

Up in Ardmuirland eBook

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Page 1

PERSONAL

Forest and meadow and hill, and the steel-blue rim of the ocean
Lying silent and sad, in the afternoon shadows and sunshine.
(*Longfellow—"Miles Standish"*)

Val and I, being twins, have always been looked upon as inseparables. True, we have been often forced apart during life's course; yet, somehow, we have always managed to drift back again into the old companionship which Nature seems to have intended in bringing us into the world together.

Boyhood and youth, as long as school life lasted, slipped by with never a parting. The crux came when we were old enough to choose our respective paths in life. It appeared that Val, although he had never before breathed a word to me—whatever he may have done to Dad—had thoroughly determined to be a priest if he could. I had never felt the ghost of a vocation in that direction, so here came the parting of the ways. Val went to college, and I was left inconsolable.

But I was not allowed to nurse my griefs; plans had been made in my regard also, it appeared.

"Ted," said Dad quite abruptly one day, "you'll have to go to Bonn. That'll be the best place for you, since Oxford is out of the question. You've got to take my place some day, and you mustn't grow up an absolute dunce. Atfield" (an old school-chum of his) "is well pleased with the place for his boy, Bill, so you may get ready to travel back with him next week, when the vacation finishes."

In those days (how long ago I almost blush to record) Catholics were not allowed access to our own universities as they now are, and we Flemings were Catholics to the core, and of old staunch Jacobites, as befitted our Scottish race and name.

So Bill Atfield took me under his wing, and to Bonn I went the very next week. There I remained until the end of my course, returning home for vacations, as a rule, but ending up with a week or two, in company with Dad, in Paris, whither Val had gone for his philosophy. But such rare meetings became rarer still when Val went off to Rome, and I had to take up a profession; and our separation was apparently destined to last indefinitely when Val had been ordained, and I went out to India after a civil service appointment.

And yet so kindly at times is Fate that, quite beyond my most ardent hopes, I have been thrown together with Val, in daily companionship, as long as life permits.

For, as it fell out, I was invalided home at quite an early stage of my public career, and, contrary to all family traditions, disgraced my kin by contracting lung disease—at least,



so the doctors have declared, though I have experienced very little inconvenience thereby, except that of being condemned to act the invalid for the rest of my life. For years I was forced by arbitrary decrees to winter in clement climes, as the only means of surviving till the spring; but now that I am fifty I have emancipated myself from such slavery, and insist on spending winter as well as summer in "bonnie Scotland." So far I have found no difference in health and strength. Thus it came about that a long visit to Val lengthened out indefinitely, and is not likely to terminate until one or other of us is removed hence.

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The *ego* appears rather prominently in these introductory paragraphs, it is true, but it was almost unavoidable; for my presence had to be accounted for in Ardmuirland before I could give reminiscences of this delightful spot. Now, however, I am free to speak of other folks; and first of dear old Val.

It was a long and arduous apprenticeship (if it is not irreverent so to style it) which Val had to pass in order to fit himself for priestly work; he was curate for I know not how many years in a large and extremely poor mission in one of our big towns. He worked well and thoroughly, as any one who knows Val will be ready to affirm; but his health would not stand the hard work and close confinement of a town, and he was forced against his will to relinquish his post. His attraction had always been toward a studious life, so it came about that he was sent up here, where he has time to study to his heart's content, since his flock will never be anything but small. Moreover, his share of poor old Dad's worldly substance enables him to live, for the emoluments here would scarcely support a canary-bird.

Yet it must not be supposed that Val is rolling in riches. In the first place, poor Dad had to sell a good deal of property to make good his losses from unfortunate investments, and he had not overmuch to leave us. His worldly wisdom, too, taught him to be sparing with Val.

"He would spend his half in a month, Ted," said the old Pater shrewdly, when he came to settle his worldly affairs. "I shall therefore leave the bulk of everything to you, and trust to you to provide liberally for the dear boy."

Dad's remark is the best possible clue to Val's character. Had he nothing else to give, Val would strip the very coat off his own back, when it was a question of relieving distress. So it is a part of my duty to see that he is clothed and fed as he ought to be, and a difficult job it is at times.

I suppose I ought to give some idea of Val's appearance, if this is to be a proper literary turn-out. When we both were younger, it was commonly said by aunts, uncles, and such like, that one was the image of the other. That would be scarcely a fair description now. I am thin; Val is inclined to become chubby. I have a beard and he is necessarily shaven; he needs glasses always, and I only for reading. With these preliminary observations I may say that Val is about five feet six in his shoes, of dark complexion, and with hair inclining to gray. He is quiet in manner, yet withal a charming companion when called upon to talk. The people worship him; that is the best testimonial of a country priest, and all that I need say about his interior man.



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If I did not know for certain that Longfellow never set eyes on Ardmuirland, I should maintain that the lines at the head of this chapter were meant for a description of it. For “the steel-blue rim of the ocean” is but three miles distant from this heather-clad, wind-swept height, which rises some seven hundred feet above it. Moreover, as one gazes down, the eye meets many a miniature forest of pine and birch, clothing portions of the lower hills, or nestling in the crevices of the numerous watercourses which divide them. Strewn irregularly over the landscape are white-walled, low-roofed farms and crofters’ dwellings—each in the embrace of sheltering barn and byre, whose roofs of vivid scarlet often shine out in the sun from a setting of green meadow or garden.

