; but Henney, supposing that she was not understood, added—

“The man who used to look at me with yon terrible eyes.”

“Yes, yes, dear, I understand you,” said the woman, as she let the coil fall, and sat down upon a chair, under the influence of strong emotion. “But who told you?”

“Jean Graham,” replied the girl.

Page 3

An answer which seemed, for certain reasons known to herself, to satisfy the woman, for the never another word she said, any more than if her tongue had been paralyzed by the increased action of her heart; but as we usually find that when that organ in woman is quiet more useful powers come into action, so the sensible dame began to exercise her judgment. A few minutes sufficed for forming a resolution; nor was it sooner formed than that it was begun to be put into action, yet not before the excited girl was away, no doubt to tell some of her companions of her relief from the bugbear of the man with the terrible eyes. The formation of a purpose might have been observed in her puckered lips and the speculation in her grey eyes. The spirit of romance had visited the small house in Toddrick's Wynd, where for fifteen years the domestic *lares* had sat quietly surveying the economy of poverty. She rose composedly from the chair into which the effect of Henney's exclamation had thrown her, went to the blue chest which contained her holiday suit, took out, one after another, the chintz gown, the mankie petticoat, the curch, the red plaid; and, after washing from her face the perspiration drops, she began to put on her humble finery—all the operation having been gone through with that quiet action which belongs to strong minds where resolution has settled the quivering chords of doubt.

Following the dressed dame up the High Street, we next find her in the writing-booth of Mr. James Dallas, writer to his Majesty's Signet. The gentleman was, after the manner of his tribe, minutely scanning some papers—that is, he was looking into them so sharply that you would have inferred that he was engaged in hunting for “flaws;” a species of game that is both a prey and a reward—*et praeda et premium*, as an old proverb says. Nor shall we say he was altogether pleased when he found his inquiry, whatever it might be, interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Margaret Hislop of Toddrick's Wynd; notwithstanding that to this personage he and Mrs. Dallas, and all the Dallases, were indebted for the whiteness of their linen. No doubt she would be wanting payment of her account; yet why apply to him, and not to Mrs. Dallas? And, besides, it needed only one glance of the writer's eye to show that his visitor had something more of the look of a client than a cleaner of linen; a conclusion which was destined to be confirmed, when the woman, taking up one of the high-backed chairs in the room, placed it right opposite to the man of law, and, hitching her round body into something like stiff dignity, seated herself. Nor was this change from her usual deportment the only one she underwent; for, as soon appeared, her style of speech was to pass from broad Scotch, not altogether into the “Inglis” of the upper ranks, but into a mixture of the two tongues; a feat which she performed very well, and for which she had been qualified by having lived in the service of the great.

Page 4

"And so Mr. Napier of Eastleys is dead?" she began.

"Yes," answered the writer, perhaps with a portion of cheerfulness, seeing he was that gentleman's agent, or "doer," as it was then called; a word far more expressive, as many clients can testify, at least after they are "done;" and seeing also that a dead client is not finally "done" until his affairs are wound up and consigned to the green box.

"And wha is his heir, think ye?" continued his questioner.

"Why, Charles Napier, his nephew," answered the writer, somewhat carelessly.

"I'm no just a'thegither sure of that, Mr. Dallas," said she, with another effort at dignity, which was unfortunately qualified by a knowing wink.

"The deil's in the woman," was the sharp retort, as the writer opened his eyes wider than he had done since he laid down his parchments.

"The deil's in me or no in me," said she; "but this I'm sure of, that Henrietta Hislop—that's our Henney, ye ken—the brawest and bonniest lass in Toddrick's Wynd (and that's no saying little), is the lawful heiress of Mr. John Napier of Eastleys, and was called Henrietta after her mother."

"The honest woman's red wud," said the writer, laughing. "Why, Mrs. Hislop, I always took you for a shrewd, sensible woman. Do you really think that, because you bore a child to Mr. John Napier, therefore Henney Hislop is the heiress of her reputed father?"

"Me bear a bairn to Mr. Napier!" cried the offended client. "Wha ever said I was the mother of Henney Hislop?"

"Everybody," replied he. "We never doubted it, though I admit she has none of your features."

"Everybody is a leear, then," rejoined the woman tartly. "There's no a drap of blood in the lassie's body can claim kindred with me or mine; though, if it were so, it would be no dishonour, for the Hislops were lairds of Highslaps in Ayrshire at the time of Malcolm Mucklehead."

"And whose daughter, by the mother's side, is she, then?" asked he, as his curiosity began to wax stronger.

"Ay, you have now your hand on the cocked egg," replied she, with a look of mystery. "The other was a wind ane, and you've just to sit a little and you'll see the chick."

The writer settled himself into attention, and the good dame thought it proper, like some preachers who pause two or three minutes (the best part of their discourse) after they

have given out the text, to raise a wonder how long they intend to hold their tongue, and thereby produce attention, to retain her speech until she had attained the due solemnity.

“It is now,” she began, in a low mysterious voice, “just sixteen years come June,—and if ye want the day, it will be the 15th,—and if ye want the hour, we may say eleven o’clock at night, when I was making ready for my bed,—I heard a knock at my door, and the words of a woman, ‘Oh, Mrs. Hislop, Mrs. Hislop!’ So I ran and opened the door; and wha think ye I saw but Jean Graham, Mr. Napier’s cook, with een like twa candles, and her mouth as wide as if she had been to swallow the biggest sup of porridge that ever crossed ploughman’s craig?”

Page 5

“‘What’s ado, woman?’ said I, for I thought something fearful had happened.

“‘Oh,’ cried she, ‘my lady’s lighter, and ye’re to come to Meggat’s Land, even noo, this minute, and bide nae man’s hindrance.’

“‘And so I will,’ said I, as I threw my red plaid ower my head; then I blew out my cruse, and out we came, jolting each other in the dark passage through sheer hurry and confusion—down the Canongate, t’ill we came to Meggat’s Land, in at the kitchen door, ben a dark passage, up a stair, then ben another passage, till we came to a back room, the door of which was opened by somebody inside. I was bewildered—the light in the room made my een reel; but I soon came to myself, when I saw a man and Mrs. Kemp the howdie busy rowing something in flannel.

“‘Get along,’ said the man to Jean; ‘you’re not wanted here.’

“‘And as Jean made off, Mrs. Kemp turned to me—

“‘Come here, Mrs. Hislop,’ said she.

“‘So I slipt forward; but the never a word more was said for ten minutes, they were so intent on getting the bairn all right—for ye ken, sir, it was a new-born babe they were busy with: they were as silent as the grave; and indeed everything was so still, that I heard their breathing like a rushing of wind, though they breathed just as they were wont to do. And when they had finished—

“‘Mrs. Hislop,’ said the man, as he turned to me, ‘you’re to take this child and bring it up as your own, or anybody else’s you like, except Mr. Napier’s, and you’re never to say when or how you got it, for it’s a banned creature, with the curse upon it of a malison for the sins of him who begot it and of her who bore it. Swear to it;’ and he held up his hand.

“‘And I swore; but I thought I would just take the advice of the Lord how far my words would bind me to do evil, or leave me to do gude, when the time came. So I took the bairn into my arms.

“‘And wha will pay for the wet-nurse?’ said I; ‘for ye ken I am as dry as a yeld crummie. But there is a woman in Toddrick’s Wynd wha lost her bairn yestreen: she is threatened wi’ a milk-fever, and by my troth this little stranger will cure her; but, besides the nourice-fee, there is my trouble.’

“‘I was coming to that,’ said he, ‘if your supple tongue had left you power to hear mine. In this leathern purse there are twenty gowden guineas—a goodly sum; but whether goodly or no, you must be content; yea, the never a penny more you may expect, for all connection between this child and this house or its master is to be from this moment finished for ever.’

“And a gude quittance it was, I thought, with a bonny bairn and twenty guineas on my side, and nothing on the other but maybe a father’s anger and salt tears, besides the wrath of God against those who forsake their children. So with thankfulness enough I carried away my bundle; and ye’ll guess that Henney Hislop is now the young woman of fifteen who was then that child of a day.”

Page 6

"And is this all the evidence," said the writer, "you have to prove that Henrietta Hislop is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Napier?"

"Maybe no," replied she; "if ye weren't so like the English stranger wha curst the Scotch kail because he did not see on the table the beef that was coming from the kitchen, besides the haggis and the bread-pudding. You've only as yet got the broth, and, for the rest, I will give you Mrs. Kemp, wha told me, as a secret, that the child was brought into the world by her own hands from the living body of Mrs. Napier. Will that satisfy you?"

"No," replied Mr. Dallas, who had got deeper and deeper into a study. "Mr. Napier, I know, was at home that evening when his wife bore a child: that child never could have been given away without his consent; and as for the consent itself, it is a still greater improbability, seeing that he was always anxious for an heir to Eastleys."

"And so maybe he was," replied she; "but I see you are only at the beef yet, and you may be better pleased when you have got the haggis, let alone the pudding. Yea, it is even likely Mr. Napier wanted an heir, and, what is more, he got one, at least an heiress; but sometimes God gives and the devil misgives. And so it was here; for Mr. Napier took it into his head that the child was not his, and, in place of being pleased with an heir, he thought himself cursed with a bastard, begotten on his wife by no other than Captain Preston, his lady's cousin. And where did the devil find that poison growing but in the heart of Isabel Napier, the sister of that very Charles who is now thinking he will heir Eastleys by pushing aside poor Henney? And then the poison, like the old apple, was so fair and tempting; for Mr. Napier had been married ten years, and enjoyed the love that is so bonnie a 'little while when it is new,' and yet had no children, till this one came so exactly nine months after the captain's visit to Scotland, that Satan had little more to do than hold up the temptation. You see, sir, how things come round; but still, according to the old fashion, after a long, weary, dreary turn. Mrs. Napier died next day after the birth; Mr. Napier lived a miserable man; Henney was brought up in poverty, and sometimes distress, but now I hope she has come to her kingdom."

Here Mrs. Hislop stopped; and as there could be no better winding-up of a romance than by bringing her heroine to her kingdom at last, she felt so well pleased with her conclusion, that she could afford to wait longer for her expected applause than the fair story-tellers in the *brigata* under Queen Pampinea; and it was as well that she was thus fortified, for the writer, in place of declaring his satisfaction, with her proofs, seemed, as he lay back in his chair in a deep reverie, to be occupied once more in hunting for flaws. At length, raising himself on his chair, and fixing his eyes upon her with that look of scepticism which a writer assumes when he addresses a would-be new client who wants to push out an old one with a better right—

Page 7

"Mrs. Hislop," said he, "if it had not been that I have always taken you for an honest woman, I would say that you are art and part in fabricating a story without a particle of foundation. There may possibly be some mystery about the birth and parentage of the young girl. You may have got her out of the house of Meggat's Land in the Canongate from a man—not Mr. Napier, you admit—who may have been the father of it by some mother residing in the house; and Mrs. Kemp may have been actuated, by some unknown means, to remove the paternity from the right to the wrong person. All this is possible; but that the child could be that one which Mrs. Napier bore is impossible, for this reason—and I beg of you to listen to it—that Mrs. Napier's child *was dead-born, and was, according to good evidence, buried in the same coffin with the mother.*"

A statement this, which, delivered in the solemn manner of an attorney who was really honest, and who knew much of this history, appeared to Mrs. Hislop so strange that her tongue was paralyzed; an effect which had never before been produced by any one of all the five causes of the metaphysicians. Even her eyes seemed to have lost their power of movement; and as for her wits, they had, like those of the renowned Astolpho, surely left, and taken refuge in the moon.

"If you are not satisfied with my words," continued the writer (no doubt ironically, for where could he have found better evidence of the effect of his statement?), "I will give you writing for the truth of what I have said to you."

And rising and going towards a green tin box, he opened the same, and taking therefrom a piece of paper, he resumed his seat.

"Now listen," said he, as he unfolded an old yellow-coloured sheet of paper, and then he read these words: "'Your presence is requested at the funeral of Henrietta Preston, my wife, and of a child still-born, from my house, Meggat's Land, Canongate, to the burying-ground at St. Cuthberts, on Friday the 19th of this month June, at one o'clock;' and the name at this letter," continued Mr. Dallas, "is that of 'John Napier of Eastleys.' Will that satisfy you?"

And the "doer" for Mr. Charles Napier, conceiving that he had at last effectually "done" his client's opponent, seemed well pleased to sit and witness the further effect of his evidence on the bewildered woman; but we are to remember that a second stroke sometimes only takes away the pain of the former, and a repetition of blows will quicken the reaction which slumbered under the first. Whether this was so or not in our present instance, or whether Mrs. Hislop had recovered her wits by a process far shorter than that followed by the foresaid Astolpho, we know not; but certain it is, that she recovered the powers of both her eyes and her tongue in much less time than the writer expected, and in a manner, too, very different from that for which he was probably prepared.

Page 8

"Weel," replied she, smiling, "it would just seem that even the haggis has not pleased you, Mr. Dallas;" and, putting her hand into a big side-pocket, that might have served a gaberlunzie for a wallet, she extracted a small piece of paper. She continued: "But ye see a guid, honest Scotchwoman's no to be suspected of being shabby at her own table; so read ye that, which you may take for the bread-pudding."

And the writer, having taken the paper, and held it before his face for so long a time that it might have suggested the suspicion that the words therein written stuck in his eyes, and would not submit to that strange process whereby, unknown to ourselves, we transfer written vocables to the ear before we can understand them, turned a look upon the woman of dark suspicion—

"Where, in God's name, got you this?" he said.

"Just read it out first," replied she. "Ye read yer ain paper, and why no mine?"

And the writer read, perhaps more easily than he could understand, the strange words:

"This child, born of my wife, and yet neither of my blood nor my lineage, I repudiate, and, unable to push it back into the dark world of nothing from which it came, I leave it with a scowl to the mercy which countervaileth the terrible decree whereby the sins of the parent shall be visited on the child. This I do on the 15th of June 17—. JOHN NAPIER of Eastleys, in the county of Mid-Lothian."

After reading this extraordinary denunciation, Mr. Dallas sat and considered, as if at a loss what to say; but whether it was that scepticism was at the root of his thoughts, or that he assumed it as a mask to conceal misgivings to which he did not like to confess, he put a question:

"Where got you this notable piece of evidence?"

"Ay," replied Mrs. Hislop, "you are getting reasonable on the last dish. That bit of paper, which to me and my dear Henney is werth the haill estate of Eastleys, was found by me carefully pinned to the flannel in which the child was wrapt."

"Wonderful enough surely," repeated he, "*if true*"—the latter words being pronounced with emphasis which made the rough liquid letter sound like a hurling stone; "but," he continued, "the whole document, in its terms of crimination and exposure, and not less the wild manner of its application, is so unlike the act of a man not absolutely frantic, that I cannot believe it to be genuine."

"But you know, Mr. Dallas," replied she, "that Mr. John Napier was a man who, if he threw a stone, cared little whether it struck the kirk window or the mill door."

“That is so far true; but, passionate and unforgiving as he was, he was not so reckless as to be regardless whether the stone did not come back on his own head.”

“And it’s no genuine!” she resumed, as, disregarding his latter words, she relapsed into her more familiar dialect. “The Lord help ye! canna ye look at first the ae paper and then the ither? and if they’re no alike, mustna the ither be the forgery?”

Page 9

An example of the conditional syllogism which might have amused even a writer to the signet, if he had not been at the very moment busy in the examination of the handwriting of the funeral letter and that of the paper of repudiation and malison—the resemblance, or rather the identity of which was so striking, as to reduce all his theories to confusion.

“By all that’s good in heaven, the same,” he muttered to himself; and then addressing his visitor, “I confess, Mrs. Hislop,” said he, “that this paper has driven me somewhat off my point of confidence; but I suppose you will see that, if the child was actually, as the letter indicates, buried with its mother, Henrietta’s rights are at an end. It is just possible, however, I fairly admit, that Mr. Napier, who was a very eccentric man, may have so worded the letter as to induce the world to believe that the so-considered illegitimate child had been dead-born, while he gratified—privately he might verily think—his vengeance by writing this terrible curse. Still I think you are wrong; but as this wonderful paper gives you a plausible plea, I would recommend you to Mr. White, in Mill’s Court, who will see to the young woman’s rights. He will be the flint, and I the steel; and between our friendly opposition we will produce a spark which will light up the candle of truth.”

“Ay,” replied she; “only as the spark of fire comes from the steel, we’ll just suppose you are the flint—and by my troth you’re hard enough; but, come as it may, it will light the lantern that will show Henney Napier to the bonnie haughs of Eastleys.”

Mrs. Hislop having got back her paper from Mr. Dallas, left the writer’s chambers, and directed her steps to Mill’s Court, where she found Mr. White, even as she had Mr. Dallas, busy poring over law papers. She was, as we have seen, one of those people who can make their own introduction acceptable, and, moreover, one of those women, few as they are, who can tell a story with the continuity and fitting emphasis necessary to secure the attention of a busy listener. So Mr. White heard her narrative, not only with interest, but even a touch of the pervading sympathy of the spirit of romance. And so he might; for who doesn’t see that the charm of mystery can be enhanced by the hope of turning it to account of money? Then he was so much of a practical man as to know that while every string has two ends, the true way to get hold of both is to make sure in the first place of one. Wherefore he began to interrogate his client as to who could speak to the doings in the house in Meggat’s Land on that eventful night when the child was born; and having taken notes of the answers to his questions, he paused a little, as if to consider what was the first step he ought to take into the region of doubt, and perhaps of intrigue, where at least there must be lies floating about like films in the clear atmosphere of truth. Nor had he meditated many minutes till he rose, and taking up his square hat and his gold-headed cane, he said—

Page 10

“Come, we will try what we can discover in a quarter where an end of the ravelled string ought to be found, whether complicated into a knot by the twisting power of self-interest or no.”

And leading the way, he proceeded with his client down the High Street, where, along under the glimmering lamps, were the usual crowds of loungers, composed of canny Saxon and fiery Celt, which have always made this picturesque thoroughfare so remarkable. Not one of all these had any interest for our two searchers; but it was otherwise when they came toward the Canongate Tolbooth, where, out from a dark entry sprang a young woman, and bounding forward, seized our good dame round the neck. This was no other than Henney Hislop herself, who, having been alarmed at the long absence of her “mother,” as she called her, and of course believed her to be, was so delighted to find her, that she sobbed out her joy in such an artless way, that even the writer owned it was interesting to behold. Nor was the picture without other traits calculated to engage attention; for the girl whose fortunes had been so strange, and were perhaps destined to be still more strange, was dressed in the humblest garb—the short gown and the skirt peculiar to the time; but then every tint was so bright with pure cleanliness, the earrings set off so fine a skin, the indispensable strip of purple round the head imparted so much of the grace of the old classic wreath; and beyond all this, which might be said to be extraneous, her features—if you abated the foresaid cast or slight squint in the eyes, which imparted a piquancy—were so regular, if not handsome, that you could not have denied that she deserved to be a Napier, if she was not a very Napier in reality. A few words whispered in Mrs. Hislop’s ear, and the girl was off, leaving our couple to proceed on their way. Even this incident had its use; for Mr. White, who had known Mr. Napier, and had faith (as who has not?) in the hereditary descent of bodily aspects, could not restrain himself from the remark, however much it might inflame the hopes of his client—“The curse has left no blight there,” said he. “That is the very face of Mr. Napier—the high nose especially; and as for the eyes, with that unmistakeable cast, why, I have seen their foretypes in the head of John Napier a hundred times.”

An observation so congenial to Mrs. Hislop, that she could not help being a little humorous, even in the depth of an anxiety which had kept her silent for the full space of ten minutes.

“Nose, sir! there wasn’t a man frae the castle yett to Holyrood wha could have produced that nose except John Napier.”

Page 11

And without further interruption than her own laugh, they proceeded till they came to the entry called Big Lochend Close, up which they went some forty or fifty steps till they came to an outer door, which led by a short dark passage to two or three inner doors in succession, all leading to separate rooms occupied by separate people. No sooner had they turned into this passage than they encountered a woman in a plaid and with a lantern in her hand, who had just left the third or innermost room, and whose face, as it peered through the thick folds of her head-covering, was illuminated by a gleam from the light she carried. She gave them little opportunity for examination, having hurried away as if she had been afraid of being searched for stolen property.

"Isbel Napier," whispered Mrs. Hislop; "she wha first brought evil into the house of the Napiers, with all its woe."

"And who bodes us small hope here," said he, "if she has been with the nurse."

And entering the room from which the ill-omening woman had issued, they found another, even her of whom they were in search, sitting by the fire, torpid and corpulent, to a degree which indicated that as it had been her trade to nurse others, she had not forgotten herself in her ministrations.

"Mrs. Temple," said Mr. White, who saw the policy of speaking fair the woman who had been so recently in the company of an evil genius; "I am glad to find you so stout and hearty."

"Neither o' the twa, sir," replied she; "for I am rather weak and heartless. Many a ane I hae nursed into health and strength, but a' nursing comes hame in the end."

"And some, no doubt, have died under your care," continued the writer, with a view to introduce his subject; "and therefore you should be grateful for the life that is still spared to you. You could not save the life of Mrs. Napier."

"That's an auld story, and a waefu' ane," she replied, with a side-look at Mrs. Hislop; "and I hae nae heart to mind it. Some said the lady wasna innocent; and doubtless Mr. Napier thought sae, for he took high dealings wi' her, and looked at her wi' a scorn that would have scathed whinstanes. Sae it was better she was ta'en awa—ay, and her baby wi' her; for if it had lived, it would have dree'd the revenge o' that stern man."

"The child!" said Mr. White, "did it die too?"

"Dee! ye may rather ask if it ever lived; for it never drew breath, in this world at least."

A statement so strange, that it brought the eyes of the two visitors to each other; and no doubt both of them recurred in memory to the statement in the funeral letter, which, whatever may have been the case with the assertion now made by the nurse, never could have been dictated by her they had met in the passage; and no doubt, also, they

both remembered the statement made by Mr. Dallas, to the effect that both the mother and child were buried together.

Page 12

"Never drew breath, you say, nurse!" resumed Mr. White, with an air of astonishment; "why, I have been given to understand, not only that the child was born alive, but that it is actually living now."

"Weel," replied the nurse, "maybe St. Cuthbert has wrought a miracle, and brought the child out o' the grave by the West Church; but he has wrought nae miracle on me, to mak' me forget what my een saw, and my hands did, that day when I helped to place the dead body o' the innocent on the breast o' its dead mother; ay, and bent her stiff arms sae as to bring them ower her bairn, just as if she had been faulding it to her bosom. And sae in this fashion were they buried."

"And you would swear to that, Mrs. Temple?" said the writer.

"Ay, upon fifty Bibles, ane after anither," was the reply, in something like a tone of triumph.

Nor could the woman be induced to swerve from these assertions, notwithstanding repeated interrogations; and the writer was left to the conclusion—which he preferred, rather than place any confidence in the funeral letter—that the nurse's statement was in some mysterious way connected with the visit of Isabel Napier; and yet, not so very mysterious, after all, when we are to consider that her brother was preparing to claim Eastleys, as well as the valuable furniture of the house in Meggat's Land, as the nearest lawful heir of his deceased uncle. The salvo was at least comfortable to both Mr. White and his client, and no doubt it helped to lighten their steps, as, bidding adieu to the "hard witness," they left her to the nursing which comes "aye hame in the end."

But their inquiries were not finished; and retracing their steps up the Canongate, they landed in the Fountain Close, where, under the leading of Mrs. Hislop, the writer was procured another witness, with a name already familiar to him through the communication of his client; and this was no other than that same Jean Graham, who was sent to Toddrick's Wynd on that eventful night, fifteen years before, to bring Mrs. Hislop to the house in Meggat's Land;—one of those simple souls—we wish there were more of them in the world—who look upon a lie as rather an operose affair, and who seem to be truthful from sheer laziness. There was, accordingly, no difficulty here; for the woman rolled off her story just as if it had been coiled up in her mind for all that length of time.

"There was a terrible stir in the house that night," she began. "The nurse, wha is yet living in Lochend Close, and Mrs. Kemp the howdie, wha is dead, were wi' my lady; and John Cowie, the butler, was busy attending our master, who had been the hail day in ane o' his dark fits, for we heard him calling for Cowie in a fierce voice ever and again; and his step sounded ower our heads upon the floor as he walked back and fore in his wrath. Then I was sent for you, and brought you, and you'll mind how Cowie bade me go along; but I had mair sense,

Page 13

for I listened at the door, and heard what the butler said to ye when he gied ye the bairn; and think ye I didna see ye carry it along the passage as ye left? Sae far I could understand; but when I heard nurse say the bairn was dead, Mrs. Kemp say the bairn was still-born, and Cowie declare it was better it was dead and awa, I couldna comprehend this ava; nor do I weel yet; but we just thought that as there was something wrang between master and my lady, he wanted us to believe that the bairn was dead, for very shame o' being thought the father, when maybe he wasna. And then he was so guid to me and my neighbour Anne Dickson,—ye mind o' her—puir soul, she's dead too,—that we couldna, for the very heart o' us, say a word o' what we knew. But now when Mr. Napier is dead, and the brother o' that wicked Jezebel, Isbel Napier, may try to take the property frae Henney, wha I aye kenned as a Napier, with the very nose and een o' the father, I have spoken out; and may the Lord gie the right to whom the right is due!"

"It's all right," said the writer, after he had jotted with a pencil the evidence of Jean, as well as that of the nurse; "and if we could find this John Cowie, we might so fortify the orphan's rights, as to defy Miss Napier and her brother, and Mr. Dallas, and all the witnesses they can bring."

"Ay," continued the woman, "but I doubt if you'll catch him. He left Mr. Napier's service about ten years ago, and I never heard mair o' him."

"Nor I either," said Mrs. Hislop.

"Well, we must search for him," added Mr. White; "for that man alone, so far as I can see, is he who will unravel this strange business."

And thus the day's work finished. The writer parted for Mill's Court, and Mrs. Hislop, filled with doubts, hopes, and anxieties, sought her humble dwelling in Toddrick's Wynd, where Henney waited for her with all the solicitude of a daughter; but a word did not escape her lips that might carry to the girl's mind a suspicion that the golden cord of their supposed relationship ran a risk of being severed, even with the eventual condition that one, if not both of the divisions, would be transmuted into a string of diamonds.

Meanwhile the agent was in his own house, revolving all the points of a puzzle more curious than any that had yet come within the scope of his experience. Sometimes he felt confidence, and at other times despair; and of course he had the consolation, which belongs to all litigants, that the opposite party was undergoing the same process of oscillation. It was clear enough that Cowie was the required Oedipus; and if it should turn out that he was dead, or could not be found, the advantage was, with a slight declination, on the part of Charles Napier; insomuch as, while he was indisputably the nephew of the deceased, the orphan, Henrietta, was under the necessity of proving her birth and pedigree. And so, as it appeared, Mr. Dallas was of that opinion, for the very

next day he applied to Chancery for a brieve to get Charles Napier served nearest and lawful heir to his uncle; and as in legal warfare, where the judges are cognisant only of patent claims, there is small room for retiring tactics, Mr. White felt himself obliged, however anxious he was to gain time, to follow his opponent's example by taking out a competing brieve in favour of Henrietta.

Page 14

The parties were now face to face in court, and the battle behoved to be fought out; but as in all legal cases, where the circumstances are strange or peculiar, the story soon gets wind, so here the Meggat's Land romance was by-and-by all over the city. Nor did it take less fantastic forms than usual, where sympathies and antipathies are strong in proportion to the paucity of the facts on which they are fed. It was a favourite opinion of some, that the case could only be cleared by supposing that a dead stranger child had been surreptitiously passed off, and even confined, as the true one; while others, equally skilled in the art of divining, maintained that the child given to Mrs. Hislop by Cowie was a bastard of his own, by the terrible woman Isabel Napier, who was thus, according to the ordinary working of public prejudice, raised to a height of crime sufficient to justify the hatred of the people: on which presumption, it behoved to be assumed that the paper containing the curse was a forgery by Cowie and his associate in crime, and that the money paid to Mrs. Hislop was furnished by the lady; all which suppositions, and others not less incredible, were greedily accepted, for the very reason that it required something prodigious to explain an enigma which exhausted the ordinary sources of man's ingenuity; just as we find in many religions, where miracles—the more absurd, the more acceptable—are resorted to to explain the mystery of man's relation to God, a secret which no natural light can illuminate.

But all these suppositions were destined to undergo refractions through the medium of a new fact. The case, by technical processes, came before the Court of Session, where the diversity of opinion was, proportionably to the number of judges, as great as among the quidnuncs outside. The only clear idea in the heads of the robed and wigged wiseacres was, that the case, Napier *versus* Napier, was a puzzle which no man could read or solve. It seemed fated to be as famous as the old Sphinx, the insoluble Moenander, or the tortuous labyrinth, or the intricate key of Hercules—*ne Apollo quidem intelligat*; and if it had not happened that Lord Kames suggested the possibility of getting an additional piece of evidence through the examination of the coffin wherein Mrs. Napier was buried, the court might have been sitting over the famous case even in this year of the nineteenth century. The notion was worthy of his lordship's ingenuity; and accordingly a commission was issued to one of the Faculty to proceed to the West Church burying-ground, and there cause to be laid open and examined the coffin of the said Mrs. Henrietta Preston or Napier, with the view to ascertain whether or not the body of a child had been placed therein along with the corpse of the mother.

Page 15

This commission was accordingly executed, and the report bore, that “he, the commissioner, had proceeded to the burying-ground of the parish of St. Cuthberts, and there caused David Scott, the sexton, to lay open the grave of the said Henrietta Preston or Napier, and to open the coffin therein contained; which having accordingly been done by the said David Scott and his assistants, the commissioner, upon a faithful examination, aided by the experience of the said David Scott, did find the skeletons of two bodies in the said coffin identified as that of the said lady, one whereof was that of a woman apparently of middle age, and the other that of a babe, which lay upon the chest of the larger skeleton in such a way or manner as to be retained or held in that position by the arms of the same being laid across it; that having satisfied himself of these facts, the commissioner caused the coffin to be again closed and the grave covered with all decency and care. And he accordingly made this report to their lordships.”

The fact thus ascertained, in opposition to the expectation of those who favoured the orphan, was viewed by the court as depriving, to a great extent, the case of that aspect of a riddle by which it had been so unfortunately distinguished; and as the case had been hung up even beyond the time generally occupied by cases at that period, when, as it was sometimes remarked, law-suits were as often settled by the old rule, *Romanus sedendo vincit*—by the death of one or other of the parties—as by a judgment, the case was again put to the Roll for a hearing on the effect of the new evidence. It was contended for the nephew by Mr. Wight, that the question was now virtually settled, insomuch that the court was not bound to solve riddles, but to find to whom pertained a certain right of inheritance. The birth of the child had been sworn to by the nurse, as well as its death, and the final placing of it in the coffin; and now the court had, as it were, ocular demonstration of these facts by the body having been seen by their own commissioner, placed on the breast of the mother in that very peculiar way described by Mrs. Temple. All claim on the part of the girl was thus virtually excluded, for the proceedings which took place that evening in another room, under circumstances of suspicion, were sworn to only by Mrs. Hislop herself, an interested witness, and were only partially confirmed by an eavesdropper, who, as eavesdroppers generally do (except when their own characters are concerned), perhaps heard according as foregone prejudices induced her to wish. These suspicious proceedings might be explained by as many hypotheses as had been devised by the wise judges of the taverns, among which was the theory of the living child being Cowie’s own by Isabel Napier, and palmed off as Mrs. Napier’s to hide the shame of the true mother,—all unlikely enough, no doubt, but not so impossible as that the coffined child should now be alive and awaiting the issue of this case, in the expectation of being Lady of Eastleys.

Page 16

On the other side, Mr. Andrews, counsel for Henrietta, maintained that while his learned brother assumed the one half of the case as proved, and repudiated the other as a lie or a myth, he had a right to embrace the other half, and pronounce the first a stratagem or trick. The proceedings in the back-room into which Jean Graham introduced Mrs. Hislop were more completely substantiated than those in the bedroom where Mrs. Napier lay; for while the one were sworn to by Mrs. Hislop herself, a soothfast witness, and confirmed in all points by the woman Graham, the other were attempted to be proven by the solitary testimony of the nurse Temple. The paper containing the curse was as indisputably in the handwriting of Mr. Napier as was the funeral letter. The money paid was proved by the fact that the orphan had been kept and educated for fifteen years. The name Henrietta was not likely to have been a mere coincidence, and it was still more unlikely that a respectable woman such as Mrs. Hislop would invent a story of affiliation so strangely in harmony with the secrets of the house in Meggat's Land, and fortify it by a forged document. Then Mrs. Hislop was unable to write, and no attempt had been made on the other side to prove that Henrietta had a father other than he who was pointed out by the paper of the curse. So he (the counsel) might follow the example of his brother, and hold the other half of the case to be unexplainable by hypotheses, however ridiculous. The child having been disposed of to Mrs. Hislop,—a fact thus proved,—what was to prevent him (the counsel) from going also to the haunts of the *tabernian* Solons, or anywhere else in the regions of fancy, for the theory that Mr. Napier, or some plotter for him in the shape of Mrs. Kemp or John Cowie, substituted the dead child of a stranger for the living one of his wife, and bribed the nurse Temple to tell the tale she had told? to which she would be the more ready by the golden promptings of the woman Isabel Napier, the niece, whose brother would, in the event of the stratagem being concealed, succeed to the estate of Eastleys.

At the conclusion of these pleadings, the judges were inclined to be even more humorous than they had been previous to the issuing of the commission, for they had thought they saw their way to a judgment against the orphan. The president (Braxfield), it is said, indulged in a joke, to the effect that he had read *somewhere*—it was not for so religious a man to say where—of a child having been claimed by two mothers; he would like to see two fathers at that work, at least he would not be one; but here the claim was set up by Death on the one side, and Life (if a personification could be allowed) on the other, and they could not follow the old precedent, because he suspected none of their lordships would like to see the grim claimant at the bar to receive his half. And so they chuckled, as judges sometimes do, at their own jokes—generally very bad—together

Page 17

oblivious of the fable of the frogs who could see no fun in a game which was death to them; for, as we have indicated, the opinion of a great majority was against the claim of the young woman: nor would the decision have been suspended that day, had not Mr. Andrews risen and made a statement—perhaps as fictitious as a counsel's conscience would permit—to the effect that the agent (Mr. White) had procured some trace of the butler Cowie, who could throw more light on the case than Death had done, and that if some time were accorded to complete the inquiry, something might turn up which would alter the complexion even of this Protean mystery. The request was granted.

But, in truth, Mr. Andrews' suggestion was simply a bit of ingenuity, intended to ward off an unfavourable judgment, and allow a development of the chapter of accidents;—a wise policy; for as the womb of Time is never empty, so Fate writes in the morning a chapter of every man's life of a day, at which in the evening he is sometimes a little surprised. No trace had yet been got of Cowie; it was not even known whether he was alive. But if we throw some fourteen days into the wallet-bag of Saturn, we may come to a day whereupon a certain person, in an inn far down in a valley of Westmoreland, and in the little town called Kirby Lonsdale, was busy reading the *Caledonian Mercury*—for it was not more easy to say where the winged *Mercury* of that time would not go, than it is to tell where a certain insect without wings, “which aye travels south,” might not be found in England as an immigrant. It was at least no wonder that the paper should contain an account of the romance wrapped up in the case Napier *versus* Napier; and certainty, if we could have judged from the face of the individual, we would have set him down as one given to the reading of riddles; for, after he had perused the paragraph, he looked as if he knew more about that case than all the fifteen, with the macers to boot. Nor was he contented with an indication of a mere look of wisdom: he actually burst out into a laugh—an expression wondrously unsuited to the gravity of the subject. You who read this will no doubt suspect that we are merely shading this man for the sake of effect: and this is true; but you are to remember that, while we are chroniclers of things mysterious, we work for the advantage to you of putting into your power to venture a shrewd guess; in making which, you are only working in the destined vocation of man, for the world is only guesswork all over, and you yourself are only guesswork as a part of it. The reader of the *Mercury* was verily Mr. John Cowie, whilom butler to Mr. John Napier, and now waiter in the Lonsdale Arms of the obscure Kirby—a place like Peebles, where, if you wanted to deposit a secret, you could do so by crying it out at the market-cross; and, moreover, he was verily in possession of the key to the Napier mystery.

Page 18

Accordingly, Mr. White of Mill's Court in two days afterwards received a letter, informing him that John Cowie was the writer of the same, and that, if a reasonable consideration were held out to him, he would proceed to the northern metropolis, and there settle for ever a case which apparently had kept the newsmongers of Edinburgh in aliment for a length of time much exceeding the normal nine days. Opportune and happily come in the very nick of time as the latter was—for the delay allowed by the court had all but expired—Mr. White saw the danger of promising anything which could be construed into a reward; but he could use other means of decoying the shy bird into his meshes; and these he used in his answer with such effect, that the man who could solve the mystery was in Edinburgh at the end of a week. Nor was Mr. White unprepared to receive him, for he had previously got a commission to examine him and take his deposition: but then an agent likes to know what a witness will say before he cites him; and the canny Scotchman, of all men in the world, is the most uncanny if brought to swear without some hope of being benefited by his oath. There was, therefore, need of tact as well as delicacy; and Mr. White contrived in the first place to get his man to take up his quarters in the house in Mill's Court. A good supper and chambers formed the first demulcent—we do not say bribe, because, by a legal fiction, all eating and drinking is set down to the score of hospitality. A Scotch breakfast followed in the morning, at which were present Mrs. White and Mrs. Hislop, and our favourite Henney—the last of whom, spite of all the efforts of her putative mother to keep from her the secret of her birth and prospects, had caught the infection of the general topic of the city, and wondered at her strange fortune, much as the paladin in the “Orlando” did when he got into the moon. No man can precognosce like a woman, and here were three; but perhaps they might have all failed, had it not been for the natural art of Henney, who, out of pure goodness and gratitude, was so delighted with the man who had rolled her in a blanket and sent her to her beloved mother, as she still called her, that she promised to make him butler at Eastleys, and keep him comfortable all his days.

“Now,” said the cautious agent, “this promise of Henney’s is not made in consideration of your giving evidence for her before the commissioner.”

“I’m thinking of nothing but her face,” said John. “I could swear to it out of a thousand; and Heaven bless her! for I think I am again in the once happy house in Meggat’s Land.”

And John pretended he was wiping a morsel of egg from his mouth, while the handkerchief was extended as far as the eye.

“A terrible night that was,” he continued. “Mrs. Napier had been in labour all day; and when Mrs. Kemp told me to tell my master that my lady had been delivered of TWINS —”

“Twins!” cried they all, as if moved by some sympathetic chord which ran from heart to heart.

Page 19

“Ay, twins,” he repeated; “one dead, and another living—even you yourself, Henney, who are as like your father as if there never had been a Captain Preston in the world.”

And thus was John Cowie precognosced. We need not say that he was that very day examined before the commissioner. He gave an account of all the proceedings of the house in Meggat’s Land on the eventful night to which we have referred. The case was no longer a puzzle; and accordingly a decision was given in favour of Henrietta, whereby we have one other example of truth and right emerging from darkness into light. Some time afterwards, the heiress, with Mrs. Hislop alongside, and John Cowie on the driver’s box, proceeded to Eastleys and took possession; where Henrietta acted the part of a generous lady, Mrs. Hislop that of a kind of a dowager, and John was once more butler in the house of the Napiers. We stop here. Those who feel interest enough in the fortunes of Henney to inquire when and whom she married, and what were the subsequent fortunes of a life so strangely begun, will do well to go to Eastleys.

THE ORPHAN.

About forty years ago, a post-chaise was a sight more novel in the little hamlet of Thorndean, than silk gowns in country churches during the maidenhood of our great-grandmothers; and, as one drew up at the only public-house in the village, the inhabitants, old and young, startled by the unusual and merry sound of its wheels, hurried to the street. The landlady, on the first notice of its approach, had hastily bestowed upon her goodly person the additional recommendation of a clean cap and apron; and, still tying the apron-strings, ran bustling to the door, smiling, colouring, and courtesying, and courtesying and colouring again, to the yet unopened chaise. Poor soul! she knew not well how to behave—it was an epoch in her annals of innkeeping. At length the coachman, opening the door, handed out a lady in widow’s weeds. A beautiful, golden-haired child, apparently not exceeding five years of age, sprang to the ground without assistance, and grasped her extended hand. “What an image o’ beauty!” exclaimed some half-dozen bystanders, as the fair child lifted her lovely face of smiles to the eyes of her mother. The lady stepped feebly towards the inn, and though the landlady’s heart continued to practise a sort of fluttering motion, which communicated a portion of its agitation to her hands, she waited upon her unexpected and unusual guests with a kindliness and humility that fully recompensed for the expertness of a practised waiter. About half an hour after the arrival of her visitors, she was seen bustling from the door, her face, as the villagers said, bursting with importance. They were still in groups about their doors, and in the middle of the little street, discussing the mysterious arrival; and, as she hastened on her mission, she was assailed with a dozen such

Page 20

questions as these—"Wat ye wha she is?" "Is she ony great body?" "Hae ye ony guess what brought her here?" and, "Is yon bonny creature her ain bairn?" But to these and sundry other interrogatories, the important hostess gave for answer, "Hoot, I hae nae time to haver the noo." She stopped at a small, but certainly the most genteel house in the village, occupied by a Mrs. Douglas, who, in the country phrase, was a very douce, decent sort of an old body, and the widow of a Cameronian minister. In the summer season Mrs. Douglas let out her little parlour to lodgers, who visited the village to seek health, or for a few weeks' retirement. She was compelled to do this from the narrowness of her circumstances; for, though she was a "clever-handed woman," as her neighbours said, "she had a sair fecht to keep up an appearance onyway like the thing ava." In a few minutes Mrs. Douglas, in a clean cap, a muslin kerchief round her neck, a quilted black bombazine gown, and snow-white apron, followed the landlady up to the inn. In a short time she returned, the stranger lady leaning upon her arm, and the lovely child leaping like a young lamb before them. Days and weeks passed away, and the good people of Thorndean, notwithstanding all their surmises and inquiries, were no wiser regarding their new visitor; all they could learn was, that she was the widow of a young officer, who was one of the first that fell when Britain interfered with the French Revolution; and the mother and her child became known in the village by the designation of "Mrs. Douglas's twa pictures!"—an appellation bestowed on them in reference to their beauty.