Our own habitation is simple enough, yet amply suffices for our needs. It is just a stone cottage of two stories, and is connected by a small cloister-like passage, Gothic in character, with the stone chapel which is the scene of Val’s priestly ministrations. This, too, is modest enough. The windows are triple lancets, filled with opaque glass, the altar of stone and marble, but simple in decoration, the tabernacle of brass, and the eastern window—larger than the others—is embellished with stained glass. It is in memory of our dear Dad, and besides his patron, St. Andrew, it has the figures of St. Valentine and St. Edmund on either side of the Apostle.

Within the house is a dining-room, a better furnished room for the reception of important visitors, and a small den known as the “priest’s room,” in which Val interviews members of his flock. Upstairs are Val’s study and my sitting-room, with our respective bed-chambers and a spare one for a casual visitor. Kitchen offices and servants’ quarters are in a tiny special block.

Both chapel and house have been built by Val. I can recall his pleading letters to Dad for help to raise a more worthy temple. The Pater, with his characteristic caution, made it a condition of his help that a new house should form part of the plan. If the old chapel was as unworthy of its purpose as Val’s descriptions painted it, the dwelling must have been indeed poverty-stricken. From what I have gleaned from the natives, both buildings must have surpassed in meanness our wildest conceptions of them. But more upon that subject later.

Any account of the chapel-house at Ardmuirland would be incomplete without some reference to a personage who holds an important position in the household, second only to that of the master of the house. This is Penelope Spence, known to the world outside as “Mistress Spence,” and to Val and myself as “Penny.” She was our nurse long ago, and is now the ruler of the domestic affairs of the chapel-house. A little, round, white-haired, rosy-faced dumpling of a woman is Penny; an Englishwoman, too, from the Midlands, where the letter H is reserved by many persons of her social standing for the sake



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of special emphasis only. I find by calculation that she first saw the light at least seventy years ago, but she is reticent upon that subject. All the precise information I have ever extracted from her on the point is that she is not so young as she once was—which is self-evident! But young or old, she is brisk and active, both in mind and body, still. Such a devoted old soul, too! She would go to the stake cheerfully for either of us, but for Val she entertains an almost superstitious reverence, which would be amusing were it not touching. When speaking of him to the natives, she invariably styles him “the Priest.” I imagine she looks for a higher place above, in recognition of her early services to him.

Penny was already a young married woman when she came into the service of our family. Her history, as I have learned it from her own lips, will be worth narrating, if I can find room for it in these pages.

Elsie is Penny’s “lady in waiting”; she is too youthful as yet to have made history. She hails from a neighboring farm, and is a really satisfactory handmaid—ready, cheerful, and diligent; she entertains a thoroughly genuine respect for her superior officer, “Mistress Spence,” in spite of the latter’s somewhat severe notions as to the training of young servants. In appearance Elsie is much like any other Scottish lassie of her age—not strikingly beautiful, nor yet ugly; just pleasant to look upon. Her most conspicuous trait is a smile which appears to be chronic. One cannot help wondering what she looks like on occasions when a smile is out of place—at her prayers, or at a funeral, for instance. I am quite prepared to maintain that she does not lose it during sleep; for though I have noticed it growing deeper and broader when she has reason to feel more than usual satisfaction (e.g., when Penny unthinkingly utters a word of praise), it never entirely disappears during the daytime.

There is another personage who deserves special mention; for not only is he an important item in our establishment, but a very special crony of mine. This is Willy Paterson (known locally, by-the-bye, as “the Priest’s Wully”), our gardener, groom, coachman (when required), and general handy man. Willy is a wiry, wrinkled, white-haired little man—little now, because stooping a bit under the weight of well-nigh eighty years—who is greatly respected by his neighbors far and near because he has “been sooth.” For he was long ago in the ranks of the police of one of our biggest cities, and his former profession, not to speak of his knowledge of the world gained thereby, entitles him to esteem. It has raised him to the rank of a species of oracle on any subject upon which he is pleased to discourse; the result is a not unpleasing, because altogether unintentional, dogmatism which seasons Willy’s opinions of men and things.



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Our garden is the pride of Willy's heart. It begins in front of the house, where flowers of varied hue succeed one another as season follows season, and roses—red, white, and yellow—seem almost perennial, since they bud forth in late May and scarcely disappear till December. But that is due to our wonderful climate as much as to Willy's attention. As the garden disappears round the corner of the house, its nature changes; vegetables in surprising and intricate variety there flourish chiefly. At the stable-yard it ceases; beyond that a dense pine wood holds its own to the very top of a hill, which rises above our domain and protects us from eastern blasts. The wood is not the least of the attractions which Ardmuirland has for me; beyond the more prosaic quality of its health-giving power, it possesses, as every bit of forest land does for those who can read its message aright, a charm unspeakable.

And now I seem to hear some crusty reader exclaim quite impatiently, having skimmed through my literary attempt thus far:

“No doubt the fellow thinks all this interesting enough! But why expect me to wade through pages of twaddle about Scottish peasants and their doings—for it is evident that is what it will turn out?”

“Read it or not, just as you feel inclined, honored sir,” I answer with all the courtesy I can command. “I respect your opinions, as your fellow-creature, and have no desire to thrust my wares upon unwilling hands. But opinions differ, luckily, or this world would be an undesirable habitation for any one, so there may be some who do not disdain my humble efforts to entertain—and perhaps even amuse. To such I dedicate my pages.”