The beautiful destroyer, however, lay in the mother's heart, now paling her cheeks like the early lily, and again scattering over them the rose and the rainbow. Still dreaming of recovery, about eight months after her arrival in Thorndean, death stole over her like a sweet sleep. It was only a few moments before the angel hurled the fatal shaft, that the truth fell upon her soul. She was stretching forth her hand to her work-basket, her lovely child was prattling by her knee, and Mrs. Douglas smiling like a parent upon both, striving to conceal a tear while she smiled, when the breathing of her fair guest became difficult, and the rose, which a moment before bloomed upon her countenance, vanished in a fitful streak. She flung her feeble arms around the neck of her child, who now wept upon her bosom, and exclaimed, "Oh! my Elizabeth, who will protect you now, my poor, poor orphan?" Mrs. Douglas sprang to her assistance. She said she had much to tell, and endeavoured to speak; but a gurgling sound only was heard in her throat; she panted for breath; the rosy streaks, deepening into blue, came and went upon her cheeks like the midnight dances of the northern lights; her eyes flashed with a momentary brightness more than mortal, and the spirit fled. The fair orphan still clung to the neck, and kissed the yet warm lips of her dead mother.

Page 21

As yet she was too young to see all the dreariness of the desolation around her; but she was indeed an orphan in the most cruel meaning of the word. Her mother had preserved a mystery over her sorrows and the circumstances of her life, which Mrs. Douglas had never endeavoured to penetrate. And now she was left to be as a mother to the helpless child, for she knew not if she had another friend; and all that she had heard of the mother's history was recorded on the humble stone which she placed over her grave: "*Here resteth the body of Isabella Morton, widow of Captain Morton; she died amongst us a stranger, but beloved.*" The whole property to which the fair orphan became heir by the death of her mother did not amount to fifty pounds, and amongst the property no document was found which could throw any light upon who were her relatives, or if she had any. But the heart of Mrs. Douglas had already adopted her as a daughter; and, circumscribed as her circumstances were, she trusted that He who provided food for the very birds of heaven, would provide the orphan's morsel.

Years rolled on, and Elizabeth Morton grew in stature and in beauty, the pride of her protector, and the joy of her age. But the infirmities of years grew upon her foster-mother, and, disabling her from following her habits of industry, stern want entered her happy cottage. Still Elizabeth appeared only as a thing of joy, contentment, and gratitude; and often did her evening song beguile her aged friend's sigh into a smile. And to better their hard lot, she hired herself to watch a few sheep upon the neighbouring hills, to the steward of a gentleman named Sommerville, who, about the time of her mother's death, had purchased the estate of Thorndean. He was but little beloved, for he was a hard master, and a bad husband; and more than once he had been seen at the hour of midnight, in the silent churchyard, standing over the grave of Mrs. Morton. This gave rise to not a few whisperings respecting the birth of poor Elizabeth. He had no children; and a nephew, who resided in his house, was understood to be his heir. William Sommerville was about a year older than our fair orphan; and ever, as he could escape the eye of his uncle, he would fly to the village to seek out Elizabeth as a playmate. And now, while she tended the few sheep, he would steal round the hills, and placing himself by her side, teach her the lessons he had that day been taught, while his arm in innocence rested on her neck, their glowing cheeks touched each other, and her golden curls played around them. Often were their peaceful lessons broken by the harsh voice and the blows of his uncle. But still William stole to the presence of his playmate and pupil, until he had completed his fourteenth year; when he was to leave Thorndean, preparatory to entering the army. He was permitted to take a hasty farewell of the villagers, for they all loved the boy; but he went only to the cottage of Mrs. Douglas. As he entered, Elizabeth

Page 22

wept, and he also burst into tears. Their aged friend beheld the yearnings of a young passion that might terminate in sorrow; and taking his hand, she prayed God to prosper him, and bade him farewell. She was leading him to the door, when Elizabeth raised her tearful eyes; he beheld them, and read their meaning, and, leaping forward, threw his arms round her neck, and printed the first kiss on her forehead! “Do not forget me, Elizabeth,” he cried, and hurried from the house.

Seven years from this period passed away. The lovely girl was now transformed into the elegant woman, in the summer majesty of her beauty. For four years Elizabeth had kept a school in the village, to which her gentleness and winning manners drew prosperity; and her grey-haired benefactress enjoyed the reward of her benevolence. Preparations were making at Thorndean Hall for the reception of William, who was now returning as Lieutenant Sommerville. A post-chaise in the village had then become a sight less rare; but several cottagers were assembled before the inn to welcome the young laird. He arrived, and with him a gentleman between forty and fifty years of age. They had merely become acquainted as travelling companions; and the stranger being on his way northward, had accepted his invitation to rest at his uncle’s for a few days. The footpath to the Hall lay through the churchyard, about a quarter of a mile from the village. It was a secluded path, and Elizabeth was wont to retire to it between school hours, and frequently to spend a few moments in silent meditation over her mother’s grave. She was gazing upon it, when a voice arrested her attention, saying, “Elizabeth—Miss Morton!” The speaker was Lieutenant Sommerville, accompanied by his friend. To the meeting of the young lovers we shall add nothing. But the elder stranger gazed on her face and trembled, and looked on her mother’s grave and wept. “Morton!” he repeated, and read the inscription on the humble stone, and again gazed on her face, and again wept. “Lady!” he exclaimed, “pardon a miserable man—what was the name of your mother?—who the family of your father? Answer me, I implore you!” “Alas! I know neither,” said the wondering and now unhappy Elizabeth. “My name is Morton,” cried the stranger; “I had a wife; I had a daughter once, and my Isabella’s face was thy face!” While he yet spoke, the elder Sommerville drew near to meet his nephew. His eyes and the stranger’s met. “Sommerville!” exclaimed the stranger, starting. “The same,” replied the other, his brow blackening like thunder, while a trembling passed over his body. He rudely grasped the arm of his nephew, and dragged him away. The interesting stranger accompanied Elizabeth to the house of Mrs. Douglas. Painful were his inquiries; for, while they kindled hope and assurance, they left all in cruel uncertainty. “Oh, sir!” said Mrs. Douglas, “if ye be the faither o’ my blessed bairn, I dinna wonder at auld Sommerville

Page 23

growing black in the face when he saw ye; for, when want came hard upon our heels, and my dear motherless and faitherless bairn was driven to herd his sheep by the brae-sides—there wad the poor, dear, delicate bairn (for she was as delicate then as she is bonnie now) been lying—the sheep a’ feeding round about her, and her readin’ at her Bible, just like a little angel, her lee lane, when the brute wad come sleekin’ down ahint her, an’ giein’ her a drive wi’ his foot, cursed her for a little lazy something I’m no gaun to name, an’ rugged her bonnie yellow hair, till he had the half o’ it torn out o’ her head; or the monster wad riven the blessed book out o’ her hand, an’ thrown it wi’ an oath as far as he could drive. But the nephew was aye a bit fine callant; only, ye ken, wi’ my bairn’s prospects, it wasna my part to encourage anything.”

Eagerly did the stranger, who gave his name as Colonel Morton, hang over the fair being who had conjured up the sunshine of his youth. One by one, he was weeping and tracing every remembered feature of his wife upon her face, when doubt again entered his mind, and he exclaimed in bitterness, “Merciful Heaven! convince me! Oh, convince me that I have found my child!” The few trinkets that belonged to Mrs. Morton had been parted with in the depth of her poverty. At that moment Lieutenant Sommerville hastily entered the cottage. He stated that his uncle had left the Hall, and delivered a letter from him to Colonel Morton. It was of few words, and as follows:

“Morton,—We were rivals for Isabella’s love; you were made happy, and I miserable. But I have not been unrevenged. It was I who betrayed you into the hands of the enemy. It was I who reported you dead—who caused the tidings to be hastened to your widowed wife, and followed them to England. It was I who poisoned the ear of her friends, until they cast her off; I dogged her to her obscurity, that I might enjoy my triumph; but death thwarted me as you had done. Yet I will do one act of mercy—she sleeps beneath the grave where we met yesterday; and the lady before whom you wept—is your own daughter.”

He cast down the letter, and exclaimed, “My child! my long lost child!” And, in speechless joy, the father and the daughter rushed to each other’s arms. Shall we add more? The elder Sommerville left his native land, which he never again disgraced with his presence. William and Elizabeth wandered by the hill-side in bliss, catching love and recollections from the scene. In a few months her father bestowed on him her hand, and Mrs. Douglas, in joy and in pride, bestowed upon both her blessing.

THE BURGHER’S TALES.

THE BROWNIE OF THE WEST BOW.

Page 24

I cannot say so much for the authenticity of the legend I am now to relate, as I have been able to do for some of the others in this collection; but that is no reason, I hope, for its failing to interest the reader, who makes it a necessary condition of his acceptance, that a legend shall keep within the bounds of human nature: not that any one of us can say what these bounds are, for every day of our experience is extending them in both the inner and outer worlds; and we never can be very sure whether the things which rise upon the distant horizon of our nocturnal visions are less unstable and uncertain than those that exist under our noses. True it is, at any rate, that the legend was narrated to me in a meagre form by a lady, sufficiently ancient to be supposed to be a lover of strange stories, and not imaginative or wicked enough to concoct them.

That part of Edinburgh called the West Bow was, at the date of our legend, the tinsmiths' quarter; a fact which no one who chanced to walk down that way could have doubted, unless indeed he was deaf. Among the fraternity there was one destined to live in annals even with more posthumous notoriety than he of the same place and craft, who long got the credit of being the author of the "Land o' the Leal." His name was Thomas, or, according to the Scottish way of pronouncing it, Tammas Dodds; who, with a wife going under the domestic euphuism of Jenny, occupied as a dwelling-house a small flat of three rooms, in the near neighbourhood of his workshop. This couple had lived together five years, without having any children procreated of their bodies, or any quarrel born of their spirits; and thus they might have lived to the end of their lives, if a malign influence, born of the devil, had not got possession of the husband's heart.

This influence, which we may be permitted by good Calvinists to call diabolical, was, as a consequence, not only in its origin, but also in its medium, altogether extraneous to our couple. For so far as regards Mrs. Jenny Dodds, she was, as much as a good wife could be, free from any great defects of conduct; and as for the tinsmith himself, he had hitherto lived so sober and douce a life, that we cannot avoid the notion, that if he had not been subject to "aiblins a great temptation," he would not have become the victim of the arch-enemy. Thus much we say of the dispositions of the two parties; and were it not that certain peculiarities belonged to Jenny, which, as reappearing in an after-part of our story, it is necessary to know, we would not have gone further into mere character—an element which has little to do generally with legends, except in so far as it either produces the incidents, or may be developed through them. The first of these peculiarities was a settled conviction that she had as good a right to rule Tammas Dodds, as being her property, as if she had drunk of the waters of St. Kevin. Nor was this conviction merely natural to her; for she

Page 25

could lay her finger on that particular part of Sacred Writ which is the foundation of the generally-received maxim, "One may do what one likes with one's own." No doubt, she knew another passage in the same volume with a very different meaning; but then Mrs. Dodds did not *wish* to remember that, or to obey it when she did remember it; and we are to consider, without going back to that crazy school of which a certain Aristippus was the dominie, that wishing or not wishing has a considerable influence upon the aspects of moral truth, if it does not exercise over them a kind of legerdemain of which we are unconscious, whereby it changes one of these aspects into another, even when these are respectively to each other as white is to black. This "claim of right" does not generally look peaceful. No more it should; for it is clearly enough against nature; and one seldom kicks at her without getting sore toes. True enough, there do appear cases where it seems to work pretty well; but when they are inquired into, it is generally found either that the husband is a simpleton, submitting by mere inanity, or a man who has resisted to the uttermost, and is at last crumpled up by pure "Caudlish" iteration and perseverance. How Tammis took it may yet appear.

Proceeding with the peculiarities: another of these was, that Mrs. Dodds, like her of Auchtermuchty, or Mrs. Grumlie, carried domesticity to devotion, scarcely anything in the world having any interest to her soul save what was contained in the house—from Tammis, the chief article of furniture, down, through the mahogany table, to the porridge-pot; clouting, mending, darning, cleaning, scouring, washing, scraping, wringing, drying, roasting, boiling, stewing, being all of them done with such duty, love, and intensity of purpose, that they were veritable sacrifices to the *lares*. This was doubtless a virtue; and as doubtless it was a vice, insomuch as, if we believe another old Greek pedagogue of the name of Aristotle, "all virtues are medial vices, and all vices extreme virtues." How Tammis viewed this question may also appear. But we may proceed to state, that Mrs. Janet Dodds was not content with doing all those things with such severity of love or duty. She was always telling herself what she intended to do, either at the moment or afterwards. "This pan needs to be scoured." "Thae stockings maun be darned." "This sark is as black as the lum, and maun be plotted." "The floor needs scrubbing." "Tammis's coat is crying, 'A steek in time saves nine,' and by my faith it says true;" and so on. Nor did it signify much whether Thomas or any other person was in the house at the time—the words were not intended for anybody but herself; and to herself she persisted in telling them with a steadfastness which only the ears of a whitesmith could tolerate; even with the consideration that he was not, as so many are, deaved with scandal—a delectation which Janet despised, if she did not care as little

Page 26

for what was going on domestically within the house on the top of the same stair, as she did for the in-door affairs of Japan or Tobolsk. We may mention, also, that she persevered in reading the same chapter of the Bible, and in singing the same psalm, every Sunday morning. In addition to these characteristics, Janet made it a point never to change the form or colour of her dress; so that if all the women in Edinburgh had been of her taste and mode of thinking, all the colours by which they are diversified and made interesting would have been reduced to the dead level of hodden-grey; the occupation of the imp Fashion would have been gone; nay, the angels, for fear of offending mortals, would have eschewed the nymph Iris, from whom the poets say they steal tints, and dipt their wings in a grey cloud before appearing in the presence of the douce daughters of men.

With all these imperfections—and how many husbands would term some of them perfections!—the married life of Thomas and Janet Dodds might have gone on for another five years, and five to that, if it had not been that Thomas, in a weary hour, cast a glance with a scarlet ray in it on a certain Mary Blyth, who lived in the Grassmarket—a woman of whom our legend says no more than that she was a widow, besides being fair to the eye, and pleasant to the ear. We could wish that we had it not to say; but as truth is more valuable than gold, yea, refined gold, we are under the necessity of admitting that that red ray betokened love, if an affection of that kind could be called by a name so hallowed by the benedictions of poets and the songs of angels. You must take it in your own way, and with your own construction; but however that may be, we must all mourn for the fearful capabilities within us, and the not less awful potentialities in the powers without—the one hidden from us up to the moment when the others appear, and all wrestling with the enemy prevented by what is often nothing less than a fatal charm. From that moment, Thomas Dodds was changed after the manner of action of moral poisons; for we are to remember that while the physical kill, the other only transmute, and the transmutation *may be* from any good below grace to any evil above the devil.

This change in the mind of the husband included his manner of viewing those peculiarities in the mental constitution of Janet to which we have alluded. Her desire to rule him was now rebellion; her devotion to “hussyskep” was nothing better than mercenary grubbing; her adhesion to her hodden-grey was vulgar affectation; and as to her monologues, they were evidence of insanity. Such changes in reference to other objects happen to every one of us every day in the year, only we don’t look at and examine them; nor, if we did, could we reconcile them to any theory of the mind—all that we can say being, that if we love a certain object, we hate any other which comes between us and our gratification; and thus, just as Mr. Thomas Dodds loved Mrs. Mary

Page 27

Blyth, so in an equal ratio he hated his good helpmate Jenny. And then began that other wonderful process called reconciliation, whereby the wish gradually overcomes scruples through the cunning mean of falsifying their aspects. Whereunto, again, the new mistress contributed in the adroit way of all such wretches—instilling into his ear the moral poison which deadened the apperception of these scruples at the same time that it brought out the advantages of disregarding them. The result of all which was, that Jenny's husband, of whom she had made a slave, for his own good and benefit, as she thought, and not without reason, arrived, by small degrees, and by relays of new motives, one after another, at the conclusion of actually removing her from this big world, and of course also from that little one to her so dear, even that of her household empire.

A resolution this, which, terrible and revolting as it may appear to those who are happily beyond the influence of "the wish," was far more easily formed than executed; for Nature—although improvident herself of her children, swallowing them up in thousands by earthquakes, tearing them by machinery, and drowning them in the sea by shiploads—is very careful to defend one of them against another. Every scheme the husband could think of was surrounded with difficulties, and one by one was laid aside, till he came to that of precipitating his faithful Jenny, as if by accident, into a deep pool in the North Loch, that sheet of water which contained as many secrets in its bosom as that more romantic one in Italy, not far removed from a certain pious nunnery. Even here there was the difficulty of getting Jenny out at night, and down Cranstoun's Close, and to west of the foot thereof, where the said deep pool was, for no other ostensible purpose in the world than to see the moon shedding her beams on the surface of the water—an object not half so beautiful to her as the clear tin pan made by her own Tammass, and in which she made her porridge every morning. But the adage about the will and the way is of such wondrous universality, that one successful effort seems as nothing in the diversity of man's inventions; and so it turned out to be comparatively easy to get Janet out one evening for the reason that her husband did not feel very well, and would like his supper the better for a walk along the edge of the loch, in which, if it was her pleasure, she would not refuse to accompany him. So pleasant a way of putting the thing harmonized with Janet's love of rule, and she agreed upon the condition she made with herself, by means of the eternal soliloquy, that she would put on the stew to be progressing towards unctuousness and tenderness before they went. Was that to be Janet's last act of her darling hussyskep? It would not be consistent with our art were we to tell you; but this much is certain, that Janet Dodds went down Cranstoun's Close along with her beloved Tammass, that shortly after

Page 28

she was plunged by him into the said deep hole of the loch, and cruelly left there to sink or swim, while he hastened back to tell his new love, Mrs. Blyth, how desperately he had done her bidding. But sometimes running away has a bad look; and it happened that as Thomas was hurrying up the dark close, he met a neighbour brother of the craft, who cried to him, "What, ho! Tammas Dodds; whaur frae and whaur tae, man?" To which, seeing how the act of running away would look in the Justiciary Court, he replied with wonderful invention for the moment, that Janet had fallen into the deep pool of the loch, and that though he had endeavoured to get her out, he had failed, by reason of his not being able to swim, and that he was running to get some one to help to save her, whereupon he entreated his brother craftsman to go with him to the spot, and help him to rescue his beloved wife, if she weren't yet dead. So away they went, in a great hurry, but to no purpose; for when they came to the said pool, no vestige of a creature being therein they could see, except some air-bubbles reflecting the moonbeams, and containing, no doubt, the living breath of the drowned woman.

Nor when the terrible news was spread through the city, and a boat and drags were made to do their uttermost, under the most willing hands, could the body be found. It was known that the bank there was pretty steep in declivity, and the presumption was, that the body had rolled down into the middle of the loch, where, in consequence of the muddiness of the waters, it would be difficult to find it. The efforts were continued next morning, and day by day, for a week, with no better success, till at last it was resolved to wait for "the bursting of the gall-bladder," when, no doubt, Mrs. Janet Dodds's body would rise and swim on the top of the waters. An event this which did not occur till about three weeks had passed; at the end of which time a crowd of people appeared at Mr. Dodds's door, bearing a corpse in a white sheet. It was received by the disconsolate Thomas with becoming resignation, and laid on the bed, even the marriage-bed, realizing that strange meeting of two ends which equalizes pain and pleasure, and reduces the product to *nil*. Nor were many hours allowed to pass when, decayed and defaced as it was, it was consigned to a coffin without Mr. Dodds being able to bring his resolution to the sticking point of trying to recognise in the confused mass of muscle and bone, forming what was once a face, the lineaments of her who had been once his pride, and now, by his own act, had become his shame and condemnation in the sight of Heaven. Next day she was consigned to the tomb, in so solemn a manner, that if man were not man, one would have had a difficulty in recognising in that gentle hand that held the head-cord, and dropped it so softly on the coffin, the same member which drove the innocent victim into the deep waters.

Page 29

There is a continuous progress in all things; a fact which we know only after we get hold of the clue. And so, when Mrs. Mary Blyth appeared as Mrs. Mary Dodds, in room of the domesticated Jenny, it was in perfect accordance with the law of cause and effect. No doubt they did their best to be happy, as all creatures do, even the devil's children, only in a wrong shaft; but they had made that fearful miscalculation, which is the wages of sin, when they counted upon conscience as a pimp to their pleasures, in place of a king's-evidence against them, that king being the Lord of heaven and earth. And so it turned out in the course of several years, that, as their love lost its fervour, their respective monitors acquired greater power in pleading the cause of her who was dead, and convincing them, against their will (for the all-powerful wish has no virtue here), that they had done a cruel thing, for which they were amenable to an avenging guardian of the everlasting element of good in nature's dualism. Yet, strange enough, each of the two kept his and her own secret. Their hearts burned, even as the fire which consumes the wicked, under the smother of a forced silence—itself a torment and an agony; yea, neither of the two would mention the name of Jenny Dodds for the entire world. And there was more than a mutual fear that one should know what the other thought. Each was under a process of exculpation and inculpation—a mutual blaming of each other in their hearts, without ever yet a word said to indicate their thoughts. It was the quarrel of devils, who make the lesser crime a foil to show the greater, and call it a virtue for the reason that they would rather be the counterfeits of good than the base metal of evil; yet with no advantage, for hypocrisy is only the glow which conceals the worm in its retreat within it. The plea of the wife was, that she was courted by the man, and that although she might have wished Jenny out of the way, and hinted as much, she never meant actual murder; while his, again, was the old Barnwell charge, that his better nature had been corrupted by the woman, and that he did it at her suggestion, and under the influence of her siren power. They thus got gradually into that state of feeling by which the runaway convicts from a penal settlement were actuated, when, toiling away through endless brakes and swamps where neither meat nor drink could be procured, they were so maddened by hunger, that each, with a concealed knife under his sleeve, watched his neighbour for an opportunity to strike; nor could one dare to fall behind, without the suspicion being raised in the minds of his companions, that he was to execute his purpose when they were off their guard. So like, in other respects too; for these men, afraid to speak their thoughts of each other, journeyed on in deep silence, and each was ready to immolate his friend at the altar of selfishness, changed into a bloodthirsty Dagon by the fiends Hunger and Thirst.

Page 30

The years were now to be counted as seven since Janet Dodds was plunged into the deep pool of the North Loch, and the state of mind of the married criminals, which we have tried to describe, had been growing and growing, for two of these years, as if it threatened to get stronger the older they grew, and the nearer the period of judgment. One morning when they were in bed—for even yet, while they concealed their thoughts from each other, and the name of Jenny Dodds was a condemned word in their vocabulary, even as the sacred name among the Romans, they had evinced no spoken enmity to each other—they heard a tirl at the door. The hour was early, and the douce genius of the grey dawn was deliberating with herself whether it was time to give place to her advancing sister, the morning. Mrs. Mary Dodds rose to answer the knock, and Thomas listened with natural curiosity to know who the early visitor was, and what was wanted. He heard a suppressed scream of fear from his wife, and the next moment she came rushing into the room; yet the never a word she uttered, and her lips were so white and dry that you might have supposed that her silence was the result of organic inability. Nor even when she got into bed again, and tried to hide her head with the bed-clothes, did her terror diminish, or her lips become more obedient to the feeling within; so that Thomas knew not what to think, except it was that she had seen a ghost—not an unnatural supposition at a time when occult causes and spiritual appearances were as undoubted as the phenomena of the electric telegraph are in our day. But he was not destined to be left many minutes more in ignorance of the cause of Mrs. Mary Dodds's terror, for, upon listening, he heard some one come into the kitchen, and bolt the door on the inside—so much for his ears; then he turned his eyes to the kitchen, into which he could, as well as the light of the grey dawn would permit, see from where he lay; and what did he see?

“How comes it? whence this mimic shape?
In look and lineament so like our kind.
You might accost the spectral thing, and say,
‘Good e’en t’ye.’”

No other than the figure of Mrs. Janet Dodds herself. Yes, there she was in her old grey dress, busy taking off that plaid which Thomas knew so well, and hanging the same upon the peg, where she had hung it so often for five long years. Thomas was now as completely deprived of the power of speech as she who lay, equally criminal as himself, alongside of him; but able at least to look, or rather, unable to shut their eyes, they watched the doings of the strange morning visitor. They saw that she was moving about as if she were intent upon domestic work; and, by-and-by, there she was busy with coals and sticks brought from their respective places, putting on the fire, which she lighted with the indispensable spunk applied to the spark in the tinder-box. Next she undertook the sweeping of the floor, saying to herself—and they heard

Page 31

the words—"It looks as if it hadna been swept for seven years." Next she washed the dishes, which had been left on the table, indulging in the appropriate monologue implying the necessity of the work. Thereafter it appeared as if she was dissatisfied with the progress of the fire, for she was presently engaged in using the bellows, every blast of which was heard by the quaking couple in bed, and between the blasts the words came, "Ower late for Tammas's breakfast." So the blowing continued, till it was apparent enough, from the reflection of the flame on the wall, that she was succeeding in her efforts. Then, having made herself sure of the fire, she went to the proper place for the porridge goblet, took the same and put a sufficient quantity of water therein, placed it on the fire, and began to blow again with the same assiduity as before, with still interjected sentences expressive of her confidence that she would overcome the obstinacy of the coals. And overcome it she did, as appeared from the entire lighting up of the kitchen. Was ever Border Brownie so industrious! Some time now elapsed, as if she were sitting with due patience till the water should boil. Thereafter she rose, and they saw her cross the kitchen to the lobby, where the meal was kept, then return with a bowl containing what she no doubt considered a sufficient quantity. The stirring utensil called a "theedle" had also got into its proper place, and by-and-by they heard the sound of the same as it beat upon the bottom and sides, guided by an experienced hand, and, every now and then, the sweltering and totling of the pot. This process was now interrupted by the getting of the grey basin into which the porridge behoved to be poured; and poured it was, the process being followed by the sound of "the clauting o' the laggan," so familiar to Scotch ears. "Now it's ready for him," said the figure, as it moved across the kitchen again, to get the spoon and the bowl of milk, both of which they saw her place beside the basin.

All things being thus completed according to the intention of the industrious worker, a period of silence intervened, as if she had been taking a rest in the chair which stood by the fire. A most ominous interlude, for every moment the couple in bed expected that she would enter the bedroom, were it for nothing else than to "intimate breakfast;" an intimation which, if one could have judged by their erect hair and the sweat that stood in big drops on their brows, they were by no means prepared for. They were not to be subjected to this fearful trial, for the figure (so we must persist in calling it) was seen again to cross the kitchen, take down the plaid, and adjust it over the head according to the manner of the times. They then heard her draw the bolt, open the door, and shut the same again after her as she departed. She was gone.

Page 32

Mr. Thomas Dodds and his wife now began to be able to breathe more freely. The hair resumed its flexibility, and the sweat disappeared; but, strange as it may seem, they never exchanged a word with each other as to who the visitor was, nor as to the morning's work she had so industriously and silently (with the exception of her monologues) executed. Too certain in their convictions as to the identity, whether in spirit or body, of the figure with that of her they had so cruelly put out of the way, they seemed to think it needless to question each other; and, independently of this, the old terror of the conscience was sufficient to seal their lips now, as it had done for a period before. Each of them supposed that the visitor was sent for the special purpose of some particular avengement of the crime upon the other; the appearance in so peaceful a way, in the meantime, being merely a premonition to show them that their consciences were not working in vain; and if Thomas was the greater sinner, which he no doubt suspected, in spite of himself, he might place against that conviction the fact that the inscrutable visitor had shown him the kindness at least of preparing his breakfast, and entirely overlooking the morning requirements of his spouse. Under these thoughts they rose and repaired with faltering step and fearful eyes to the kitchen. There everything was in the order they had anticipated from what they had seen and heard. Each looked with a shudder at the basin of porridge as if it had been invested with some terrible charm—nay, might it not have been poisoned?—a thought which rushed instantaneously into the head of Thomas, and entirely put to flight the prior hypothesis that he had been favoured by this special gift of cookery. The basin was accordingly laid aside by hands that trembled to touch it, and fear was a sufficient breakfast for both of them on that most eventful morning.

This occurrence, as may readily be supposed, was kept a profound secret. They both saw that it might be the forerunner of divine means to bring their evil deeds to light; and, under this apprehension, their taciturnity and mutual discontent, if not growing hatred, continued, broken only by occasional growls and curses, and the ejaculations forced out by the inevitable circumstances of their connection. The effect of the morning visit was meanwhile most apparent upon the man who committed the terrible act. He could not remain in the house, which, even in their happiest condition, was slovenly kept, showing everywhere the want of the skilled hands of that queen of housewives, Mrs. Janet Dodds—so ill-requited for her devotion to her husband. Nay, he felt all this as a reproof to him, and sorely and bitterly lamented the fatal act whereby he had deprived of life the best of wives, and the most honest and peaceful of womankind. Then the awe of divine vengeance deepened these shadows of the soul till he became moody and melancholy, walking hither and thither without an object, and in secluded places, looking fearfully around him as if he expected every moment the spectre visitor of the morning to appear before him. Nor was he less miserable at home, where the growing hatred made matters worse and worse every hour, and where, when the grey dawn came, he expected another visit and another scene of the same description as the last.

Page 33

Nearly a week had thus passed, and it was Sabbath morning. The tinsmiths' hammers were silent, the noisy games of the urchins were hushed, the street of the Bow resounded only occasionally to the sound of a foot—all Edinburgh was, in short, under the solemnity enjoined by the Calvinism so much beloved by the people; and surely the day might have been supposed to be held in such veneration by ministering spirits, sent down to earth to execute the purposes of Heaven, that no visit of the feared shadow would disturb even the broken rest of the wicked. So perhaps thought our couple; but their thoughts belied them, for just again, as the dawn broke over the tops of the high houses, the well-known tirl was heard at the door. Who was to open it? For days the mind of the wife had been made up. She would not face that figure again; no, if all the powers of the world were there to compel her; and as for Thomas, conscience had reduced the firmness of a man who once upon a time could kill to a condition of fear and trembling. Yet terrified as he was, he considered that he was here under the obligation to obey powers even higher than his conscience, and disobedience might bring upon him some evil greater than that under which he groaned. So up he got, trembling in every limb, and proceeding to the door, opened the same. What he saw may be surmised, but what he felt no one ever knew, for the one reason that he had never the courage to tell it, and for the other that no man or woman was ever placed in circumstances from which they could draw any conclusion which could impart even a distant analogy. This much, however, was known: Thomas retreated instantly to bed, and the visitor, in the same suit of hodden-grey, again entered, passed the bolt, took off her plaid, hung it up, and began the duties which she thought were suited to the day and the hour. So much being thus alike, the couple in the bedroom no doubt augured a repetition of the old process. They were right, and they were wrong. Their eyes were fixed upon her, and watched her movements; but the watch was that of the charmed eye, which is said to be without motive. They saw her once more go deliberately and tentily through the old process of putting on the fire, and they heard again the application of the bellows, every blast succeeding another with the regularity of a clock, until the kitchen was illuminated by the rising flame. This was all that could be called a repetition; for in place of going for the porridge goblet, she went direct for the tea-kettle, into which she poured a sufficient quantity of water, saying the while to herself, "Tammis maun hae his tea breakfast on Sabbath morning"—words which Thomas, as he now lay quaking in bed, knew very well he had heard before many a time and oft. Nor were the subsequent acts less in accordance with the old custom of the dwelling. There was no sweeping of the floor or scouring of pans on the sacred morning; in place of all which she had something else to do, for

Page 34

surely we must suppose that this gentle visitor was a good Calvinist, and would perform only the acts of necessity and mercy. These she had done in so far as regarded necessity, and now they saw her go to the shelf on which the Bible was deposited—a book which, alas! for seven years had not been opened by either of the guilty pair. Having got what she wanted, she sat down by the table, opened the volume at a place well thumbed, and began to read aloud a chapter in the Corinthians, which Thomas Dodds, the more by reason that he had heard it read two hundred and fifty times, knew by heart. This being finished, she turned up a psalm, yea, that very psalm which Janet Dodds had sung every Sunday morning, and, presently, the kitchen was resonant with the rising notes of the Bangor, as they came from a throat trembling with devotion—

“I waited on the Lord my God,
And patiently did bear;
At length to me He did incline
My voice and cry to hear.

“He took me from a fearful pit,
And from the miry clay,
And on a rock He set my feet,
Establishing my way.”

The service finished, they saw her replace the book where she had found it; and by this time the kettle was spewing from the mouth thereof a volume of steam, as if it were calling to its old mistress to relieve it from the heat of the fire; nor was she long in paying due obedience. The tea-pot was got where she seemed to know it would be found, so also the tea-canister. The quantity to be put in was a foregone conclusion, and steadily measured with the spoon. The water was poured in, and the utensil placed on the cheek of the chimney in order to the indispensable infusion. Next the cup and saucer were placed on the table, then followed the bread and butter, and the sugar and the milk; all being finished by the words to herself, “There’s nae egg in the house.” Having thus finished her work, she took down her plaid, adjusted it carefully, opened the door, and departed.

The effect produced by this second spectral appearance could scarcely be exaggerated, yet we suspect you will not find it of that kind which is most in harmony with human nature, except in the case of Mrs. Dodds the second, who lay, as on the former occasion, sweating and trembling. It was now different with the husband, on whom apparently had fallen some of the seeds of the word, as they were scattered by the lips of the strange visitor, and conscience had prepared the soil. The constitutional strength of character which had enabled him to perpetrate a terrible deed of evil, was ready as a power to achieve his emancipation, and work in the direction of good. So, without saying a word of all that had been acted that morning, he rose and dressed

himself, and, going into the kitchen, he sat down without the fear of poison, and partook of the breakfast which had been so strangely prepared for him, nor was he satisfied till he read the chapter and psalm with which he had been so long familiar. He then returned to the bedroom, and addressing his wife—

Page 35

“You now see,” said he, “that Heaven has found us out. That visitor is nae ither than Mrs. Janet Dodds returned frae the grave, and sure it is that nane are permitted to leave that place o’ rest except for a purpose. No, it’s no for naething that Janet Dodds comes back to her auld hame. What the purpose may be, the Lord only knows; but this seems to me to be clear enough—that you and I maun pairt. You see that nae breakfast has been laid for you. I have taen mine, and nae harm has come o’t; a clear sign that though we are baith great criminals, you are considered to be the warst o’ the twa. It was you wha put poison into my ear and cast glamour ower my een; it was you wha egged me on, for ‘the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her words are smoother than oil; but her feet take hold of hell.’ That I am guilty, I know; and ‘though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.’ I will dree my doom whatever it may be, and so maun you yours; but there may be a difference, and so far as mortal can yet see, yours will be waur to bear than mine. But, however a’ that may be, the time is come when you maun leave this house. ‘Cast out the strange woman, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease;’ but ‘go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.’ Keep your secret frae a’ save the Lord; and may He hae mercy on your soul!”

With which words, savouring as they did of the oburgations of the black pot to the kettle, Mr. Thomas Dodds left his house, no doubt in the expectation that Mrs. Dodds *secunda* would move her camp, and betake herself once more to her old place of residence in the Grassmarket. Where he went that day no man ever knew, further than that he was seen in the afternoon in St. Giles’s Church, where, no doubt, he did his best to make a cheap purchase of immunity to his soul and body, in consideration of a repentance brought on by pure fear, produced by a spectre; and who knows but that that was a final cause of the spectre’s appearance? We have seen that it was a kindly spirit, preparing porridge and tea for him at the same time that it made his hair stand on end, and big drops of sweat settle upon his brow or roll down therefrom—a conjunction this of the tawse and the jelly-pot, whereby kind and loving parents try to redeem naughty boys. Nor let it be said that this kindly dealing with a murderer is contrary to the ways of Heaven; for, amidst a thousand other examples, did not Joshua, after the wall of Jericho lay flat at the blast of a trumpet, save that vile woman Rahab at the same time that he slew the young and the old, nay, the very infants, with the edge of the sword? All which, though we are not, by token of our sins, able to see the reason thereof, is doubtless consonant to a higher justice—altogether unlike our goddess, who is represented as blind, merely because she is supposed not to see a bribe when offered to her by a litigant.

Page 36

So the penitence of Mr. Thomas Dodds might be a very dear affair after all, in so much as terror is a condition of the soul which, of all we are doomed to experience, is the most difficult to bear, especially if it is a terror of divine wrath. On his return to his house in the evening, he found that Mrs. Mary had taken him at his word and decamped, but not without providing herself with as good a share of the “goods in communion” as she could, perhaps, at two or three returns, carry off. So was she like Zebulun in all save her righteousness, for she “rejoiced in her going out;” nay, she had some reason, for she had discovered that in a secret drawer of an old cabinet there was a pose of gold collected by the industrious hands of Mrs. Janet, and unknown to her husband, every piece of which she carried off in spite of all fear of the spectre, which, if a sensible one, might have been supposed to be more irritated at this heedless spoliation than at all the Jezebel had yet done, with the exception of the counselling her death in the deep hole of the North Loch. On seeing all this robbery, Mr. Dodds became more and more aware of the bad exchange he had made by killing his good spouse to enable him to take another, who had merely found more favour in his eyes by reason of her good looks; and we may augur how much deeper his feeling of regret would have been, had he known the secret pose, so frugally and prudently laid up, perhaps for his sake, at least for the sake of both, when disease or old age might overtake them, in a world where good and evil, pleasure and pain, appear to be fixed quantities, only shoved from one to another by wisdom and prudence, yet sometimes refusing to be moved even by these means.

After satisfying himself of the full extent of the robbery, which, after all, he had brought upon himself, and very richly deserved, he sat down upon a chair and began to moralize, after the manner of those late penitents who have found themselves out to be either rogues or fools—the number of whom comprehends, perhaps, all mankind. He had certainly good reason to be contrite. The angel in the house had become a spectre, and she who was no angel, either in the house or out of it, had carried off almost everything of any value he possessed. Nor did he stop at mere unspoken contrition, he bewailed in solemn tones his destiny, and then began to cast up all the perfections of good Janet, the more perfect and beautiful these seeming in proportion as he felt the fear of her reappearance, perhaps next time, in place of making his breakfast, to run away with him to the dire place of four letters. All her peculiarities were now virtues—nay, the very things which had appeared to him the most indefensible took on the aspect of angelic endowments. While her careful housewifery was all intended for his bodily health and comfort, her perseverance in adhering to the one chapter and the one psalm was due to that love of iteration which inspires those

Page 37

who are never weary of well-doing. And what was more extraordinary, one verse of the psalm—that which we have quoted—had special reference to the manner of her death, and her deliverance from condemnation in the world to come. No doubt the man who meditates upon his own crime or folly at the very moment when he is suffering from its sharp recalcitrations, is just about as miserable a wretch as the reformatory of the world can present; but when, to the effects upon himself, he is compelled to think of the cruelty he has exercised towards others—and those perhaps found out to be his best friends—we doubt if there are any words beyond the vocabulary of the condemned that are sufficient to express his anguish. Even this did not comprehend all the suffering of Mr. Dodds, for, was he not under doom without knowing what form it was to assume, whether the spectre (whose cookery might be a sham) would choke him, burn him, or run away with him?

Deeply steeped in this remorseful contemplation, during which the figure of his ill-used wife flitted before the eye of his fancy with scarcely less of substantial reality than she had shown in her spectral form, he found that he had lost all regard to time. The night was fast setting in, the shadows of the tall houses were falling deeper and deeper on the room, and the Sabbath stillness was a solemn contrast to the perturbations inside the chamber of his soul, where “the serpents and the cockatrices would not be charmed.” Still, everything within and without was dreary, and the spoliation of his means did not tend to enliven the outer scene, or impart a charm to the owner. While in this state of depression, Tammias heard a knock at the door. It was not, as on the former occasions, what is called a tirl. It might be a neighbour, or it might be an old crony, and he stood in need of some one to raise his spirits, so he went to the door and opened it. But what was his horror when he saw enter a female figure, in all respects so like his feared visitor that he concluded in the instant that she was the same! nor could all his penitence afford him resolution enough to make a proper examination; besides, it was grey dark, and even a pair of better eyes than he could boast of, might, under the circumstances soon to appear, have been deceived. Retreating into the kitchen, he was followed by this dubious, and yet not dubious visitor, who, as he threw himself upon a chair, took a seat right opposite to him.

“Ye’ll no ken me, Tammias Dodds?” said she.

Whereupon Tammias looked and looked again, and still the likeness he dreaded was so impressive, that, in place of moving his tongue, he moved, that is, he shuddered, all over.

“What—eh?” at length he stuttered; “ken ye? wha in God’s name are ye? No surely Mrs. Janet Dodds in the likeness of the flesh!”

“No, but her sister, Mrs. Paterson,” replied the other. “And is it possible ye can hae forgotten the only woman who was present at your first marriage?”

Page 38

"Ay, ay," replied Tammas, as he began to come to a proper condition of perceiving and thinking; "and it was you, then, wha was here this morning?"

"No, no," replied she; "I have not been here for seven long years, even since that terrible night when you pushed Janet into the North Loch."

"And may Heaven and its angels hae mercy upon me!" ejaculated he.

"Aiblins they may," said she, "for your purpose was defeated; yea, even by that Heaven and thae angels."

"What mean you, woman?" cried the astonished man. "What, in the name o' a' that's gude on earth and holy in heaven, do ye mean?"

"Just that Janet Dodds is at this hour a leevin' woman," was the reply.

"The Lord be thanked!" cried Tammas again, "for 'He preserveth all them that love Him.'"