Yet, between ourselves (dear, appreciative reader), it is but just that I should offer some apology for thus rushing into print. I trust to you to keep the matter a strict secret from my doctor (McKillagen, M.D., M.R.C.S.), but winter weather at Ardmuirland is not altogether of a balmy nature. Consequently it is necessary that these precious lungs of mine should not be exposed too rashly to

“the cauld, cauld blast, on yonder lea.”

This leads to much enclosure within doors during a good share of the worst of our months—say from February to May, off and on; this again leads to a dearth of interesting occupation.

It is Val who is really to be blamed for this literary attempt. When, in an unlucky moment, I was one day expatiating on the material afforded to a book-maker (I do not use the word in a sporting sense, of course) by the varied characters and histories of our people, and the more than ordinary interest attaching to some, he beamed at me across the dinner-table, a twinkle of humor disclosing itself from behind his glasses, and said:



“Why not write about them yourself, Ted? You complain of having nothing to do in bad weather.”

The idea took root; it was nourished by reflection. Here is the fruit; pluck it or not, gentle reader, as your inclination bids.



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II

MEMORIES

“Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.”
(*Goldsmith—“Deserted Village”*)

I have heard a complaint made of some reverend preachers (untruthfully, I well believe) that they could never begin a sermon without harking back to the Creation. Now it is not my intention to travel quite so far back into the past, but I must confess to a desire to dig somewhat deeply into the history of Ardmuirland in days gone by before touching upon more recent happenings. Such a desire led me to investigate the recollections of some of our “oldest inhabitants.”

Willy Paterson, I well knew, was to be trusted for accurate memories of a certain class of happenings; but for more minute details of events the feminine mind is the more reliable. So I determined to start with Willy’s wife, Bell. Their dwelling is nearest to ours; it stands, indeed, but a few yards down the road which leads past our gate. It is a white-walled, thatched house of one story only—like most of the habitations in Ardmuirland; it stands in a little garden whose neatness and the prolific nature of its soil are standing proofs of Willy’s industry in hours of leisure.

Owing to the prevalence in our neighborhood of some particular patronymics—Macdonald, Mackintosh, Mackenzie, and the rest—many individuals are distinguished by what is called in Ardmuirland a “by-name.” Some of these are furnished by the title of the residence of the family in question, others by the calling or trade of father, mother, or other relative; thus we have “Margot of the Mill,” “Sandy Craigdhu,” as examples of the former, and “Nell Tailor,” “Duncan the Post,” of the latter. Still more variety is obtained by the mention of some personal trait of the individual, such as “Fair Archie,” “Black Janet,” and the like. Willy Paterson’s wife was commonly known by such a by-name; every one spoke of her as “Bell o’ the Burn,” from the name of her childhood’s home.

Bell is a spare, hard-featured body—not attractive at first sight, though when one comes to know her, and the somewhat stern expression relaxes, as the lines about the mouth soften, and the brown eyes grow kindly, one begins to think that Bell must have been once quite handsome. She is always scrupulously clean whenever I chance to visit her, and is usually arrayed in a white “mutch” cap, spotless apron, and small tartan shawl over her shoulders. Willy and she have reared up a large family, all of them now settled in the world and most of them married. They are most proud of their youngest, Margaret, who is a lay sister in a town convent. Though her husband is reckoned a traveler, Bell can lay no claim to the title; she probably never moved farther than ten

miles away from the family hearthstone until the day she left her father's house by the Burn of Breakachy to marry Willy Paterson, and certainly has never traveled much since that time.



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Most of the houses of Ardmuirland are constructed on exactly the same plan. There are two principal rooms—"but" and "ben," as they are commonly designated. (It is unnecessary here to dive into etymology; but it may be noticed in passing that *but* signifies "without" and *ben* "within.") To "gae ben" is to pass into the inner room, which at one time opened out of the ordinary living apartment or kitchen, but is now usually separated from it by a little entrance lobby. Besides these two chief rooms, the initiated will be able to point out sundry little hidden closets and cupboards, fitted up as sleeping apartments, and reminding one of the contrivances on board ship. The two rooms each contain a more demonstrative bed, as a rule: but in some cases the bed is shut up with panelled doors like a cupboard.

All that I learned from Bell about the Ardmuirland of bygone days was gathered from her lips at intervals, and in the course of many repeated visits; for it would have been fatal to my purpose had I allowed her to imagine that I intended to make public use of her communications. Though I have retained the substance, I have often altered the form; for it would be useless to expect the reader to translate (if it were even possible to do so without the help of a glossary) Bell's broad Scots dialect. Yet the temptation has been too great to be resisted from time to time to quote her exact words—so quaint her diction and, to me at least, so attractive withal.

A description of the original chapel of the district will serve as a fitting introduction to these memoirs. According to Bell, it must have been simple even to destitution. No smoothly hewn stones, no carved windows, no decoration of any kind distinguished it from the houses of the people. It was a small, low building of rough stone, unplastered, even inside, and roofed by a heather thatch. There was a single door in the side wall. The roof within was open to the rude, unvarnished beams which upheld the thatch. The floor was of beaten clay, and there were rough benches for the people to sit upon during the sermon, but no contrivance for kneeling upon.

"Some o' the fowk had boards to kneel on, ye ken," Bell explained, "but the maist o' them prayed kneelin' on the flure."

The altar was a plain, deal kitchen table, devoid of all ornament in the shape of draperies except the necessary linen coverings. Underneath it was a box, within which the vestments were stowed away; for there was no semblance of sacristy, and the priest's house was some yards distant. At the opposite end from the altar was a raised dais for the accommodation of the singers, of whom Bell herself was one. She could not recall what they were accustomed to sing as a rule.

"I mind we wad sing the *Dies Irae*, whiles," was all the information she could give on that point. One would think it scarcely possible that so penitential a chant could form the usual musical accompaniment to Sunday Mass! A teacher of music from a neighboring glen used to come over from time to time to practise the singers.



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“I mind weel,” said Bell, “he had a wand and a tunin’ fork.” Are these not the recognized signs of ability, all the world over, to conduct a band of singers? The practices were held in the priest’s house; sometimes the pastor would join in the singing, although Bell naively remarked on that point:

“He hadna much ear for music, ye ken.”

Of the priest of that day, “Mr.” McGillivray, as the old style of address ran, more will be said later. The figure next in prominence to him in Bell’s recollections was the old sacristan, Robbie Benzie. For many years he acted as “clerk” at the altar, continuing to carry out his duties when well advanced in years. During the week he carried on his trade of weaver; on Sundays he was at his post betimes, carrying a lantern with him, from which he took the light for the altar candles. Bell describes him as a stalwart man with fine features and dark eyes. Clad in his green tartan plaid, he always accompanied the priest round the little chapel with the holy water for the Asperges, and with his “lint-white locks” flowing onto his neck, he used to appear in Bell’s eyes “a deal mair imposin’ lookin’ ner the priest himsel’.” His modest and respectful bearing gained him the esteem of all. “I always think of him,” said Bell, “as one o’ the saints of th’ olden times, ye ken. He was the model of a guid Catholic—pious, hard-workin’, and aye happy and contented.”

In those far-off days Ardmuirland was entirely Catholic. The Faith, in consequence, was an integral part of the life of the district, and the priest the recognized potentate, whom every one was at all times ready to serve—working on his croft, plowing, harvesting, and such like—with cheerful promptitude. Any such labor, when required, was requested by the priest from the altar on Sunday.

“I shall be glad to receive help this week on the glebe-land,” he would announce. “You will kindly arrange the division of labor among yourselves.”

The same would happen when the time came for cutting and storing up peats for the winter fuel. The day and hour would be named, and all who could possibly help would be at the hill punctually to take their respective shares in the labor.

It was on one such occasion that the incident occurred which struck me as the culminating point of Bell’s recollections. I cannot give it as dramatically as she did, and if I attempted to do so the pathos would be marred by the broad Doric—unintelligible to southrons—in which her narrative was told; but I will reproduce it as faithfully as possible in my own words.



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It was the “peat-casting” for the priest; every one had worked with a will—young and old. Dinner had been sent up to the moss at noon by the various housewives of the district. It was a sumptuous repast, as usual on so great an occasion; chickens, oatcake, scones, cheese, and abundance of milk had been thoroughly enjoyed by the workers. The children—bearers of the dainties from their respective mothers—though bashful in responding to the fatherly greetings of the old priest, were yet secretly proud of the honor of his special notice. Shyly they stood about in groups, watching for a time the resumed labors of fathers and brothers, until afternoon was wearing away, and it was time to betake themselves home to make ready for the still more important event of the day. Gaily they rushed down the hill, their joyous laughter and merry shouts—relieved as they were from the restraint which good manners had imposed in the priest’s presence—awaking the echoes of the glen. For many of them would be allowed to take part in the evening’s festivity, and all might share in the preparations for it. This event was the public supper in the priest’s barn, when women were welcomed with their husbands and brothers, and even the bigger children were admitted. For the evening repast, as for that of noonday, each family contributed its share of provisions, which were always ample in quantity as well as excellent in quality.

Supper, on this particular occasion—as was usual—took some time, and it was a serious business, when little conversation was encouraged. But after supper the real fun began. None love dancing more than Scots; so dancing must needs form the climax of every gathering for social enjoyment. The bashful roughness which characterized the commencement had worn off; lads and lasses were thoroughly enjoying the somewhat rare opportunity of taking part in so large an assembly; Archie Cattanach, the piper, was throwing his whole soul into the skirls and flourishes of his choice tunes; all was gaiety and innocent enjoyment. The good priest sat looking on pleased because his people were happy; now and again he would move his position to another group of the older guests, so that he might chat with all in turn; his flock, though they held their Pastor in that reverence which none but a priest can inspire, were under no false restraint in his presence, but joined in laugh and jest with ease and simplicity.

Loudly rang out Archie’s pipes, merrily tripped the dancers, and joy reigned supreme, when suddenly there came an unexpected check. The outer door flew open, and a girlie of about ten, wild-eyed, bare-headed, panting for breath, rushed into the midst of the gathering. She was evidently laboring under the stress of some unwonted excitement. There was no shyness now, in spite of the priest’s presence—in spite of the eager faces that sought hers in anxious questioning.

“Mither, Mither!” she screamed shrilly, as she caught sight of the familiar face she sought, and rushed toward her mother’s open arms. It was little Peggy, Bell’s younger sister.

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“Oh, Mither,” she wailed through her sobs, “oor Jessie’s nae to be foond! She’s nae at hame. I dinna ken wha she’s gane!”

With her mother’s arms around her, the child was able to give a more coherent account of the circumstances which had led to this abrupt cessation of the dance; for Archie’s melody had trailed off into an unmusical drone and speedily ceased, and the dancers had spontaneously crowded round the child and her mother.