"'But all the wicked He will destroy,'" returned she; "and surely it was wicked to try to drown sae faithful a wife and sae gude a Christian."

"Wicked!" rejoined he, in rising agony. "'Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let them reprove me, it shall,' as Solomon says, 'be an excellent oil.'"

"I am glad," continued the woman, "to find you with a turned heart; but whaur is the Jezebel ye took in her place?"

"Awa this day," replied he. "I have found her out, and never mair is she wife o' mine."

"Sae far weel and better," said she.

"Ay, but speak to me o' Janet," cried he, earnestly. "Come, tell me how she escaped, whaur she is, and how she is; for now I think there is light breaking through the fearfu' cloud."

"Light indeed," continued Mrs. Paterson; "and now, listen to a strange tale, mair wonderfu' than man's brain ever conceived. When ye thought ye had drowned her, and cared naething doubtless—for ye see I maun speak plain—whether her spirit went to the ae place or the ither, ay, and ran awa to add to murder a lee, she struggled out o' the deep, yea—

'He took her from the fearfu' pit,
And from the miry clay.'

And when she got to the bank she ran as for the little life was in her, until she came to the foot of Halkerstone's Wynd, where she crossed to the other side of the loch. When she thought hersel' safe, she took the road to Glasgow, where I was then living wi' my husband, wha is since dead. The night was dark, but self-preservation maks nae gobs at dangers; so on she went, till in the grey morning she made up to the Glasgow carrier, wha agreed to gie her a cast even to the end o' his journey. It was the next night when she arrived at my door, cold and hungry, and, what was waur, sair and sick at heart. She told me the hail story as weel as she could for sobs and greeting; for the thought aye rugged at her heart that the man she had liked sae weel, and had toiled for night and day, should hae turned out to be the murderer o' his ain wife."

"And weel it might hae rugged and rugged," ejaculated Tammas.

Page 39

"I got aff her wet clothes," continued she, "and gave her some strong drink to warm her, and then we considered what was to be dune. My husband was for off to Edinburgh to inform on ye, even if there should hae been a drawing o' the neck on't; but Janet cried, and entreated baith him and me to keep the thing quiet. She said she couldna gae back to you; and as for getting you punished, she couldna bear the thought o't. And then we a' thought what a disgrace it would be to our family if it were thought that my sister had been attempted to be murdered by her husband. We knew weel enough ye would say she had fallen in by accident; and when afterwards we heard that ye had buried a body that had been found in the loch, we made up our minds as to what we would do. We just agreed to keep Janet under her maiden name. Nane in Glasgow had ever seen her before, and her ain sorrows kept her within doors, so that the secret wasna ill to keep. Years afterwards, my husband was ta'en from me, and Janet and I came, about twa months syne, to live at Juniper Green, wi' John Paterson, my husband's brother, wha had offered us a hame."

"And is Janet there now?" cried Tammas, impatiently.

"Ay," continued Mrs. Paterson; "but, alas! she's no what she was. She gets at times out o' her reason, and will be that way for days thegither. The doctor has a name for it ower lang for my tongue, but it tells naething but what we ken ower weel. When in thae fits she thinks she is here in the Bow, and living with you, and working and moiling in the house just as she used to do langsyne. Mairower, and that troubles us maist ava, she will be out when the reason's no in, so that we are obliged to watch her. Five days syne she was aff in the morning before daylight, and even so late as this morning she played us the same trick; whaur she gaed we couldna tell, but I had some suspicion she was here."

"Ay," replied Mr. Dodds, as he opened his eyes very wide; "she was here wi' a vengeance."

Thus Mrs. Paterson's story was finished; and our legend of the Brownie, more veritable, we opine, than that of Bodsbeck, is also drawing to a conclusion. Tammas, after a period of meditation, more like one of Janet's hallucinations than a fit of rational thinking, asked his sister-in-law whether she thought that Janet, in the event of her getting quit of her day-dreams, would consent to live with him again. To which question she answered that she was not certain; for that Janet, when in her usual state of mind, was still wroth against him for the attempt to take away her life; but she added that she had no objection, seeing he was penitent, to give him an opportunity to plead for himself. She even went further, and agreed to use her influence to bring about a reconciliation. It was therefore agreed between them that the sister should call again when Janet had got quit of her temporary derangement, and Thomas might follow up this intimation

Page 40

with a visit. About four days thereafter, accordingly, Mrs. Paterson kept her word, and next day Mr. Dodds repaired to Juniper Green. At first Janet refused to see him; but upon Mrs. Paterson's representations of his penitence and suffering, she became reconciled to an interview. We may venture to say, without attempting a description of a meeting unparalleled in history, that if Janet Dodds had not been a veritable Calvinist, no good could have come of all Mr. Dodds's professions; but she knew that the Master cast out the dumb spirit which tore the possessed, and that that spirit attempted murder not less than Tammas. Wherefore might not *his* dumb spirit be cast out as well by that grace which aboundeth in the bosom of the Saviour? We do not say that a return of her old love helped this deduction, because we do not wish to mix up profane with sacred things. Enough if we can certify that a very happy conclusion was the result. The doctor did his duty, and Janet having been declared *compos mentis*, returned to her old home. Her first duty was to look for "the pose." It was gone in the manner we have set forth; but Janet could collect another, and no doubt in due time did; nor did she fail of any of her old peculiarities, all of which became endeared to Thomas by reason of their being veritable sacrifices to his domestic comfort.

GLEANINGS OF THE COVENANT.

THE LAST SCRAP.

It is a fact well known to Dr. Lee, and to many besides, that notwithstanding the extensive researches of Wodrow and others, there have died away in the silent lapse of time, or are still hovering over our cleuchs and glens, in the aspect of a dim and misty tradition, many instances of extreme cruelty and wanton oppression, exercised (during the reign of Charles II.) over the poor Covenanters, or rather Nonconformists, of the south and west counties of Scotland. In particular, although the whole district suffered, it was in the vale of the Nith, and in the hilly portion of the parish of Closeburn, that the fury of Grierson, Dalzell, and Johnstone—not to mention an occasional simoom, felt on the withering approach of Clavers *with his lambs*—was felt to the full amount of merciless persecution and relentless cruelty. The following anecdote I had from a sister of my grandmother, who lived till a great age, and who was lineally descended from one of the parties. I have never seen any notice whatever taken of the circumstances; but am as much convinced of its truth, in all its leading features, as I am of that of any other similar statements which are made in Wodrow, "Naphtali," or the "Cloud of Witnesses."

Page 41

The family of Harkness has been upwards of four hundred years tenants on the farm of Queensberry, occupying the farm-house and steading situated upon the banks of the Caple, and known by the name of Mitchelslacks. The district is wild and mountainous, and, at the period to which I refer, in particular, almost inaccessible through any regularly constructed road. The hearts, however, of these mountain residents were deeply attuned to religious and civil liberty, and revolted with loathing from the cold doctrines and compulsory ministrations of the curate of Closeburn. They were, therefore, marked birds for the myrmidons of oppression, led on by Claverhouse, and "Red Rob," the scarlet-cloaked leader of his band.

It was about five o'clock of the afternoon, in the month of August, that a troop of horse was seen crossing the Glassrig—a flat and heathy muir—and bearing down with great speed upon Mitchelslacks. Mrs. Harkness had been very recently delivered of a child, and still occupied her bed, in what was denominated the chamber, or cha'mer—an apartment separated from the rest of the house, and set apart for more particular occasions. Her husband, the object of pursuit, having had previous intimation, by the singing or whistling of a bird (as was generally reported on such occasions), had betaken himself, some hours before, to the mountain and the cave—his wonted retreat on similar visits. From this position, on the brow of a precipice, inaccessible by any save a practised foot, he could see his own dwelling, and mark the movements which were going on outside. The troop, having immediately surrounded the houses, and set a guard upon every door and window, as well as an outpost, or spy, upon an adjoining eminence, immediately proceeded with the search—a search conducted with the most brutal incivility, and even indelicacy; subjecting every child and servant to apprehensions of the most horrid and revolting character. It would be every way improper to mention even a tithe of the oaths and blasphemy which were not only permitted, but sanctioned and encouraged, by their impious and regardless leader. Suffice it to say, that after every other corner and crevice was searched in vain, the cha'mer was invaded, and the privacy of a female, in very interesting and delicate circumstances, rudely and suddenly entered.

"The old fox is here," said Clavers, passing his sword up to the hilt betwixt the mother and her infant, sleeping unconsciously on her arm, and thrusting it home with such violence that the point perforated the bed, and even penetrated the floor beneath.

"Toss out the whelp," vociferated Red Rob—always forward on such occasions; "and the b—ch will follow." And, suiting the action to the word, he rolled the sleeping, and happily well-wrapped, infant on the floor.

Page 42

"The Lord preserve my puir bairn!" was the instantaneous and instinctive exclamation of the agonized and now demented mother, springing at the same time from her couch, and catching up her child with a look of the most despairing alarm. A cloud of darkened feeling seemed to pass over the face and features of the infant,[*] and a cry of helpless suffering succeeded, at once to comfort and to madden the mother. "A murderous and monstrous herd are ye all," said she, again resuming her position, and pressing the affrighted, rather than injured child to her breast. "Limbs of Satan and enemies of God, begone! He whom ye seek is not here; nor will the God *he* serves and *you* defy, ever suffer him, I fervently hope and trust, to fall into your merciless and unhallowed hands."

[note *: "In the light of heaven its face
Grew dark as they were speaking."]

At this instant a boy about twelve years of age was dragged into the room, and questioned respecting the place of his father's retreat, sometimes in a coaxing, and at others in a threatening manner. The boy presented, to every inquiry, the aspect of dogged resistance and determined silence.

"Have the bear's cub to the croft," said Clavers, "and shoot him on the spot."

The boy was immediately removed; and the distracted mother left, happily for herself, in a state of complete insensibility. There grew, and there still grows, a rowan-tree in the corner of the garden or kailyard of Mitchelslacks; to this tree or bush the poor boy was fastened with cords, having his eyes bandaged, and being made to understand, that, if he did not reveal his father's retreat, a ball would immediately pass through his brain. The boy shivered, attempted to speak, then seemed to recover strength and resolution, and continued silent.

"Do you wish to smell gunpowder?" ejaculated Rob, firing a pistol immediately under his nose, whilst the ball perforated the earth a few paces off.

The boy uttered a loud and unearthly scream, and his head sunk upon his breast. At this instant, the aroused and horrified mother was seen on her bended knees, with clasped hands, and eyes in which distraction rioted, at the feet of the destroyers. But nature, which had given her strength for the effort, now deserted her, and she fell lifeless at the feet of her apparently murdered son. Even the heart of Clavers was somewhat moved at this scene; and he was in the act of giving orders for an immediate retreat, when there rushed into the circle, in all the frantic wildness of a maniac, at once the father and the husband. He had observed from his retreat the doings of that fearful hour: and, having every reason to conclude that he was purchasing his own safety at the expense of the lives of his whole family, he had issued from the cave, and hurled himself from the steep, and was now in the presence of those whom he deemed the murderers of his family.

Page 43

“Fiends—bloody, brutal, heartless fiends—are ye all! And is this your work, ye sons of the wicked and the accursed one? What! could not *one* content ye? Was not the boy enough to sacrifice on your accursed temple to Moloch, but ye must imbrue your hands in the blood of a weak, an infirm, a helpless woman! Oh, may the God of the Covenant,” added he, bending reverently down upon his knees, and looking towards heaven, “may the God of Jacob forgive me for cursing ye! And, thou man of blood” (addressing Clavers personally), “think ye not that the blood of Brown, and of my darling child, and my beloved wife—think ye not, wot ye not, that their blood, and the blood of the thousand saints which ye have shed, will yet be required, ay, fearfully required, even to the last drop, by an avenging God, at your hands?”

Having uttered these words with great and awful energy, he was on the point of drawing his sword, concealed under the flap of his coat, and of selling his life as dearly as possible, when Mrs. Harkness, who had now recovered her senses, rushed into his arms, exclaiming—

“Oh Thomas, Thomas, what is this ye hae done? Oh, beware, beware!—I am yet alive and unskaited. God has shut the mouths of the lions; they have not been permitted to hurt *me*. And our puir boy, too, moves his head, and gives token of life. But you, you, my dear, dear, infatuated husband—oh, into what hands have ye fallen, and to what a death are ye now reserved!”

“Unloose the band,” vociferated Clavers; “make fast your prisoner’s hands, and, in the devil’s name, let us have done with this drivelling!”

There was a small public-house at this time at Closeburn mill, and into this Clavers and his party went for refreshment; whilst an adjoining barn, upon which a guard was set, served to secure the prisoner. No sooner was Mr. Harkness left alone, and in the dark—for it was now nightfall—than he began to think of some means or other of effecting his escape. The barn was happily known to him; and he recollected that, though the greater proportion of the gable was built of stone and lime, yet that a small part towards the top, as was sometimes the case in these days, was constructed of turf, and that, should he effect an opening through the soft material, he might drop with safety upon the top of a peat-stack, and thus effect his escape to Creechope Linn, with every pass and cave of which he was intimately acquainted. In a word, his escape was effected in this manner; and though the alarm was immediately given, and large stones rolled over the precipices of the adjoining linn, he was safely ensconced in darkness, and under the covert of a projecting rock; and ultimately (for, in the course of a few days, King William and liberty were the order of the day) he returned to his wife and his family, there to enjoy for many years that happiness which the possession of a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man is sure to impart. The brother, however, of this more favoured individual was not so fortunate, as may be gathered from Wodrow, and the “Cloud of Witnesses;” for he was executed ere the day of deliverance, at the Gallowlee, and his most pathetic and eloquent address is still extant.

Page 44

Let us rejoice with trembling that we live in an age and under a government so widely different from those now referred to; and whilst on our knees we pour forth the tribute of thankfulness to God, let us teach our children to prize the precious inheritance so dearly purchased by our forefathers.

* * * * *

THE STORY OF MARY BROWN.

If the reader of what I am going to relate for his or her edification, or for perhaps a greater luxury, *viz.* wonder, should be so unreasonable as to ask for my authority, I shall be tempted, because a little piqued, to say that no one should be too particular about the source of pleasure, inasmuch as, if you will enjoy nothing but what you can prove to be a reality, you will, under good philosophical leadership, have no great faith in the sun—a thing which you never saw, the existence of which you are only assured of by a round figure of light on the back of your eye, and which may be likened to tradition; so all you have to do is to believe like a good Catholic, and be contented, even though I begin so poorly as to try to interest you in two very humble beings who have been dead for many years, and whose lives were like a steeple without a bell in it, the intention of which you cannot understand till your eye reaches the weathercock upon the top, and then you wonder at so great an erection for so small an object. The one bore the name of William Halket, a young man, who, eight or nine years before he became of much interest either to himself or any other body, was what in our day is called an Arab of the City—a poor street boy, who didn't know who his father was, though, as for his mother, he knew her by a pretty sharp experience, insomuch as she took from him every penny he made by holding horses, and gave him more cuffs than cakes in return. But Bill got out of this bondage by the mere chance of having been taken a fancy to by Mr. Peter Ramsay, innkeeper and stabler, in St. Mary's Wynd (an ancestor, we suspect, of the Ramsays of Barnton), who thought he saw in the City Arab that love of horse-flesh which belongs to the Bedouin, and who accordingly elevated him to the position of a stable-boy, with board and as many shillings a week as there are days in that subdivision of time.

Nor did William Halket—to whom for his merits we accord the full Christian name—do any discredit to the perspicacity of his master, if it was not that he rather exceeded the hopes of his benefactor, for he was attentive to the horses, civil to the farmers, and handy at anything that came in his way. Then, to render the connection reciprocal, William was gratefully alive to the conviction that if he had not been, as it were, taken from the street, the street might have been taken from him, by his being locked up some day in the Heart of Midlothian. So things went on in St. Mary's Wynd for five or six years, and might have gone on for twice that

Page 45

period, had it not been that at a certain hour of a certain day William fell in love with a certain Mary Brown, who had come on that very day to be an under-housemaid in the inn; and strange enough, it was a case of “love at first sight,” the more by token that it took effect the moment that Mary entered the stable with a glass of whisky in her hand sent to him by Mrs. Ramsay. No doubt it is seldom that a fine blooming young girl, with very pretty brown hair and very blue eyes, appears to a young man with such a recommendation in her hand; but we are free to say that the whisky had nothing to do with an effect which is well known to be the pure result of the physical attributes of the individual. Nay, our statement might have been proved by the counterpart effect produced upon Mary herself, for she was struck by William at the same moment when she handed him the glass; and we are not to assume that the giving of a pleasant boon is always attended with the same effect as the receiving of it.

But, as our story requires, it is the love itself between these two young persons, whose fates were so remarkable, we have to do with—not the causes, which are a mystery in all cases. Sure it is, humble in position as they were, they could love as strongly, as fervently, perhaps as ecstatically, as great people—nay, probably more so, for education has a greater chance of moderating the passion than increasing it; and so, notwithstanding of what Plutarch says of the awfully consuming love between Phrygius and Picrea, and also what Shakespeare has sung or said about a certain Romeo and a lady called Juliet, we are certain that the affection between these grand personages was not *more* genuine, tender, and true, than that which bound the simple and unsophisticated hearts of Will Halket and Mary Brown. But at best we merely play on the surface of a deep subject when we try with a pen to describe feelings, and especially the feelings of love. We doubt, if even the said pen were plucked from Cupid’s wing, whether it would help us much. We are at best only left to a choice of expressions, and perhaps the strongest we could use are those which have already been used a thousand times—the two were all the world to each other, the world outside nothing at all to them; so that they could have been as happy on the top of Mount Ararat, or on the island of Juan Fernandez, provided they should be always in each other’s company, as they were in St. Mary’s Wynd. And as for whispered protestations and chaste kisses—for really their love had a touch of romance about it you could hardly have expected, but which yet kept it pure, if not in some degree elevated above the loves of common people—these were repeated so often about the quiet parts of Arthur’s Seat and the King’s Park, and the fields about the Dumbiedykes and Duddingstone Loch, that they were the very moral aliments on which they lived. In short, to Mary Brown the great Duke of Buccleuch was as nothing compared to Willie Halket, and to Willie

Page 46

Halket the beautiful Duchess of Grammont would have been as nothing compared to simple Mary Brown. All which is very amiable and very necessary; for if it had been so ordained that people should feel the exquisite sensations of love in proportion as they were beautiful, or rich, or endowed with talent (according to a standard), our world would have been even more queer than that kingdom described by Gulliver, where the ugliest individual is made king or queen.

Things continued in this very comfortable state at the old inn in St. Mary's Wynd for about a year, and it had come to enter into the contemplation of Will that upon getting an increase of his wages he would marry Mary, and send her to live with her mother, a poor, hard-working washerwoman, in Big Lochend Close; whereunto Mary was so much inclined, that she looked forward to the day as the one that promised to be the happiest that she had yet seen, or would ever see. But, as an ancient saying runs, the good hour is in no man's choice; and about this time it so happened that Mr. Peter Ramsay, having had a commission from an old city man, a Mr. Dreghorn, located as a planter in Virginia, to send him out a number of Scottish horses, suggested to William that he would do well to act as supercargo and groom. Mr. Dreghorn had offered to pay a good sum to the man who should bring them out safe, besides paying his passage over and home. And Mr. Ramsay would be ready to receive Will into his old place again on his return. As for Mary, with regard to whom the master knew his man's intentions, she would remain where she was, safe from all temptation, and true to the choice of her heart. This offer pleased William, because he saw that he could make some money out of the adventure, whereby he would be the better able to marry, and make a home for the object of his affections; but he was by no means sure that Mary would consent; for women, by some natural divining of the heart, look upon delays in affairs of love as ominous and dangerous. And so it turned out that one Sabbath evening, when they were seated beneath a tree in the King's Park, and William had cautiously introduced the subject to her, she was like other women.

"The bird that gets into the bush," she said, as the tears fell upon her cheeks, "sometimes forgets to come back to the cage again. I would rather hae the lean lintie in the hand, than the fat finch on the wand."

"But you forget, Mary, love," was the answer of Will, "that you can feed the lean bird, but you can't feed me. It is I who must support you. It is to enable me to do that which induces me to go. I will come with guineas in my pocket where there are now only pennies and placks; and you know, Mary, the Scotch saying, 'A heavy purse makes a light heart.'"

"And an unsteady one," rejoined Mary. "And you may bring something else wi' you besides the guineas; maybe a wife."

“One of Mr. Dreghorn’s black beauties,” said Will, laughing. “No, no, Mary, I am too fond of the flaxen ringlets, the rosy cheeks, and the blue eyes; and you know, Mary, you have all these, so you have me in your power. But to calm your fears, and stop your tears, I’ll tell you what I’ll do.”

Page 47

“Stay at hame, Will, and we’ll live and dee thegither.”

“No,” replied Will; “but, like the genteel lover I have read of, I will swear on your Bible that I will return to you within the year, and marry you at the Tron Kirk, and throw my guineas into the lap of your marriage-gown, and live with you until I die.”

For all which and some more we may draw upon our fancy; but certain it is, as the strange story goes, that Will did actually then and there—for Mary had been at the Tron Kirk, and had her Bible in her pocket (an article, the want of which is not well supplied by the scent-bottle of our modern Maries)—swear to do all he had said, whereupon Mary was so far satisfied that she gave up murmuring—perhaps no more than that. Certain also it is, that before the month was done, Will, with his living, kicking charges, and after more of these said tears from Mary than either of them had arithmetic enough to enable them to count, embarked at Leith for Richmond, at which place the sugar-planter had undertaken to meet him.

We need say nothing of the voyage across the Atlantic, somewhat arduous at that period, nor need we pick up Will again till we find him in Richmond, with his horses all safe, and as fat and sleek as if they had been fed by Neptune’s wife, and had drawn her across in place of her own steeds. There he found directions waiting from Mr. Dreghorn, to the effect that he was to proceed with the horses to Peach Grove, his plantation, a place far into the heart of the country. But Will was content; for had he not time and to spare within the year, and he would see some more of the new world, which, so far as his experience yet went, seemed to him to be a good place for a freeman to live in? So off he went, putting up at inns by the way, as well supplied with food and fodder as Mr. Peter Ramsay’s, in St. Mary’s Wynd, and showing off his nags to the planters, who wondered at their bone and muscle, the more by reason they had never seen Scotch horses before. As he progressed, the country seemed to Will more and more beautiful, and by the time he reached Peach Grove he had come to the unpatriotic conclusion that all it needed was Mary Brown, with her roses, and ringlets, and eyes, passing like an angel—lovers will be poets—among these ebon beauties, to make it the finest country in the world.

Nor when the Scotsman reached Peach Grove did the rosy side of matters recede into the shady; for he was received in a great house by Mr. Dreghorn with so much kindness, that, if the horses rejoiced in maize and oats, Will found himself, as the saying goes, in five-bladed clover. But more awaited him, even thus much more, that the planter, and his fine lady of a wife as well, urged him to remain on the plantation, where he would be well paid and well fed; and when Will pleaded his engagement to return to Scotland within the year, the answer was ready, that he might spend eight months in Virginia at least, which would enable him to take home more money,—an answer that seemed so very reasonable, if not prudent, that “Sawny” saw the advantage thereof and agreed. But we need hardly say that this was conceded upon the condition made with himself, that he would write to Mary all the particulars, and also upon the condition,

acceded to by Mr. Dreghorn, that he would take the charge of getting the letter sent to Scotland.

Page 48

All which having been arranged, Mr. Halket—for we cannot now continue to take the liberty of calling him Will—was forthwith elevated to the position of driving negroes in place of horses, an occupation which he did not much relish, insomuch that he was expected to use the lash, an instrument of which he had been very chary in his treatment of four-legged chattels, and which he could not bring himself to apply with anything but a sham force in reference to the two-legged species. But this objection he thought to get over by using the sharp crack of his Jehu-voice as a substitute for that of the whip; and in this he persevered, in spite of the jeers of the other drivers, who told him the thing had been tried often, but that the self-conceit of the negro met the stimulant and choked it at the very entrance to the ear; and this he soon found to be true. So he began to do as others did; and he was the sooner reconciled to the strange life into which he had been precipitated by the happy condition of the slaves themselves, who, when their work was over, and at all holiday hours, dressed themselves in the brightest colours of red and blue and white, danced, sang, ate corn-cakes and bacon, and drank coffee with a zest which would have done a Scotch mechanic, with his liberty to produce a lock-out, much good to see. True, indeed, the white element of the population was at a discount at Peach Grove. But in addition to the above source of reconciliation, Halket became day by day more captivated by the beauty of the country, with its undulating surface, its wooded clumps, its magnolias, tulip-trees, camellias, laurels, passion-flowers, and palms, its bright-coloured birds, and all the rest of the beauties for which it is famous all over the world. But nature might charm as it might—Mary Brown was three thousand miles away.

Meanwhile the time passed pleasantly, for he was accumulating money; Mary's letter would be on the way, and the hope of seeing her within the appointed time was dominant over all the fascinations which charmed the senses. But when the month came in which he ought to have received a letter, no letter came—not much this to be thought of, though Mr. Dreghorn tried to impress him with the idea that there must be some change of sentiment in the person from whom he expected the much-desired answer. So Halket wrote again, giving the letter, as before, to his master, who assured him it was sent carefully away; and while it was crossing the Atlantic he was busy in improving his penmanship and arithmetic, under the hope held out to him by his master that he would, if he remained, be raised to a book-keeper's desk; for the planter had seen early that he had got hold of a long-headed, honest, sagacious "Sawny," who would be of use to him. On with still lighter wing the intermediate time sped again, but with no better result in the shape of an answer from her who was still the object of his day fancies and his midnight dreams. Nor

Page 49

did all this kill his hope. A third letter was despatched, but the returning period was equally a blank. We have been counting by months, which, as they sped, soon brought round the termination of his year, and with growing changes too in himself; for as the notion began to worm itself into his mind that his beloved Mary was either dead or faithless, another power was quietly assailing him from within,—no other than ambition in the most captivating of all shapes—Mammon. We all know the manner in which the golden deity acquires his authority; nor do we need to have recourse to the conceit of the old writer who tells us that the reason why gold has such an influence upon man, lies in the fact that it is of the colour of the sun, which is the fountain of light, and life, and joy. Certain it is, at least, that Halket having been taken into the counting-house on a raised salary, began “to lay by,” as the Scotch call it; and by-and-by, with the help of a little money lent to him by his master, he began by purchasing produce from the neighbouring plantations, and selling it where he might,—all which he did with advantage, yet with the ordinary result to a Scotsman, that while he turned to so good account the king’s head, the king’s head began to turn his own.

And now in place of months we must begin to count by lustrums; and the first five years, even with all the thoughts of his dead, or, at least, lost Mary, proved in Halket’s case the truth of the book written by a Frenchman, to prove that man is a plant; for he had already thrown out from his head or heart so many roots in the Virginian soil that he was bidding fair to be as firmly fixed in his new sphere as a magnolia, and if that bore golden blossoms, so did he; yet, true to his first love, there was not among all these flowers one so fair as the fair-haired Mary. Nay, with all hope not yet extinguished, he had even at the end of the period resolved upon a visit to Scotland, when, strangely enough, and sadly too, he was told by Mr. Dreghorn, that having had occasion to hear from Mr. Peter Ramsay on the subject of some more horse-dealings, that person had reported to him that Mary Brown, the lover of his old stable-boy, was dead. A communication this which, if it had been made at an earlier period, would have prostrated Halket altogether, but it was softened by his long foreign anticipations, and he was thereby the more easily inclined to resign his saddened soul to the further dominion of the said god, Mammon; for, as to the notion of putting any of those beautiful half-castes he sometimes saw about the planter’s house at Peach Grove, in the place of her of the golden ringlets, it was nothing better than the desecration of a holy temple. Then the power of the god increased with the offerings, one of which was his large salary as manager, a station to which he was elevated shortly after he had received the doleful tidings of Mary’s death. Another lustrum is added, and we arrive

Page 50

at ten years; and yet another, and we come to fifteen; at the end of which time Mr. Dreghorn died, leaving Halket as one of his trustees, for behoof of his wife, in whom the great plantation vested. If we add yet another lustrum, we find the Scot—fortunate, save for one misfortune that made him a joyless worshipper of gold—purchasing from the widow, who wished to return to England, the entire plantation under the condition of an annuity.

And Halket was now rich, even beyond what he had ever wished; but the chariot-wheels of Time would not go any slower—nay, they moved faster, and every year more silently, as if the old Father had intended to cheat the votary of Mammon into a belief that he would live for ever. The lustrums still passed: another five, another, and another, till there was scope for all the world being changed, and a new generation taking the place of that with which William Halket and Mary Brown began. And he was changed too, for he began to take on those signs of age which make the old man a painted character; but in one thing he was not changed, and that was the worshipful steadfastness, the sacred fidelity, with which he still treasured in his mind the form and face, the words and the smiles, the nice and refined peculiarities that feed love as with nectared sweets, which once belonged to Mary Brown, the first creature that had moved his affections, and the last to hold them, as the object of a cherished memory for ever. Nor with time, so deceptive, need we be so sparing in dealing out those periods of five years, but say at once that at last William Halket could count twelve of them since first he set his foot on Virginian soil; yea, he had been there for sixty summers, and he had now been a denizen of the world for seventy-eight years. In all which our narrative has been strange, but we have still the stranger fact to set forth, that at this late period he was seized with that moral disease (becoming physical in time) which the French call *mal du pays*, the love of the country where one was born, and first enjoyed the fresh springs that gush from the young heart. Nor was it the mere love of country, as such, for he was seized with a particular wish to be where Mary lay in the churchyard of the Canongate, to erect a tombstone over her, to seek out her relations and enrich them, to make a worship out of a disappointed love, to dedicate the last of his thoughts to the small souvenirs of her humble life. Within a month this old man was on his way to Scotland, having sold the plantation, and taken bills with him to an amount of little less than a hundred thousand pounds.

Page 51

In the course of five weeks William Halket put his foot on the old pier of Leith, on which some very old men were standing, who had been urchins when he went away. The look of the old harbour revived the image which had been imprinted on his mind when he sailed, and the running of the one image into the other produced the ordinary illusion of all that long interval appearing as a day; but there was no illusion in the change, that Mary Brown was there when he departed, and there was no Mary Brown there now. Having called a coach, he told the driver to proceed up Leith Walk, and take him to Peter Ramsay's inn, in St. Mary's Wynd; but the man told him there was no inn there, nor had been in his memory. The man added that he would take him to the White Horse in the Canongate, and thither accordingly he drove him. On arriving at the inn, he required the assistance of the waiter to enable him to get out of the coach; nor probably did the latter think this any marvel, after looking into a face so furrowed with years, so pale with the weakness of a languid circulation, so saddened with care. The rich man had only an inn for a home, nor in all his native country was there one friend whom he hoped to find alive. Neither would a search help him, as he found on the succeeding day, when, by the help of his staff, he essayed an infirm walk in the great thoroughfare of the old city. The houses were not much altered, but the signboards had got new names and figures; and as for the faces, they were to him even as those in Crete to the Cretan, after he awoke from a sleep of forty-seven years—a similitude only true in this change, for Epimenidas was still as young when he awoke as when he went to sleep, but William Halket was old among the young and the grown, who were unknown to him, as he was indeed strange to them. True, too, as the coachman said, Peter Ramsay's inn, where he had heard Mary singing at her work, and the stable where he had whistled blithely among his favourite horses, were no longer to be seen—*etiam cineres perierunt*—their very sites were occupied by modern dwellings. What of that small half-sunk lodging in Big Lochend Close, where Mary's mother lived, and where Mary had been brought up, where perhaps Mary had died? Would it not be a kind of pilgrimage to hobble down the Canongate to that little lodging, and might there not be for him a sad pleasure even to enter and sit down by the same fireplace where he had seen the dearly-beloved face, and listened to her voice, to him more musical than the melody of angels?

And so, after he had walked about till he was wearied, and his steps became more unsteady and slow, and as yet without having seen a face which he knew, he proceeded in the direction of the Big Close. There was, as regards stone and lime, little change here; he soon recognised the half-sunk window where, on the Sunday evenings, he had sometimes tapped as a humorous sign that he was about to enter, which had often been responded

Page 52

to by Mary's finger on the glass, as a token that he would be welcome. It was sixty years since then. A small corb would now hold all that remained of both mother and daughter. He turned away his head as if sick, and was about to retrace his steps. Yet the wish to enter that house rose again like a yearning; and what more in the world than some souvenir of the only being on earth he ever loved was there for him to yearn for? All his hundred thousand pounds were now, dear as money had been to him, nothing in comparison of the gratification of seeing the room where she was born—yea, where probably she had died. In as short a time as his trembling limbs would carry him down the stair, which in the ardour of his young blood he had often taken at a bound, he was at the foot of it. There was there the old familiar dark passage, with doors on either side, but it was the farthest door that was of any interest to him. Arrived at it, he stood in doubt. He would knock, and he would not; the mystery of an undefined fear was over him; and yet, what had he to fear? For half a century the inmates had been changed, no doubt, over and over again, and he would be as unknowing as unknown. At length the trembling finger achieves the furtive tap, and the door was opened by a woman, whose figure could only be seen by him in coming between him and the obscure light that came in by the half-sunk window in front; nor could she, even if she had had the power of vision, see more of him, for the lobby was still darker.

"Who may live here?" said he, in the expectation of hearing some name unknown to him.

The answer, in a broken, cracked voice, was not slow—

"Mary Brown; and what may you want of her?"

"Mary Brown!" but not a word more could he say, and he stood as still as a post; not a movement of any kind did he show for so long a time that the woman might have been justified in her fear of a very spirit.

"And can ye say nae mair, sir?" rejoined she. "Is my name a bogle to terrify human beings?"

But still he was silent, for the reason that he could not think, far less speak, nor even for some minutes could he achieve more than the repetition of the words, "Mary Brown."

"But hadna ye better come in, good sir?" said she. "Ye may ken our auld saying, 'They that speak in the dark may miss their mark;' for words carry nae light in their een ony mair than me, for, to say the truth, I am old and blind."

And, moving more as an automaton than as one under a will, Halket was seated on a chair, with this said old and blind woman by his side, who sat silent and with blank eyes

waiting for the stranger to explain what he wanted. Nor was the opportunity lost by Halket, who, unable to understand how she should have called herself Mary Brown, began, in the obscure light of the room, to scrutinize her form and features; and in doing this, he went upon the presumption that this second Mary Brown only carried the name of the

Page 53

first; but as he looked he began to detect features which riveted his eyes; where the reagent was so sharp and penetrating, the analysis was rapid—it was also hopeful—it was also fearful. Yes, it was true that that woman was *his* Mary Brown. The light-brown ringlets were reduced to a white stratum of thin hair; the blue eyes were grey, without light and without speculation; the roses on the cheeks were replaced by a pallor, the forerunner of the colour of death; the lithe and sprightly form was a thin spectral body, where the sinews appeared as strong cords, and the skin seemed only to cover a skeleton. Yet, withal, he saw in her that identical Mary Brown. That wreck was dear to him; it was a relic of the idol he had worshipped through life; it was the only remnant in the world which had any interest for him; and he could on the instant have clasped her to his breast, and covered her pale face with his tears. But how was he to act? A sudden announcement might startle and distress her.

“There was once a Mary Brown,” said he, “who was once a housemaid in Mr. Peter Ramsay’s inn in St. Mary’s Wynd.”

“And who can it be that can recollect that?” was the answer, as she turned the sightless orbs on the speaker. “Ye maun be full o’ years. Yes, that was my happy time, even the only happy time I ever had in this world.”

“And there was one William Halket there at that time also,” he continued.

Words which, as they fell upon the ear, seemed to be a stimulant so powerful as to produce a jerk in the organ; the dulness of the eyes seemed penetrated with something like light, and a tremor passed over her entire frame.

“That name is no to be mentioned, sir,” she said nervously, “except aince and nae mair; he was my ruin; for he pledged his troth to me, and promised to come back and marry me, but he never came.”

“Nor wrote you?” said Halket.

“No, never,” replied she; “I would hae gien the world for a scrape o’ the pen o’ Will Halket; but it’s a’ past now, and I fancy he is dead and gone to whaur there is neither plighted troth, nor marriage, nor giving in marriage; and my time, too, will be short.”

A light broke in upon the mind of Halket, carrying the suspicion that Mr. Dreghorn had, for the sake of keeping him at Peach Grove, never forwarded the letters, whereto many circumstances tended.

“And what did you do when you found Will had proved false?” inquired Halket. “Why should that have been your ruin?”



“Because my puir heart was bound up in him,” said she, “and I never could look upon another man. Then what could a puir woman do? My mother died, and I came here to work as she wrought—ay, fifty years ago, and my reward has been the puir boon o’ the parish bread; ay, and waur than a’ the rest, blindness.”

“Mary!” said Halket, as he took her emaciated hand into his, scarcely less emaciated, and divested of the genial warmth.

Page 54

The words carried the old sound, and she started and shook.

"Mary," he continued, "Will Halket still lives. He was betrayed, as you have been betrayed. He wrote three letters to you, all of which were kept back by his master, for fear of losing one who he saw would be useful to him; and, to complete the conspiracy, he reported you dead upon the authority of Peter Ramsay. Whereupon Will betook himself to the making of money; but he never forgot his Mary, whose name has been heard as often as the song of the birds in the groves of Virginia."

"Ah, you are Will himself!" cried she. "I ken now the sound o' your voice in the word 'Mary,' even as you used to whisper it in my ear in the fields at St. Leonard's. Let me put my hand upon your head, and move my fingers ower your face. Yes, yes. Oh, mercy, merciful God, how can my poor worn heart bear a' this!"

"Mary, my dear Mary!" ejaculated the moved man, "come to my bosom and let me press you to my heart; for this is the only blissful moment I have enjoyed for sixty years."

Nor was Mary deaf to his entreaties, for she resigned herself as in a swoon to an embrace, which an excess of emotion, working on the shrivelled heart and the wasted form, probably prevented her from feeling.

"But, oh, Willie!" she cried, "a life's love lost; a lost life on both our sides."

"Not altogether," rejoined he, in the midst of their mutual sobs. "It may be—nay, it is—that our sands are nearly run. Yea, a rude shake would empty the glass, so weak and wasted are both of us; but still there are a few grains to pass, and they shall be made golden. You are the only living creature in all this world I have any care for. More thousands of pounds than you ever dreamt of are mine, and will be yours. We will be married even yet, not as the young marry, but as those marry who may look to their knowing each other as husband and wife in heaven, where there are no cruel, interested men to keep them asunder; and for the short time we are here you shall ride in your carriage as a lady, and be attended by servants; nor shall a rude breath of wind blow upon you which it is in the power of man to save you from."

"Ower late, Willie, ower late," sighed the exhausted woman, as she still lay in his arms. "But if all this should please my Will—I canna use another name, though you are now a gentleman—I will do even as you list, and that which has been by a cruel fate denied us here we may share in heaven."

"And who shall witness this strange marriage?" said he. "There is no one in Edinburgh now that I know or knows me. Has any one ever been kind to you?"

"Few, few indeed," answered she. "I can count only three."

“I must know these wonderful exceptions,” said he, as he made an attempt at a grim smile; “for those who have done a service to Mary Brown have done a double service to me. I will make every shilling they have given you a hundred pounds. Tell me their names.”

Page 55

"There is John Gilmour, my landlord," continued she, "who, though he needed a' his rents for a big family, passed me many a term, and forbye brought me often, when I was ill and couldna work, many a bottle o' wine; there is Mrs. Paterson o' the Watergate, too, who aince, when I gaed to her in sair need, gave me a shilling out o' three that she needed for her bairns; and Mrs. Galloway, o' Little Lochend, slipt in to me a peck o' meal ae morning when I had naething for breakfast."

"And these shall be at our marriage, Mary," said he. "They shall be dressed to make their eyes doubtful if they are themselves. John Gilmour will wonder how these pounds of his rent he passed you from have grown to hundreds; Mrs. Paterson's shilling will have grown as the widow's mite never grew, even in heaven; and Mrs. Galloway's peck of meal will be made like the widow's cruse of oil—it will never be finished while she is on earth."

Whereupon Mary raised her head. The blank eyes were turned upon him, and something like a smile played over the thin and wasted face. At the same moment a fair-haired girl of twelve years came jumping into the room, and only stopped when she saw a stranger.

"That is Helen Kemp," said Mary, who knew her movements. "I forgot Helen; she lights my fire, and when I was able to gae out used to lead me to the Park."

"And she shall be one of the favoured ones of the earth," said he, as he took by the hand the girl, whom the few words from Mary had made sacred to him, adding, "Helen, dear, you are to be kinder to Mary than you have ever been;" and, slipping into the girl's hand a guinea, he whispered, "You shall have as many of these as will be a bigger tocher to you than you ever dreamed of, for what you have done for Mary Brown."

And thus progressed to a termination a scene, perhaps more extraordinary than ever entered into the head of a writer of natural things and events not beyond the sphere of the probable. Nor did what afterwards took place fall short of the intentions of a man whose intense yearnings to make up for what had been lost led him into the extravagance of a vain fancy. He next day took a great house, and forthwith furnished it in proportion to his wealth. He hired servants in accordance, and made all the necessary arrangements for the marriage. Time, which had been so cruel to him and his sacred Mary, was put under the obligation of retribution. John Gilmour, Mrs. Paterson, Mrs. Galloway, and Helen Kemp were those, and those alone, privileged to witness the ceremony. We would not like to describe how they were decked out, nor shall we try to describe the ceremony itself. But vain are the aspirations of man when he tries to cope with the Fates! The changed fortune was too much for the frail and wasted bride to bear. She swooned at the conclusion of the ceremony, and was put into a silk-curtained bed. Even the first glimpse of grandeur was too much for the spirit whose sigh was "vanity, all is vanity," and, with the words on her lips, "A life's love lost," she died.

Page 56

TIBBY FOWLER.

"Tibby Fowler o' the glen,
A' the lads are wooin' at her."—*Old Song*.