Peggy had been left in charge at home, for Bell was allowed to take part in the “ball.” Jessie, the youngest but one of the family, was a little maid of four years. She had accompanied Peggy and her brothers, with a crowd of other small folk, when the children went to the moss with provisions for the workers. All had gone and returned in a body, and no one noticed that Jessie was not with them. It was only when Peggy began to assemble her own little charges, to conduct them to their own house, that she missed the wee lassie. Peggy knew that her father and mother, together with all her elders in the family, had already started for the barn—some to help in the preparations, others to chat with those who were assembling outside. It was growing dark, for the children had delayed their homeward journey (as they often will when a number are together) to play and sport.

There was no one to advise or help the child. Sending on three-year-old Elsie and the other little ones in charge of Johnnie, she ran back, half distracted, toward the hill they had left earlier in the afternoon. Shouting out for Jessie by name, she wandered hither and thither—terrified, self-accusing, disconsolate. But it was all to no purpose. Darkness fell, and fearful and contrite, Peggy had no resource but to seek her mother.

There was no more merriment that night. A search party was at once organized by the younger men, who started with lanterns and some of their collies to the peat-moss. All that night the anxious mother kept weary vigil, while the men-folk searched the hill. Day broke, and no trace had been found of the lost child. Weary and sad, the men returned for some needful rest and others took their places. But though they traversed the moors all day, and searched crevices and water-courses with diligence, they met with no better success. Sometimes a sound would break through the stillness which would stir their hearts with renewed hope. The cry of a child! Weak and faint, indeed, but telling of the continuance of life! But again and again, after scaling heights or creeping down comes, they were doomed to disappointment. It was but the bleat of a strayed lamb! That night a larger party set out with lanterns and torches, and once more ranged the hills shouting for the child; but once again morning dawned upon disappointed hopes.

Then every one who could be of any possible use was pressed into the service. The people flocked out of their homes from all that district, and hand in hand they started in a long line stretching across a wide tract of country, and moving slowly on until every inch of ground in their way had been thoroughly explored.



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It was after three nights and three days had passed that they came upon the weak little body, lying stark and still under an overhanging rock, and half buried in the heather. Moss was clutched in her clenched hand, and shreds of moss were on her cold lips; the poor little bairn had hungered for food, and had seized that which first came to hand to satisfy her craving. She was quite dead.

The bereaved mother mourned her darling with a grief that none but a mother can know. But the child had been her father's special pet of all his little flock.

"His heart," said Bell, the rising tears witnessing to the sadness of the memories called back by her story, "was well-nigh broke. He burst into tears at the sight of her wee white face, and sobbed like a bairn wi' the rest of us."

And poor little Peggy! How touching the story! She never ceased to reproach herself for what she considered her carelessness in losing sight of Jessie on that fatal day. No single creature attached a shadow of blame to her; on the contrary, it was the dearest wish of all to try to console her and assure her of her innocence in that respect. But it was of no avail. Her unceasing grief fretted away her strength, and six months later she was borne to St. Mungo's ancient burying ground to share Jessie's grave.

"It's nigh on sixty years sin'," said Bell apologetically, as she wiped her streaming eyes with her apron; "but the thocht o' that time brings the tears up yet."

III

ARCHIE

"Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie."

(Pope—"Ode to Solitude")

He was an unusually wretched semblance of a man. A tattered coat—some one's cast-off overcoat—green, greasy, mud-stained, clung round his shaking knees; trousers which might have been of any hue originally, but were now "sad-colored," flapped about his thin legs and fringed his ankles; shoes, slashed across the front for ease, revealed bare feet beneath; an antique and dirty red woolen muffler swathed his neck almost to the ears. Surmounting these woeful garments appeared a yellow, wrinkled face surrounded by a straggling fringe of gray whisker; gray locks strayed from an old red handkerchief tied round the brows under a dilapidated wide-awake hat. To add to his woe-begone aspect, the poor wretch was streaming with wet, for a Scottish mist had been steadily falling all the morning.



Leaning on his stick, the man slowly shuffled up the central path toward the porch in which I was sitting, striving to get the nearest possible approach to an open-air pipe. Touching his sorry headgear, he looked at me with mild eyes of faded blue, and smiled benignly as he asked:

“Could I see himsel’?”

I had not long come to that part of the country, and I was not thoroughly conversant with the terminology of the people, but it flashed upon me what he meant.



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“Did you wish to see the priest?” I rejoined.

“Aye,” replied the old vagrant—for so I deemed him. The smile seemed stereotyped, for it never faded. His face, when one regarded it attentively, had a quite attractive pleasantness.

“I’m sorry to say he’s out just now,” I said. “But you may go round to the back and get something to eat, if you wish.”

It struck me as strange that he did not ask for money, but thanked me profusely and politely, as he touched his wretched hat once more and shuffled off toward the kitchen quarters.

He did not reappear for so long a time that I began to think it would be prudent to investigate. Traveling gentry of such a class are not always desirable visitors when the kitchen happens to be unoccupied for the nonce. As I made my way in that direction through the little hall I heard voices through the half-open door beyond.

“It’ll be all right, Archie,” Penny was saying. “The priest shall have the money as soon as he comes in, and if he can’t say the Mass to-morrow, I’ll take care to send you word by Willy. Now, mind you get a bit of fire lighted when you get back home. You must be wet through!”

“Thank ye kindly, Mistress Spence,” came the slow response in the quavering voice of the old man. “It’s yersel’ that’s aye kind and thochtful!”

I waited till I heard the door close upon the supposed “tramp” before venturing to make the inquiries that rushed to my lips. And even then I paused a while. When needing information from Penny, one has to be circumspect; she has a way of shutting off the supply with ruthless decision, yet with a seeming absence of deliberate purpose, whenever she suspects a “pumping” operation.

“I’m one that won’t be drove,” I’ve often heard her say. So we old fellows are often obliged to have recourse to diplomacy in dealing with our old nurse.

Consequently I lounged casually, as it were, into Penny’s domain with the remark, “That poor old chap looked awfully wet, Penny.”

“Wet enough he was, Mr. Edmund,” replied the unsuspecting Penny, “and I have just been giving him a good hot cup of tea; for he never touches wine or spirits.”

She was evidently betrayed by my apparent lack of inquisitiveness into a relation of the details I was longing to hear.



“To think,” she continued, “of the creature walking down in such weather, and he such a frail old mortal, too, just to make sure of Mass to-morrow for his wife’s anniversary. I can’t help thinking, Mr. Edmund, that some of us might take an example in many things from poor old Archie McLean!”

“Does he live far away?” I asked—just to encourage the flow of the narrative.

“A good three miles—and his rheumatism something hawful,” exclaimed Penny, now thoroughly started on her recital. I had but to lend an ear, and my curiosity would be satisfied.

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Archie, it appeared, had been a soldier in his young days, but when he came to settle in Ardmuirland his time of service had expired; that was long ago, for he was now quite an elderly man. He took up his residence in a deserted mill, by the Ardmuir Burn. As he proved to be thoroughly quiet and inoffensive, the neighbors—true to their national character, not speedily attracted by strangers—began in course of time to make his acquaintance, and he eventually became a great favorite with all. When younger, Penny had been told, he had been “a wonderful good gardener,” and for trifling payment, or in return for a meal, would always “redd-up” the gardens of the district. Thus he acquired the designation of “Airchie Gairdener,” and by that was usually known.

What his neighbors could not comprehend was how Archie spent these small earnings, but more especially to what use he had put his army pension, which every one knew he once received regularly. He had no occasion to buy food, for kindly neighbors would always exchange for meal or eggs the varied produce of his well-cultivated garden. His clothes cost him nothing; for he had worn the same old garments for years past, and though no self-respecting tramp would have accepted them, he never seemed anxious to replace them. If any others were given him, he would use them for a time, out of compliment to the donor, but the ancient attire would always reappear after a short interval.

“As to where his money goes,” summed up Penny, “I’ve a notion that his Reverence knows more than any one else except Archie himself. Poor Archie often asks for the priest, and I’ve heard his Reverence speaking to him in quite an angry way—for him,” she added quickly; “but there’s never any change in Archie’s way of living. Some of the people here think he’s a perfect saint, and I’m not so sure that they’re far wrong! However, I think he ought to take ordinary care of his ’ealth; that seems to me a duty even for saints!”

I tried to glean more details from Val, but found him strangely reticent.

“Poor old fellow! A good soul, if ever there was one!” was the only remark I could elicit.

This air of mystery made me more than ever desirous of learning something about Archie’s antecedents. It was this curiosity which led me, in the first instance, to visit his tumbledown dwelling. It was a quaint establishment. A moderately large garden surrounded it on three sides, roughly fenced in from the woodland, its fence interwoven with gorse branches to keep out rabbits. The varied supplies of vegetables were evidence of Archie’s industry, in spite of his rheumatism. It was by the produce of this garden that the old man obtained in return the oatmeal and milk which formed his staple food; for he could no longer work for others.

The house itself was a picture! Its aged roof seemed to have bent beneath the weight of years; for the ridge had sunk in the middle of its mossy, grass-grown expanse, and threatened to fall upon its occupant to the peril of his life. A small barrel served for a

chimney. One window possessed still two small panes of glass; the other openings were filled in with bits of boarding, as was the whole of the other window.

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There was something quite uncanny about the silence of the place. The monotonous ripple of the burn below seemed to intensify it. I stood in hesitation for a moment or two before venturing to knock at the door. When at last I had done so, shuffling footsteps sounded within, and Archie opened the door; the same bland smile which I had noticed when I first saw him appeared on his wrinkled face, and the faded blue eyes lighted up.

“Come ben, sir; come ben!” he said hospitably. “Ye’re kindly welcome, tho’ ‘tis but a puir hoosachie for ane o’ the gentry.”

It was indeed a sorry place to live in. The roof was so unsound that, as I learned later from Bell, it was difficult to find a dry spot for his wretched bed in wet weather. Added to this, as the same informant assured me, the place was a happy hunting-ground for rats.

“The rats is that bould, sir,” she said, “that he’s fairly to tak’ a stick to bed wi’ him o’ nichts, to keep the beasts off. It’s a wonder they rats hasna’ yokit on him afore this!”

But on this, my first visit, no rat put in an appearance.

I gave no motive for looking in, nor did Archie seem to be surprised at my call. He was evidently much pleased to see me; but I could not help thinking at the time that his cordial welcome was due in great measure to my relationship to Val.

That first visit was short, but it was succeeded by others. It soon became quite customary to wind up my daily walk with a chat with the “hermit”—as I got into the way of calling him. For beyond the mystery attaching to the man—or perhaps I ought to say intensifying it—was the fact that he was a really attractive personality. He could talk about the various countries he had seen with a degree of intelligence unlooked for in one of his condition; moreover, he could season his remarks with much spice of sound, earnest wisdom, which amused while it edified me. It did not take long to discover that Archie “Gairdener” was a man out of the common.