All our readers have heard and sung of "Tibby Fowler o' the glen;" but they may not all be aware that the glen referred to lies within about four miles of Berwick. No one has seen and not admired the romantic amphitheatre below Edrington Castle, through which the Whitadder coils like a beautiful serpent glittering in the sun, and sports in fantastic curves beneath the pasture-clad hills, the grey ruin, the mossy and precipitous crag, and the pyramid of woods, whose branches, meeting from either side, bend down and kiss the glittering river, till its waters seem lost in their leafy bosom. Now, gentle reader, if you have looked upon the scene we have described, we shall make plain to you the situation of Tibby Fowler's cottage, by a homely map, which is generally *at hand*. You have only to bend your arm, and suppose your shoulder to represent Edrington Castle, your hand Clarabad, and near the elbow you will have the spot where "ten cam' rowing owre the water;" a little nearer to Clarabad is the "lang dyke side," and immediately at the foot of it is the site of Tibby's cottage, which stood upon the Edrington side of the river; and a little to the west of the cottage, you will find a shadowy row of palm-trees, planted, as tradition testifieth, by the hands of Tibby's father, old Ned Fowler, of whom many speak until this day. The locality of the song was known to many; and if any should be inclined to inquire how we became acquainted with the other particulars of our story, we have only to reply, that that belongs to a class of questions to which we do not return an answer. There is no necessity for a writer of tales taking for his motto—*vitam impendere vero*. Tibby's parents had the character of being "bien bodies;" and, together with their own savings, and a legacy that had been left them by a relative, they were enabled at their death to leave their daughter in possession of five hundred pounds. This was esteemed a fortune in those days, and would afford a very respectable foundation for the rearing of one yet. Tibby, however, was left an orphan, as well as the sole mistress of five hundred pounds, and the proprietor of a neat and well-furnished cottage, with a piece of land adjoining, before she had completed her nineteenth year; and when we add that she had hair like the raven's wings when the sun glances upon them, cheeks where the lily and the rose seemed to have lent their most delicate hues, and eyes like twin dew-drops glistening beneath a summer moonbeam, with a waist and an arm rounded like a model for a sculptor, it is not to be wondered at that "a' the lads cam' wooin' at her." But she had a woman's heart as well as woman's beauty and the portion of an heiress. She found her cottage surrounded, and her path beset, by a herd of grovelling pounds-shillings-and-pence

Page 57

hunters, whom her very soul loathed. The sneaking wretches, who profaned the name of lovers, seemed to have *money* written on their very eyeballs, and the sighs they professed to heave in her presence sounded to her like stifled groans of—*your gold—your gold!* She did not hate them, but she despised their meanness; and as they one by one gave up persecuting her with their addresses, they consoled themselves with retorting upon her the words of the adage, that “her *pride* would have a fall!” But it was not from pride that she rejected them, but because her heart was capable of love —of love, pure, devoted, unchangeable, springing from being beloved, and because her feelings were sensitive as the quivering aspen, which trembles at the rustling of an insect’s wing. Amongst her suitors there might have been some who were disinterested; but the meanness and sordid objects of many caused her to regard all with suspicion, and there was none among the number to whose voice her bosom responded as the needle turns to the magnet, and frequently from a cause as inexplicable. She had resolved that the man to whom she gave her hand should wed her for herself—and for herself only. Her parents had died in the same month; and about a year after their death she sold the cottage and the piece of ground, and took her journey towards Edinburgh, where the report of her being a “great fortune,” as her neighbours term her, might be unknown. But Tibby, although a sensitive girl, was also, in many respects, a prudent one. Frequently she had heard her mother, when she had to take but a shilling from the legacy, quote the proverb, that it was

“Like a cow in a clout,
That soon wears out.”

Proverbs we know are in bad taste, but we quote it, because by its repetition the mother produced a deeper impression on her daughter’s mind than could have been effected by a volume of sentiment. Bearing therefore in her memory the maxim of her frugal parent, Tibby deposited her money in the only bank, we believe, that was at that period in the Scottish capital, and hired herself as a child’s maid in the family of a gentleman who occupied a house in the neighbourhood of Restalrig. Here the story of her fortune was unknown, and Tibby was distinguished only for a kind heart and a lovely countenance. It was during the summer months, and Leith Links became her daily resort; and there she was wont to walk with a child in her arms and another leading by the hand, for there she could wander by the side of the sounding sea; and her heart still glowed for her father’s cottage and its fairy glen, where she had often heard the voice of its deep waters, and she felt the sensation which we believe may have been experienced by many who have been born within hearing of old Ocean’s roar, that wherever they may be, they hear the murmur of its billows as the voice of a youthful friend, and she almost fancied, as she approached the sea, that

Page 58

she drew nearer the home which sheltered her infancy. She had been but a few weeks in the family we have alluded to, when, returning from her accustomed walk, her eyes met those of a young man habited as a seaman. He appeared to be about five-and-twenty, and his features were rather manly than handsome. There was a dash of boldness and confidence in his countenance; but as the eyes of the maiden met his, he turned aside as if abashed and passed on. Tibby blushed at her foolishness, but she could not help it, she felt interested in the stranger. There was an expression, a language, an inquiry in his gaze, she had never witnessed before. She would have turned round to cast a look after him, but she blushed deeper at the thought, and modesty forbade it. She walked on for a few minutes, upbraiding herself for entertaining the silly wish, when the child who walked by her side fell a few yards behind. She turned round to call him by his name—Tibby was certain that she had no motive but to call the child, and though she did steal a sidelong glance towards the spot where she had passed the stranger, it was a mere accident, it could not be avoided—at least so the maiden wished to persuade her conscience against her conviction; but that glance revealed to her the young sailor, not pursuing the path on which she had met him, but following her within the distance of a few yards, and until she reached her master's door, she heard the sound of his footsteps behind her. She experienced an emotion between being pleased and offended at his conduct, though we suspect the former eventually predominated, for the next day she was upon the Links as usual, and there also was the young seaman, and again he followed her to within sight of her master's house. How long this sort of dumb love-making, or the pleasures of diffidence continued, we cannot tell. Certain it is that at length he spoke, wooed, and conquered; and about a twelvemonth after their first meeting, Tibby Fowler became the wife of William Gordon, the mate of a foreign trader. On the second week after their marriage William was to sail upon a long, long voyage, and might not be expected to return for more than twelve months. This was a severe trial for poor Tibby, and she felt as if she would not be able to stand up against it. As yet her husband knew nothing of her dowry, and for this hour she had reserved its discovery. A few days before their marriage she had lifted her money from the bank and deposited it in her chest.

“No, Willie, my ain Willie,” she cried, “ye maunna, ye winna leave me already: I have neither faither, mother, brother, nor kindred; naebody but you, Willie; only you in the wide world; and I am a stranger here, and ye winna leave your Tibby. Say that ye winna, Willie.” And she wrung his hand, gazed in his face, and wept.

“I maun gang, dearest; I maun gang,” said Willie, and pressed her to his breast; “but the thocht o’ my ain wifie will mak the months chase ane anither like the moon driving shadows owre the sea. There’s nae danger in the voyage, hinny, no a grain o’ danger; sae dinna greet; but come, kiss me, Tibby, and when I come hame I’ll mak ye leddy o’ them a’.”

Page 59

"Oh no, no, Willie!" she replied; "I want to be nae leddy; I want naething but my Willie. Only say that ye'll no gang, and here's something here, something for ye to look at." And she hurried to her chest, and took from it a large leathern pocket-book that had been her father's, and which contained her treasure, now amounting to somewhat more than six hundred pounds. In a moment she returned to her husband; she threw her arms around his neck; she thrust the pocket-book into his bosom. "There, Willie, there," she exclaimed; "that is yours—my faither placed it in my hand wi' a blessing, and wi' the same blessing I transfer it to you—but dinna, dinna leave me." Thus saying, she hurried out of the room. We will not attempt to describe the astonishment, we may say the joy, of the fond husband, on opening the pocket-book and finding the unlooked-for dowry. However intensely a man may love a woman, there is little chance that her putting an unexpected portion of six hundred pounds into his hands will diminish his attachment; nor did it diminish that of William Gordon. He relinquished his intention of proceeding on the foreign voyage, and purchased a small coasting vessel, of which he was both owner and commander. Five years of unclouded prosperity passed over them, and Tibby had become the mother of three fair children. William sold his small vessel and purchased a larger one, and in fitting it up all the gains of his five successful years were swallowed up. But trade was good. She was a beautiful brig, and he had her called the *Tibby Fowler*. He now took a fond farewell of his wife and little ones upon a foreign voyage which was not calculated to exceed four months, and which held out high promise of advantage. But four, eight, twelve months passed away, and there were no tidings of the *Tibby Fowler*. Britain was then at war; there were enemies' ships and pirates upon the sea, and there had been fierce storms and hurricanes since her husband left; and Tibby thought of all these things and wept; and her lisping children asked her when their father would return, for he had promised presents to all, and she answered, to-morrow, and to-morrow, and turned from them and wept again. She began to be in want, and at first she received assistance from some of the friends of their prosperity; but all hope of her husband's return was now abandoned; the ship was not insured, and the mother and her family were reduced to beggary. In order to support them, she sold one article of furniture after another, until what remained was seized by the landlord in security for his rent. It was then that Tibby and her children, with scarce a blanket to cover them, were cast friendless upon the streets, to die or to beg. To the last resource she could not yet stoop, and from the remnants of former friendship she was furnished with a basket and a few trifling wares, with which, with her children by her side, she set out, with a broken and a sorrowful heart, wandering from village to village. She had travelled in this manner for some months, when she drew near her native glen, and the cottage that had been her father's, that had been her own, stood before her. She had travelled all the day and sold nothing. Her children were pulling by her tattered gown, weeping and crying, "Bread, mother, give us bread!" and her own heart was sick with hunger.

Page 60

“Oh, wheesht, my darlings, wheesht!” she exclaimed, and she fell upon her knees and threw her arms round the necks of all the three, “you will get bread soon; the Almighty will not permit my bairns to perish; no, no; ye shall have bread.”

In despair she hurried to the cottage of her birth. The door was opened by one who had been a rejected suitor. He gazed upon her intently for a few seconds; and she was still young, being scarce more than six-and-twenty, and in the midst of her wretchedness, yet lovely.

“Gude gracious, Tibby Fowler!” he exclaimed, “is that you? Poor creature! are ye seeking charity? Weel, I think ye’ll mind what I said to you now, that your pride would have a fa’!”

While the heartless owner of the cottage yet spoke, a voice behind her was heard exclaiming, “It is her! it is her! my ain Tibby and her bairns!”

At the well-known voice, Tibby uttered a wild scream of joy, and fell senseless on the earth; but the next moment her husband, William Gordon, raised her to his breast. Three weeks before he had returned to Britain, and traced her from village to village, till he found her in the midst of their children, on the threshold of the place of her nativity. His story we need not here tell. He had fallen into the hands of the enemy; he had been retained for months on board of their vessel; and when a storm had arisen, and hope was gone, he had saved her from being lost and her crew from perishing. In reward for his services, his own vessel had been restored to him, and he was returned to his country, after an absence of eighteen months, richer than when he left, and laden with honours. The rest is soon told. After Tibby and her husband had wept upon each other’s neck, and he had kissed his children, and again their mother, with his youngest child on one arm, and his wife resting on the other, he hastened from the spot that had been the scene of such bitterness and transport. In a few years more, William Gordon having obtained a competency, they re-purchased the cottage in the glen, where Tibby Fowler lived to see her children’s children, and died at a good old age in the house in which she had been born—the remains of which, we have only to add, for the edification of the curious, may be seen until this day.

THE CRADLE OF LOGIE.

It is not very easy, when we consider the great desire manifested by authors and editors to serve up piquant dishes of fiction on the broad table of literature, to account for the fact that the undoubtedly true story of the Cradle of Logie and the Indian Princess, as she is often called, should never have appeared in print. It has apparently escaped the sharpest eyes of our chroniclers. Sir Walter Scott did not appear to have much fancy for Angus; but it would seem that the facts of this strange occurrence in a civilised country, and not very far back, had never reached him. Even the histories of Forfarshire

Page 61

are silent; and the pictures of Scotland for tourists, which generally seize on any romantic trait connected with a locality or an old ruin, have also overlooked them. Yet the principal personage in the drama was one whose name was for years in the mouths of the people, not only for peculiarities of character, but retribution of fate; and this local fame has died away only within a comparatively recent period. It was in my very early years that I saw the Cradle, and heard, imperfectly, its tale from my mother; but her account was comparatively meagre. I sought long for details; nor was I by any means successful till I fell in with a man named Aminadab Fairweather, a resident at the Scouring Burn, in Dundee, who was in the habit of frequenting Logie House, and who, though very old, remembered many of the circumstances.

The truth is, there were rich flesh-pots in Logie House—richer than those which supplied the muscles of the Theban mummies, so enduring through long ages, no doubt, from being so well fed; for Mr. Fletcher of Lindertes,[*] who was proprietor of the mansion, was the greatest epicurean and glossogaster that ever lived since Leontine times. Then a woman called Jenny McPherson, who had in early life, like “a good Scotch louse,” who “aye travels south,” found her way from Lochaber to London, where she had got into George’s kitchen, and learned something better than to make sour kraut, was the individual who administered to her master’s epicureanism, if not gulosity. Nay, it was said she had a hand in the tragedy of the Cradle; but, however that may be, it is certain she was deep in the confidences of Fletcher. But then Mrs. McPherson, as she chose to call herself—though the never a McPherson was connected with her except by the ties of blood, which, like those of all Celts, had their loose terminations dangling into infinity at the beginning of the world’s history—was given to administering the contents of her savoury flesh-pots to others than the family of Logie; yea, like a true Highlander, she delighted in having henchmen—or haunchmen truly, in this instance—who gave her love in return for her edible luxuries. It happened that our said Aminadab was one of those favoured individuals; and it is lucky for this generation that he was, for if he had not been, there would assuredly have been no records of the Cradle and the black lady.

[note *: Mr. Fletcher had also the property of Balinsloe as well as Logie. They’ve all passed into other hands.]

It was in a little parlour off the big kitchen that Janet received her henchmen. And was there ever man so happy as our good Aminadab?—and that for several human reasons, whereof the first was certainly the Logie flesh-pots; the second, the stories about the romantic place wherewith she contrived to garnish and spice these savoury mouthfuls; and last, Janet herself, who was always under the feminine delusion that she was the corporate representative of the first

Page 62

of these reasons, if, indeed, the others were not mere *adjecta*, not to be taken into account; whereas there were doubts if she was for herself ever counted at all, except as the mere “old-pot” which contained the realities. And their happiness would certainly have been complete if it had not been—at least in the case of Aminadab—that it could be enjoyed only by passing through that grim medium, a churchyard. But then, is not all celestial bliss burdened by this condition; nay, is not even our earthly bliss, which is a foretaste of heaven, only a flower raised upon the rottenness of other flowers—a type of the soul as it issues from corruption? Yes, Aminadab could not get to the holy of holies except by passing through Logie kirkyard, a small and most romantic Golgotha, on the left of the road leading to Lochee, whose inhabitants it contained, and which was so limited and crowded, that one might prefigure it as one of those holes or dungeons in Michael Angelo’s pictures, belching forth spirits in the shape of inverted tadpoles, the tail uppermost, and yet representing ascending sparks. The wickets that surrounded Logie House—lying as it does upon the south side of Balgay Hill, and flanked on the east by a deep gully, wherethrough runs a small stream, which, so far as I know, has no name—were locked at night. The terrors of this place, at the late hours when these said henchmen behaved to seek their savoury rewards, were the only drawback to Aminadab’s supreme bliss.

And if the time of these symposial meetings had been somewhat later in the century, how much more formidable would have been a passage through this contracted valley of tumuli and bones! No churchyard, except those of Judea, was ever invested with such terrors—not the mystical fears of a divine fate seen in the descending cloud, with Justice gleaming with fiery eyes on Sin, and holding those scales, the decision of which would destine to eternal bliss or eternal woe, and that Justice personified in Him “whose glory is a burning like the burning of a fire,”—no, but the revolting fears produced by the profanity of that poor worm of very common mud, which has been since the beginning of time acting the God. Ay, the aurelia-born image of grace sees a difference when it looks from the sun to the epigenetic thing which He raises out of corruption. There was, in that small place of skulls, a rehearsal of the great day. We hear little of these freaks now-a-days; but it was different then, when men made themselves demons by drink. One night William Maule of Panmure, then in his days of graceless frolic; Fletcher Read, the nephew of the laird, and subsequently the laird himself, of Logie; Rob Thornton, the merchant, Dudhope, and other kindred spirits, who used to sing in the inn of Sandy Morren, the hotel-keeper, “Death begone, here’s none but souls,” sallied drunk from the inn. The story goes that the night was dark, and there stood at the door a hearse, which

Page 63

had that day conveyed to the “howf,” now about to be shut up because of its offence against the nostrils of men who are not destined to need a grave, the wife of an inconsolable husband and the mother of children; and thereupon came from Maule’s mouth—for wickedness will seek its playful function in a pun—the proposition that the bacchanals should have a rehearsal in the kirkyard of Logie. Well, it signified, of course, nothing that the Black Princess had been buried there, so far away from the land of “the balmy East,”

“Where the roses blow and the oranges grow,
And all is divine but man below.”

Fletcher Read might have recollected this, but what though? Was not the pun a good one—worthy of Hood? They all mounted the hearse, Panmure being driver; nor could Sandy Morren give to these white-robed spirits, who were so soon to rise in glory from the envious earth, more than a sour-milk horn and half a dozen of snow-white table-cloths for the theatrical property of the great players. So it has been since the time when the shepherd who killed the son of Aebolus, for that he gave them wine which they thought was poison, because they found their heads out of order—wine still generates on folly the afflatus of madness. The story goes on. The night was as dark as those places they were to illumine with their white robes, alas! not of innocence. But the darkness was not of the moon’s absence in another hemisphere; only that darkness which is cloud-born, and must cede in twinkling yet glorious intervening moments to the moon, when she will salute the graves and the marriage-guests; and the hearse, as it slowly wended its way up the road to Lochee, every now and then pouring forth from its dark inside peals of laughter. The travellers on the road look with wide eyes at the grim apparition, and flee. They arrive at the rough five-bar stile; it is thrown back, and the hearse is driven into the place of the dead. The story goes on. There is silence everywhere, and appropriately there, where the four brick corners of the smoke-coloured Cradle rise from the hollow of Balgay Hill. They waited till the moon shone out again in her calm, breathless repose; and then resounded from the clanging black boards of the hearse a terrible din resembling thunder, and already each man, with his table-cover rolled round him, was snug behind the solemn head-stones, storied with domestic loves severed by the dark angel.

Now was the time for the trumpet-call, which behoved to be sounded by the cycloborean lungs of the broad-chested Panmure. The story has no reason to flag where the stake of the *grimelinage* is the upraising of white-robed spirits. The sour-milk horn is sounded as it never was sounded before on the earth which had passed away; every spirit comes forth from below the head-stones; and there rose a wail of misery which nothing but wine could have produced.

“Mercy on our poor souls!”

Page 64

“Justice,” cried Maule. “Stand out there, Bob Thornton, and answer for the sins done in the body.” The story goes on, and it intercalates “fie, fie, on man.” Thornton stands forth shrieking for the said mercy.

“Was not you, sir, last night, of the time of the past world, in the inn kept by Sandy Morren, in the town called Bonnie Dundee—bonnie in all save its sin, and its magistracy gone a-begging, and its hemp-spinners,[*] and the effect of Sandy Riddoch’s reign—drinking and swearing?”

[note *: There is some prevision here which I cannot explain.]

“I was.”

“Then down with you to the pit which has no bottom whatsoever.”

And Thornton disappears in the hollow not far from where the brick Cradle stands.

“Stand forth, Fletcher Read.”

“Weren’t you, sir, art and part in confining in yonder dungeon the poor unfortunate black lady, whereby she was murdered by that villain of an uncle of yours, Fletcher of Lindertes?”

“I was.”

“Down with you to the pit and the lake of brimstone.”

And down he went into the same valley.

“Stand forth, Dudhope.”

“Were not you, sir, seen, on the 21st of December of the late dynasty of time, in the company of one of these denizens of Rougedom in the Overgate, that disgrace of the last world, for which it has very properly been burnt up like a scroll of Sandy Riddoch’s peculations?”

“I was.”

“Then down to the pit.”

And Dudhope—even he the representative of Graham of opprobrious memory—disappeared.

“You’re all (cried Maule) like the Lady of Luss’s kain eggs, every one of which fell through the ring into the tub, and didn’t count.”



And so on with the rest, till there were no more to go down. Yet the horn sounded again, for Maule was not so drunk that he did not remember there were any more to come; but then, had he not been singing in Sandy Morren's, "Death begone, here's none but souls?" The story goes on. The horn having sounded, there stood forth a figure that did not belong to this crowd of sinners. It was a woman dressed in dark clothes, with a black bonnet, and an umbrella in her hand. How the great God can show his power over the little god, man! The woman was no other than a Mrs. Geddes of Lochee, who, having got a little too much at the Scouring Burn, had, on her way home, slipped into the resting-place of her husband, who had been buried only a week before, and having got drowsy, had fallen asleep on the flat stone which covered him. In a half dreamy state she had seen all this terrible mummery—no mummery to her; for she thought it real: and as every one stood forward by name, she often said to herself, "When will it be Johnnie's turn, poor man? for he was an awfu' sinner; I fear the pit's owre guid for him." But Johnnie was not called. And then she expected her own summons—fell agony of a moment of

Page 65

the expectation of scorching flames to envelope her body, the flesh of which, as she pinched herself, had feeling and sensibility. Then if these great men, whose names she had often heard of, and who, as having white robes, and riches, and honours, might have expected to get to heaven, and yet didn't, what was to become of her, who had only dark garments, and who had been drinking that night at the Scouring Burn? There was no great wonder that Mrs. Geddes was distressed, yea miserable; and when she heard the horn sounded and no one went forward—Johnnie was of course afraid, and was concealing himself—she stood up with her umbrella in her hand. And Maule, now getting terrified through the haze of his drunkenness, cried out, "Who are you?"

"Mrs. Geddes, Johnnie Geddes's wife, o' the village o' Lochee, just twa miles frae that sink o' sin, Bonnie Dundee. I hae been a great sinner. I kept company wi' Sandy Simpson when Johnnie was living, and came here to greet owre his grave."

"A woman!" cried Maule; "then to heaven as fast as your wings will carry you."

And this man, who braved God, shook with terror before a weak woman; and so did all these brave bacchanals, who, on hearing the horn when no more remained to be condemned, thought their false God had called them, and had returned to witness the object of their new-born fear. Hurrying into the hearse, the party were in a few minutes posting to Dundee in solemn silence, where they arrived about two o'clock, not to resume their orgies, but to separate each for his home, with the elements in him of a sense of retribution, not forgotten for many a day. At the long run the story finishes, and the chronicler, lifting up his hands to heaven, cries, "Is there no end, Lord, is there no end to the profanity of man? Lord, why stayeth the hand of vengeance?"

If guidman Aminadab had known these things—which he couldn't do, because, like Sir James Colquhoun's last day (of the session), which he wanted the judges to abolish, this last day (of the world) happened after the said Aminadab was in the habit of seeking Mrs. M'Pherson's parlour—he would have had greater deductions from his pleasure; for Aminadab read his Bible, and belonged to the first Secession. And so it was better he didn't, especially on that night when Mrs. M'Pherson had been so extraordinarily condescending to her henchman as to set before him a fine piece of pork, in recognition of his adherence to the resolution of leaving the flesh-pots of Egypt—the old Church. It was a dark night in January. There was a cheerful fire in the neat parlour, and Janet was communicative, if not chatty, in good English, got in George's kitchen at Kew.

"I would like all this better," said Aminadab, "if I had not that churchyard to come through; and then there's that fearful-looking Cradle in the hollow, with four lums like the stump posts of a child's rocking-bed. What is it, Janet?—it's not a cow-house, nor a henhouse, but a pure dungeon, fearful to free men, who might shudder to be confined in it."

Page 66

"What more?" said Janet. "Do you know anything more, Aminadab?"

"Yes; but I am eating Logie's pork, and don't like to say much."

"Never mind the pork, man; speak out. Do the folks down in the town say anything, or shake their heads, or point their fingers?"

"Well, they say there's a human being confined in it," replied Aminadab. "And so they may, for sounds have been heard coming from the dark hole—ay, and I have heard them myself—deep moans and weeping. I would like to know if there's a secret."

"Hush, hush, Aminadab. There is a secret, and you're the only man I would speak of it to."

And Mrs. McPherson rose solemnly and locked the door upon herself and her henchman.

"You know, Aminadab, that my master came from Bombay some years ago, and brought home with him a black wife. Dear, good soul—so kind, so timid, so cheerful too; but, Heaven help me, what could I do?—for you know Mr. Fletcher is a terrible man. He does not fear the face of clay; and the scowl upon his face when he is in his moods is terrible. I am bound to obey."

"But what of her?" said Aminadab. "It's no surely she who is in the horrid hole?"

"Never you mind that, but eat your bacon, you fool for stopping me. When I'm stopped, I seldom begin again for a day and night at least."

"Something like your master, Janet."

"No, Aminadab; I have a *heart*, lad."

"That I know, Janet," said Aminadab, with a lump of pork in his mouth; "and—and—it—is—fat—lass."

"And the easier swallowed," said she

"I meant your heart, Mrs. McPherson.

"And I must swallow that too, as it seems to come up my throat and choke me, even as the pork seems to do you. Take time, Aminadab. There's no hurry, man. Ah well, then, we have it all among the servants how Mr. Fletcher got my lady. He was a great man in Bombay—governor, I think, or something near that—and my lady was the only daughter of the Nawab or Nabob of some kingdom near Bombay—I forget the strange Indian name. She was the very petted child of her father; and when Mr. Fletcher saw her, she



was running about the palace like a wild, playful creature—I may say, our bonny little roes of the Highland hills, or maybe another creature she used to speak about, I think they call it gazelle, with such wonderful eyes for shining, that you cannot look into them no more you could at the sun. For, oh, Aminadab! they have strange things in these places, which are much nearer the sun than we are here in this old country. But the mighty Nabob was unwilling to give her to the white-faced lover, even though he was the governor of Bombay, forbye having Balinsloe and Lindertes in Scotland too. Maybe he thought a Scotsman could not like a black Indian princess, though she was with her grand shawls about her, and her jewelled turban, and diamonds and pearls, and all that; and maybe, Aminadab, he thought”—and here Janet lowered her husky voice—“that it was just for these fine things he wanted her, rich though he was himself. Yet, strange enough too, the Nabob had promised the man who should marry his daughter the weight of herself in fine Indian gold, weighed in a balance, as her tocher. Heard ye ever the like of a tocher, man?”

Page 67

“That would depend upon her size and weight, Janet, lass. Now, had you a tocher like that, it would be a gey business, I think,—fourteen potato-stones at the very least, I would say, eh?”—and he must get quit of the mouthful before he could finish—“Eh, Janet?”

“And if you go on at that rate with my pork, you will not, by-and-by, be much behind me. But, guid faith, Aminadab, I’m not ashamed, lad, of my size. A poor, smoke-dried, shrivelled cook shames her guid savoury dishes, intended to fatten mankind and make them jolly. But you are right about the offer of the Nabob. The creature was small, and light, and lithe, and could not weigh much. But then, think of the jewels! These did not depend upon her weight, but upon their own light. Oh, what diamonds, and rubies, and pearls as big as marbles! I have looked at them till my eyes reeled with the light of them; and no wonder, when I have heard them valued at a hundred thousand guineas—and to think of all that being held in a little box! There is one necklace worth fifteen thousand itself.”

“And yet a small neck, too, maybe?—’And thou shalt make a necklace to fit her neck,’ said the Lord. It would not be half the girth of yours, Mrs. M’Pherson?”

“Ay, Aminadab; not a half, nor anything like it. But don’t stop me again, lad, or I’ll stop the pork. (A pause.) Ah, well, I fear it was the shining jewels, and not the black face, did the business on my master’s side. And, of course, he would be all smiles at the Nabob’s court; for, Aminadab, my lad, there never was on the face of God’s earth a man who could so soon change the horrid dark scowl into the very light of sunshine as Mr. Fletcher. I have seen him, when in company with Kincaldrum, and Dudhope, and Gleneagles, and the rest, laughing till his face was as red as the sun, then, all of a sudden, when some of his moods came over him, turn just like a fiend new come out of—oh, I’ll just say it out, Aminadab, though ye be of the Seceders—just hell, lad.”

“But, good mother Janet—”

“Mother your own mother, man, till you be a father, Aminadab. Have I not told you to let me go on? There’s no honour in a mother: that sow you are eating was the mother six times of thirteen at each litter; and I think that’s about seventy-eight. Mother, forsooth! Ay, and yet you’ll see a beggar wretch, clad in tanterwallops—rags is owre guid a word—coming to Logie door, and looking as if she had the right to demand meal from me, merely because she has two at her feet and one in her arms. Such honourable gaberlunzies get no meal from me. My master was keen for the match; but the Nabob was shy of the white face. And here’s a curious thing—I got it from my lady herself. She said the Nabob, her papa, as she called him—for, just like us here, they have kindly words and real human feelings—made a bargain with my master, that if he took her away out of India to where the big woman they call the Company lives, he would be kind to her, and *’treat her as he would do a child which is rocked in a cradle.’*”

Page 68

“Better than Naomi’s wish,” said Aminadab; “And the Lord grant ye find rest in the house of thy husband.”

“That bargain they made him sign with blood drawn just right over his heart; and the Nabob signed, too, for the weight of gold and the jewels. Then came the marriage. Such a day had not been witnessed in Bombay for years, if ever, when a great son of the big woman was to be married to the daughter of a Nawab. All the great men of Bombay, and the rich Parsees, she called them, were at the king’s court, and the little princes round about for hundreds of miles, and all the ministers of Indian state,—for you must know that the marriage was in the English fashion, as the Nawab thought he could bind the bridegroom best in that way. Then the grand feast, and such dancing, and deray, and firing of cannons, and waving of flags, was never seen!”

“And all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.”

“Just so, guid auld Burgher lad,” rejoined Mrs. M’Pherson.

“They had only been a few months married, when Mr. Fletcher’s health having failed him,—and surely his liver is rotten to this day, if not his heart too,—he came home with his wife, and bought this bonnie place. She brought with her a squalling half-and-half thing,—there he’s at the door this moment.” By-and-by, “My little prince (she cried), go to Aditi—Ady, we call her—that’s the black ayah my lady brought home with her.”

“That will be another wife, I fancy,” said Aminadab. “They have all two or three wives in the East, haven’t they? Guid faith, ane’s mair than enuegh here, if the Nawab’s daughter’s in her cradle.”

“No, no, no, ye fool.”

“And I shall cut off the multitude of No,’ Ezekiel thirtieth, fifteen.”

“An ayah is a servant; and Ady’s a good black soul as ever foolishly washed her face when there’s no occasion for the trouble. And yet these black creatures are for ever washing themselves. They wash before breakfast and after breakfast, before dinner and after dinner, before supper and after supper, but the never a bit whiter they are that ever I could see.”

“Yea, they might save themselves a great deal of trouble,” said Aminadab.

“But they won’t,” rejoined Janet. “We have been tortured with their washings. Sometimes, when angry, I say to Ady, Can’t you go down to the *Scouring Burn*?”

“And wash thyself in the brook Cherith, which is before Jordan.”

“But she says it’s Brahma that bids her—that’s their biggest god; and this Brahma is a trouble to us too. It seems he is everywhere; and Ady seeks him on Balgay Hill and in the churchyard o’ nights, when the moon’s out; thereafter coming in with those eyes of hers like flaming coals, darting them on us, who don’t believe in Brahma, as if we were the real heathens, and not she and her mistress.”

“And thou shalt not erect a temple to Dagon, but cut him down to the stumps,” said Amimadab.

Page 69

“Hush, hush, man. Our servants are all in terror. They say that Ady is right, for that they have seen him in about the skirts of Balgay woods, and down in the hollow of the ravine, moving about like a spirit of darkness, with something white round his head, and a wide cloak wrapped about him.”

Aminadab had just taken up a large tankard of ale, wherewith he intended to make a clean sweep of his hearty supper down his throat; but he paused, laid down the tankard, turned pale, shook, and looked wistfully into the face of his chieftainess. Nor did he speak a word, because some idea had probably magnetized his tongue at the wrong end, and the other would not move.

“Ady says, and so do the servants, that he has no shadow; and we should think he shouldn’t, because our ghosts hereaway have none that ever I heard of. But that’s a lie of their foolish religion; for I could swear I one night saw his shadow flit like that of a sun-dial, when the sun’s in a hurry to get the curtains round his head, away past the east end of the house, and disappear in a moment. But I’ll tell you what, Aminadab, he may, like our spirits, be a shadow himself. I could hardly speak for fear, though five minutes before I had as good a tankard of that Logie-brewed as you have before you; but I got my tongue through the ale at the other end o’t, and cried out with Zechariah, wherein I was something like you, Aminadab, ‘Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north.’”

“That would stump his Dagonship,” said Aminadab, with an effort to be cheerful in spite of the foresaid idea, whatever it was. “Ay,” he continued, after drinking off the tankard, and getting courage and wit at same time, “a line from the Bible is just like a rifle-shot in the hinder-end of these false gods. They can’t stand it nohow.”

“And you’ve stumpt me,” replied the cook, “with the chopping-knife of your folly, so that I don’t know where to find my legs again. It was a year after he came to Logie before another half-and-half was born—a boy too; and then there came a change over Mr. Fletcher’s mind. There’s something strange about those English that live long in India. I’ve noticed it when I was in London, in George’s house; but it’s all from the liver,” continued the cook. “First grilled upon the ribs, then cooled with champagne, then healed up with curry, chiles, and ginger. No wonder the devil gets into the kitchen, where a dish like that is waiting him. Then they’re so proud and selfish, and fond of themselves and their worthless lives.”

“‘Skin for skin, yea, all that they have, will they give for their lives.’ So the devil said of him of Uz.”

Page 70

"But you see it's all in the liver," continued the cook. "Aditi came to me one day, and said, 'De 'Gyptians in India tink body divided into sixteen parts, with God to each part! he! he! Janette!' and the black creature laughed. Then I say, the liver of an Englishman, after he comes from India, is the devil's part; and so it was with Mr. Fletcher. He began first to interfere with Kalee's religion. 'Oh, terrible, Janette!' cried Ady, on another day; 'master cut off head of Kartekeya's peacock, and smashed de tail of Garoora.' On another day, 'Right eye of elephant head of Ganeso knocked into de skull.' Another day, this time in tears, weeping awfully, 'Oh, Janette! tail of holy cow clean snap over de rump!'"

"All right," said Aminadab of the first Secession. "And I will cause their images to cease out of Noph."

"Ay, but I am 'wide,'" continued the cook.

"Three feet and a half across the bosom," said Aminadab, who was still in his reverie, with the secret idea still exercising a power over him, even after the tankard of ale.

"Wide in my mind and charities, ye fool, man," continued she, not disinclined this time to laugh; for she was proud of being jolly in the person. "I felt for poor Kalee. She wept incessantly at the loss of the cow's tail, and asked me if I had seen it, nay, implored me like a worshipper to try to recover it for her. I said, God forgive me, that I had seen it in the dung-pit, and that George had carted it away. 'And didn't know de value!' cried Ady. 'Worth de necklace of diamonds;' and both she and Kalee broke out into such a yell as made the house ring. Yet with all this, Kalee still loved the gloomy man. She would throw her jewelled arms about his neck, and hang upon him, with her feet off the ground, so little, light, and lithe. She was so like a sapling, you could have bent her any way. And when the love was in her heart, and it was never absent, she was really bonny. Our eyes hereaway are mere cinders to these glowing churley bits of flaming sulphur; and then that strange look of the shining face, just as if she yearned to enter into his very soul,—ay, as the souls of these black creatures go up and form a part of Brahma's spirit, that's all over the earth."

"All art," cried Aminadab, getting impatient of Janet's eloquence—eloquence, I say; for Janet was a superior woman, and, though a cook, a natural genius. "All art. 'And he made her to use enchantments, and deal with familiar spirits and wizards,'"

"No, no, man, it was all real nature. But it wasna real nature made him throw the poor black soul away, whose gold and jewels he had bartered his white, I should say yellow, rotten-livered body for. Ay, if she had been a man, I would have liked her better than him; for, as I hate the skin of an old hen when the fat becomes rancid and golden, so do I hate a yellow-faced man, with the devil sitting gnawing at his liver."

"The reason the devil's so bitter," said Aminadab.

Page 71

“Ay, if you were to try a beef-steak off his rump or spare-rib, ye’ll find it more like the absynth I use in the kitchen than the flesh of a capon or three-year old stot.”

“Yea, I would be like unto him who was made to ‘suck honey out of the living rock.’”

“The cruel man threw her away from him, just as if her tocher had been the weight of herself in copper, instead of gold. And oh! it was so easily done; for the creature was not only, as I have said, light, but she had such a touchiness when her glancing eye saw that her love was not returned by him she loved beyond all the earth, that you would have thought she shrunk all up into a tiny child, cowering in the corner of the big drawing-room, so like a wounded bird.”

“Yaw-aw-aw,” yawned the Seceder, half asleep. “And he gave up the ghost in the room, while he sought his meat to relieve his soul.”

“Asleep and dreaming,” cried Mrs. M’Pherson, who had got into the very spirit of description. “Away to the Scouring Burn, and never show your face here again.”

But Aminadab soon pacified the wide-souled and wide-bodied cook, who, being of his own persuasion, really loved the man. Yes, she was a Seceder from the old faith; and such a Seceder! No wonder there was a blank among the congregation of mere bodies.

It was now well on to twelve, and Aminadab had that Cradle to pass, and the kirkyard to get through; all, too, with that idea in his head to which we have alluded, and which, we may as well tell, was no other than a vivid recollection of having seen this Brahma on a prior night. He had discharged the notion at the time as an illusion, though in general he had little power over his supernatural fears, which were to him not indeed supernatural, but very natural; so much so, as we have said, that a mere inanimate and dead, very dead burying-place, had been more than once the means of cutting him out of a savoury piece of pork, and a good Logie-brewed tankard. It was the allusion made by Janet that recalled the suspicion that he had seen “something.” Ah, “something!” what a pregnant vocable—so mysterious, so provocative of curiosity—an “it!”—of all the words in our language, the most suggestive of a difference from the real being of flesh and blood, carrying a name got at the baptismal font, whereby it shall be known and pass current like a counter. And is it not at best only a counter, yea, a counterfeit? We are only to each other as signs of things which are not seen; and yet we laugh when we hear the “it,” as if it might not be the very thing of which we are one of the signs! Is it not thus that we are all humbugged in this world of ours? For we take the sign for the thing; yea, talk to the sign, and love it, or hate it, or worship it—all the while being as ignorant as mules, “ne pictum quidem vidit;” the very sign may be as far from the reality, as in philosophy we see it every day. And thus, all wandering and groping in the dark, the blind leading the blind, we screech like owls at a spark of light from the real fountain beyond Aldebaran.

Page 72

And the owls were more busy than pleasant that night in the deep woods of Balgay Hill. It was a sign that the moon was not kindly to their heavy eyes. The scene, as Aminadab issued from the postern, might have been felt as beautiful, from the very awe which it inspired. But Aminadab was no lover of Nature, especially if he saw in her recesses any hiding-places for such beings as Brahma, more mysterious to him from knowing nothing at all about him, except that he was some Ashtoreth, or Chemosh, or Milcom, in a new form, let loose from hell, to disturb the pure souls of Seceders destined for heaven. The full moon fell on the hollow in the hills, surmounted by the dark woods of Balgay right aface of him, the house of Logie behind, and the declinations on either side, in one of which lay the little Golgotha. There, in the midst of the hollow, stood, grim and desolate, the dark brick-built Cradle, casting its shadow to the south; the four-corner prominences shooting out like horns, and so unlike the habitation of a human being, yea, unlike any composition of brick and lime ever reared by the hand of a genius for house-making. The shadow lay on the grass like those ghastly sun-pictures so called, yet more like moon-born things; and then the solemn silence, only relieved to be deepened by the occasional to-hoo! was oppressive to him, as if a medium for some footsteps to startle him into superstition. Yet he was drawn towards the horrid dungeon in spite of his very self. Janet's story would come at last, he thought, to a termination which would justify his own suspicions. And even there before him was evidence in the same direction; for having thrown himself, as if by an effort, into the shade of the dungeon, he could see beyond its verge, and by, as it were, looking round the corner, the body of the dark-faced Aditi. She had, no doubt, come stealthily from the house, and was postured in an attitude far deeper in humiliation and adjuration than we practise in our land. Her face was covered by her hands; for, in truth, she could see nothing through these mere light-permitting slips of a brick's width, wherewith this horrible hole was supplied, as if by a relaxation of severity in its last stage of perfect inhumanity. No, nothing could be seen, but something might be heard; yea, the most piteous moans that ever burst from an oppressed heart, and yet so soft, so uncomplaining, as if the sufferer found no fault with aught in the world but herself. Then Aditi's sounds were something like responses, rising as the internal sounds rose, and as they died away—a jabbering wail of an Eastern tongue. Aminadab, blunt though he was, and fonder of pork than poetry, and of scriptural quotations—which he had always at his tongue's end for conclaves of weavers—than impassioned sentiments, rising at the inspiring touch of this strange world's endless and ever-occurring occasions, was impressed. He looked over the dark abode, up at the moon, then at the prostrate Ady, and thought of the distance

Page 73

between that prisoner and the gay palace where she was brought up, with its paradise of flowers, and aromas, and singing birds of gold and azure—far away, far away. And then that blood-written oath—oh, so literally fulfilled and obeyed! But the thought was evanescent from very fear. Nor was his nervousness unjustified; for, even as he turned his head, he saw a figure wrapped up in a dark cloak, and surmounted by a white coil of pure linen, as he thought, emerging from the clump of thick trees that stood on the north end of the burying-ground. The figure, having run as it were in fear so far forward, no sooner saw the projecting head of Aminadab, than it turned and retreated. At the same instant Ady rose, as if disturbed, and ran to the house. Yet the moaning did not cease. It seemed interminable; or, if to be terminated by the absence of Ady, the sufferer did not know she was gone. And oh, these wails!—Aminadab fled and took them along with him, nor did they ever leave him.