That Archie was a good Christian was self-evident. No weather, however tempestuous, could keep him from Sunday Mass, and I noticed with some surprise that he received Holy Communion at least once and sometimes more frequently every week, but always on a week-day, when our congregation consisted chiefly of our household and Bell.

“I suppose Archie ‘Gairdener’ finds it more convenient to come to the Sacraments on a week-day,” I remarked one day to Val, “because of the late hour of Mass on Sunday.”

“Scarcely that,” was his quiet answer. “I happen to know from other sources that he still keeps up the old practice he found in use when he first came here. In those days no one dreamed of breaking fast on a Sunday until the priest himself did. Every one came to Mass fasting, as Archie still does—though I believe he is the only one nowadays.”



During the two or three years that followed I saw a good deal of Archie. We became such cronies, indeed, that Val was considerably amused that I should take so much pleasure in the company of one with whom I could have few ideas in common. But there was something that attracted me to the old fellow from the first, which I can not define in words.

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A severe winter made it almost impossible for the old man to get to Sunday Mass at all; he would do his best, but it was evident, as I could see more plainly in my visits, that he was growing very feeble. I happened to be seedy myself at that time, and did not manage to get out so frequently as before, owing to the trying weather.

It came with no surprise when Val told me in early spring that Archie was growing worse, and that the doctor gave little hope of his regaining strength; in the circumstances, Val thought it well not to delay the Last Sacraments any longer. I tried to accompany him when he went to the old mill for that purpose, but I had to give it up. It was about a week later that I was able to visit the old man.

Winter seemed to have departed for good on that day in mid-April. A bright sun was shining; deluded little birds were flitting about as though summer had come; even on the hill the air was mild and balmy.

The brooding silence seemed accentuated in the neighborhood of Archie's hermitage. An unusual sign of life was to be seen at the mill-house itself; smoke was rising from the extemporized chimney; for Bell, as I knew, had installed herself as nurse and was doing her best to render the last days of the old recluse more restful than they could have been during his more active period.

It was Bell who answered to my knock. With a gesture imploring silence she led me in. I was startled at the sight which met my eyes. The old man lay stretched on the bare earthen floor, his head pillowed upon a large stone. His body was covered by blankets, but his arms were crossed on his breast outside of them and embraced his crucifix. His eyes were closed, but he was still breathing fitfully. Bell whispered, in response to my amazed look of inquiry:

"He wouldna' rest till Wully and I lifted him oot o' bed before Wully went for the priest. He'd been keepin' yon big stane for years to serve him at the last."

Val appeared very soon. Archie showed no sign of recognition, even when the well-known voice began the prayers he seemed to have been waiting for before departing.

Bell lighted the blessed candle, which was in readiness, and knelt with Willy on one side of the quiet form, while I knelt on the other near to the priest.

"Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world, in the name of God the Father Almighty, Who created thee: in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, Who suffered for thee"—thus the quiet voice continued until those prayerful words: "Pity his sighs, pity his tears, trusting in nothing but thy mercy"—when the last long breath, like a sigh of relief, passed from the dying man's lips as his soul departed.



I could not shake off a sense of loss as keen as though some dearly loved friend had been taken from me. Val and I walked home in unbroken silence through the shadow of the wood, newly decked in tender green buds, up to the rising ground beyond. My brother seemed as much touched as I.

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It was not until our meal was over, and we sat on either side of the still necessary fire, though we had dined without a lamp, and still preferred the dusk for a quiet talk, that Val spoke of Archie.

“Now that the poor old fellow is at rest,” he said, “I will tell you, by his express desire, something about his history. He wanted me to promise to make it public, but that I resolutely refused to do, for many reasons. ‘Let Mr. Edmund know, at least,’ he said. ‘I do not want him to have too good an opinion of me, or he will not pray as much as I should wish for my poor soul.’ So you have a right to know, Ted.”

And with that he unfolded the story of Archie McLean’s early years.

Archie had been a wild boy in his youth, with a strong propensity for drink—hereditary, unfortunately—which he was not so well able to satisfy on his father’s croft, in Banffshire; so, to gain more liberty, he ran off and enlisted. When scarcely more than twenty he took up with a girl he met in one of the provincial towns in which he happened to be stationed, and eventually married her. He had asked no leave—indeed, at his age it would not have been granted; his wife, therefore, was not “on the strength of the regiment”—in other words, depended entirely upon his pay, and what little she might earn, for the necessaries of life, and even for traveling expenses, in case of removal elsewhere. The girl was a negligent Protestant, and he a non-practising Catholic. They had been married before a Registrar, and neither of them entered a church as long as the woman lived. The one child born to them died a week later, unbaptized.

Such a marriage could not possibly prove happy, but it was more unfortunate in its results than could have been imagined. The man’s craving for drink grew with its indulgence. His wife, neglected by him, followed his example and took to that sorry comforter; before long she had acquired habits of drunkenness that disgusted even him. Soon she had fallen so low that her life was a crying scandal for its unrestrained vices.

The man’s companions took a savage pleasure in taunting him about his wife’s depravity, until the very mention of her name was hateful to him. He acknowledged that he himself was bad enough, but her conduct had reached the extreme of vileness. The result was what might have been foreseen. Quarrels and recriminations were perpetual. The man hated the woman because of her vicious life; he hated himself because, as his conscience reminded him in lucid intervals, he was responsible for her downfall.