Even when he went to bed they were fresh upon his ear, claiming precedence to the vision of his eye; though that, too, asserted its authority as something miraculous—whether the Eastern mystery itself, or some tutelary genius brought from heaven by the shriek of man's cruelty. Nor could he rest for the thought that, humble as he was, he was surely taken there that he might go to the powers of earth to ask them to aid the powers of heaven. Why, that Cradle had been built within the limits of civilisation. Even the mason was known: the bricks were not Egyptian bricks, nor the mortar foreign, nor the wood a tree from the heart of Africa; and yet, why was it there—nay, why was the use of it not inquired into? If Jeshurun had waxed fat and kicked against the Lord of heaven, was there no lord of earth that could tame this yellow-livered worshipper of Baal, who yet was received among the chiefs of Israel to drink the pure juice of the grape, and make a god of his belly, and to sing obscene songs? Even in that house there was riot and debauchery upon the spoils of that woman, encaged like a beast, and at the world's end from her natural protectors.

Yea, our good soul Aminadab became bold. He was privileged, if not called. But then that Brahma—that incarnation of a power confessed by millions on millions of people possessed of souls, and therefore something in God's reckonings! It was no illusion. Twice he had seen the mysterious being. How did he come hither to the Ultima Thule, as it were, of the known world? Why did he come just at a juncture when the daughter of a king of his own favoured people was immured in a dungeon, and calling for his help? Because he must have known that a spark of the spirit that belonged to him, and would go back to him, was threatened to be extinguished by power in a land owing no obedience to him. But didn't that same moon shine on the children of Brahma as well as on the children of Christ? and were there no powers in

Page 74

heaven but what we confessed? How philosophical all this in a Scouring Burn weaver in hysterics! Yet there are greater men than Aminadab who could not explain such things. Ah, well; to the honour of poor Aminadab, it was for once not pork he sought at Logie House. Next night at ten he was in the parlour; but how did he get there, and Brahma in these very woods? Aminadab very probably could not have told himself; yet there he was.

"Come again so soon, Aminadab?"

"Ay," replied he. "Though a man may fall, he may be raised up again.' I stumbled in front of my friend, but she will not kick me; yea, she will lift me up."

"Be silent," she said. "You were seen last night near the Cradle, where no one dare approach. None of the servants go there save me; and even Ady, if she goes, it is by stealth. Ah, you know something now; but there's one thing you don't know, and that is, that rich men can pay watchers to discover those who search into their iniquities."

"Whatever I know," said Aminadab, "I am ignorant of this: why that dungeon, containing a human being, can keep its place at the distance of a mile from a town with 30,000 inhabitants."

"But they don't know it, lad. Be you quiet, and pick that leg of a chicken; that is better than the knowledge that kills. There is not one of the magistrates would dare to touch a hair on Mr. Fletcher's head, no, for all that lies in the power of Brahma."

"But why do you keep the secret? 'The steps of a good woman are ordered by the Lord;' but does He order you to step to the Cradle?"

"I do it for good," said she, "because I can soften griefs that are unbearable; and cooks have something in their power. But if I were to say a word to Fletcher, I would be turned away, and another might treat the prisoner worse."

"But why would not the powers interfere?"

"Because bailies love a dinner and fine wines; and it is easier to wink than think, and easier to think than get themselves out of trouble by acting on their thoughts. Will that satisfy you? It is a strange business; but the world's a strange place, and strange men and women live therein. Meat and drink and honour are better than wisdom. Look to your plate, Aminadab. Oh! I wish I knew less; but I saw what was coming when I saw George Cameron begin to build what he said was to be like a cradle. Did I not recollect what Kalee told me about the blood-bond? Did we not all witness the growing gloom gathering day by day over his face? Then separate beds. Then no more companionship, out or in. The gloom for ever, and the tears of Kalee for ever and ever,



and the terror and anguish of poor soul Aditi! Ah! yes; but he never struck her, never upbraided her; and at length she shrunk from him as if from a serpent. And this he could not bear: it made his dun-yellow black, Aminadab! Then, when the Cradle was finished, and a truckle and a table and a chair were put in,

Page 75

he called me to him, and said, with a horrid smile on his face, 'M'Pherson, you are a Highlander, and staunch to your master. I am true to my word. Yes, I signed a bond, when I married Kalee, that I would treat her as a father would a child whom he rocked in a cradle. I have obeyed. Kalee goes into the Cradle to-night. You are to give her child's food; but you cannot rock the Cradle. Let the winds which drive in past Balgay woods do that if they can. My honour is pure. Swear to obey me.'

"I could not say no, and look on that face. Kalee has been in that dungeon, fed by me, and has never seen her children for a whole year."

"The vengeance of the Lord hangeth over the wicked by a burnt thread," said Aminadab.

"Yes, who was to know that her own protector, even the great spirit of her land, was to come here to help her? He was seen last night again! He wanders about and about—flits hither and thither. He needs no rest—no food. He is independent of rain, and wind, and thunder, and storms."

"But he does not help her," said Aminadab.

"His time is coming. Kalee is dying."

"Dying!"

"Ay, dying. Then Brahma will claim that which is a part of himself, and then will be the time of his return to his chosen people."

"Horrible!" ejaculated Aminadab. The chicken stood untasted. "Does Mr. Fletcher know this?"

"Why, to be sure, haven't I told him? But may not a child die in its own cradle, and the father continue feasting with the lords and the lairds, drinking and swearing, and debauching, when he knows that his honour is discharged,—ay, and the blood-bond paid?"

"And the body, when she dies—"

"Will be in Logie burying-ground; ay, and strange people from the East, a long way beyond where our sun rises, with black faces and bleeding hearts, will come and bend over the little grave, and weep for the daughter of their prince. Ah! Aminadab, grief makes a learned woman of me, a poor servant; but I cannot save Kalee, none can save her now. Consumption has set in; and bad air, and a rejected love, and a mother's yearning will do the work. I was with her now with my cruse—all alone with her; for no one dare approach. She knows she's dying. She asked for the children—"

“Will you not let me see my boys?”

“I shook my head.

“And will Fletcher not see me before I die, to receive my last kiss?”

“I shook my head.

“And Aditi, who will return to my father’s palace, is she to be kept from me to the end?”

“I shook my head.”

“And will no one watch?” said Aminadab.

“Yes, I will watch all night; but it will be unknown to Fletcher. No one can speak to him now. He goes hither and thither. He has no rest yet; the gloom is deeper than ever.”

“Horrible mystery!” again ejaculated Aminadab. “But ‘the wicked shall perish; they shall consume into smoke, they shall consume away.’”

Page 76

Occasions make heroes of very ordinary men; and Aminadab felt that he could be one of these worthies that night. He soon left after these words of Janet; but he was now more upon his guard against watchers. Perhaps Janet had mentioned them to induce him to avoid too minute an examination where there was danger of another kind; and this rather encouraged him. The only fault of his heroism was the strange feelings which arose in his mind when he thought of the Indian spirit. Somehow this vision could not be got rid of, or analyzed by the small philosophy he had. As for Fletcher, he viewed him merely as a human monster,—no uncommon phenomenon at a time when, although there might not be any greater evil than now, men were more reckless of consequences, more dead to shame, less under the control of public opinion, probably not less under the fear of God. He cleared the wicket. It was again a bright moonlight night. He passed again the Cradle, and was bold enough to listen again. Alas! the wail was weaker, the bright lamp of these eyes was fast losing its oil. So he thought; for he could hear only now and then a very inaudible sob, and occasionally a very weak wail, shrill and yet low. He could not stay, for Janet would be coming stealthily with her cruse,—yes, her cruse; for, so far as he could see by the narrow slips, all was darkness around the dying stranger, in a proud land of liberty and humanity—the proudest seen on the face of the earth, or perhaps ever will be seen; yet by-and-by to have more reason to be proud—by-and-by, when Kalee would be asleep in the bosom of Brahma, her body only the monument of the shams of that proud land of liberty and humanity, and the true religion of God's covenant from the beginning.

Retreating quickly, he proceeded over the green hollow, and got into the skirt of Balgay wood. There he stood patiently, still fearful, but with the new-born zeal of curiosity and sympathy. By-and-by he saw Janet come out with her cruse, and walk as lightly as her huge body would permit. She looked round and round, as if in great fear of Fletcher, probably of the Indian spirit; for it was clear she had a conviction of the truth of the real presence of Brahma. All is still; no Fletcher seen, nor watch. But in about half an hour the dark Aditi came trotting out, clothed in pure white, looking also fearfully about her; but it was more clear that she expected some one. Stranger still, she made for the very spot where Aminadab was watching. He studied her direction to the breadth of a line, and stepped aside. There was plenty of foliage and some thick bushes. He threw himself down on the ground, and heard the sighing of Ady as if almost close to him. By-and-by she was joined by the mystery—yes, that being who had so long been the terror of Logie House to all but the master, who knew nothing of him. He was there; but Aminadab could not see more of him than his head, which was, as usual, enveloped in the

Page 77

same white cloth. He heard their conversation, of which not a word could he understand. But oh, that natural language of the heart, which is the same in all lands, and will be the same in heaven—those quick utterances, deep sighs, shakings of the frame as if the beings were convulsed! It seemed to be the last meeting; it was so eloquent of heart loves, so mysterious in religious aspirations. But here occurred a strange incident. Even at the distance where they were, a loud, shrill scream was heard, as if the last of expiring human nature. How it shook these two, till the very leaves rustled, and the night-hawks and owls screamed their terrible discord! All was still again. The male ran, as if moved by the frenzy of a dervish, forward towards the Cradle; then, as he saw the door half open, retreated. Aminadab could make nothing of the figure, beyond the conviction that it was the same he had seen by fitful glimpses before. It was altogether indescribable, unlike anything he had ever seen or read of. On his return, Ady met him and caught him in her arms, as if to lead him back to the wood. Yet he was fitful, anxious, and flighty, as if he knew not where to go, or what to do. Again the rapid whisperings, so sharp and intense as sometimes to appear like hissing of strange foreign creatures. It seemed as if his soul was on fire, and urged him he knew not whither. At that instant the door of the Cradle opened altogether, and Janet came out with the light. Ady darted forward like a moonbeam in the midst of another moonbeam, and seen by its superior whiteness. An instant served for some communication between her and Janet. Then a shrill scream from Ady, a running hither and thither on the part of the male figure, and at length, darting into the wood, he disappeared. Aminadab now saw Janet go into the house. Was all over? Aminadab could not tell. Ady still hung round the Cradle. She even circled it like a hovering ghost. At length she neared the door. The key had been left, and she entered.

Now was Aminadab's time. He rushed forward, opened the door, and entered the dungeon. A terrible sight met his eyes—sight! yes; even in the comparative darkness, there was enough in the small glimmer of moonlight entering by one of the holes to carry objects to eyes that would have pierced the deepest gloom. There is said to be no darkness in the world sufficient to conceal objects entirely; but here there was, in addition to the attenuated beam, the white dress of Ady, and the bed where Kalee lay. Janet had described it, and the table and the chair: what more than the bare walls was there to describe? Nothing. On that bed, covered by a thin white cloth, lay this Indian princess dead, with Ady hanging over her, and pulling at her, and offering to her blank eyes, once like diamonds, a small figure of an Indian god. Then the groans and suppressed shrieks of the faithful soul, as she still pulled and shook the corpse, as if she could

Page 78

get from it one last look directed to the wooden figure. Too late! Kalee had died, not only away from her people, but away from the gods of her people. All of a sudden the ayah ceased her endeavours, and directed her eagle eye, suffused with tears, up to the roof. Quick words followed the look. Aminadab could not understand them, but the motions and aspirations convinced him that she cried, "There, there, Brahma; there she goes, to be of thy eternal and infinite soul, from which she came, and to which she flies."

Then, suddenly, she rushed out of the dungeon. Aminadab looked after her. She did not go to Logie House, but in the direction of the wood, whither the indescribable figure had gone. Aminadab heard no more, scarcely saw more, if it was not the corpse lying before him. He was afraid of Janet, more of Fletcher, who might now at length come to pass his eyes over the body in the Cradle, where he was to cherish her as a father cherisheth his child; yet he would look, and look again. How shrivelled that face of darkness, yet how calm and loving-like; as if, even in the midst of the agony of the last hour, it smiled love to her destroyer!

By-and-by a light again approached. It was Janet with a white sheet.

"You here! Good heavens! Away, away! Fletcher is to look at her; yes, he is to look at her in the cradle he promised her. Away! no more."

"I saw Brahma," said Aminadab; "yes, true Brahma, Brahma!"

"Fool, fool! Man, I only told you it was Brahma to keep you from the Cradle for your own safety."

"Then who was the strange being?"

"I dare not tell you that; but I fear Ady's away with him, without hat, or cloak, or box, or supper."

"To where?"

"Nor that, lad. But I fear you will hear more of this Scotch tragedy some day. Get you gone; there is Fletcher."

Aminadab obeyed.

And Fletcher did see her. Some time after the departure of Aminadab he crossed the green. It seemed that night he had refrained from company, not through penitence, or any motive that man could divine in the nature of the man. Strangely-formed beings do things which do not seem to belong to their natures or to human nature, and it is this that makes them strange. Before he entered this, not, alas! Domdaniel, he called Janet

to the door. He wanted to be alone. She gave him the cruse; and with the old gloom upon his face, perhaps he wanted to test his courage. It could not be that he wanted to look once more on the face of the mother of his children; nor that he felt now that there had been one in the world who really did love him, as few women have ever loved. Then man measures woman's love by his own; but when was man's heart stirred by nature's strongest passion like that of devoted woman? while now the world did not contain one heart that was moved to him by anything stronger than dithyrambic delirium. Who knows? But there was Fletcher

Page 79

looking on the corpse of his wife, and waving over her face the light of the small cruse he held in his hand! Was he moved, as he saw the still, death-bound features, that once could not contain the expression which the leaping heart, with that burning fire in it of that land of the sun, tried in vain to force into it; the eye, too, that flashed and leapt as never is seen in our country of humid fogs, stifling the inborn heat and blurring the vision; and those arms that entwined him so as the vine holds the olive in its grasp, as if it would give the juice which fires and inebriates, for the oil that calms, and fattens, and sustains? All over that lithe body which enabled her, when he saw her first in the land of her fathers, to bound and flee as if she had wings, and these beautiful as the monaul's, ay, and enabled her, too, to play round him in that Eastern gaiety which had charmed him, if he ever loved her, and even for a time made his home like Fairydom! Who shall say there was no movement in his stern features, no moisture in his eye, no trembling of the lip, no tremor of the body, as he might have read the last effort of nature in the expression of calm forgiveness or continued affection? Who could read *him*?

At midnight, two days after, Kalee slept in Logie kirkyard. There is no stone to point out the grave of the Indian princess, who lies—as becomes, too, in our boasted land of liberty, entitled to her boast in an equality at length, which even pride cannot deny—among the humble artisans and cottars of Lochee. Did Fletcher Read, on that after day, when Panmure blew the white iron trump, not expect to see Kalee rise up and seek judgment on the house of Logie? The blood was hereditary, and the heart that is fed by the blood, and which impels it.

If it had not been that Aminadab married the portly Janet, we might have heard no more of the fortunes of this man. But how true Aminadab's quotation, that God's vengeance never sleeps! Where, in all the scathed corpses of heaven's lightning, was there ever one that told its tale like that of Fletcher of Balinsloe, Lindertes, and Logie? He was recalled to India again.

“Ay, Aminadab, he was forced to go by the Government; but maybe the Government was only like a thing that is moved by the storm, and cuts in twain, where its own silly power could do nothing. Before he went, he married a beautiful little woman,[*] perhaps the most spirited in the shire, white as Kalee was black, and come, too, of gentle blood. Why did she marry this man? Had she not heard of the fate of Kalee? Had she not seen the Cradle (still standing in the hollow of the hill)? No doubt; but woman will go through worse storms than man's passion to get to the goal of wealth and honour. Then there is a frenzy in woman, Aminadab. She is like the boys, who seek danger for its own sake, and will skim on skates the rim of the black pool that descends from the film of ice down to the bubbling well of death below. Women have an ambition to tame wild men; ay, even wild men have a charm for them, which the tame sons of prudence and industry cannot inspire. So it was: they were married, and he took her to India.”

Page 80

[note *: Afterwards, as I have heard, the wife of Milne of Milneford. She lived till nearly a hundred.]

“So the Lord did lead him; and there was no strange god with them.”

“Ay, but there was a God *before* him, lad.”

“What mean you, Janet?”

“Do you not recollect of Brahma?”

“Do not mention that strange figure, Janet. My blood runs cold.”

Janet laughed.

“Runs cold, lad, at what? Brahma was just one of the Nawab’s great men, whom he sent over here to watch the fate of his daughter. Why, man, he lodged next door to you, with Mrs. Lyon at the Scouring Burn.”

“The black man the boys used to run after?”

“The very same. He returned with Ady, and was at the court of the Nawab and told all, ay, and more than we knew—that Fletcher would be obliged to visit Bombay again ere long after. He had got this from some of the authorities in England. For many a day did the prince weep for his Kalee; for many a day did he watch for the murderer’s arrival, ay, as a tiger of his jungles watches in the night with fiery eyes for a beast even more cruel than himself. He had even all the coast of Coromandel, I think they call it, to give intelligence of the vessel. The very name of the vessel was known; the very paint of its sides, and the flag it bore—so well had he kept up his knowledge of what was going on in England.”

“Wonderful!” cried Aminadab. “And the fowler that did slay, falleth into his own net.”

“And a terrible net, with meshes of sharp steel to hold and cut.”

“Ah!” cried Aminadab, as he rubbed his hands, and chuckled like a big boy who sees the porridge boiling.

“You may well be anxious, lad; but you’ll have more than you want.”

“No, unless he is put into a fiery pit and burnt to a cinder, or into a den of tigers, or a nest of hooded snakes, or—”

“Peace, lad; better than all. But surely we are forgetting that we are Christians, that we have seen the new light of grace, Aminadab.”

“Ay, true. Mercy pertaineth to the Lord. We belong to the furnace which trieth gold; not to the refining-pot of the Old Church, which is for silver.”

“Ah, well! God’s judgment was soon executed. The ship was recognised and hailed long before she arrived at Bombay. A crowd of black devils boarded her, seized Fletcher, and dragged him on shore. Not an instant was lost. Trial was a laughter. They danced round in joy, making the very Brahma hear their orgies. Four horses, ropes, victim between two and two, whip, yell, and Fletcher is in four quarters.

“Nor did they end here. They had forgotten the white wife. She too—justice demanded it. They did not ask why; but the sailors had suspected what was going on; and when they saw the devils coming back, they put Mrs. Fletcher into a big basket, and hoisted her to the top-mast. The poor woman could see from that height the mangled remains of her husband; but she was an extraordinary woman. She kept her place composedly as she heard the yells of the demons. They could not find her, and went away like wild animals deprived of their bloody prey. The ship went on. Mrs. Fletcher returned safe to Scotland, where she was known as the heroine who had gone through so much for the love of a villain.”

Page 81

The story of Fletcher has died away in Angus; but at one time it was in every mouth, and many a head was shaken as the Sunday loiterers from Dundee and Lochee passed by the Cradle in their walks on Balgay Hill. I have heard that it was demolished as a disgrace to Scotland somewhere about 1810 or 1812. The hollow where the ruins stood is quite visible yet, and the old circumambulating ghost, which, by-the-bye, has unfortunately a white face, is not yet laid.

THE DEATH OF THE CHEVALIER DE LA BEAUTE.

It was near midnight, on the 12th of October 1516, when a horseman, spurring his jaded steed, rode furiously down the path leading to the strong tower of Wedderburn. He alighted at the gate, and knocked loudly for admission.

"What would ye?" inquired the warder from the turret.

"Conduct me to your chief," was the laconic reply of the breathless messenger.

"Is your message so urgent that ye must deliver it to-night?" continued the warder, who feared to kindle the fiery temper of his master, by disturbing him with a trifling errand.

"Urgent, babbler!" replied the other, impatiently; "to-day the best blood of the Homes has been lapped by dogs upon the street; and I have seen it."

The warder aroused the domestics in the tower, and the stranger entered. He was conducted into a long, gloomy apartment, dimly lighted by a solitary lamp. Around him hung rude portraits of the chiefs of Wedderburn, and on the walls were suspended their arms and the spoils of their victories. The solitary apartment seemed like the tomb of war. Every weapon around him had been rusted with the blood of Scotland's enemies. It was a fitting theatre for the recital of a tale of death. He had gazed around for a few minutes, when heavy footsteps were heard treading along the dreary passages, and the next moment Sir David Home entered, armed as for the field.

"Your errand, stranger?" said the young chief of Wedderburn, fixing a searching glance upon him as he spoke.

The stranger bowed, and replied, "The Regent"-----

"Ay!" interrupted Home, "the enemy of our house, the creature of our hands, whom we lifted from exile to sovereignty, and who now with his minions tracks our path like a bloodhound! What of this gracious Regent? Are ye, too, one of his myrmidons, and seek ye to strike the lion in his den?"

“Nay,” answered the other; “but from childhood the faithful retainer of your murdered kinsman.”

“My murdered kinsman!” exclaimed Wedderburn, grasping the arm of the other. “What! more blood! more! What mean ye, stranger?”

“That, to gratify the revenge of the Regent Albany,” replied the other, “my lord Home and your kinsman William have been betrayed and murdered. Calumny has blasted their honour. Twelve hours ago I beheld their heads tossed like footballs by the foot of the common executioner, and afterwards fixed over the porch of the Nether Bow, for the execration and indignities of the slaves of Albany. All day the blood of the Homes has dropped upon the pavement, where the mechanic and the clown pass over and tread on it.”

Page 82

"Hold!" cried Home, and the dreary hall echoed with his voice. "No more!" he continued; and he paced hurriedly for a few minutes across the apartment, casting a rapid glance upon the portraits of his ancestors. "By heavens! they chide me," he exclaimed, "that my sword sleeps in the scabbard, while the enemies of the house of Home triumph." He drew his sword, and approaching the picture of his father, he pressed the weapon to his lips, and continued, "By the soul of my ancestors, I swear upon this blade, that the proud Albany and his creatures shall feel that one Home still lives!" He dashed the weapon back into its sheath, and approaching the stranger, drew him towards the lamp, and said, "Ye are Trotter, who was my cousin's henchman, are ye not?"

"The same," replied the messenger.

"And ye come to rouse me to revenge?" added Sir David. "Ye shall have it, man—revenge that shall make the Regent weep—revenge that the four corners of the earth shall hear of, and history record. Ye come to remind me that my father and my brother fell on the field of Flodden, in defence of a foolish king, and that I, too, bled there—that there also lie the bones of my kinsman, Cuthbert of Fastcastle, of my brother Cockburn and his son, and the father and brother of my Alison. Ye come to remind me of this; and that, as a reward for the shedding of our blood, the head of the chief of our house has been fixed upon the gate of Edinburgh as food for the carrion crow and the night owl! Go, get thee refreshment, Trotter; then go to rest, and dream of other heads exalted, as your late master's is, and I will be the interpreter of your visions."

Trotter bowed and withdrew, and Lady Alison entered the apartment.

"Ye are agitated, husband," said the gentle lady, laying her hand upon his; "hath the man brought evil tidings?"

"Can good tidings come to a Home," answered Sir David, "while the tyrant Albany rides rough-shod over the nobility of Scotland, and, like a viper, stings the bosom that nursed him? Away to thy chamber, Alison; leave me, it is no tale for woman's ears."

"Nay, if you love me, tell me," she replied, laying her hand upon his brow, "for since your return from the field of Flodden, I have not seen you look thus."

"This is no time to talk of love, Aley," added he. "But come, leave me, silly one, it concerns not thee; no evil hath overtaken the house of Blackadder, but the Homes have become a mark for the arrows of desolation, and their necks a footstool for tyrants. Away, Alison; to-night I can think of but one word, and that is—vengeance!"

Lady Alison wept, and withdrew in silence; and Wedderburn paced the floor of the gloomy hall, meditating in what manner he should most effectually resent the death of his kinsman.

Page 83

It was only a few weeks after the execution of the Earl of Home and his brother, that the Regent Albany offered an additional insult to his family by appointing Sir Anthony D’Arcy warden of the east marches, an office which the Homes had held for ages. D’Arcy was a Frenchman, and the favourite of the Regent; and, on account of the comeliness of his person, obtained the appellation of the *Sieur de la Beaute*. The indignation of Wedderburn had not slumbered, and the conferring the honours and the power that had hitherto been held by his family upon a foreigner, incensed him to almost madness. For a time, however, no opportunity offered of causing his resentment to be felt; for D’Arcy was as much admired for the discretion and justice of his government as for the beauty of his person. To his care the Regent had committed young Cockburn, the heir of Langton, who was the nephew of Wedderburn. This the Homes felt as a new indignity, and, together with the Cockburns, they forcibly ejected from Langton Castle the tutors whom D’Arcy had placed over their kinsman. The tidings of this event were brought to the Chevalier while he was holding a court at Kelso; and immediately summoning together his French retainers and a body of yeomen, he proceeded with a gay and a gallant company by way of Fogo to Langton. His troop drew up in front of the castle, and their gay plumes and burnished trappings glittered in the sun. The proud steed of the Frenchman was covered with a panoply of gold and silver, and he himself was decorated as for a bridal. He rode haughtily to the gate, and demanded the inmates of the castle to surrender.

“Surrender! boasting Gaul!” replied William Cockburn, the uncle of the young laird; “that is a word the men of Merse have yet to learn. But yonder comes my brother Wedderburn; speak it to him.”

D’Arcy turned round, and beheld Sir David Home and a party of horsemen bearing down upon them at full speed. The Chevalier drew back, and waiting their approach, placed himself at the head of his company.

“By the mass! Sir Warden,” said Sir David, riding up to D’Arcy, “and ye have brought a goodly company to visit my nephew. Come ye in peace, or what may be your errand?”

“I wish peace,” replied the Chevalier, “and come to enforce the establishment of my rights; why do you interfere between me and my ward?”

“Does a Frenchman talk of his rights upon the lands of Home?” returned Sir David; “or by whose authority is my nephew your ward?”

“By the authority of the Regent, rebel Scot!” retorted D’Arcy.

“By the authority of the Regent!” interrupted Wedderburn; “dare ye, foreign minion, speak of the authority of the murderer of the Earl of Home, while within the reach of the sword of his kinsman?”

“Ay! and in his teeth dare tell him,” replied the Chevalier, “that the Home now before me is not less a traitor than he who proved false to his sovereign on the field of Flodden, who conspired against the Regent, and whose head now adorns the port of Edinburgh.”

Page 84

“Wretch!” exclaimed the henchman Trotter, dashing forward, and raising his sword, “said ye that my master proved false at Flodden?”

“Hold!” exclaimed Wedderburn, grasping his arm. “Gramercy, ye uncivilised dog! for the sake of your master’s head would ye lift your hand against that face which ladies die to look upon? Pardon me, most beautiful Chevalier! the salutation of my servant may be too rough for your French palate, but you and your master treated my kinsman somewhat more roughly. What say ye, Sir Warden? do ye depart in peace, or wish ye that we should try the temper of our Border steel upon your French bucklers?”

“Depart ye in peace, vain boaster,” replied D’Arcy, “lest a worse thing befall you.”

“Then on, my merry men!” cried Wedderburn, “and to-day the head of the Regent’s favourite, the Chevalier of Beauty, for the head of the Earl of Home!”

“The house of Home and revenge!” shouted his followers, and rushed upon the armed band of D’Arcy. At first the numbers were nearly equal, and the contest was terrible. Each man fought hand to hand, and the ground was contested inch by inch. The gilded ornaments of the French horses were covered with blood, and their movements were encumbered by their weight. The sword of Wedderburn had already smitten three of the Chevalier’s followers to the ground, and the two chiefs now contended in single combat. D’Arcy fought with the fury of despair, but Home continued to bear upon him as a tiger that has been robbed of its cubs. Every moment the force of the Chevalier was thinned, and every instant the number of his enemies increased, as the neighbouring peasantry rallied round the standard of their chief. Finding the most faithful of his followers stretched upon the earth, D’Arcy sought safety in flight. Dashing his silver spurs into the sides of his noble steed, he turned his back upon his desperate enemy, and rushed along in the direction of Pouterleiny, and through Dunse, with the hope of gaining the road to Dunbar, of which town he was governor. Fiercely Wedderburn followed at his heels, with his naked sword uplifted, and ready to strike; immediately behind him rode Trotter, the henchman of the late earl, and another of Home’s followers named Dickson. It was a fearful sight as they rushed through Dunse, their horses striking fire from their heels in the light of the very sunbeams, and the sword of the pursuer within a few feet of the fugitive. Still the Chevalier rode furiously, urging on the gallant animal that bore him, which seemed conscious that the life of its rider depended upon its speed. His flaxen locks waived behind him in the wind, and the voice of his pursuers ever and anon fell upon his ear, like a dagger of death thrust into his bosom. The horse upon which Wedderburn rode had been wounded in the conflict, and, as they drew near Broomhouse, its speed slackened, and his followers, Trotter and Dickson, took the lead in the pursuit. The Chevalier had reached a spot on the right bank of the Whitadder, which is now in a field of the farm of Swallowdean, when his noble steed, becoming entangled with its cumbrous trappings, stumbled, and hurled its rider to the earth. The next moment the swords of Trotter and Dickson were through the body of the unfortunate Chevalier.

Page 85

"Off with his head!" exclaimed Wedderburn, who at the same instant reached the spot. The bloody mandate was readily obeyed; and Home, taking the bleeding head in his hand, cut off the flaxen tresses, and tied them as a trophy to his saddle-bow. The body of the *Chevalier de la Beaute* was rudely buried on the spot where he fell. A humble stone marks out the scene of the tragedy, and the people in the neighbourhood yet call it "*Bawty's Grave*." The head of the Chevalier was carried to Dunse, where it was fixed upon a spear at the cross, and Wedderburn exclaimed, "Thus be exalted the enemies of the house of Home!"

The bloody relic was then borne in triumph to Home Castle, and placed upon the battlements. "There," said Sir David, "let the Regent climb when he returns from France for the head of his favourite; it is thus that Home of Wedderburn revenges the murder of his kindred."

THE STORY OF THE PELICAN.

Though not so much a tradition as a memory still fresh probably in the minds of some of the good old Edinburgh folks, we here offer, chiefly for the benefit of our young female readers who are fond of a story wherein little heroines figure, as in Beranger's *Sylphide*, an account of a very famous adventure of a certain little Jeannie Deans in our city—the more like the elder Jeannie, inasmuch as they both were concerned in a loving effort to save the life of a sister. Whereunto, as a very necessary introduction, it behoves us to set forth that there was, some sixty years ago, more or less, a certain Mr. William Maconie, who was a merchant on the South Bridge of Edinburgh, but who, for the sake of exercise and fresh air—a commodity this last he need not have gone so far from the Calton Hill to seek—resided at Juniper Green, a little village three or four miles from St. Giles's. Nor did this distance incommode him much, seeing that he had the attraction to quicken his steps homewards of a pretty young wife and two little twin daughters, Mary and Annie, as like each other as two rosebuds partially opened, and as like their mother, too, as the objects of our simile are to themselves when full blown.

Peculiar in this respect of having twins at the outset, and sisters too—a good beginning of a contract to perpetuate the species—Mr. Maconie was destined to be even more so, inasmuch as there came no more of these pleasant *deliciae domi*, at least up to the time of our curious story—a circumstance the more to be regretted by the father, in consequence of a strange fancy (never told to his wife) that possessed him of wishing to insure the lives of his children as they came into the world, or at least after they had got through the rather uninsurable period of mere infant life. And in execution of this fancy—a very fair and reasonable one, and not uncommon at that time, whatever it may be now, when people are not so provident—he had got an insurance to the extent of five hundred pounds effected in the Pelican Office—perhaps the most famous at that time—on the lives of the said twins, Mary and Annie, who were, no doubt, altogether unconscious of the importance they were thus made to hold in the world.

Page 86

Yet, unfortunately for the far-seeing and provident father, this scheme threatened to fructify sooner than he wished, if indeed it could ever have fructified to his satisfaction; for the grisly spectre of typhus laid his relentless hand upon Mary when she—and of a consequence Annie—was somewhere about eight years old. And surely, being as we are very hopeful optimists in the cause of human nature, we need not say that the father, as he and his wife watched the suffering invalid on through the weary days and nights of the progress towards the crisis of that dangerous ailment, never once thought of the Pelican, except as a bird that feeds its young with the warm blood of its breast. But, sorrowful as they were, their grief was nothing in comparison with the distress of little Annie, who slipped about listening and making all manner of anxious inquiries about her sick sister, whom she was prohibited from seeing for fear of her being touched by the said spectre; nor was her heart the less troubled with fears for her life, that all things seemed so quiet and mysterious about the house—the doctor coming and going, and the father and mother whispering to each other, but never to her, and their faces so sad-like and mournful, in place of being, as was their wont, so cheerful and happy.

And surely all this solicitude on the part of Annie Maconie need not excite our wonder, when we consider that, from the time of their birth, the twin sisters had never been separated, but that, from the moment they had made their entrance on this world's stage, they had been always each where the other was, and had run each where the other ran, wished each what the other wished, and wept and laughed each when the other wept or laughed. Nature indeed, before it came into her fickle head to make two of them, had in all probability intended these little sisters—"little cherries on one stalk"—to be but one; and they could only be said not to be *one*, because of their bodies being two—a circumstance of no great importance, for, in spite of the duality of body, the spirit that animated them was a unity, and as we know from an old philosopher called Plato, the spirit is really the human creature, the flesh and bones constituting the body being nothing more than a mere husk intended at the end to feed worms. And then the mother helped this sameness by dressing them so like each other, as if she wanted to make a *Comedy of Errors* out of the two little female Dromios.

But in the middle of this mystery and solicitude, it happened that Annie was to get some light; for, at breakfast one morning—not yet that of the expected crisis—when her father and mother were talking earnestly in an undertone to each other, all unaware that the child, as she was moving about, was watching their words and looks, much as an older victim of credulity may be supposed to hang on the cabbalistic movements and incantations of a sibyl, the attentive little listener eagerly drank in every word of the following conversation:—

Page 87

"The doctor is so doubtful," said the anxious mother, with a tear in her eye, "that I have scarcely any hope; and if she is taken away, the very look of Annie, left alone 'bleating for her sister lamb,' will break my heart altogether."

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Maconie, "it would be hard to bear; but"—and it was the first time since Mary's illness he had ever remembered the insurance—"it was wise that I insured poor Mary's life in the Pelican."

"Insured her life in the Pelican!" echoed the wife in a higher tone. "That was at least lucky; but, oh! I hope we will not need to have our grief solaced by that comfort in affliction for many a day."

And this colloquy had scarcely been finished when the doctor entered, having gone previously into the invalid's room, with a very mournful expression upon his face; nor did his words make that expression any more bearable, as he said—

"I am sorry to say I do not like Mary's appearance so well to-day. I fear it is to be one of those cases where we cannot discover anything like a crisis at all; indeed I have doubts about this old theory being applicable to this kind of fever, where the virus goes on gradually working to the end."

"The end!" echoed Mrs. Maconie; "then, doctor, I fear you see what that will be."

"I would not like to say," added he; "but I fear you must make up your mind for the worst."

Now, all this was overheard by Annie, who, we may here seize the opportunity of saying, was, in addition to being a sensitive creature, one of those precocious little philosophers thinly spread in the female world, and made what they are often by delicate health, which reduces them to a habit of thinking much before their time. Not that she wanted the vivacity of her age, but that it was tempered by periods of serious musing, when all kinds of what the Scotch call "auld farrant" (far yont) thoughts come to be where they should not be, the consequence being a weird-like kind of wisdom, very like that of the aged; so the effect on a creature so constituted was just equal to the cause. Annie ran out of the room with her face concealed in her hands, and got into a small bedroom darkened by the window-blind, and there, in an obscurity and solitude suited to her mind and feelings, she resigned herself to the grief of the young heart. It was now clear to her that her dear Mary was to be taken from her; had not the doctor said as much? And then she had never seen death, of which she had read and heard and thought so much, that she looked upon it as a thing altogether mysterious and terrible. But had she not overheard her father say that he had insured poor dear Mary's life with the Pelican? and had she not heard of the pelican—yea, the pelican of the wilderness—as a creature of a most mythical kind, though she knew not aught of its

nature, whether bird or beast, or man or woman, or angel? But whatever it might be, certain it was that her father would never have got this wonderful

Page 88

creature to insure Mary's life if it was not possessed of the power to bring about so great a result. So she cogitated and mused and philosophized in her small way, till she came to the conclusion that the pelican not only had the destiny of Mary in its hands, but was under an obligation to save her from that death which was so terrible to her. Nor had she done yet with the all-important subject; for all at once it came into her head as a faint memory, that one day, when her father was taking her along with her mother through the city, he pointed to a gilded sign, with a large bird represented thereon, tearing its breast with its long beak, and letting out the blood to its young, who were holding their mouths open to drink it in. "There," said he, "is the Pelican;" words she remembered even to that hour, for they were imprinted upon her mind by the formidable appearance of the wonderful-looking creature feeding its young with the very blood of its bosom. But withal she had sense enough to know—being, as we have said, a small philosopher—that a mere bird, however endowed with the power of sustaining the lives of its offspring, could not save that of her sister, and therefore it behoved to be only the symbol of some power within the office over the door of which the said sign was suspended. Nor in all this was Annie Maconie more extravagant than are nineteen-twentieths of the thousand millions in the world who still cling to occult causes.

And with those there came other equally strange thoughts; but beyond all she could not for the very life of her comprehend that most inexcusable apathy of her father, who, though he had heard with his own ears, from good authority, that her beloved Mary was lying in the next bedroom dying, never seemed to think of hurrying away to town—even to that very Pelican who had so generously undertaken to insure Mary's life. It was an apathy unbecoming a father; and the blood of her little heart warmed with indignation at the very time that the said heart was down in sorrow as far as its loose strings would enable it to go. But was there no remedy? To be sure there was, and Annie knew, moreover, what it was; but then it was to be got only by a sacrifice, and that sacrifice she also knew, though it must of necessity be kept in the meantime as secret as the wonderful doings in the death-chamber of the palace of a certain Bluebeard.

Great thoughts these for so little a woman as Annie Maconie; and no doubt the greatness and the weight of them were the cause why, for all that day—every hour of which her father was allowing to pass—she was more melancholy and thoughtful than she had ever been since Mary began to be ill. But, somehow, there was a peculiar change which even her mother could observe in her; for while she had been in the habit of weeping for her sister, yea, and sobbing very piteously, she was all this day apparently in a reverie. Nor even up to the time of her going to bed was she less thoughtful and abstracted, even

Page 89

as if she had been engaged in solving some problem great to her, however small it might seem to grown-up infants. As for sleeping under the weight of so much responsibility, it might seem to be out of the question; and so, verily, it was; for her little body, acted on by the big thoughts, was moved from one side to another all night, so that she never slept a wink, still thinking and thinking, in her unutterable grief, of poor Mary, her father's criminal passiveness, and that most occult remedy which so completely engrossed her mind.

But certainly it was the light of morning for which sister Annie sighed; and when it came glinting in at the small window, she was up and beginning to dress, all the while listening lest the servant or any other one in the house should know she was up at that hour. Having completed her toilet, she slipped down stairs, and having got to the lobby, she was provident enough to lay hold of an umbrella, for she suspected the elements as being in league against her. Thus equipped, she crept out by the back door, and having got thus free, she hurried along, never looking behind her till she came to the main road to Edinburgh, when she mounted the umbrella—one used by her father, and so large that it was more like a main-sheet than a covering suitable to so small a personage; so it behoved, that if she met any other “travellers on purpose bent,” the moving body must have appeared to be some small tent on its way to a fair, carried by the proprietor thereof, of whom no more could be seen but the two short toddling legs, and the hem of the black riding-hood. But what cared Annie? She toiled along; the miles were long in comparison of the short legs, but then there was a large purpose in that little body, in the view of which miles were of small account, however long a time it might take those steps to go over them. Nor was it any drawback to all this energy, concentrated in so small a bulk, that she had had no breakfast. Was the dying sister Mary able to take any breakfast? and why should Annie eat when Mary, who did all she did—and she always did everything that sister Mary did—could not? The argument was enough for our little logician.

By the time she reached, by those short steps of hers, the great city, it was half-past eleven, and she had before her still a great deal to accomplish. She made out, after considerable wanderings, the street signalized above all streets by that wonderful bird; but after she got into it, the greater difficulty remained of finding the figure itself, whereto there was this untoward obstacle, that it was still drizzling in the thick Scotch way of concrete drops of mist, and the umbrella which she held over her head was so large that no turning it aside would enable her to see under the rim at such an angle as would permit her scanning so elevated a position, and so there was nothing for it but to draw it down. But even this was a task—heavy as the mainsheet was with rain, and rattling in a considerable wind—almost beyond her strength; and if it hadn't been that a kindly personage who saw the little maid's difficulty gave her assistance, she might not have been able to accomplish it. And now, with the heavy article in her hand, she peered about for another half-hour, till at length her gladdened eye fell upon the mystic symbol.

Page 90

And no sooner had she made sure of the object than she found her way into the office, asking the porter as well as a clerk where the pelican was to be found,—questions that produced a smile; but smile here or smile there, Annie was not to be beat; nor did she stop in her progress until at last she was shown into a room where she saw, perched on a high stool, with three (of course) long legs, a strange-looking personage with a curled wig and a pair of green spectacles, who no doubt must be the pelican himself. As she appeared in the room with the umbrella, not much shorter or less in circumference than herself, the gentleman looked curiously at her, wondering no doubt what the errand of so strange a little customer could be.

“Well, my little lady,” said he, “what may be your pleasure?”

“I want the pelican,” said Annie.

The gentleman was still more astonished, even to the extent that he laid down his pen and looked at her again.

“The pelican, dear?”

“Ay, just the pelican,” answered she deliberately, and even a little indignantly. “Are you the pelican?”

“Why, yes, dear; all that is for it below the figure,” said he, smiling, and wondering what the next question would be.

“I am so glad I have found you,” said she; “because sister Mary is dying.”

“And who is sister Mary?”

“My sister, Mary Maconie, at Juniper Green.”

Whereupon the gentleman began to remember that the name of William Maconie was in his books as holder of a policy.

“And what more?”

“My father says the pelican insured Mary’s life; and I want you to come direct and do it, because I couldn’t live if Mary were to die; and there’s no time to be lost.”

“Oh! I see, dear. And who sent you?”

“Nobody,” answered Annie. “My father wouldn’t come to you; and I have come from Juniper Green myself without telling my father or mother.”

“Oh yes, dear! I understand you.”

“But you must do it quick,” continued she, “because the doctor says she’s in great danger; so you must come with me and save her immediately.”

“I am sorry, my dear little lady,” rejoined he, “that I cannot go with you; but I will set about it immediately, and I have no doubt, being able to go faster than you, that I will get there before you, so that all will be right before you arrive.”

“See that you do it, then,” said she; “because I can’t live if Mary dies. Are you quite sure you will do it?”

“Perfectly sure, my little dear,” added he. “Go away home, and all will be right; the pelican will do his duty.”

Page 91

And Annie being thus satisfied, went away, dragging the main-sheet after her, and having upon her face a look of contentment, if not absolute happiness, in place of the sorrow which had occupied it during all the time of her toilsome journey. The same road is to be retraced; and if she had an object before which nerved her little limbs, she had now the delightful consciousness of that object having been effected—a feeling of inspiration which enabled her, hungry as she was, to overcome all the toil of the return. Another two hours, with that heavy umbrella over head as well as body, brought her at length home, where she found that people had been sent out in various directions to find the missing Annie. The mother was in tears, and the father in great anxiety; and no sooner had she entered and laid down her burden, than she was clasped to the bosom, first of one parent, and then of the other.

“But where is the pelican?” said the anxious little maid.

“The pelican, my darling!” cried the mother; “what do you mean?”

“Oh! I have been to him at his own office at Edinburgh to get him to come and save Mary’s life, and he said he would be here before me.”

“And what in the world put it in your head to go there?” again asked the mother.

“Because I heard my father say yesterday that the pelican had insured dear sister Mary’s life, and I went to tell him to come and do it immediately; because if Mary were to die, I couldn’t live, you know. That’s the reason, dear mother.”

“Yes, yes,” said the father, scarcely able to repress a smile which rose in spite of his grief. “I see it all. You did a very right thing, my love. The pelican has been here, and Mary is better.”

“Oh! I am so glad,” rejoined Annie; “for I wasn’t sure whether he had come or not; because, though I looked for him on the road, I couldn’t see him.”

At the same moment the doctor came in, with a blithe face.

“Mary is safe now,” said he. “There has been a crisis, after all. The sweat has broken out upon her dry skin, and she will be well in a very short time.”

“And there’s no thanks to you,” said Annie, “because it was I who went for the pelican.”

Whereupon the doctor looked to the father, who, taking him aside, narrated to him the story, at which the doctor was so pleased that he laughed right out.

“You’re the noblest little heroine I ever heard of,” said he.

“But have you had anything to eat, dear, in this long journey?” said the mother.

“No, I didn’t want,” was the answer; “all I wanted was to save Mary’s life, and I am glad I have done it.”

Page 92

And glad would we be if, by the laws of historical truth, our stranger story could have ended here; but, alas! we are obliged to pain the good reader's heart by saying that the demon who had left the troubled little breast of Mary Maconie took possession of Annie's. The very next day she lay extended on the bed, panting under the fell embrace of the relentless foe. As Mary got better, Annie grew worse; and her case was so far unlike Mary's, that there was more a tendency to a fevered state of the brain. The little sufferer watched with curious eyes the anxious faces of her parents, and seemed conscious that she was in a dangerous condition. Nor did it fail to occur to her as a great mystery as well as wonder, why they did not send for the wonderful being who had so promptly saved the life of her sister. The thought haunted her, yet she was afraid to mention it to her mother, because it implied a sense of danger—a fear which one evening she overcame. Fixing her eyes, now every moment waxing less clear, on the face of her mother—

"Oh mother, dear," she whispered, "why do you not send for the pelican?"

In other circumstances the mother would have smiled; but, alas, no smile could be seen on that pale face. Whether the pelican was sent for we know not, but certain it is, that he had no power to save poor Annie, and she died within the week. But she did not die in vain, for the large sum insured upon her life eventually came to Mary, whom she loved so dearly.

THE WIDOW'S AE SON.

We will not name the village where the actors in the following incidents resided; and it is sufficient for our purpose to say that it lay in the county of Berwick, and within the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of Dunse. Eternity has gathered forty winters into its bosom since the principal events took place. Janet Jeffrey was left a widow before her only child had completed his tenth year. While her husband lay upon his deathbed, he called her to his bedside, and, taking her hand within his, he groaned, gazed on her face, and said, "Now, Janet, I'm gaun a lang and a dark journey; but ye winna forget, Janet—ye winna forget—for ye ken it has aye been uppermost in my thoughts and first in my desires, to mak Thamas a minister; promise me that ae thing, Janet, that, if it be HIS will, ye will see it performed, an' I will die in peace." In sorrow the pledge was given, and in joy performed. Her life became wrapt up in her son's life; and it was her morning and her evening prayer that she might live to see her "dear Thamas a shining light in the kirk." Often she declared that he was an "auld farrant bairn, and could ask a blessing like ony minister." Our wishes and affections, however, often blind our judgment. Nobody but the mother thought the son fitted for the kirk, nor the kirk fitted for him. There was always something original, almost poetical about him; but still Thomas was "no orator as Brutus was."

Page 93

His mother had few means beyond the labour of her hands for their support. She had kept him at the parish school until he was fifteen, and he had learned all that his master knew; and in three years more, by rising early and sitting late at her daily toils, and the savings of his field labour and occasional teaching, she was enabled to make preparation for sending him to Edinburgh. Never did her wheel spin so blithely since her husband was taken from her side, as when she put the first lint upon the rock for his college sarks. Proudly did she show to her neighbours her double spinel yarn—observing, “It’s nae finer than he deserves, poor fallow, for he’ll pay me back some day.” The web was bleached and the shirts made by her own hands; and the day of his departure arrived. It was a day of joy mingled with anguish. He attended the classes regularly and faithfully; and truly as St. Giles’s marked the hour, the long, lean figure of Thomas Jeffrey, in a suit of shabby black, and half a dozen volumes under his arm, was seen issuing from his garret in the West Bow, darting down the frail stair with the velocity of a shadow, measuring the Lawnmarket and High Street with gigantic strides, gliding like a ghost up the South Bridge, and sailing through the Gothic archway of the College, till the punctual student was lost in its inner chambers. Years rolled by, and at length the great, the awful day arrived—

“Big with the fate of Thomas and his mother.”

He was to preach his trial sermon; and where? In his own parish—in his native village! It was summer, but his mother rose by daybreak. Her son, however, was at his studies before her; and when she entered his bedroom with a swimming heart and swimming eyes, Thomas was stalking across the floor, swinging his arms, stamping his feet, and shouting his sermon to the trembling curtains of a four-post bed, which she had purchased in honour of him alone. “Oh, my bairn! my matchless bairn!” cried she, “what a day o’ joy is this for your poor mother! But oh, hinny, hae ye it weel aff? I hope there’s nae fears o’ ye stickin’ or using notes!” “Dinna fret, mother—dinna fret,” replied the young divine; “stickin’ and notes are out o’ the question. I hae every word o’ it as clink as the A B C.” The appointed hour arrived. She was first at the kirk. Her heart felt too big for her bosom. She could not sit—she walked again to the air—she trembled back—she gazed restless on the pulpit. The parish minister gave out the psalm—the book shook while she held it. The minister prayed, again gave out a psalm, and left the pulpit. The book fell from Mrs. Jeffrey’s hand. A tall figure paced along the passage. He reached the pulpit stairs—took two steps at once. It was a bad omen; but arose from the length of his limbs—not levity. He opened the door—his knees smote upon one another. He sat down—he was paler than death. He rose—his bones were paralytic. The Bible was opened—his

Page 94

mouth opened at the same time, and remained open, but said nothing. His large eyes stared wildly around. At length his teeth chattered, and the text was announced, though half the congregation disputed it. "My brethren!" said he once, and the whiteness of his countenance increased; but he said no more. "My bre—thren!" responded he a second time; his teeth chattered louder; his cheeks became clammy and death-like. "My brethren!" stammered he a third time emphatically, and his knees fell together. A deep groan echoed from his mother's pew. His wildness increased. "My mother!" exclaimed the preacher. They were the last words he ever uttered in a pulpit. The shaking and the agony began in his heart, and his body caught the contagion. He covered his face with his hands, fell back, and wept. His mother screamed aloud, and fell back also; and thus perished her toils, her husband's prayer, her fond anticipations, and the pulpit oratory of her son. A few neighbours crowded round her to console her and render her assistance. They led her to the door. She gazed upon them with a look of vacancy—thrice sorrowfully waved her hand, in token that they should leave her; for their words fell upon her heart like dew upon a furnace. Silently she arose and left them, and reaching her cottage, threw herself upon her bed in bitterness. She shed no tears; neither did she groan, but her bosom heaved with burning agony. Sickness smote Thomas to his very heart; yea, even unto blindness he was sick. His tongue was like heated iron in his mouth, and his throat like a parched land. He was led from the pulpit. But he escaped not the persecution of the unfeeling titter, and the expressions of shallow pity. He would have rejoiced to have dwelt in darkness for ever, but there was no escape from the eyes of his tormentors. The congregation stood in groups in the kirkyard, "just," as they said, "to hae anither look at the orator;" and he must pass through the midst of them. With his very soul steeped in shame, and his cheeks covered with confusion, he stepped from the kirk door. A humming noise issued through the crowd, and every one turned their faces towards him. His misery was greater than he could bear. "Yon was oratory for ye!" said one. "Poor deevil!" added another, "I'm sorry for him; but it was as guid as a play." "Was it tragedy or comedy?" inquired a third, laughing as he spoke. The remarks fell upon his ear—he grated his teeth in madness, but he could endure no more; and, covering his face with his hands, he bounded off like a wounded deer to his mother's cottage. In despair he entered the house, scarce knowing what he did. He beheld her where she had fallen upon the bed, dead to all but misery. "Oh mother, mother!" he cried, "dinna ye be angry—dinna ye add to the afflictions of your son! Will ye no, mother?—will ye no?" A low groan was the only answer. He hurried to and fro across the room, wringing his hands. "Mother," he again exclaimed, "will ye no speak ae word?"

Page 95

Oh, woman! ye wadna be angry if ye kened what an awfu' thing it is to see a thousan' een below ye, and aboon ye, and round about ye, a' staring upon ye like condemning judges, an' looking into your very soul—ye hae nae idea o' it, mother; I tell ye, ye hae nae idea o't, or ye wadna be angry. The very pulpit floor gaed down wi' me, the kirk wa's gaed round about, and I thought the very crown o' my head wad pitch on the top o' the precentor. The very een o' the multitude soomed round me like fishes!—an' oh, woman! are ye dumb? will ye torment me mair? can ye no speak, mother?" But he spoke to one who never spoke again. Her reason departed, and her speech failed, but grief remained. She had lived upon one hope, and that hope was destroyed. Her round ruddy cheeks and portly form wasted away, and within a few weeks the neighbours, who performed the last office of humanity, declared that a thinner corpse was never wrapt in a winding sheet than Mrs. Jeffrey. Time soothed, but did not heal the sorrows, the shame, and the disappointment of the son. He sank into a village teacher, and often, in the midst of his little school, he would quote his first, his only text—imagine the children to be his congregation—attempt to proceed—gaze wildly round for a moment, and sit down and weep. Through these aberrations his school dwindled into nothingness, and poverty increased his delirium. Once, in the midst of the remaining few, he gave forth the fatal text. "My brethren!" he exclaimed, and smiting his hand upon his forehead, cried, "Speak, mother!—speak now!" and fell with his face upon the floor. The children rushed screaming from the school, and when the villagers entered, the troubled spirit had fled for ever.

THE LAWYER'S TALES.

THE STORY OF MYSIE CRAIG.

In detailing the curious circumstances of the following story, I am again only reporting a real law case to be found in the Court of Session Records, the turning-point of which was as invisible to the judges as to the parties themselves—that is, until the end came; a circumstance again which made the case a kind of developed romance. But as an end implies a beginning, and the one is certainly as necessary as the other, we request you to accompany us—taking care of your feet—up the narrow spiral staircase of a tenement called Corbet's Land, in the same old town where so many wonderful things in the complicated drama—or dream, if you are a Marphurius—of human life have occurred. Up which spiral stair having got by the help of our hands, almost as indispensable as that of the feet, we find ourselves in a little human dovecot of two small rooms, occupied by two persons not unlike, in many respects, two doves—Widow Craig and her daughter, called May, euphuized by the Scotch into Mysie. The chief respects in which they might be likened, without much stress, to the harmless creatures we have mentioned, were their love for each other,

Page 96

together with their total inoffensiveness as regarded the outside world; and we are delighted to say this, for we see so many of the multitudinous sides of human nature dark and depraved, that we are apt to think there is no bright side at all. Nor shall we let slip the opportunity of saying, at the risk of being considered very simple, that of all the gifts of felicity bestowed, as the Pagan Homer tells, upon mankind by the gods, no one is so perfect and beautiful as the love that exists between a good mother and a good daughter.

For so much we may be safe by having recourse to instinct, which is deeper than any secondary causes we poor mortals can see. But beyond this, there were special reasons tending to this same result of mutual affection, which come more within the scope of our observation. In explanation of which, we may say that the mother, having something in her power during her husband's life, had foreseen the advantages of using it in the instruction of her quick and intelligent daughter in an art of far more importance then than now—that of artistic, needlework. Nay, of so much importance was this beautiful art, and to such perfection was it brought at a time when a lady's petticoat, embroidered by the hand, with its profuse imitations of natural objects, flowers, and birds, and strange devices, would often cost twenty pounds Scots, that a sight of one of those operose achievements of genius would make us blush for our time and the labours of our women. Nor was the perfection in this ornamental industry a new thing, for the daughters of the Pictish kings confined in the castle were adepts in it; neither was it left altogether to paid sempstresses, for great ladies spent their time in it, and emulation quickened both the genius and the diligence. So we need hardly say it became to the mother a thing to be proud of, that her daughter Mysie proved herself so apt a scholar that she became an adept, and was soon known as one of the finest embroideresses in the great city. So, too, as a consequence, it came to pass that great ladies employed her; and often the narrow spiral staircase of Corbet's Land was brushed on either side by the huge masses of quilted and emblazoned silk that, enveloping the belles of the day, were with difficulty forced up to and down from the small room of the industrious Mysie.

But we are now speaking of art, while we should have more to say (for it concerns us more) of the character of the young woman who was destined to figure in a stranger way than in making beautiful figures on silk. Mysie was one of a class: few in number they are indeed, but on that account more to be prized. Her taste and fine manipulations were but counterparts of qualities of the heart—an organ to which the pale face, with its delicate lines and the clear liquid eyes, was a suitable index. The refinement which enabled her to make her imitation of beautiful objects on the delicate material of her work was only

Page 97

another form of a sensibility which pervaded her whole nature—that gift which is only conceded to peculiar organizations, and is such a doubtful one, too, if we go, as we cannot help doing, with the poet, when he sings that “chords that vibrate sweetest pleasures,” often also “thrill the deepest notes of woe.” Nay, we might say that the creatures themselves seem to fear the gift, for they shrink from the touch of the rough world, and retire within themselves as if to avoid it, while they are only courting its effects in the play of an imagination much too ardent for the duties of life; and, as a consequence, how they seek secretly the support of stronger natures, clinging to them as do those strange plants called parasites, which, with their tender arms and something so like fingers, cling to the nearest stem of a stouter neighbour, and embracing it, even though hollow and rotten, cover it, and choke it with a flood of flowers. So true is it that woman, like the generous vine, lives by being supported and held up; yet equally true that the strength she gains is from the embrace she gives; and so it is also that goodness, as our Scottish poet Home says, often wounds itself, and affection proves the spring of sorrow.

All which might truly be applied to Mysie Craig; but as yet the stronger stem to which she clung was her mother, and it was not likely, nor was it in reality, that that affection would prove to her anything but the spring of happiness, for it was ripened by love; and the earnings of the nimble fingers, moving often into the still hours of the night, not only kept the wolf from the door, but let in the lambs of domestic harmony and peace. Would that these things had so continued! But there are other wolves than those of poverty, and the “ae lamb o’ the fauld” cannot be always under the protection of the ewe; and it so happened on a certain night, not particularized in the calendar, that our Mysie, having finished one of these floral petticoats on which she had been engaged for many weeks, went forth with her precious burden to deliver the same to its impatient owner, no other than the then famous Anabella Gilroy, who resided in Advocate’s Close—of which fine lady, by the way, we may say, that of all the gay creatures who paraded between “the twa Bows,” no one displayed such ample folds of brocaded silk, nodded her pon-pons more jauntily, or napped with a sharper crack her high-heeled shoes, all to approve herself to “the bucks” of the time, with their square coats brocaded with lace, their three-cornered hats on the top of their bob-wigs, their knee-buckles and shoe-buckles. And certainly not the least important of those, both in his own estimation and that of the sprightly Anabella, was George Balgarnie, a young man who had only a year before succeeded to the property of Balgruddery, somewhere in the north, and of whom we might say that, in forming him, Nature had taken so much pains with the building up of the body, that she had forgotten the mind, so

Page 98

that he had no more spiritual matter in him than sufficed to keep his blood hot, and enable his sensual organs to work out their own selfish gratifications; or, to perpetrate a metaphor, he was all the polished mahogany of a piano, without any more musical springs than might respond to one keynote of selfishness. And surely Anabella had approved herself to the fop to some purpose; for when our sempstress with her bundle had got into the parlour of the fine lady, she encountered no other than Baggins—a circumstance apparently of very small importance; but we know that a moment of time is sometimes like a small seed, which contains the nucleus of a great tree—perhaps a poisonous one. And so it turned out that, while Anabella was gloating over the beautiful work of the timid embroideress, Baggins was busy admiring the artist, but not merely—perhaps not at all—as an artist, only as an object over whom he wished to exercise power.

This circumstance was not unobserved by the little embroideress, but it was only observed to be shrunk from in her own timid way; and probably it would soon have passed from her mind, if it had not been followed up by something more direct and dangerous. And it was; for no sooner had Mysie got to the foot of the stairs than she encountered Baggins, who had gone out before her; and now began one of those romances in daily life of which the world is full, and of which the world is sick. Baggins, in short, commenced that kind of suit which is nearly as old as the serpent, and therefore not to be wondered at; neither are we to wonder that Mysie listened to it, because we have heard so much about “lovely woman stooping to folly,” that we are content to put it to the large account of natural miracles. And not very miraculous either, when we remember that if the low-breathed accents of tenderness awaken the germ of love, they awaken at the same time faith and trust. And such was the beginning of the romance which was to go through the normal stages,—the appointment to meet again, the meeting itself, the others that followed, the extension of the moonlight walks, sometimes to the Hunter’s Bog between Arthur’s Seat and Salisbury Crags, and sometimes to the song-famed “Wells o’ Weary,”—all which were just as sun and shower to the germ of the plant. The love grew and grew, and the faith grew and grew also which saw in him that which it felt in itself. Nay, if any of those moonlight-loving elves that have left their foot-marks in the fairy rings to be seen near St. Anthony’s Well had whispered in Mysie’s ear, “Baggins will never make you his wife,” she would have believed the words as readily as if they had impugned the sincerity of her own heart. In short, we have again the analogue of the parasitic plant. The very fragility and timidity of Mysie were at once the cause and consequence of her confidence. She would cling to him and cover him with the blossoms of her affection; nay, if there were unsoundness in the stem, these very blossoms would cover the rottenness.

Page 99

This change in the life of the little sempstress could not fail to produce some corresponding change at home. We read smoothly the play we have acted ourselves; and so the mother read love in the daughter's eyes, and heard it, too, in her long sighs; nor did she fail to read the sign that the song which used to lighten her beautiful work was no longer heard; for love to creatures so formed as Mysie Craig is too serious an affair for poetical warbling. But she said nothing; for while she had faith in the good sense and virtue of her daughter, she knew also that there was forbearance due to one who was her support. Nor, as yet, had she reason to fear, for Mysie still plied her needle, and the roses and the lilies sprang up in all their varied colours out of the ground of the silk or satin as quickly and as beautifully as they were wont, though the lilies of her cheeks waxed paler as the days flitted. And why the latter should have been, we must leave to the reader; for ourselves only hazarding the supposition that, perhaps, she already thought that Balgarnie should be setting about to make her his wife—an issue which behoved to be the result of their intimacy sooner or later; for that in her simple mind there should be any other issue, was just about as impossible as that, in the event of the world lasting as long, the next moon would not, at her proper time, again shine in that green hollow, between the Lion's Head and Samson's Ribs, which had so often been the scene of their happiness. Nay, we might say that though a doubt on the subject had by any means got into her mind, it would not have remained there longer than it took a shudder to scare the wild thing away.

Of course, all this was only a question of time; but certain it is, that by-and-by the mother could see some connection between Mysie's being more seldom out on those moonlight nights than formerly, and a greater paleness in her thin face, as if the one had been the cause of the other. But still she said nothing, for she daily expected that Mysie would herself break the subject to her; and so she was left only to increasing fears that her daughter's heart and affections had been tampered with, and perhaps she had fears that went farther. Still, so far as yet had gone, there was no remission in the labours of Mysie's fingers, as if in the midst of all—whatever that all might be—she recognised the paramount necessity of bringing in by those fingers the required and usual amount of the means of their livelihood. Nay, somehow or other, there was at that very time, when her cheek was at the palest, and her sighs were at their longest, and her disinclination to speak was at the strongest, an increase of work upon her; for was not there a grand tunic to embroider for Miss Anabella, which was wanted on a given day; and were there not other things for Miss Anabella's friend, Miss Allardice, which were not to be delayed beyond that same day? And so she stitched and stitched on and on, till sometimes the little lamp seemed to go out for want of oil, while the true cause of her diminished light was really the intrusion of the morning sun, against which it had no chance. It might be, too, that her very anxiety to get these grand dresses finished helped to keep out of her mind ideas which could have done her small good, even if they had got in.

Page 100

But at length the eventful hour came when the gentle sempstress withdrew the shining needle, made clear by long use, from the last touch of the last rose; and doubtless, if Mysie had not been under the cloud of sorrow we have mentioned, she would have been happier at the termination of so long a labour than she had ever been, for the finishing evening had always been celebrated by a glass of strong Edinburgh ale—a drink which, as both a liquor and a liqueur, was as famous then as it is at this day. But of what avail was this work-termination to her now? Was it not certain that she had not seen Balgarnie for two moons? and though the impossibility of his not marrying her was just as impossible as ever, why were these two moons left to shine in the green hollow and on the rising hill without the privilege of throwing the shadows of Mysie Craig and George Balgarnie on the grass, where the fairies had left the traces of their dances? Questions these which she was unable to answer, if it were not even that she was afraid to put them to herself. Then, when was it that she felt herself unable to tie up her work in order to take it home, and that her mother, seeing the reacting effect of the prior sleepless nights in her languid frame, did this little duty for her, even as while she was doing it she looked through her tears at her changed daughter? But Mysie would do so much. While the mother should go to Miss Allardice, Mysie would proceed to Miss Anabella; and so it was arranged. They went forth together, parting at the Nether Bow; and Mysie, in spite of a weakness which threatened to bring her with her burden to the ground, struggled on to her destination. At the top of Advocate's Close she saw a man hurry out and increase his step even as her eye rested on him; and if it had not appeared to her to be among the ultimate impossibilities of things, natural as well as unnatural, she would have sworn that that man was George Balgarnie; but then, it just so happened that Mysie came to the conclusion that such a circumstance was among these ultimate impossibilities.

This resolution was an effort which cost her more than the conviction would have done, though doubtless she did not feel this at the time, and so with a kind of forced step she mounted the stair; but when she got into the presence of Miss Gilroy, she could scarcely pronounce the words—

“I have brought you the dress, ma'am.”

“And I am so delighted, Miss Craig, that I could almost take you into my arms,” said the lady; “but what ails ye, dear? You are as white as any snow I ever saw, whereas you ought to have been as blithe as a bridesmaid, for don't you know that you have brought me home one of my marriage dresses? Come now, smile when I tell you that to-morrow is my wedding-day.”

“Wedding-day,” muttered Mysie, as she thought of the aforesaid utter impossibility of herself not being soon married to George Balgarnie; an impossibility not rendered less impossible by the resolution she had formed not to believe that within five minutes he had flown away from her.

Page 101

"Yes, Miss Craig, and surely you must have heard who the gentleman is; for does not the town ring of it from the castle to the palace, from Kirk-o'-Field to the Calton?"

"I have not been out," said Mysie.

"That accounts for it," continued the lady; "and I am delighted at the reason, for wouldn't it have been terrible to think that my marriage with George Balfarnie of Balgrudery was a thing of so small a note as not to be known everywhere?"

If Mysie Craig had appeared shortly before to Miss Gilroy paler than any snow her ladyship had ever seen, she must now have been as pale as some other kind of snow that nobody ever saw. The dreadful words had indeed produced the adequate effect, but not in the most common way, for we are to keep in view that it is not the most shrinking and sensitive natures that are always the readiest to faint; and there was, besides, the aforesaid conviction of impossibility which, grasping the mind by a certain force, deadened the ear to words implying the contrary. Mysie stood fixed to the spot, as if she were trying to realize some certainty she dared not think was possible, her lips apart, her eyes riveted on the face of the lady—mute as that kind of picture which a certain ancient calls a silent poem, and motionless as a figure of marble.

An attitude and appearance still more inexplicable to Anabella, perhaps irritating as an unlucky omen, and therefore not possessing any claim for sympathy—at least it got none.

"Are you the Mysie Craig," she cried, as she looked at the girl, "who used to chat to me about the dresses you brought, and the flowers on them? Ah, jealous and envious, is that it? But you forget, George Balfarnie never could have made *you* his wife—a working needlewoman; he only fancied you as the plaything of an hour. He told me so himself when I charged him with having been seen in your company. So, Mysie, you may as well look cheerful. Your turn will come next with some one in your own station."

There are words which stimulate and confirm; there are others that seem to kill the nerve and take away the sense, nor can we ever tell the effect till we see it produced; and so we could not have told beforehand—nay, we would have looked for something quite opposite—that Mysie, shrinking and irritable as she was by nature, was saved from a faint (which had for some moments been threatening her) by the cruel insult which thus had been added to her misfortune. She had even power to have recourse to that strange device of some natures, that of "affecting to be not affected;" and casting a glance at the fine lady, she turned and went away without uttering a single word. But who knows the pain of the conventional concealment of pain except those who have experienced the agony of the trial? Even at the moment when she heard that George Balfarnie was to be married, and that she came to know that she had been for weeks sewing the

Page 102

marriage dress of his bride, she was carrying under her heart the living burden which was the fruit of her love for that man. Yet not the burden of shame and dishonour, as our story will show, for she was justified by the law of her country—yea, by certain words once written by an apostle to the Corinthians, all which may as yet appear a great mystery; but as regards Mysie Craig's agony, as she staggered down Miss Gilroy's stairs on her way home, there could be no doubt or mystery whatever.

Nor, when she got home, was there any comfort there for the daughter who had been so undutiful as to depart from her mother's precepts, and conceal from her not only her unfortunate connection with a villain, but the condition into which that connection had brought her. But she was at least saved from the pain of a part of the confession, for her mother had learned enough from Miss Allardice to satisfy her as to the cause of her daughter's change from the happy creature she once was, singing in the long nights, as she wrought unremittingly at her beautiful work, and the poor, sighing, pale, heart-broken thing she had been for months. Nor did she fail to see, with the quick eye of a mother, that as Mysie immediately on entering the house laid herself quietly on the bed, and sobbed in her great agony, she had learned the terrible truth from Miss Gilroy that the robe she had embroidered was to deck the bride of her destroyer. Moreover, her discretion enabled her to perceive that this was not the time for explanation, for the hours of grief are sacred, and the heart must be left to do its work by opening the issues of Nature's assuagement, or ceasing to beat. So the night passed, without question or answer; and the following day, that of the marriage, was one of silence, even as if death had touched the tongue that used to be the medium of cheerful words and tender sympathies—a strange contrast to the joy, if not revelry, in Advocate's Close.

It was not till after several days had passed that Mysie was able, as she still lay in bed, to whisper, amidst the recurring sobs, in the ear of her mother, as the latter bent over her, the real circumstances of her condition; and still, amidst the trembling words, came the vindication that she considered herself to be as much the wife of George Balgarnie as if they had been joined by "Holy Kirk;" a statement which the mother could not understand, if it was not to her a mystery, rendered even more mysterious by a reference which Mysie made to the law of the country, as she had heard the same from her cousin, George Davidson, a writer's clerk in the Lawnmarket. Much of which, as it came in broken syllables from the lips of the disconsolate daughter, the mother put to the account of the fond dreams of a mind put out of joint by the worst form of misery incident to young women. But what availed explanations, mysteries or no mysteries, where the fact was patent that Mysie Craig lay there, the poor heartbroken victim of man's perfidy—her powers of industry broken and useless—the fine weaving genius of her fancy, whereby she wrought her embroidered devices to deck and adorn beauty, only engaged now on portraying all the evils of her future life; and above all, was she not soon to become a mother?

Page 103

Meanwhile, and in the midst of all this misery, the laid-up earnings of Mysie's industry wore away, where there was no work by those cunning fingers, now thin and emaciated; and before the days passed, and the critical day came whereon another burden would be imposed on the household, there was need for the sympathy of neighbours in that form which soon wears out—pecuniary help. That critical day at length came. Mysie Craig gave birth to a boy, and their necessities from that hour grew in quicker and greater proportion than the generosity of friends. There behoved something to be done, and that without delay. So when Mysie lay asleep, with the innocent evidence of her misfortune by her side, Mrs. Craig put on her red plaid and went forth on a mother's duty, and was soon in the presence of George Balgarnie and his young wife. She was under an impulse which made light of delicate conventionalities, and did not think it necessary to give the lady an opportunity of being absent: nay, she rather would have her to be present; for was she, who had been so far privy to the intercourse between her husband and Mysie, to be exempt from the consequences which she, in a sense, might have been said to have brought about?

"Ye have ruined Mysie Craig, sir!" cried at once the roused mother. "Ye have ta'en awa her honour. Ye have ta'en awa her health. Ye have ta'en awa her bread. Ay, and ye have reduced three human creatures to want, it may be starvation; and I have come here in sair sorrow and necessity to ask when and whaur is to be the remeid?"

"When and where you may find it, woman!" said the lady, as she cast a side-glance to her husband, probably by way of appeal for the truth of what she thought it right to say. "Mr. Balgarnie never injured your daughter. Let him who did the deed yield the remeid!"

"And do you stand by this?" said Mrs. Craig.

But the husband had been already claimed as free from blame by his wife, who kept her eye fixed upon him; and the obligation to conscience, said by sceptics to be an offspring of society, is sometimes weaker than what is due to a wife, in the estimation of whom a man may wish to stand in a certain degree of elevation.

"You must seek another father to the child of your daughter," said he lightly. And not content with the denial, he supplemented it by a laugh as he added, "When birds go to the greenwood, they must take the chance of meeting the goshawk."

"And that is your answer?" said she.

"It is; and you need never trouble either my wife or me more on this subject," was the reply.

"Then may the vengeance o' the God of justice light on the heads o' baith o' ye!" added Mrs. Craig, as she went hurriedly away.

Nor was her threat intended as an empty one, for she held on her way direct to the Lawnmarket, where she found George Davidson, to whom she related as much as she had been able to get out of Mysie, and also what had passed at the interview with Balgarnie and his lady. After hearing which, the young writer shook his head.

Page 104

"You will get a trifle of aliment," said he; "perhaps half-a-crown a week, but no more; and Mysie could have made that in a day by her beautiful work."

"And she will never work mair," said the mother, with a sigh.

"For a hundred years," rejoined he, more to himself than to her, and probably in congratulation of himself for his perspicacity, "and since ever there was a College of Justice, there never was a case where a man pulled up on oath for a promise of marriage admitted the fact. It is a good Scotch law, only we want a people to obey it. But what," he added again, "if we were to try it, though it were only as a grim joke and a revenge in so sad and terrible a case as that of poor Mysie Craig!"

Words which the mother understood no more than she did law Latin; and so she was sent away as sorrowful as she had come, for Davidson did not want to raise hopes which there was no chance of being fulfilled; but he knew as a Scotchman that a man who trusts himself to a "strae rape" in the hope of its breaking, may possibly hang himself; and so it happened that the very next day a summons was served upon George Balgarnie, to have it found and declared by the Lords of Session that he had promised to marry Mysie Craig, whereupon a child had been born by her; or, in fault of that, he was bound to sustain the said child. Thereupon, without the ordinary law's delay, certain proceedings went on, in the course of which Mysie herself was examined as the mother to afford what the lawyers call a *semiplena probatio*, or half proof, to be supplemented otherwise, and thereafter George Balgarnie stood before the august fifteen. He denied stoutly all intercourse with Mysie, except an occasional walk in the Hunter's Bog; and this he would have denied also, but he knew that he had been seen, and that it would be sworn to by others. And then came the last question, which Mr. Greerson, Mysie's advocate, put in utter hopelessness. Nay, so futile did it seem to try to catch a Scotchman by advising him to put his head in a noose on the pretence of seeing how it fitted his neck, that he smiled even as the words came out of his mouth—

"Did you ever promise to marry Mysie Craig?"

Was prudence, the chief of the four cardinal virtues, ever yet consistent with vice? Balgarnie waxed clever—a dangerous trick in a witness. He stroked his beard with a smile on his face, and answered—

"Yes, *once—when I was drunk!*"

Words which were immediately followed by the crack of a single word in the dry mouth of one of the advocates—the word "NICKED."

And nicked he was; for the presiding judge, addressing the witness, said—

“The drunkenness may be good enough in its own way, sir; but it does not take away the effect of your promise; nay, it is even an aggravation, insomuch as having enjoyed the drink, you wanted to enjoy with impunity what you could make of the promise also.”

Page 105

If Balgarnie had been a reader, he might have remembered Waller's verse—

“That eagle's fate and mine are one,
Which on the shaft that made him die
Espied a feather of his own,
Wherewith he wont to soar so high.”

So Mysie gained her plea, and the marriage with Anabella, for whom she had embroidered the marriage gown, was dissolved. How matters progressed afterwards for a time, we know not; but the Scotch know that there is wisdom in making the best of a bad bargain, and in this case it was a good one; for, as the Lady of Balgrudery, Mysie Craig did no dishonour to George Balgarnie, who, moreover, found her a faithful wife, and a good mother to the children that came of this strange marriage.

THE TWIN BROTHERS.

William Sim was the son of a feuar in the southern part of Dumfriesshire, who, by dint of frugality, had hoarded together from three to four hundred pounds. This sum he was resolved to employ in setting up his son in business; and, in pursuance of this resolution, at the age of fourteen William was bound as an apprentice to a wealthy old grocer in Carlisle; and it was his fortune in a few months to ingratiate himself into the favour and confidence of his master. The grocer had a daughter, who, though not remarkable for the beauty of her face or the elegance of her person, had nevertheless an agreeable countenance, and ten thousand independent charms to render it more agreeable. She was some eighteen months older than William; and when he first came to be an apprentice with her father, and a boarder in his house, she looked upon him as quite a boy, while she considered herself to be a full-grown woman. He was, indeed, a mere boy—and a clownish-looking boy too. He wore a black leathern cap, edged and corded with red, which his mother called a *bendy*; a coarse grey jacket; a waistcoat of the same; and his trousers were of a brownish-green cord, termed *thickset*. His shoes were of the double-soled description, which ought more properly to be called brogues; and into them, on the evening previous to his departure, his father had driven tacks and sparables innumerable, until they became like a plate of iron or a piece of warlike workmanship, resembling the scaled cuirass of a mailed knight in the olden time; “for,” said he, “the callant will hae runnin’ about on the causeway and plainstones o’ Carlisle sufficient to drive a’ the shoon in the world aff his feet.” When, therefore, William Sim made his debut behind the counter of Mr. Carnaby, the rich grocer of Carlisle, and as he ran on a message through the streets, with his bendy cap, grey jacket, thickset trousers, and ironed shoes, striking fire behind him as he ran, and making a noise like a troop of cavalry, the sprucer youngsters of the city said he was “new caught.” But William Sim had not been two years in Carlisle when he began to show his shirt collar; his clattering

Page 106

brogues gave place to silent pumps, his leathern bendy to a fashionable hat, and his coarse grey jacket to a coat with tails. Moreover, he began to bow and smile to the ladies when they entered the shop; he also became quite a connoisseur in teas and confections; he recommended them to them, and he bowed and smiled again as they left. Such was the work of less than two years; and before three went round, there was not a smarter or a better dressed youth in all Carlisle than William Sim. He became a favourite subject of conversation amongst the young belles; and there was not one of them who, if disengaged, would have said to him, “Get thee behind me.” Miss Carnaby heard the conversation of her young companions, and she gradually became conscious that William was not a boy; in fact, she began to wonder how she had ever thought so, for he, as she said unto herself, was “certainly a very interesting *young man*.” Within other four years, and before the period of his apprenticeship had expired, William began to repeat poetry—some said to write it, but that was not the fact; he only twisted or altered a few words now and then, to suit the occasion; and almost every line ended with words of such soft sounds as bliss, kiss—love, dove—joy, cloy, and others equally sweet, the delightful meanings of which are only to be met with in the sentimental glossary. He now gave Miss Carnaby his arm to church; and, on leaving it in the afternoons, they often walked into the fields together. On such occasions,

“Talk of various kinds deceived the road;”

and even when they were silent, their silence had an eloquence of its own. One day they had wandered farther than their wont, and they stood on the little bridge where the two kingdoms meet, about half a mile below Gretna. I know not what soft persuasion he employed, but she accompanied him up the hill which leadeth through the village of Springfield, and they went towards the far-famed Green together. In less than an hour, Miss Carnaby that was, returned towards Carlisle as Mrs. Sim, leaning affectionately on her husband’s arm.

When the old grocer heard of what had taken place, he was exceedingly wroth; and although, as has been said, William stood high in his favour, he thus addressed him—

“Ay, ay, sir!—fine doings! This comes of your Sunday walking! And I suppose you say that my daughter is yours—that she is your wife; and *she* may be *yours*—but I’ll let you know, sir, my *money* is *mine*; and I’ll cut you both off. You shan’t have a sixpence. I’ll rather build a church, sir; I’ll give it towards paying off the national debt, you rascal. You would steal my daughter—eh!”

Thus spoke Mr. Carnaby in his wrath; but when the effervescence of his indignation had subsided, he extended to both the hand of forgiveness, and resigned his business in favour of his son-in-law.

Page 107

Mr. William Sim, therefore, began the world under the most favourable circumstances. He found a fortune prepared to his hands; he had only to improve it. In a few years the old grocer died; and he bequeathed to them the gains of half a century. For twenty years Mr. Sim continued in business, and he had nearly doubled the fortune which he obtained with his wife. Mrs. Sim was a kind-hearted woman; but by nature, or through education, she had also a considerable portion of vanity, and she began to think that it was the duty of her opulent husband to retire from business, and assume the character of an independent gentleman; or rather, I ought to say, of a country gentleman—a squire. She professed to be the more anxious that he should do this on account of the health of her daughter—the sole survivor of five children—and who was then entering upon womanhood. Maria Sim (for such was their daughter's name) was a delicate and accomplished girl of seventeen. The lovely hue that dwelt upon her cheeks, like the blush of a rainbow, was an emblem of beauty, not of health. At the solicitations of her mother, her father gave up his business, and purchased a neat villa, and a few acres that surrounded it, in the neighbourhood of Windermere. The house lay in the bosom of poetry; and the winds that shouted like a triumphant army through the mountain glens, or in gentle zephyrs sighed upon the lake, and gambolled with the ripples, made music around it.

The change, the beauty, I had almost said the deliciousness of their place of abode, had effected a wondrous improvement in the health of Maria; yet her mother was not happy. She was not treated by her neighbours with the obsequious reverence which she believed to be due to persons possessed of twenty thousand pounds. The fashionable ladies in the neighbourhood, also, called her “a mean person”—“a nobody”—“an upstart of yesterday.” In truth, there were not a few who so spoke, because they envied the wealth of the Sims, and were resolved to humble them.

An opportunity for them to do so soon occurred. A subscription ball or assembly, patronized by all the fashionables in the district, was to take place at Keswick. Mrs. Sim, in some measure from a desire of display, and also, as she said, to bring out Maria, put down her husband's name, her own, and their daughter's, on the list. Many of the personages above referred to, on seeing the names of the Sim family on the subscription paper, turned upon their heel, and exclaimed—“Shocking!”

But the important evening arrived. Mrs. Sim had ordered a superb dress from London expressly for the occasion. A duchess might have worn it at a drawing-room. The dress of Maria was simplicity typified, and consisted of a frock of the finest and the whitest muslin; while her slender waist was girdled with a lavender ribbon, her raven hair descended down her snowy neck in ringlets, and around her head she wore a wreath of roses.

Page 108

When Mr. Sim, with his wife and daughter, entered the room, there was a stare of wonderment amongst the company. No one spoke to them, no one bowed to them. The spirit of dumbness seemed to have smitten the assembly. But a general whispering, like the hissing of a congregation of adders, succeeded the silence. Then, at the head of the room, the voices of women rose sharp, angry, and loud. Six or eight, who appeared as the representatives of the company, were in earnest and excited conversation with the stewards; and the words—"low people!"—"vulgar!"—"not to be borne!"—"cheese! faugh!"—"impertinence!"—"must be humbled!"—became audible throughout the room. One of the stewards, a Mr. Morris of Morris House, approached Mr. Sim, and said—

"You, sir, are Mr. Sim, I believe, late grocer and cheesemonger in Carlisle?"

"I suppose, sir," replied the other, "you know that without me telling you; if you do not, you have some right to know me."

"Well, sir," continued the steward of the assembly, "I come to inform you that you have made a mistake. This is not a *social dance* amongst *tradesmen*, but an *assembly of ladies and gentlemen*; therefore, sir, your presence cannot be allowed here."

Poor Maria became blind, the hundred different head-dresses seemed to float around her. She clung to her father's arm for support. Her mother was in an agony of indignation.

"Sir," said Mr. Sim, "I don't know what you call *gentlemen*; but if it be not *genteel* to have sold teas and groceries, it is at least more *honourable* than to use them and never pay for them. You will remember, sir, there is a considerable sum standing against you in my books; and if the money be not paid to me tonight, you shall have less space to dance in before morning."

"Insolent barbarian!" exclaimed Squire Morris, stamping his foot upon the floor.

Mrs. Sim screamed; Maria's head fell upon her father's shoulder. A dozen gentlemen approached to the support of the steward; and one of them, waving his hand and addressing Mr. Sim, said, "Away, sir!"

The retired merchant bowed and withdrew, not in confusion, but with a smile of malignant triumph. He strove to soothe his wife—for his daughter, when relieved from the presence of the disdainful eyes that gazed on her, bore the insult that had been offered them meekly—and, after remaining an hour in Keswick, they returned to their villa in the same chaise in which they had arrived.

In the assembly room the dance began, and fairy forms glided through the floor, lightly, silently, as a falling blossom embraceth the earth. Mr. Morris was leading down a

dance, when a noise was heard at the door. Some person insisted on being admitted, and the door-keepers resisted him. But the intruder carried with him a small staff, on the one end of which was a brass crown, and on its side the letters G. R. It was a talisman potent as the wand of a magician; the doorkeepers became powerless before it. The intruder entered the room—he passed through the mazes of the whirling dance—he approached Mr. Morris—he touched him on the shoulder—he put a piece of paper in his hand—he whispered in his ear—

Page 109

"You are my prisoner!—come with me!"

His lady and his daughters were present, and they felt most bitterly the indignity which a low tradesman had offered them. Confusion paralyzed them; they stood still in the middle of the dance, and one of the young ladies swooned away and fell upon the ground. The time, the place, the manner of arrest, all bespoke malignant and premeditated insult.

Mr. Morris gnashed his teeth together, but, without speaking, accompanied the officer that had arrested him in the room. He remained in custody in an adjoining inn throughout the night; on the following day, was released on bail; and, within a week, his solicitor paid the debt, by augmenting the mortgage on Morris House estate.

It is hardly necessary to say—for such is human nature—that, after this incident, the hatred between Mr. Sim and Squire Morris became inveterate; and the wives of both, and the daughters of the latter, partook in the relentless animosity. Two years passed, and every day the mutual hatred and contempt in which they held each other increased. At that period, a younger son of Squire Morris, who was a lieutenant in the service of the East India Company, obtained leave to visit England and his friends. It was early in June; the swallows chased each other in sport, twittering as they flew over the blue bosom of Windermere; every bush, every tree—yea, it seemed as if every branch sent forth the music of singing birds, and the very air was redolent with melody, from the bold songs of the thrush and the lark to the love-note of the wood-pigeon; and even the earth rejoiced in the chirp of the grasshopper, its tiny but pleasant musician. The fields and the leaves were in the loveliness and freshness of youth, luxuriating in the sunbeams, in the depth of their summer green; and the butterfly sported, and the bee pursued its errand from flower to flower. The mighty mountains circled the scene, and threw their dun shadow on the lake, where, a hundred fathoms deep, they seemed a bronzed and inverted world. At this time, Maria Sim was sailing upon the lake in a small boat that her father had purchased for her, and which was guided by a boy.

A sudden, but not what could be called a strong, breeze came away. The boy had little strength and less skill, and, from his awkwardness in shifting the sail, he caused the boat to upset. Maria was immersed in the lake. The boy clung to the boat, but terror deprived him of ability to render her assistance. She struggled with the waters, and her garments bore her partially up for a time. A boat, in which was a young gentleman, had been sailing to and fro, and, at the time the accident occurred, was within three hundred yards of her. On hearing her sudden cry, and the continued screams of the boy, he drew in his sail, and, taking the oars, at his utmost strength pulled to her assistance. Almost at every third stroke he turned round his head to see the progress he had made, or if he had yet reached her. Twice he beheld her disappear beneath the water—a third time she rose to the surface—he was within a few yards of her. He sprang from his boat. She was again sinking. He dived after her, he raised her beneath his arm, and

succeeded in placing her in his boat. He also rescued the boy, and conveyed them both to land.

Page 110

Maria, though for a time speechless, was speedily, through the exertions of her deliverer, restored to consciousness. Even before she was capable of thanking him or of speaking to him—yea, before her eyes had opened to meet his—he had gazed with admiration on her beautiful features, which were lovely, though the shadow of death was then over them, almost its hand upon them. In truth, he had never gazed upon a fairer face, and when she spoke, he had never listened to a sweeter or a gentler voice. He had been beneath an Indian sun, where the impulses of the heart are fervid as the clime, and where, when the sun is gazed upon, its influence is acknowledged. But, had she been less beautiful than she was, and her features less lovely to look upon, there was a strong something in the very manner and accident of their being brought into each other's society, which appealed more powerfully to the heart than beauty could. It at least begot an interest in the fate of each other; and an interest so called is never very widely separated from affection. The individual who had saved Maria's life was Lieutenant Morris.

He conveyed her first to a peasant's cottage, and afterwards to her father's villa. He knew nothing of the feeling of hatred that existed between their families; and when Mr. Sim heard his name, though for a moment it caused a glow to pass over his face, every other emotion was speedily swallowed up in gratitude towards the deliverer of his child; and when Maria was sufficiently recovered to thank him, though she knew him to be the son of her father's enemy, it was with tears too deep for words—tears that told what eloquence would have failed to express. Even Mrs. Sim, for the time, forgot her hatred of the parents in her obligations to the son.

When, however, the young lieutenant returned to Morris House, and made mention of the adventure in which he had been engaged, and spoke at the same time, in the ardour of youthful admiration, of the beauty and gentleness of the fair being he had rescued from untimely death, the cheeks of his sisters became pale, their eyeballs distended as if with horror. The word "wretch!" escaped from his mother's lips, and she seemed struggling with smothered rage. He turned towards his father for an explanation of the change that had so suddenly come over the behaviour of his mother and sisters.

"Son," said the squire, "I had rather thou hadst perished than that a son of mine should have put forth his hand to assist a dog of the man whose daughter thou hast saved!"

On being made acquainted with the cause of the detestation that existed between the two families, Lieutenant Morris, in some degree, yielded to the whisperings of wounded pride, and began to regret that he had entered the house of a man who had offered an indignity to his father that was not to be forgiven. But he thought also of the beauty of Maria, of the sweetness of her smile, and of the tears of voiceless gratitude which he had seen bedimming the lustre of her bright eyes.

Page 111

He had promised to call again at her father's on the day after the accident; and with an ardent kindness, Mr. Sim had welcomed him to do so. But he went forth, he wandered by the side of the lake, he approached within sight of the house, there was a contention of strange feelings in his breast, and he returned without paying his promised visit. Nevertheless, thoughts of Maria haunted him, and her image mingled with all his fancies. She became as a spirit in his memory that he could not expel, and that he would not if he could.

Three weeks passed on—it was evening—the sun was sinking behind the mountains, and Lieutenant Morris was wandering through a wooded vale, towards Mr. Sim's mansion; for though he entered it not, he nightly drew towards it, as if instinctively, wandering around it, and gazing on its windows as he did so, marvelling as he gazed. He was absorbed in one of those dreamy reveries in which men saunter, speak, and muse unconsciously, when, in following the windings of a footpath which led through a thicket, he suddenly found himself in the presence of a young lady, who was walking slowly across the wood with a book in her hand. Their eyes met—they startled—the book dropped by her side—it was Maria.

I must not, however, dwell longer on this part of the subject; for the story of the twin brothers is yet to begin. Let it be sufficient to say that William, or, as I have hitherto called him, Lieutenant Morris, and Maria whom he saved, became attached to each other. Their dispositions were similar; they seemed formed for each other. Affection took deep root in their hearts; and to root up that affection in the breast of either, was to destroy the heart itself. He made known his attachment towards Maria to his father; and galled pride and hatred to those who had injured him being stronger in the breast of the old squire than the small still voice of affection, he spurned his son from him, and ordered him to leave his house for ever.

The parents of Maria, notwithstanding their first feelings of gratitude towards the saviour of their daughter, were equally averse to a union between them; but with Maria the impulse of the heart and the lover's passionate prayer prevailed over her parents' frowns. They were wed, they became all to each other, and were disowned by those who gave them birth.

When Lieutenant Morris left India, he obtained permission to remain in England for three years; and it was about twelve months after his arrival that the marriage between him and Maria took place. He had still two years to spend in his native land, and he hired a secluded and neat cottage on the banks of the Annan for that period, for the residence of himself and his young and beautiful wife.

Twelve months after their marriage, Maria became the mother of twins—the twin brothers of our tale. But three months had not passed, nor had her infants raised their first smile towards their mother's face, when the sterile hand of death touched the

bosom that supplied them with life. The young husband wept by the bed of death, with the hand of her he loved in his.

Page 112

“William!” said the gentle Maria—and they were her dying words, for she spoke not again—“my eyes will not behold another sun! I must leave you, love! Oh my husband! I must leave our poor, our helpless infants! It is hard to die thus! But when I am gone, dearest—when my babes have no mother—oh, go to *my mother*, and tell her—tell her, William—that it was the dying request of her Maria, that she would be as a mother to them. Farewell, love!—farewell! If”—

Emotion and the strugglings of death overpowered her—her speech failed—her eyes became fixed—her soul passed away, and the husband sat in stupefaction and in agony, holding the hand of his dead wife to his breast. He became conscious that she stirred not—that she breathed not—oh! that she was not! and the wail of the distracted widower rang suddenly and wildly through the cottage, startling his infants from their slumber, and, as some who stood round the bed said, causing even the features of the dead to move, as though the departed spirit had lingered, casting a farewell glance upon the body, and passed over it again, as the voice it had loved to hear rose loud in agony.

The father of Maria came and attended her body to its last, long resting-place. But he did no more; and he left the churchyard without acknowledging that he perceived his grief-stricken son-in-law.

In a few months it was necessary for Lieutenant Morris to return to India, and he could not take his motherless and tender infants thither. He wrote to the parents of his departed Maria; he told them of her last request, breathed by her last words; he implored them, as they had once loved her, during his absence to protect his children.

But the hatred between Mr. Sim and Squire Morris had in no degree abated. The former would have listened to his daughter’s prayer, and taken her twins and the nurse into his house; but his wife was less susceptible to the influence of natural feeling, and even, while at intervals she wept for poor Maria, she said—

“Take both of them, indeed! No, no! I loved our poor, thoughtless, disobedient Maria, Mr. Sim, as well as you did, but I will not submit to the Morrisises. They have nothing to give the children; we have. But they have the same, they have a greater right to provide for them than we have. They shall take one of them, or none of them come into this house.” And again she broke into lamentations over the memory of Maria, and, in the midst of her mourning, exclaimed—“But the child that we take shall never be called Morris.”

Mr. Sim wrote an answer to his son-in-law, as cold and formal as if it had been a note added to an invoice; colder indeed, for it had no equivalent to the poor, hackneyed phrase in all such, of “*esteemed favours*.” In it he stated that he would “bring up” one of the children, provided that Squire Morris would undertake the charge of the other. The unhappy father clasped his hands together on perusing the letter, and exclaimed—

Page 113

“Must my poor babes be parted?—shall they be brought up to hate each other? Oh Maria! would that I had died with you, and our children also!”

To take them to India with him, where a war was threatened, was impossible, and his heart revolted from the thought of leaving them in this country with strangers. At times he was seen, with an infant son on each arm, sitting over the stone upon the grave of their mother which he had reared to her memory, kissing their cheeks and weeping over them, while they smiled in his face unconsciously, and offered to him, in those smiles, affection’s first innocent tribute. On such occasions their nurse stood gazing on the scene, wondering at her master’s grief.

Morris, of Morris House, reluctantly consented to take one of his grandchildren under his care; but at the same time he refused to see his son previous to his departure.

The widowed father wept over his twin sons, and invoking a blessing on them, saw their little arms sundered, and each conveyed to the houses of those who had undertaken to be their protectors, while he again proceeded towards India. The names of the twin sons were George and Charles: the former was committed to the care of Mr. Morris, the other to Mr. Sim. Yet it seemed as if these innocent pledges of a family union, instead of destroying, strengthened the deep-rooted animosity that existed between them. Not a month passed that they did not, in some way, manifest their hatred of and their persecution towards each other.

The squire exhibited a proof of his vindictiveness, in not permitting the child of his son to remain beneath his roof. He had a small property in Devonshire, which was rented by an individual who, with his wife, had been servants under his father. To them George Morris, one of the infant sons of poor Maria, before he was yet twelve months old, was sent, with an injunction that he should be brought up as their own son, that he should be taught to consider himself as such, and bear their name.

The boy Charles, whose lot it was to be placed under the protection of his mother’s parents, was more fortunate. The love they had borne towards their Maria they now lavished upon him. They called him by their own name—they spoke of him as their heir, as their *sole* heir, and they inquired not after his brother. That brother became included in the hatred which Mrs. Sim, at least, bore to his father’s family. As he grew up, his father’s name was not mentioned in his presence. He was taught to call his grandfather—father, and his grandmother—mother; and withal, his mother so called instilled into his earliest thoughts an abhorrence of the inmates of Morris House. At times his grandfather whispered to her on such occasions, “Do not do the like of that, dear; we know not how it may end.” But she regarded not his admonitions, and she strove that her grandchild should hold the very name of Morris in hatred.

Page 114

The peasants to whose keeping George was confided, occupied, as has been stated, a small farm under his grandfather, which lay on the banks of the Dart, a few miles from Totnes. Their name was Prescott: they were cold-hearted and ignorant people; they had no children of their own, nor affection for those of others; neither had they received instructions to show any to him whom they were to adopt as a son; and if they had been arraigned for not doing so, they were of a character to have said with Shylock—"It is not in the bond." When he grew up, there was then no school in that part of Devonshire to which they could have sent him, had they been inclined; but they were not inclined; though, if they had had the power to educate him, they could have referred again to their bond, and said that no injunction to educate him was mentioned there. His first ideas were a consciousness of cruelty and oppression. At seven years of age he was sent to herd a few sheep upon Dartmoor; before he was nine, he was placed as a parish apprentice to the owner of a tin mine, and buried from the light of heaven.

Often and anxiously Lieutenant Morris wrote from India, inquiring after his sons. He sent presents—love-gifts to each; but his letters were unheeded, his presents disregarded. His children grew up in ignorance of his existence, or of the existence of each other.

It was about eighteen years after the death of Maria, and what is called an annual *Revel* was held at Ashburton. Prizes were to be awarded to the best wrestlers, and hundreds were assembled from all parts of Devonshire to witness the sports of the day. Two companies of soldiers were stationed in the town at the time, and the officers, at the suggestion of a young ensign called Charles Sim, agreed to subscribe a purse of ten guineas towards the encouragement of the games. The young ensign was from Cumberland, where the science of wrestling is still a passion; and he, as the reader will have anticipated from the name he bore, was none other than one of the twin brothers. The games were skilfully and keenly contested; and a stripling from the neighbourhood of Totnes, amidst the shouts of the multitude, was declared the victor. The last he had overcome was a gigantic soldier, a native of Cumberland. When the young ensign beheld his champion overcome, his blood rose for the honour of his native county, and he regretted that he had not sustained it in his own person.

The purse subscribed by the officers was still to be wrestled for, and the stripling victor re-entered the ring to compete for it. On his design being perceived, others who wished to have contended for it drew back, and he stood in the ring alone, no one daring to come forward to compete with him. The umpire of the games was proclaiming that, if no one stood against him, the purse would be awarded to him who had already been pronounced the victor of the day, when Ensign Sim, who, with his brother officers, had witnessed the sports from the windows of an adjacent inn, said—

Page 115

“Well, the lad shall have the purse, though I don’t expect he will win it; for, if no one else will, I shall give him a throw to redeem the credit of old Cumberland.”

“Bravo, Sim!” cried his brother officers, and they accompanied him towards the ring.

The people again shouted when they perceived that there was to be another game, and the more so when they discovered that the stranger competitor was a gentleman. The ensign, having cast off his regimentals, and equipped himself in the strait canvas jacket worn by wrestlers, entered the ring. But now arose a new subject of wonderment, which in a moment was perceived by the whole multitude; and the loud huzzas that had welcomed his approach were hushed in a confused murmur of astonishment.

“Zwinge!” exclaimed a hundred voices, as they approached each other; “they be loik one anoother as two beans!”

“Whoy, which be which?” inquired others.

The likeness between the two wrestlers was indeed remarkable; their age, their stature, the colour of their hair, their features, were alike. Spectators could not trace a difference between the one and the other. The ensign had a small and peculiar mark below his chin; he perceived that his antagonist had the same. They approached each other, extending their arms for the contest. They stood still, they gazed upon each other; as they gazed they started; their arms dropped by their sides; they stood anxiously scrutinizing the countenance of each other, in which each saw himself as in a glass. Astonishment deprived them of strength; they forgot the purpose for which they met; they stretched forth their hands, they grasped them together, and stood eagerly looking into each other’s eyes.

“Friend,” said the ensign, “this is indeed singular; our extraordinary resemblance to each other fills me with amazement. What is your name? from whence do you come?”

“Whoy, master,” rejoined the other, “thou art so woundy like myself, that had I met thee anywhere but in the middle o’ these folk, I should have been afeared that I was agoing to die, and had zeen mysel’. My name is George Prescot, at your sarvice. I coom from three miles down the river there; and what may they call thee?”

“My name,” replied the soldier, “is Charles Sim. I am an orphan; my parents I never saw. And tell me—for this strange resemblance between us almost overpowers me—do yours live?”

“Whoy,” was the reply, “old Tom Prescot and his woif be alive; and they zay as how they be my vather and moother, and I zuppose they be; but zoom cast up to them that they bean’t.”

No wrestling match took place between them; but hand in hand they walked round the ring together, while the spectators gazed upon them in silent wonder.

The ensign presented the youth, who might have been styled his fac-simile, with the purse subscribed by his brother officers and himself; and in so doing he offered to double its contents. But the youth, with a spirit above his condition, peremptorily refused the offer, and said—

Page 116

"No, master—thank you the zame—I will take nothing but what I have won."

Charles was anxious to visit "old Tom Prescot and his wife," of whom the stranger had spoken; but the company to which he belonged was to march forward to Plymouth on the following day, and there to embark. His brother officers also dissuaded him from the thought.

"Why, Sim," said they, "the likeness between you and the conqueror of the ring was certainly a very pretty coincidence, and your meeting each other quite a drama. But, my good fellow," added they, laughing, "take the advice of older heads than your own—don't examine too closely into your father's faults."

Three years passed, and Charles, now promoted to the rank of a lieutenant, accompanied the Duke of York in his more memorable than brilliant campaign in Holland. A soldier was accused of having been found sleeping on guard; he was tried, found guilty, and condemned to be shot. A corporal's guard was accompanying the doomed soldier from the place where sentence had been pronounced against him to the prison-house, from whence he was to be brought forth for execution on the following day. Lieutenant Sim passed near them. A voice exclaimed—

"Master! master!—save me! save me!"

It was the voice of the condemned soldier. The lieutenant turned round, and in the captive who called to him for assistance he recognised the Devonshire wrestler—the strange portrait of himself. And even now, if it were possible, the resemblance between them was more striking than before; for, in the stranger, the awkwardness of the peasant had given place to the smartness of the soldier. Charles had felt an interest in him from the first moment he beheld him; he had wished to meet him again, and had resolved to seek for him should he return to England; and now the interest that he had before felt for him was increased tenfold. The offence and the fate of the doomed one were soon told. The lieutenant pledged himself that he would leave no effort untried to save him; and he redeemed his pledge. He discovered, he obtained proof that the condemned prisoner, George Prescot, had been employed on severe and dangerous duties, against which it was impossible for nature longer to stand up, but in all of which he had conducted himself as a good, a brave, and a faithful soldier; and, more, that it could not be proved that he was actually found asleep at his post, but that he was stupified through excess of fatigue.

He hastened to lay the evidence he had obtained respecting the conduct and innocence of the prisoner before his Royal Highness, who, whatever were his faults, was at least the soldier's friend. The Duke glanced over the documents which the lieutenant laid before him; he listened to the evidence of the comrades of the prisoner. He took a pen; he wrote a few lines; he placed them in the hands of Lieutenant Sim. They contained

the free pardon of Private Prescott. Charles rushed with the pardon in his hand to the prisoner; he exclaimed—

Page 117

"Take this—you are pardoned—you are free!"

The soldier would have embraced his knees to thank him; but the lieutenant said—

"No! kneel not to me—consider me as a brother. I have merely saved the life of an innocent and deserving man. But the strange resemblance between us seems to me more than a strange coincidence. You have doubts regarding your parentage; I know but little of mine. Nature has written a mystery on our faces which we need to have explained. When this campaign is over, we shall inquire concerning it. Farewell for the present; but we must meet again."

The feelings of the reprieved and unlettered soldier were too strong for his words to utter; he shook the hand of his deliverer and wept.

A few days after this some sharp fighting took place. The loss of the British was considerable, and they were compelled to continue their retreat, leaving their dead, and many of their wounded, exposed, as they fell behind them. When they again arrived at a halting-place, Lieutenant Sim sought the regiment to which the soldier who might be termed his second self belonged. But he was not to be found; and all that he could learn respecting him was, that, three days before, George Prescott had been seen fighting bravely, but that he fell covered with wounds, and in their retreat was left upon the field.

Tears gushed into the eyes of the lieutenant when he heard the tidings. His singular meeting with the stranger in Devonshire; their mysterious resemblance to each other; his meeting him again in Holland under circumstances yet more singular; his saving his life; and the dubious knowledge which each had respecting their birth and parentage,—all had sunk deep into his heart, and thoughts of these things chased sleep from his pillow.

It was but a short time after this that the regiment of Lieutenant Sim was ordered to India, and he accompanied it; and it was only a few months after his arrival, when the Governor-General gave an entertainment at his palace, at which all the military officers around were present. At table, opposite to Lieutenant Sim, sat a man of middle age; and, throughout the evening, his eyes remained fixed upon him, and occasionally seemed filled with tears. He was a colonel in the Company's service, and a man who, by the force of merit, had acquired wealth and reputation.

"I crave your pardon, sir," said he, addressing the lieutenant; "but if I be not too bold, a few words with you in private would confer a favour upon me, and if my conjectures be right, will give us both cause to rejoice."

"You may command me, sir," said the youth.



The colonel rose from the table and left the room, and the lieutenant rose also and accompanied him. They entered an adjoining apartment. The elder soldier gazed anxiously on the face of the younger, and again addressing him, said—

Page 118

"Sir, do not attribute this strange behaviour upon my part to rudeness. It has been prompted by feelings painfully, deeply, I may add tenderly, interesting to me. It may be accident, but your features bring memories before my eyes that have become a part of my soul's existence. Nor is it your features only, but I have observed that there is the mark of a rose-bud beneath your chin. I remember twins on whom that mark was manifest, and the likeness of a countenance is graven upon my heart, the lineaments of which were as yours are. Forgive me then, sir, in thus abruptly requesting your name."

The lieutenant looked surprised at the anxiety and looks of the stranger, and he answered—

"My name is Charles Sim."

"Yes! yes!" replied the colonel, gasping as he spoke; "I saw it; I felt it! Your name is Charles, but not Sim; that was your mother's name—your sainted mother's. You bear it from your grandfather You come from Cumberland?"

"I do!" was the reply, in accents of astonishment.

"My son! my son!—child of my Maria!" were the accents that broke from the colonel, as he fell upon the neck of the other.

"My father!" exclaimed Charles, "have I then found a father?" And the tears streamed down his cheeks.

Many questions were asked, many answered; and amongst others, the father inquired —

"Where is your brother—my little George? Does he live? You were the miniatures of your mother; and so strikingly did you resemble each other, that while you were infants, it was necessary to tie a blue ribbon round his arm, and a green one round yours, to distinguish you from each other."

Charles became pale; his knees shook; his hands trembled.

"Then I *had* a brother?" he cried.

"You had," replied his father; "but wherefore do you say you *had* a brother? Is it possible that you do not know him? He has been brought up with my father—Mr. Morris of Morris House."

"No, he has not," replied Charles; "the man you speak of, and whom you say is my grandfather, has brought up no one—none of my age. I have hated him from childhood, for he has hated me; and but that you have told me he is my grandfather, I would hate him still. But he has brought up no one that could be a brother of mine."

“Then my child has died in infancy,” rejoined the colonel.

“No, no,” added Charles; “I knew not that I had a brother—not even that I had a father; but you say my brother resembled me; that I from my birth had the mark beneath my chin which I have now, and that he had the same: then I know him; I have seen my brother!”

“Where, where? when, when?” breathlessly inquired the anxious parent. “Speak, my son!—oh speak!”

Page 119

"Shortly after I had joined my regiment," continued Charles, "I was present in Devonshire, at what is called a revel. Our mess gave a purse towards the games. We put forward a Cumberland man belonging to the regiment, in the full confidence that he would be the victor of the day; but a youth, a mere youth, threw not only our champion, but all who dared to oppose him. I was stung for the honour of Cumberland; I was loath to see the hero carry his laurels so easily from the field. I accoutred myself in the wrestler's garb; I entered the ring. The shouting of the multitude ceased instantaneously. I gazed upon my antagonist, he gazed upon me. Our hands fell; we both shook; we were the image of each other. Three years afterwards I was in Holland. A soldier was unjustly condemned to die; I saved him; I obtained his pardon. He was my strange counterpart whom I met in Devonshire. He had the mark of the rose-bud beneath his chin that I have, and which you say my brother has."

"And where is he now?" eagerly inquired the colonel.

"Alas! I know not," answered Charles; "nor do I think he lives. Three days after I had rescued him from unmerited death, I learned that he had fallen bravely on the field; and whether he be now a prisoner or with the dead, I cannot tell."

"Surely it was thy brother," said the colonel; "yet how he should be in Devonshire, or a soldier in the ranks, puzzles me to think. No, no, Charles, it cannot be; it is a coincidence, heightened by imagination. Your grandfather has not been kind to me, but he is not capable of the cruelty which the tale you have told would imply he had exercised towards the child I entrusted to his care. He hates me, but surely he could not be cruel to my offspring. You know Morris House?" he added.

"I know it well," replied Charles; "but I never knew in it one who could be my brother, nor one of my age; neither did I know Mr. Morris to be my grandfather; nor yet have I heard of him but as one who had injured my mother while she lived, and who had been the enemy of her parents."

"Enough, enough, my son," said the colonel; "my soul is filled with words which I cannot utter. I weep for your angel-mother; I weep for my son, your brother; and I mourn for the unceasing hatred that exists between your grandsires. But, Charles, we must return to England; we must do so instantly. I have now fortune enough for you and for your brother also, if he yet live, and if we can find him. But we must inquire after and go in quest of him."

Within three months Charles Morris, or Lieutenant Sim as he has hitherto been called, and his father returned to England together. But instead of following them, I shall return to George Prescott, the prize-wrestler and the condemned and pardoned soldier. It has been mentioned that he was wounded and left upon the field by a retreating army. I have to add that he was made prisoner, and when his wounds were healed, he was, though not perceptibly, disabled for active service. Amongst his brethren in captivity

was a Captain Paling, who, when an exchange of prisoners took place, hastened to join his regiment, and gave George, who was deemed unfit for service, a letter to his mother and sisters who resided in Dartmouth. The letter was all that the captain could give him, for he was penniless as George was himself.

Page 120

George Prescott feeling himself once more at liberty, took his passage from Rotterdam in a sloop bound for Dartmouth, and with only the letter of Captain Paling in his pocket to pay for his conveyance. He perceived that the skipper frequently cast suspicious glances towards him, as though he were about to ask, "Where is your money, sir?" But George saw this, and he bore it down with a high hand. He knew that the certain way of being treated with the contempt and neglect which poverty always introduces in its train, was to plead being poor. He was by no means learned, but he understood something of human nature, and he knew a good deal of the ways of men—of the shallowness of society, and the depths of civility. He therefore carried his head high. He called for the best that the ship could afford, and he fared as the skipper did, though he partook but sparingly.

But the vessel arrived in Dartmouth harbour; it entered the mouth of the romantic river, on the one side of which was the fort, still bearing the name of Cromwell, and on the other Kingsbridge, which Peter Pindar hath celebrated; while on both sides, as precipitous banks, rose towering hills, their summits covered by a stunted furze, and the blooming orchard meeting it midway.

Some rather unpleasant sensations visited the disabled soldier as the vessel sailed up the river towards the town. The beauty of its situation made no impression upon him, for he had seen it a thousand times; and it was perhaps as well that it did not; for to look on it from the river, or from a distant height—like a long line of houses hung on the breast of romance—and afterwards to enter it and find yourself in the midst of a narrow, dingy street, where scarce two wheelbarrows could pass, produceth only disappointment, and that, too, of the bitterest kind. It seems, indeed, that the Devonians have conceded so much of their beautiful county to the barrenness of Dartmoor, that they grudge every inch that is occupied as a street or highway. Ere this time, George Prescott had in a great measure dropped his Devonshire dialect; and now, taking the letter of Captain Paling from his pocket, he placed it in the hands of the commander of the packet, saying, "Send your boy ashore with this to a widow lady's of the name of Paling; you will know her family, I suppose. You may tell the boy to say that the letter is from her son, Captain Paling, and that I shall wait here until I receive her answer before proceeding up the river."

The skipper stated that he knew Mrs. Paling well, who was a most respectable lady, and that he remembered also her son, who was an officer in the army, and who for some time had been a prisoner of war.

The boy went on shore with the letter, and within a quarter of an hour returned, having with him a young gentleman, accompanied by a couple of pointer dogs. The stranger was the brother of Captain Paling. He inquired for George Prescott, and on seeing him, invited him to his mother's house. The skipper, on seeing his passenger in such respectable company, let fall no hint that the passage-money was not paid; and the soldier and the brother of Captain Paling went on shore together.

Page 121

In his letter the captain dwelt on many kindnesses which he had received from its bearer, and of the bravery which he had seen him evince on the field; informing them also that his pockets would be but ill provided with cash, and regretting his own inability to replenish them.

The kindness of Mrs. Paling and her family towards him knew no limits. She asked him a hundred questions respecting her son, her daughters concerning their brother; and they imagined wants for him, that they might show him a kindness. Now, however, twelve miles was all that lay between him and his home. They entreated him to remain until next day; but he refused, for

“Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”

It is true, he could hardly give the name of home to the house of those whom he called his parents, for it had ever been to him the habitation of oppressors; yet it was his home, as the mountain covered with eternal snow is the home of the Greenlander, and he knew no other. The usual road to it was by crossing the Dart at a ferry about a hundred yards above the house of Mrs. Paling. Any other road caused a circuit of many miles.

“If you will not remain with us to-night,” said the brother of Captain Paling, who had conducted him from the vessel to his mother’s house, “I shall accompany you to the ferry.”

“No, I thank you—I thank you,” said George, confusedly; “there is no occasion for it—none whatever. I shall not forget your kindness.”

He did not intend to go by the ferry; for though the charge of the boatman was but a halfpenny, that halfpenny he had not in his possession; and he wished to conceal his poverty.

But women have sharp eyes in these matters. They see where men are blind; and a sister of Captain Paling named Caroline read the meaning of their guest’s confusion, and of his refusing to permit her brother to accompany him to the shore; and, with a delicacy which spoke to the heart of him to whom the words were addressed, she said

“Mr. Prescott, you have only now arrived from the Continent, and it is most likely that you have no small change in your pocket. The ferrymen are unreasonable people to deal with. If you give them a crown, they will row away and thank you, forgetting to return the change. The regular charge is but a halfpenny; therefore you had better take coppers with you;” and as she spoke, she held a halfpenny in her fingers towards him.

“Well, well,” stammered out George, with his hand in his pocket, “I believe I have no coppers;” and he accepted the halfpenny from the hand of Caroline Paling; and while he did so, he could not conceal the tears that rose to his eyes.

But, trifling as the amount of her offer was, it must be understood that the person to whom it was tendered was one who would not have accepted more—who was ashamed of his poverty, and strove to conceal it; and there was a soul, there was a delicacy, in her manner of tendering it which I can speak of, but not describe. It saved him also from having to wander weary and solitary miles at midnight.

Page 122

No sooner had the disabled soldier crossed the river, and entered the narrow lanes overshadowed by dark hedges of hazel, than he burst into tears, and his first words were, "Caroline, I will remember thee!"

It was near midnight when he approached the house which he called his home. The inmates were asleep. He tapped at the window, the panes of which were framed in lead after the form of diamonds.

"Who be there?" cried an angry voice.

"Your son! your son!" he replied. "George!"

"Zon!" repeated the voice; "we have no zon. If it be thee, go to Coomberland, lad. We have noughts to do with thee. Thy old grandfather, Zquire Morris, be now dead, and he ha'n't paid us so well for what we have done as to have oughts to zay to thee again; zo good night, lad."

"Father! mother!" cried George, striking more passionately on the window, "what do you mean?"

"Whoy, ha'n't I told thee?" answered the voice that had spoken to him before. "Thou art no zon of ours. Thou moost go to Coomberland, man, to Zquire Morris—to his zeketors,[*] I mean, for he is dead. They may tell thee who thou art; I can't. We ha'n't been paid for what we have done for thee already. However, thou may'st coom in for t'night;" and as the old man who had professed to be his father spoke, he arose and opened the door.

[note *: Executors.]

George entered the house, trembling with agitation.

"Father," he said—"for thou hast taught me to call thee father; and if thou art not, tell me who I am."

"Ha'n't I told thee, lad?" answered the old man. "Go to Coomberland; I know noughts about thee."

"To Cumberland!" exclaimed George; and he thought of the young officer whom he had twice met, who belonged to that county, and whose features were the picture of his own. "Why should I go to Cumberland?"

"Whoy, I can't tell thee whoy thou shouldst go," said the old man; "but thou was zent me from there, and there thou moost go back again, vor a bad bargain thou hast been to me. Zquire Morris zent thee here, and forgot to pay for thee; and if thou lodgest here to-night, thou won't forget to be a-moving, bag and baggage, in the morning."

George was wearied, and glad to sleep beneath the inhospitable roof of those whom he had considered as his parents; but on the following morning he took leave of them, after learning from them all that they knew of his history.

But I must again leave him, and return to Colonel Morris, and his son Charles.

They came to England together, and hastened towards Morris House; and there the long disowned son learned that his father was dead, and that his mother and his sisters knew not where his child was, or what had become of him. But his kindred had ascertained that he was now rich, and they repented of their unkindness towards him.

“Son,” said his mother, “I know nothing of thy child. Thy father was a strange man—he told little to me. If any one can tell thee aught concerning thy boy, it will be John Bell, the old coachman; but he has not been in the family for six years, and where he now is I cannot tell, though I believe he is still somewhere in the neighbourhood.”

Page 123

With sad and anxious hearts the colonel and his son next visited the house of Mr. Sim—the dwelling-place in which the infancy, the childhood, and what may be called the youth, of the latter had been passed.

Tears gathered in the eyes of Charles as he approached the door. He knew that his grandsire and his grandmother had acted wrongly towards him, in never speaking to him of his father, or making known to him that such a person lived; but when he again saw the house which had been the scene of a thousand happy days, round which he had chased the gaudy butterfly and the busy bee, or sought the nest of the chaffinch, the yellowhammer, and the hedge-sparrow, the feelings of boyhood rose too strong in his soul for resentment; and on meeting Mr. Sim (his grandfather) as they approached the door of the house, Charles ran towards him, and, stretching out his hand, cried, “Father!”

The old man recognised him, and exclaimed, “Charles!—Charles!—child of my Maria!” and wept.

At the mention of her name, the colonel wept also.

“What gentleman is this with thee, Charles?” inquired Mr. Sim.

“It is *my father!*” was the reply.

Mr. Sim, who was now a grey-haired man, reeled back a few paces—he raised his hands—he exclaimed, “Can I be forgiven?”

“Forgiven!—ay, doubly forgiven!” answered Colonel Morris, “as the father of lost, loved Maria, and as having been more than a father to my boy, who is now by my side. But know you nothing of my other son? My Maria bore twins.”

“Nothing! nothing!” replied Mr. Sim; “that question has cost me many an anxious thought. It has troubled also the conscience of my wife; for it was her fault that he also was not committed to my charge; and I would have inquired after your child long ago, but that there was no good-will between your father and me; and I was a plain, retired citizen—he a magistrate, and a justice of the peace for the county, who could do no wrong.”

The colonel groaned.

They proceeded towards the villa together. Mrs. Sim met her grandson with a flood of tears, and, in her joy at meeting him, she forgot her dislike to his father and her hatred to that father’s family.

The colonel endeavoured to obtain information from his father-in-law respecting his other son; and he told him all that his mother had said, of what she had spoken

regarding the coachman, and also of what Charles had told him, in twice meeting one who so strongly resembled himself.

“Colonel,” said Mr. Sim, “I know the John Bell your mother speaks of; he now keeps an inn near Langholm. To-morrow we shall go to his house, and make inquiry concerning all that he knows.”

“Be it so, father,” said the colonel. And on the following day they took a chaise and set out together—the grandfather, the father, and the son.

They had to cross the Annan, and to pass the churchyard where Maria slept. As they drew near to it, the colonel desired the driver to stop.

Page 124

"Follow me, Charles," he said; and Mr. Sim accompanied them. They entered the churchyard; the colonel led them to the humble grave-stone that he had raised to the memory of his Maria. He sat down upon it, he pressed his lips to it and wept.

"Charles," said he, "look on your mother's grave. Here, on this stone, day after day, I was wont to sit with you and your brother upon my knee, fondling you, breathing your mother's name in your ears; and though neither of you knew what I said, you smiled as I wept and spoke. Oh Charles! though you then filled my whole heart (and you do now), I could only distinguish you from each other by the ribbons on your arms. Would to Heaven that I may discover my child! and, whatever be his condition, I shall forgive my father for the injustice he has done me and mine—I shall be happy. And, oh! should we indeed find your brother—should he prove to be the youth whom you have twice met—I shall say that Heaven has remembered me when I forgot myself! But come hither, Charles—come, kneel upon your mother's grave—kiss the sod where she lies, and angels will write it in their books, and show it to your mother, where she is happy. Come, my boy."

Charles knelt on his mother's grave. He had arisen, and they were about to depart; for his grandfather had accompanied them, and was a silent but tearful spectator of the scene.

They were leaving the churchyard, joined in the arms of each other, when two strangers entered it. The one was John Bell, the other George Prescott.

"Colonel! Colonel! there is John Bell that you spoke of," exclaimed Mr. Sim.

"Father! father!" at the same instant cried his son, "he is here—it is him!—my brother—or—he whom I have told you of, who so strangely resembles me."

Charles rushed forward—it was George Prescott—and he took the proffered hand of the other, and said, "Sir, I rejoice to meet thee again—it seems I belong to Cumberland as well as thou dost; and this gentleman (pointing to John Bell), who seems to know more of me than I do myself, has promised to show me here my mother's grave!"

"And where is that grave?" cried the colonel earnestly, who had been an interested spectator of all that passed.

"Even where the wife of your youth is buried, your honour," answered John Bell; "you have with you one son—behold his twin brother!"

The colonel pressed his new-found son to his breast. With his children he sat down on the stone over Maria's grave, and they wept together.

Our tale is told. Colonel Morris and his sons had met. His elder brothers died, and he became the heir of his father's property. Mr. Sim also stated that, in his will, he should



divide his substance equally between the brothers; and he did so. I have but another word to add. George forgot not Caroline Paling, who had assisted him when his heart was full and his pocket empty, and within twelve months he again visited Dartmouth; but when he returned from it, Caroline accompanied him as his wife; and when he introduced her to his father and his brother—"Behold," said he, "what a halfpenny, delicately tendered, may produce."

Page 125

THE STORY OF THE GIRL FORGER.

It is a common thing for writers of a certain class, when they want to produce the feeling of wonder in their readers, to introduce some frantic action, and then to account for it by letting out the secret that the actor was mad. The trick is not so necessary as it seems, for the strength of human passions is a potentiality only limited by experience; and so it is that a sane person may under certain stimulants do the maddest thing in the world. The passion itself is always true—it is only the motive that may be false; and therefore it is that in narrating for your amusement, perhaps I may add instruction, the following singular story—traces of the main parts of which I got in the old books of a former procurator-fiscal—I assume that there was no more insanity in the principal actor, Euphemia, or, as she was called, Effie Carr, when she brought herself within the arms of the law, than there is in you, when now you are reading the story of her strange life. She was the only daughter of John Carr, a grain merchant, who lived in Bristo Street. It would be easy to ascribe to her all the ordinary and extraordinary charms that are thought so necessary to embellish heroines; but as we are not told what these were in her case, we must be contented with the assurance that nature had been kind enough to her to give her power over the hearts of men. We shall be nearer our purpose when we state, what is necessary to explain a peculiar part of our story, that her father, in consequence of his own insufficient education, had got her trained to help him in keeping his accounts with the farmers, and in writing up his books; nay, she enjoyed the privilege of writing his drafts upon the Bank of Scotland, which the father contrived to sign, though in his own illiterate way, and with a peculiarity which it would not have been easy to imitate.

But our gentle clerk did not consider these duties imposed upon her by her father as excluding her either from gratifying her love of domestic habits, by assisting her mother in what at that time was denominated hussyskep or housekeeping, or from a certain other gratification, which might without a hint from us be anticipated—no other than the luxury of falling head and ears, and heart too we fancy, in love with a certain dashing young student of the name of Robert Stormonth, then attending the University, more for the sake of polish than of mere study, for he was the son of the proprietor of Kelton, and required to follow no profession. How Effie got entangled with this youth we have no means of knowing, so we must be contented with the Scotch proverb—

“Tell me where the flea may bite,
And I will tell where love may light.”

Page 126

The probability is, that from the difference of their stations and the retiring nature of our gentle clerk, we shall be safe in assuming that he had, as the saying goes, been smitten by her charms in some of those street encounters, where there is more of love's work done than in "black-footed" tea coteries expressly held for the accommodation of Cupid. And that the smiting was a genuine feeling we are not left to doubt; for in addition to the reasons we shall afterwards have too good occasion to know, he treated Effie not as those wild students who are great men's sons do "the light o' loves" they meet in their escapades, for he entrusted his secrets to her, he took such small counsel from her poor head as a "learned clerk" might be supposed able to give; nay, he told her of his mother, and how one day he hoped to be able to introduce her at Kelton as his wife. All which Effie repaid with the devotedness of that most wonderful affection called the first or virgin love—the purest, the deepest, the most thorough-going of all the emotions of the human heart. But as yet he had not conceded to her wish that he should consent to their love being made known to Effie's father and mother. Love is only a leveller to itself and its object: the high-born youth, inured to refined manners, shrank from a family intercourse, which put him too much in mind of the revolt he had made against the presumed wishes and intentions of his proud parents. Wherein, after all, he was only true to the instincts of that institution, apparently so inhumane as well as unchristian in its exclusiveness, called aristocracy, and yet with the excuse that its roots are pretty deeply set in human nature.

But, proud as he was, Bob Stormonth, the younger of Kelton, was amenable to the obligations of a necessity, forged by his own imprudent hands. He had, by a fast mode of living, got into debt—a condition from which his father, a stern man, had relieved him twice before, but with a threat on the last occasion, that if he persevered in his prodigality, he would withdraw from him his yearly allowance, and throw him upon his own resources. The threat proved ineffectual, and this young heir of entail, with all his pride, was once in the grasp of low-born creditors; nay, things in this evil direction had gone so far that writs were out against him, and one in the form of a caption was already in the hands of a messenger-at-arms. That the debts were comparatively small in amount, was no amelioration where the purse was all but empty; and he had exhausted the limited exchequers of his chums, which with college youths was, and is, not difficult to do. So the gay Bob was driven to his last shift, and that, as is generally the case, was a mean one; for necessity, as the mother of inventions, does not think it proper to limit her births to genteel or noble devices to please her proud consort. He even had recourse to poor Effie to help him; and, however ridiculous this may seem, there were reasons that made the application appear not so desperate as some of his other schemes. It was only the caption that as yet quickened his fears; and as the sum for which the writ was issued was only twenty pounds, it was not, after all, so much beyond the power of a clerk.

Page 127

It was during one of their ordinary walks in the Meadows that the pressing necessity was opened by Stormonth to the vexed and terrified girl. He told her that, but for the small help he required in the meantime, he would be ruined. The wrath of his father would be excited once more, and probably to the exclusion of all reconciliation; and he himself compelled to flee, but whither he knew not. He had his plan prepared, and proposed to Effie, who had no means of her own, *to take a loan* of the sum out of her father's cash-box—words very properly chosen according to the euphemistic policy of the devil; but Effie's genuine spirit was roused and alarmed.

"Dreadful!" she whispered, as if afraid that the night wind would carry her words to honest ears. "Besides," she continued, "my father, who is a hard man, keeps his desk lockit."

Words which took Stormonth aback, for even he saw there was here a necessity as strong as his own; yet the power of invention went to work again.

"Listen, Effie," said he. "If you cannot help me, it is not likely we shall meet again. I am desperate, and will go into the army."

The ear of Effie was chained to a force which was direct upon the heart. She trembled and looked wistfully into his face, even as if by that look she could extract from him some other device less fearful, by which she might have the power of retaining him for so short a period as a day.

"You draw out your father's drafts on the bank, Effie," he continued. "Write one out for me, and I will put your father's name to it. You can draw the money. I will be saved from ruin; and your father will never know."

A proposal which again brought a shudder over the girl.

"Is it Robert Stormonth who asks me to do this thing?" she whispered again.

"No," said he; "for I am not myself. Yesterday, and before the messenger was after me, I would have shrunk from the suggestion. I am not myself, I say, Effie. Ay or no; keep me or lose me—that is the alternative."

"Oh, I cannot," was the language of her innocence, and for which he was prepared; for the stimulant was again applied in the most powerful of all forms—the word farewell was sounded in her ear.

"Stop, Robert! let me think." But there was no thought, only the heart beating wildly. "I will do it; and may the penalty be mine, and mine only."

So it was: "even virtue's self turns vice when misapplied." What her mind shrank from was embraced by the heart as a kind of sacred duty of a love making a sacrifice for the

object of its first worship. It was arranged; and as the firmness of a purpose is often in proportion to the prior disinclination, so Effie's determination to save her lover from ruin was forthwith put in execution; nay, there was even a touch of the heroine in her, so wonderfully does the heart, acting under its primary instincts, sanctify the device which favours its affection.

Page 128

That same evening Effie Carr wrote out the draft for twenty pounds on the Bank of Scotland, gave it to Stormonth, who, from a signature of the father's, also furnished by her, perpetrated the forgery—a crime at that time punishable by death. The draft so signed was returned to Effie. Next forenoon she went to the bank, as she had often done for her father before; and the document being in her handwriting, as prior ones of the same kind had also been, no scrutinizing eye was turned to the signature. The money was handed over, but *not counted* by the recipient, as before had been her careful habit—a circumstance with its effect to follow in due time. Meanwhile Stormonth was at a place of appointment out of the reach of the executor of the law, and was soon found out by Effie, who gave him the money with trembling hands. For this surely a kiss was due. We do not know; but she returned with the satisfaction, overcoming all the impulses of fear and remorse, that she had saved the object of her first and only love from ruin and flight.

But even then the reaction was on the spring; the rebound was to be fearful and fatal. The teller at the bank had been struck with Effie's manner; and the non-counting of the notes had roused a suspicion, which fought its way even against the improbability of a mere girl perpetrating a crime from which females are generally free. He examined the draft, and soon saw that the signature was a bad imitation. Thereupon a messenger was despatched to Bristo Street for inquiry. John Carr, taken by surprise, declared that the draft, though written by his daughter, was forged—the forgery being in his own mind attributed to George Lindsay, his young salesman. Enough this for the bank, who had in the first place only to do with the utterer, against whom their evidence as yet only lay. Within a few hours afterwards Effie Carr was in the Tolbooth, charged with the crime of forging a cheque on her father's account-current.

The news soon spread over Edinburgh—at that time only an overgrown village, in so far as regarded local facilities for the spread of wonders. It had begun there, where the mother was in recurring faints, the father in distraction and not less mystery, George Lindsay in terror and pity. And here comes in the next strange turn of our story. Lindsay all of a sudden declared he was the person who imitated the name—a device of the yearning heart to save the girl of his affection from the gallows, and clutched at by the mother and father as a means of their daughter's redemption. One of those thinly-sown beings who are cold-blooded by nature, who take on love slowly but surely, and seem fitted to be martyrs, Lindsay defied all consequences, so that it might be that Effie Carr should escape an ignominious death. Nor did he take time for further deliberation: in less than half an hour he was in the procurator-fiscal's office—the willing self-criminator; the man who did the deed;

Page 129

the man who was ready to die for his young mistress and his love. His story, too, was as ready as it was truth-seeming. He declared that he had got Effie to write out the draft as if commissioned by John Carr; that he took it away, and with his own hands added the name; that he had returned the check to Effie to go with it to the bank, and had received the money from her on her return. The consequence was his wish, and it was inevitable. That same day George Lindsay was lodged also in the Tolbooth, satisfied that he had made a sacrifice of his life for one whom he had loved for years, and who yet had never shown him even a symptom of hope that his love would be returned.

All which proceedings soon came on the wings of rumour to the ears of Robert Stormonth, who was not formed to be a martyr even for a love which was to him as true as his nature would permit. He saw his danger, because he did not see the character of a faithful girl who would die rather than compromise her lover. He fled—aided probably by that very money he had wrung out of the hands of the devoted girl; nor was his disappearance connected with the tragic transaction; for, as we have said, the connection between him and Effie had been kept a secret, and his flight could be sufficiently accounted for by his debt.

Meanwhile the precognitions or examination of the parties went on, and with a result as strange as it was puzzling to the officials. Effie was firm to her declaration, that she not only wrote the body of the cheque, but attached to it the name of her father, and had appropriated the money in a way which she declined to state. On the other hand, Lindsay was equally staunch to his statement made to the procurator-fiscal, that he had got Effie to write the draft, had forged the name to it, and got the money from her. The authorities very soon saw that they had got more than the law bargained for or wanted; nor was the difficulty likely soon to be solved. The two parties could not both be guilty, according to the evidence, nor could one of them be guilty to the exclusion of the other; neither, when the balance was cast, was there much difference in the weight of the scales, because, while it was in one view more likely that Lindsay signed the false name, it was beyond doubt that Effie wrote the body of the document, and she had, moreover, presented it. But was it for the honour of the law that people should be hanged on a likelihood? It was a new case without new heads to decide it, and it made no difference that the body of the people, who soon became inflamed on the subject, took the part of the girl and declared against the man. It was easy to be seen that the tracing of the money would go far to solve the mystery; and accordingly there was a strict search made in Lindsay's lodgings, as well as in Effie's private repositories at home. We need not say with what effect, where the money was over the Border and away. It was thus in all views more a case for *Astraea* than common

Page 130

heads; but then she had gone to heaven. The Lord Advocate soon saw that the law was likely to be caught in its own meshes. The first glimpse was got of the danger of hanging so versatile, so inconsistent, so unsearchable a creature as a human being on a mere confession of guilt. That that had been the law of Scotland in all time, nay, that it had been the law of the world from the beginning, there was no doubt. Who could know the murderer or the forger better than the murderer or the forger himself? and would any one throw away his life on a false plea? The reasoning does not exhaust the deep subject; there remains the presumption that the criminal will, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, deny, and deny boldly. But our case threw a new light on the old law, and the Lord Advocate was slow to indict where he saw not only reasons for failure, but also rising difficulties which might strike at the respect upon which the law was founded.

The affair hung loose for a time, and Lindsay's friends, anxious to save him, got him induced to run his letters—the effect of which is to give the prosecutor a period wherein to try the culprit, on failure of which the person charged is free. The same was done by Effie's father; but quickened as the Lord Advocate was, the difficulty still met him like a ghost that would not be laid, that if he put Effie at the bar, Lindsay would appear in the witness-box; and if he put Lindsay on his trial, Effie would swear he was innocent; and as for two people forging *the same name*, the thing had never been heard of. And so it came to pass that the authorities at last, feeling they were in a cleft stick, where if they relieved one hand the other would be caught, were inclined to liberate both panels. But the bank was at that time preyed upon by forgeries, and were determined to make an example now when they had a culprit, or perhaps two. The consequence was, that the authorities were forced to give way, vindicating their right of choice as to the party they should arraign. That party was Effie Carr, and the choice justified itself by two considerations: that she, by writing and uttering the cheque, was so far committed by evidence exterior to her self-inculpation; and secondly, that Lindsay might break down in the witness-box under a searching examination. Effie was therefore indicted and placed at the bar. She pleaded guilty, but the prosecutor, notwithstanding, led evidence, and at length Lindsay appeared as a witness for the defence. The people who crowded the court had been aware from report of the condition in which Lindsay stood; but the deep silence which reigned throughout the hall when he was called to answer, evinced the doubt whether he would stand true to his self-impeachment. The doubt was soon solved. With a face on which no trace of fear could be perceived, with a voice in which there was no quaver, he swore that it was he who signed the draft and sent Effie for the money. The oscillation of sympathy, which

Page 131

had for a time been suspended, came round again to the thin pale girl, who sat there looking wistfully and wonderingly into the face of the witness, and the murmuring approbation that broke out, in spite of the shrill “silence” of the crier, expressed at once admiration of the man—criminal as he swore himself to be—and pity for the accused. What could the issue be? Effie was acquitted, and Lindsay sent back to gaol. Was he not to be tried? The officials felt that the game was dangerous. If Lindsay had stood firm in the box, had not Effie sat firm at the bar, with the very gallows in her eye, and would not she, in her turn, be as firm in the box? All which was too evident, and the consequence in the end came to be, that Lindsay was in the course of a few days set at liberty.

And now there occurred proceedings not less strange in the house of John Carr. Lindsay was turned off, because, though he had made a sacrifice of himself to save the life of Effie, the sacrifice was only that due to the justice he had offended. The dismissal was against the protestations of Effie, who alone knew he was innocent; and she had to bear the further grief of learning that Stormonth had left the city on the very day whereon she was apprehended—a discovery this too much for a frame always weak, and latterly so wasted by her confinement in prison, and the anguish of mind consequent upon her strange position. And so it came to pass in a few more days that she took to her bed, a wan, wasted, heart-broken creature; but stung as she had been by the conduct of the man she had offered to die to save, she felt even more the sting of ingratitude in herself for not divulging to her mother as much of her secret as would have saved Lindsay from dismissal, for she was now more and more satisfied that it was the strength of his love for her that had driven him to his great and perilous sacrifice. Nor could her mother, as she bent over her daughter, understand why her liberation should have been followed by so much sorrow; nay, loving her as she did, she even reproached her as being ungrateful to God.

“Mother,” said the girl, “I have a secret that lies like a stane upon my heart. George Lindsay had nae mair to do with that forgery than you.”

“And who had to do with it then, Effie, dear?”

“Myself,” continued the daughter; “I filled up the cheque at the bidding o’ Robert Stormonth, whom I had lang loved. It was he wha put my faither’s name to it. It was to him I gave the money, to relieve him from debt, and he has fled.”

“Effie, Effie,” cried the mother; “and we have done this thing to George Lindsay—ta’en from him his basket and his store, yea, the bread o’ his mouth, in recompense for trying to save your life by offering his ain!”

“Yes, mother,” added Effie; “but we must make that wrang richt.”

Page 132

“And mair, lass,” rejoined the mother, as she rose abruptly and nervously, and hurried to her husband, to whom she told the strange intelligence. Then John Carr was a just man as well as a loving parent; and while he forgave his unfortunate daughter, he went and brought back George Lindsay to his old place that very night; nor did he or Mrs. Carr know the joy they had poured into the heart of the young man, for the reason that they did not know the love he bore to their daughter. But if this was a satisfaction to Effie, in so far as it relieved her heart of a burden, it brought to her a burden of another kind. The mother soon saw how matters stood with the heart of Lindsay, and she, moreover, saw that her or her daughter’s gratitude could not be complete so long as he was denied the boon of being allowed to marry the girl he had saved from the gallows, and she waited her opportunity of breaking the delicate subject to Effie. It was not time yet, when Effie was an invalid, and even so far wasted and worn as to cause apprehensions of her ultimate fate, even death; nor perhaps would that time ever come when she could bear to hear the appeal without pain; for though Stormonth had ruined her character and her peace of mind—nay, had left her in circumstances almost unprecedented for treachery, baseness, and cruelty—he retained still the niche where the offerings of a first love had been made: his image had been indeed burned into the virgin heart, and no other form of man’s face, though representing the possessor of beauty, wealth, and worldly honours, would ever take away that treasured symbol. It haunted her even as a shadow of herself, which, disappearing at sundown, comes again at the rising of the noon; nay, she would have been contented to make other sacrifices equally great as that which she had made; nor wild moors, nor streams, nor rugged hills, would have stopped her in an effort to look upon him once more, and replace that inevitable image by the real vision, which had first taken captive her young heart.

But time passed, bringing the usual ameliorations to the miserable. Effie got so far better in health that she became able to resume, in a languid way, her former duties, with the exception of those of “the gentle clerk”—for of these she had had enough; even the very look of a bank-draft brought a shudder over her; nor would she have entered the Bank of Scotland again, even with a good cheque for a thousand pounds, to have been all her own. Meanwhile the patient George had plied a suit which he could only express by his eyes or the attentions of one who worships, but he never alluded, even in their conversations, to the old sacrifice. The mother too, and not less the father, saw the advantages that might result as well to the health of her mind as that of her body. They had waited—a vain waiting—for the wearing out of the traces of the obdurate image; and when they thought they might take placidity as the sign of what they

Page 133

waited for, they first hinted, and then expressed in plain terms, the wishes of their hearts. For a time all their efforts were fruitless; but John Carr getting old and weak, wished to be succeeded in his business by George; and the wife, when she became a widow, would require to be maintained—reasons which had more weight with Effie than any others, excepting always the act of George's self-immolation at the shrine in which his fancy had placed her. The importunities at length wore out her resistings, without effacing the lines of the old and still endeared image, and she gave a cold, we may say reluctant, consent. The bride's "ay" was a sigh, the rapture a tear of sadness. But George was pleased even with this: Effie, the long-cherished Effie, was at length his.

In her new situation, Effie Carr—now Mrs. Lindsay—performed all the duties of a good and faithful wife; by an effort of the will no doubt, though in another sense only a sad obedience to necessity, of which we are all, as the creatures of motives, the very slaves. But the old image resisted the appeals of her reason, as well as the blandishments of a husband's love. She was only true, faithful, and kind, till the birth of a child lent its reconciling power to the efforts of duty. Some time afterwards John Carr died—an event which carried in its train the subsequent death of his wife. There was left to the son-in-law a dwindling business, and a very small sum of money, for the father had met with misfortunes in his declining years, which impaired health prevented him from resisting. Time wore on, and showed that the power of the martyr-spirit is not always that of the champion of worldly success, for it was now but a struggle between George Lindsay, with a stained name, and the stern demon of misfortune. He was at length overtaken by poverty, which, as affecting Effie, preyed so relentlessly upon his spirits, that within two years he followed John Carr to the grave. Effie was now left with two children to the work of her fingers, a poor weapon wherewith to beat off the wolf of want, and even this was curtailed by the effects of the old crime, which the public still kept in green remembrance.

Throughout, our story has been the sensationalism of angry fate, and even less likely to be believed than the work of fiction. Nor was the vulture face of the Nemesis yet smoothed down. The grief of her bereavement had only partially diverted Effie's mind from the recollections of him who had ruined her, and yet could not be hated by her, nay, could not be but loved by her. The sensitized nerve, which had received the old image, gave it out fresh again to the reviving power of memory, and this was only a continuation of what had been a corroding custom of years and years. But, as the saying goes, it is a long road that does not offer by its side the spreading bough of shade to the way-worn traveller. One day, when Effie was engaged with her work, of which she was as weary as of the dreaming which accompanied it, there appeared before her, without premonition or foreshadowing sign, Robert Stormonth of Kelton, dressed as a country gentleman, booted, and with a whip in his hand.

Page 134

"Are you Effie Carr?"

The question was useless to one who was already lying back in her chair in a state of unconsciousness, from which she recovered only to open her eyes and avert them, and shut them and open them again, like the victim of epilepsy.

"And do you fear me?" said the excited man, as he took her in his strong arms and stared wildly into her face; "I have more reason to fear you, whom I ruined," he continued. "Ay, brought within the verge of the gallows. I know it all, Effie. Open your eyes, dear soul, and smile once more upon me. Nay, I have known it for years, during which remorse has scourged me through the world. Look up, dear Effie, while I tell you I could bear the agony no longer; and now opportunity favours the wretched penitent, for my father is dead, and I am not only my own master, but master of Kelton, of which you once heard me speak. Will you not look up yet, dear Effie? I come to make amends to you, not by wealth merely, but to offer you again that love I once bore to you, and still bear. Another such look, dear—it is oil to my parched spirit. You are to consent to be my wife; the very smallest boon I dare offer."

During which strange rambling speech Effie was partly insensible; yet she heard enough to afford her clouded mind a glimpse of her condition, and of the meaning of what was said to her. For a time she kept staring into his face as if she had doubts of his real personality; nor could she find words to express even those more collected thoughts that began to gather into form.

"Robert Stormonth," at length she said, calmly, "and have you suffered too? Oh, this is more wonderful to me than a' the rest o' these wonderful things."

"As no man ever suffered, dear Effie," he answered. "I was on the eve of coming to you, when a friend I retained here wrote me to London of your marriage with the man who saved you from the fate into which I precipitated you. How I envied that man who offered to die for you! He seemed to take from me my only means of reparation; nay, my only chance of happiness. But he is dead. Heaven give peace to so noble a spirit! And now you are mine. It is mercy I come to seek in the first instance; the love—if that, after all that is past, is indeed possible—I will take my chance of that."

"Robert," cried the now weeping woman, "if that love had been aince less, what misery I would have been spared! Ay, and my father, and mother, and poor George Lindsay, a' helped awa to the grave by my crime, for it stuck to us to the end." And she buried her head in his bosom, sobbing piteously.

"My crime, dear Effie, not yours," said he. "It was you who saved my life; and if Heaven has a kindlier part than another for those who err by the fault of others, it will be reserved for one who made a sacrifice of love. But we have, I hope, something to enjoy before you go there, and as yet I have not got your forgiveness."

Page 135

"It is yours—it is yours, Robert," was the sobbing answer. "Ay, and with it a' the love I ever had for you."

"Enough for this time, dear Effie," said he. "My horse waits for me. Expect me to-morrow at this hour with a better-arranged purpose." And folding her in his arms, and kissing her fervently, even as his remorse were thereby assuaged as well as his love gratified, he departed, leaving Effie to thoughts we should be sorry to think ourselves capable of putting into words. Nor need we say more than that Stormonth kept his word. Effie Carr was in a few days Mrs. Stormonth, and in not many more the presiding female power in the fine residence of Kelton.

THE BURGHER'S TALES.

THE TWO RED SLIPPERS.

The taking down of the old house of four or five flats called Gowanlock's Land, in that part of the High Street which used to be called the Luckenbooths, has given rise to various stories connected with the building. Out of these I have selected a very strange legend—so strange indeed, that, if not true, it must have been the production, *quod est in arte summa*, of a capital inventor; nor need I say that it is of much importance to talk of the authenticity of these things, for the most authentic are embellished by invention—and it is certainly the best embellished that live the longest; for all which we have very good reasons in human nature.

Gowanlock's Land, it would seem, merely occupied the site of an older house, which belonged, at the time of Prince Charlie's occupation of the city, to an old town councillor of the name of Yellowlees. This older house was also one of many stories—an old form in Edinburgh, supposed to have been adopted from the French; but it had, which was not uncommon, an entry from the street running under an arch, and leading to the back of the premises to the lower part of the tenement, that part occupied by the councillor. There was a lower flat, and one above, which thus constituted an entire house; and which, moreover, rejoiced in the privilege of having an extensive garden, running down as far as the sheet of water called the North Loch, that secret "domestic witness," as the ancients used to say, of many of the dark crimes of the old city. These gardens were the pride of the rich burghers of the time, decorated by Dutch-clipped hollies and trim boxwood walks; and in our special instance of Councillor Yellowlees' retreat, there was, in addition, a summer-house or rustic bower standing at the bottom, that is, towards the north, and close upon the loch. I may mention also that, in consequence of the damp, this little bower was strewn with rushes for the very special comfort of Miss Annie Yellowlees, the only and much petted child of the good councillor.

Page 136

All which you must take as introductory to the important fact that the said Miss Annie, who, as a matter of course, was “very bonnie,” as well as passing rich to be, had been, somewhat previous to the prince’s entry to the town, pledged to be married to no less considerable a personage than Maister John Menelaws, a son of him of the very same name who dealt in pelts in a shop of the Canongate, and a student of medicine in the Edinburgh University; but as the councillor had in his secret soul hankerings after the prince, and the said student, John, was a red-hot royalist, the marriage was suspended, all to the inexpressible grief of our “bonnie Annie,” who would not have given her John for all the Charlies and Geordies to be found from Berwick to Lerwick. On the other hand, while Annie was depressed, and forced to seek relief in solitary musings in her bower by the loch, it is just as true that “it is an ill wind that blows naebody gude;” nay, the truth of the saying was verified in Richard Templeton, a fellow-student of Menelaws, and a rival, too, in the affections of Annie; who, being a Charlieite as well as an Annieite, rejoiced that his companion was in the meantime foiled and disappointed.

Meanwhile, and, I may say, while the domestic affairs of the councillor’s house were still in this unfortunate position, the prince’s bubble burst in the way which history tells us of, and thereupon out came proscriptions of terrible import, and, as fate would have it, young Templeton’s name was in the bloody register; the more by reason that he had been as noisy as Edinburgh students generally are in the proclamation of his partisanship. He must fly or secrete himself, or perhaps lose a head in which there was concealed a considerable amount of Scotch cunning. He at once thought of the councillor’s house, with that secluded back garden and summer-house, all so convenient for secrecy, and the envied Annie there, too, whom he might by soft wooings detach from the hated Menelaws, and make his own through the medium of the pity that is akin to love. And so, to be sure, he straightway, under the shade of night, repaired to the house of the councillor, who, being a tender-hearted man, could not see a sympathiser with the glorious cause in danger of losing his head. Templeton was received—a report set abroad that he had gone to France—and all proper measures were taken within the house to prevent any domestic from letting out the secret.

In this scheme, Annie, we need hardly say, was a favouring party; not that she had any love for the young man, for her heart was still true to Menelaws (who, however, for safety’s sake, was now excluded from the house), but that, with a filial obedience to a beloved father, she felt, with a woman’s heart, sympathy for one who was in distress, and a martyr to the cause which her father loved. Need we wonder at an issue which may already be looming on the vision of those who know anything of human nature? The two young

Page 137

folks were thrown together. They were seldom out of each other's company. Suffering is love's opportunity, and Templeton had to plead for him not only his misfortune, but a tongue rendered subtle and winning by love's action in the heart. As the days passed, Annie saw some new qualities in the martyr prisoner which she had not seen before; nay, the pretty little domestic attentions had the usual reflex effect upon the heart which administered them, and all that the recurring image of Menelaws could do to fight against these rising predilections was so far unavailing, that that very image waxed dimmer and dimmer, while the present object was always working through the magic of sensation. Yes, Annie Yellowlees grew day by day fonder of her *protege*, until at length she got, as the saying goes, "over head and ears." Nay, was she not, in the long nights, busy working a pair of red slippers for the object of her new affections, and were not these so very suitable to one who, like Hercules, was reduced almost to the distaff, and who, unlike that woman-tamed hero, did not need them to be applied anywhere but to the feet?

In the midst of all this secluded domesticity, there was all that comfort which is said to come from stolen waters. Then was there not the prospect of the proscription being taken off, and the two would be made happy? Even in the meantime they made small escapades into free space. When the moon was just so far up as not to be a tell-tale, Templeton would, either with or without Annie, step out into the garden with these very red slippers on his feet. That bower by the loch, too, was favourable to the fondlings of a secret love; nor was it sometimes less to the prisoner a refuge from the eeriness which comes of *ennui*—if it is not the same thing—under the pressure of which strange feeling he would creep out at times when Annie could not be with him; nay, sometimes when the family had gone to bed.

And now we come to a very wonderful turn in our strange story. One morning Templeton did not make his appearance in the breakfast parlour, but of course he would when he got up and got his red slippers on. Yet he was so punctual; and Annie, who knew that her father had to go to the council chamber, would see what was the cause of the young man's delay. She went to his bedroom door. It was open; but where was Templeton? He was not there. He could not be out in the city; he could not be even in the garden with the full light of a bright morning sun shining on it. He was not in the house; he was not in the garden, as they could see from the windows. He was nowhere to be found; and, what added to the wonder, he had taken with him his red slippers, wherever he had gone. The inmates were in wonderment and consternation, and, conduplicated evil! they could make no inquiry for one who lay under the ban of a bloody proscription.

Page 138

But wonders, as we all know, generally ensconce themselves in some snug theory, and die by a kind of pleasant euthanasia; and so it was with this wonder of ours. The councillor came, as the days passed, to the conclusion that Templeton, wearied out by his long confinement, had become desperate, and had gone abroad. As good a theory as could be got, seeing that he had not trusted himself in going near his friends; and Annie, whose grief was sharp and poignant, came also to settle down with a belief which still promised her her lover, though perhaps at a long date. But, somehow or another, Annie could not explain why, even with all the fondness he had to the work of her hands, he should have elected to expose himself to damp feet by making the love-token slippers do the duty of the pair of good shoes he had left in the bedroom.

Even this latter wonder wore away; and months and months passed on the revolving wheel which casts months, not less than moments, into that gulf we call eternity. The rigour of the Government prosecutions was relaxed, and timid sympathisers began to show their heads out of doors, but Richard Templeton never returned to claim either immunity or the woman of his affections. Nor within all this time did John Menelaws enter the house of the councillor; so that Annie's days were renounced to sadness, and her nights to reveries. But at last comes the eventful "one day" of the greatest of all story-tellers, Time, whereon happen his startling discoveries. Verily one day Annie had wandered disconsolately into the garden, and seated herself on the wooden form in the summer-house, where in the moonlight she had often nestled in the arms of her proscribed lover, who was now gone, it might be, for ever. Objective thought cast her into a reverie, and the reverie brought up again the images of these objects, till her heart beat with an affection renewed through a dream. At length she started up, and, wishing to hurry from a place which seemed filled with images at once lovable and terrible, she felt her foot caught by an impediment whereby she stumbled. On looking down she observed some object of a reddish-brown colour; and becoming alarmed lest it might be one of the toads with which the place was sometimes invaded, she started back. Yet curiosity forced her to a closer inspection. She applied her hand to the object, and brought away one of those very slippers which she had made for Templeton. All very strange; but what maybe conceived to have been her feelings when she saw, sticking up from beneath the rushes, the white skeleton of a foot which had filled that very slipper! A terrible suspicion shot through her mind. She flew to her father, and, hurrying him to the spot, pointed out to him the grim object, and showed him the slipper which had covered it. Mr. Yellowlees was a shrewd man, and soon saw that, the foot being there, the rest of the body was not far away. He saw, too, that his safety might be compromised either as having

Page 139

been concerned in a murder or the harbourage of a rebel; and so, making caution the better part of his policy, he repaired to a sympathiser, and having told him the story, claimed his assistance. Nor was this refused. That same night, by the light of a lamp, they exhumed the body of Templeton, much reduced, but enveloped with his clothes; only they observed that the other red slipper was wanting. On examining the body, they could trace the evidence of a sword-stab through the heart. All this they kept to themselves; and that same night they contrived to get the sexton of the Canongate to inter the body as that of a rebel who had been killed, and left where it was found.

This wonder also passed away, and, as time sped, old things began to get again into their natural order. Menelaws began to come again about the house; and as an old love, when the impediments are removed, is soon rekindled again, he and Annie became even all that which they had once been to each other. The old vows were repeated without the slightest reference being made by either party to the cause which had interfered to prevent them from having been fulfilled. It was not for Annie to proffer a reason, and it did not seem to be the wish of Menelaws to ask one. In a short time afterwards they were married.

The new-married couple, apparently happy in the enjoyment of an affection which had continued so long, and had survived the crossing of a new love, at least on one side, removed to a separate house farther up in the Lawnmarket. Menelaws had previously graduated as a doctor, and he commenced to practise as such, not without an amount of success. Meanwhile the councillor died, leaving Annie a considerable fortune. In the course of somewhere about ten years they had five children. They at length resolved on occupying the old house with the garden, for Annie's reluctance became weakened by time. It was on the occasion of the flitting that Annie had to rummage an old trunk which Menelaws, long after the marriage, had brought from the house of his father, the dealer in pelts. There at the bottom, covered over by a piece of brown paper, she found—what? The very slipper which matched the one she still secretly retained in her possession. *Verbum sapienti*. You may now see where the strange land lies; nor was Annie blind. She concluded in an instant, and with a horror that thrilled through her whole body, that Menelaws had murdered his rival. She had lain for ten years in the arms of a murderer. She had borne to him five children. Nay, she loved him with all the force of an ardent temperament. The thought was terrible, and she recoiled from the very possibility of living with him a moment longer. She took the fatal memorial and secreted it along with its neighbour; and having a friend at a little distance from Edinburgh, she hurried thither, taking with her her children. Her father had left in her own power a sufficiency for her support, and she afterwards returned to town. All the requests of her husband for an explanation she resisted, and indeed they were not long persisted in, for Menelaws no doubt gauged the reason of her obduracy—a conclusion the more likely that he subsequently left Scotland. I have reason to believe that some of the existing Menelaws' are descended from this strange union.

Page 140

THE FAITHFUL WIFE

There is very prevalent, along the Borders, an opinion that the arms of the town of Selkirk represent an incident which occurred there at the time of the battle of Flodden. The device, it is well known, consists of a female bearing a child in her arms, seated on a tomb, on which is also placed the Scottish lion. Antiquaries tell us that this device was adopted in consequence of the melancholy circumstance of the wife of an inhabitant of the town having been found, by a party returning from the battle, lying dead at the place called Ladywood-edge, with a child sucking at her breast.

We have not the slightest wish to disturb this venerable legend. It commemorates, with striking force, the desolation of one of Scotland's greatest calamities; and though the device is rudely and coarsely imagined, there is a graphic strength in the conception, which, independently of the truth of the story, recommends it to the lover of the bold and fervid genius of our countrymen. We must, at same time, be allowed to say that there is another version, and this we intend, shortly, now to lay before the public, without vouching for its superiority of accuracy over its more favoured and cherished brother; and rather, indeed, cautioning the credulous lovers of old legends to be upon their guard, lest Dr. Johnson's reproof of Richardson be applicable to us, in saying that we have it upon authority.

When recruits were required by King James the Fourth for the invasion of the English territory, which produced the most lamentable of all our defeats, it is well known that great exertions were used in the cause by the town-clerk of Selkirk, whose name was William Brydone, for which King James the Fifth afterwards conferred on him the honour of knighthood. Many of the inhabitants of Selkirk, fired with the ardour which the chivalric spirit of James infused into the hearts of his people, and with the spirit of emulation which Brydone had the art of exciting among his townsmen, as Borderers, joined the banners of their provost. Among these was one, Alexander Hume, a shoemaker, a strong stalwart man, bold and energetic in his character, and extremely enthusiastic in the cause of the king. He was deemed of considerable importance by Brydone, being held the second best man of the hundred citizens who are said to have joined his standard. When he came among his companions he was uniformly cheered. They had confidence in his sagacity and prudence, respected his valour, and admired his strength.

If Hume was thus courted by his companions, and urged by Brydone to the dangerous enterprise in which the king, by the wiles and flattery of the French queen, had engaged, he was treated in a very different manner by Margaret, his wife,—a fine young woman, who, fond to distraction of her husband, was desirous of preventing him from risking his life in a cause which she feared, with prophetic feeling, would bring

Page 141

desolation on her country. Every effort which love and female cajolery could suggest was used by this dutiful wife to keep her husband at home. She hung round his neck,—held up to his face a fine child five months old, whose mute eloquence softened the heart, but could not alter the purpose of the father,—wept, prayed, implored. She asked him the startling question—Who, when he was dead—and die he might—would shield her from injury and misfortune, and cherish, with the tenderness and love which its beauty and innocence deserved, the interesting pledge of their affection? She painted in glowing colours—which the imagination, excited by love, can so well supply—the situation of her as a widow and her child as an orphan. Their natural protector gone, what would be left to her but grief, what would remain for her child but destitution? His spirit would hear her wails; but beggary would array her in its rags, and hunger would steal from her cheek the vestiges of health and the lineaments of beauty.

These appeals were borne by Hume by the panoply of resolution. He loved Margaret as dearly, as truly as man could love woman, as a husband could love the partner of his life and fortunes. He answered with tears and embraces; but he remained true to the cause of his king and his country.

“Would you hae me, Margaret,” he said, “to disgrace mysel’ in the face o’ my townsmen? Doesna our guid king intend to leave his fair Margaret, and risk the royal bluid o’ the Bruce for the interests o’ auld Scotland? and doesna our honoured provost mean to desert, for a day o’ glory, his braw wife, that he may deck her wimple wi’ the roses o’ England, and her name wi’ a Scotch title? Wharfore, then, should I, a puir tradesman, fear to put in jeopardy for the country that bore me the life that is hers as weel as yours, and sacrifice, sae far as the guid that my arm can produce, the glory o’ my king and the character o’ my country?”

Margaret heard this speech with the most intense grief. She was incapable of argument. She was inconsolable. Her husband remained inexorable, and entreaty gave way to anger. She had adopted the idea that Hume was buoyed up with the pride of leadership; and she told him, with some acrimony, that his ambition of being thought the bravest man of Selkirk would not, in the event of his death, supply the child he was bound to work for with a bite of bread. Her love and anger carried her beyond bounds. She used other language of a harsher character, which forced her good-natured husband to retaliate in terms unusual to him, unsuited to the serious subject which they had in hand, and far less to the dangerous separation which they were about to experience. The conversation got more acrimonious. Words of a high cast produced expressions stronger still, and Hume left his wife in anger, to go to the field from which he might never return.

Page 142

Regret follows close upon the heels of incensed love. Alexander Hume had not been many paces from his own house, when his wife saw, in its proper light, the true character of her situation. Her husband had gone on a perilous enterprise. He might perish. She had perhaps got her last look of him who was dearest to her bosom. That look was in anger. The idea was terrible. Those who know the strength and delicacy of the feelings of true affection may conceive the situation of Margaret Hume. Unable to control herself, she threw her child into its crib, and rushed out of the house. One parting glance of reconciliation was all she wanted. She hurried through the town with an excited and terrified aspect, searching everywhere for her husband. He had departed with his companions; and Margaret was left in the agony of one whose sorrow is destined to be increased by the workings of an excited fancy, and the remorseful feelings of self-impeachment.

In the meantime, Hume having joined his companions, proceeded to the main army of the king, which was encamped on the hill of Flodden, lying on the left of the river Till. The party with which he was associated put themselves under the command of Lord Home; who, with the Earls of Crawford and Montrose, led the left of the van of the Scottish army. This part of the king's troops, it is well known, was opposed to Sir Edmund Howard. They were early engaged, and fought so successfully that Howard soon stood in need of succour from Lord Dacre, to save him from being speared on the field.

In this struggle Alexander Hume displayed the greatest prowess. He was seen in every direction dealing out death wherever he went. He was not, however, alone. His companions kept well up to him; and, in particular, one individual, who had joined the party as they approached the field, fought with a bravery equal to that of Hume himself. That person kept continually by his side, and seemed to consider the brave Borderer as his chosen companion-in-arms, whom he was bound to defend through all the perils of the fight. A leather haubergeon and an iron helmet, in which there was placed a small white feather, plucked from a cock's wing, constituted the armour of this brave seconder of Hume's gallantry. When Hume was attacked by the English with more force than his individual arm could sustain, no one of his companions was more ready to bring him aid than this individual. On several occasions he may be said to have saved his life, for Hume's recklessness drew him often into the very midst of the fight, where he must have perished had it not been for the timely assistance of his friend. On one occasion, in particular, an Englishman came behind him, and was in the very act of inserting a spear between the clasps of his armour, when his companion struck the dastardly fellow to the earth, and resumed the fight in front of the battle.

Page 143

This noble conduct was not unappreciated by Hume; for where is bravery found segregated from gratitude and generosity? He called upon him, even in the midst of the battle, for his name, that he might, in the event of their being separated, recollect and commemorate his friendship. The request was not complied with, but the superintending and saving arm of the stranger continued to be exercised in favour of the Borderer. They fought together to the end of the battle. The result of the bloody contest is but too well known. The strains of poetry have carried the wail of bereavement to the ends of the earth, and sorrow has claimed the sounds as its own individual expression.

The Scottish troops took their flight in different directions. Hume and his companions were obliged to lie in secret for a considerable time in the surrounding forests. He made many inquiries among his friends for the individual who had fought with him so bravely and saved his life. He could find no trace of him, beyond the information that he had disappeared when Hume had given up the fight. The direction in which he went was unknown; nor could any one tell the place from which he came.

The people of Selkirk who had been in the fight, sought their town as soon as they could with safety get out of the reach of the English. Their numbers formed a sorry contrast to those who had, with light hearts and high hopes, sought the field of battle; and it has been reported that when the wretched wounded and bloodstained remnant entered the town, a cry of sorrow was raised by the inhabitants collected to meet them, the remembrance of which remained on the hearts of their children long after those who uttered it had been consigned with their griefs to the grave.

Hume, who had also grievously repented of the harsh words he had applied to his beloved wife on the occasion of their separation, was all impatience to clasp her to his bosom, and seal their reconciliation with a kiss of repentance and love. Leaving his companions as they entered the town, he flew to the house. He approached the door. He reached it with a trembling heart. He had prepared the kind words of salutation. He had wounds to show, and to get dressed by the tender hand of sympathy. Lifting the latch, he entered. No one came to meet him. No sound, either of wife or child, met his ear. On looking round he saw, sitting in an arm-chair, the person who had accompanied him in battle, wearing the same haubergeon, the same helmet, the individual white feather that had attracted his attention. That person was Margaret Hume. She was dead. Her head reclined on the back of the chair, her arms hung by her side, the edge of her haubergeon was uplifted, and at her white bosom, from which flowed streams of blood, her child sucked the milk of a dead mother. *Omissis nugis rem experiamur.*

END OF VOL. XXIII.