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The regiment was on the eve of removing to other quarters, and much as he would have liked to leave his wife behind to shift for herself, he dare not face the consequences. Coming to her lodgings, therefore, to arrange about her journey, he found the woman hopelessly incapable. His mad rage against her was inflamed by the drink he had just taken; in his anger he was strongly tempted to rid himself of the burden she had become. Nothing could be easier! No one had seen him enter the house, and there was every chance of his being able to steal away unperceived, in the dusk of the evening. An uncontrollable loathing for the woman urged him on; conscience was disregarded. He seized one of the pillows of the bed. It was merely necessary to press it over her face, hold it there till life was extinct, and creep away, a free man!

It must have been the ever-watching Angel Guardian of that wretched man who touched his heart at that moment of danger, by a sudden grace. He faltered; threw down the pillow, and swiftly ran from the room and from the house—pursued by remorse.

An hour later, when he ventured to return, he was met on the threshold with the tidings that his wife had been found dead of heart failure.

For many a year after that horrible day Archie McLean was tormented by his reproachful conscience. He regarded himself as a murderer in desire, though actually guiltless of his wife's blood. The terrible shock was his salvation. From that day he never more touched strong drink. The formerly inveterate drunkard, a great portion of whose time was spent in the cells, rose by degrees to the position of the smartest soldier in his company. When his long service had to come to an end, he took a situation as gardener for a time; but a desire which had come upon him when his army service had been completed became still more urgent. He longed to be able to devote himself to a penitential life, as a means of making such atonement as was in his power for his past transgressions. Even while in the army his life had been one of rigorous mortification, dating from the day when he once more began to practise his religion; he shunned no duty, however distasteful, and shrank from no danger.

In response to the keen desire which dominated him, Archie threw up his situation, and searching for some part of the country in which he would not be known, yet where he should find life and surroundings not entirely foreign to his experience, settled at length at Ardmuirland. For about forty years his life was characterized by a rigorous austerity. His pension was at once carried to the priest, as soon as he received it, to be devoted to the offering of Masses for the soul of his unhappy wife, and the relief of the poor—scarcely poorer than himself. He never spent a penny upon his own needs; even the scanty earnings of his labor, unless made in kind, went the same way as his pension. The clothing, even, which charitable persons bestowed upon him in pity soon passed into coin for the same end; no scolding of his spiritual Father could prevail upon him to look better after his own well-being.



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"I've been a great sinner, Father," he would say. "I owe a big debt to the justice of the Almighty!"

As he had lived, so he died, I had noticed that my brother had shown no surprise, as I did, at the sight of the dying figure of the old man stretched on the bare earth with a stone for his pillow; Val had become familiar with the idea.

"My Saviour died on a Cross for me, and shall I, a vile sinner, be content to die in my bed?" Thus he would always answer the remonstrances of the priest.

Whenever I read the Gospel narrative of Lazarus—the wretchedly clothed, ill-fed, diseased mendicant—who inspired loathing in the eyes and nostrils of the delicately nurtured, sensual men who flocked past his unlovely form to the banquets of the rich glutton at whose palace gate he lay, my thoughts fly at once to my old friend, Archie the penitent, and my prayers rise to Heaven on his behalf in the Church's touching petition for the departed:

"Cum Lazaro, quondam paupere, eternam habeas requiem!"

"With Lazarus, once poor, now blest
May'st thou enjoy eternal rest!"

IV

GOLDEN DREAMS

"All the world is turning golden, turning golden
In the spring."
(*Nora Hopper—"April."*)

On a day when May was growing old, everything up at Ardmuirland was green and gold except the sky, and that was mostly blue and gold. Gorse and broom were in full blossom, so that on all sides the outlook was glorious!

Looking through my field-glasses to discover the meaning of a column of dense smoke, which seemed to be rising from a hill in the distance, I found myself gazing at a forest in flames! Fire—a very wall of fire—seemed to extend for miles along a dense tract of woodland! So seemingly fierce the blaze that it lighted up with golden gleams the tower of a distant church beyond the wood! Yet, as I looked steadily, it became evident that the flames neither diminished nor increased; presently I discovered that the column of smoke rose from a spot entirely different—more to the foreground. In the end I had to confess with reluctance that my eyes had been deceived; there was no sensational forest fire at all! What I had seen was but the sunshine on an expanse of yellow bloom



on some rising ground beyond the belt of woodland, and on the old church tower, while a rare cloud shaded the nearer prospect.

What a silly goat I called myself! Looking nearer home I saw the same red-gold glow, which needed but the sunshine to wake it into flame. The disused quarry, not half a mile away, where the sun was bright, might have been an open gold mine—so brilliant the shining of its wealth of broom bushes! The hedge of gorse which bordered the road on both sides had no speck of green to mar its splendor.

“All the world is turning golden, turning golden.
Gold butterflies are light upon the wing;
Gold is shining through the eyelids that were holden
Till the spring.”



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The graceful verse haunted me all that day, repeating spontaneously, again and again, its tuneful refrain. For up at Ardmuirland we have to wait till May for settled springtide.

Later on I strolled across to her cottage to have a chat with “Bell o’ the Burn.” I found her busy at her washtub on the threshold of the door, but none the less ready to enter into conversation, as I leaned on the garden fence watching her tireless pink hands, as they worked up the snowy soapsuds.

“You’ve maybe haird the news, sir?” she began, a note of inquiry in her tone.

I had seen yesterday’s *Scotsman*, but not in those pages did any of our folk look for news. They read—those, at least, who possess that accomplishment—the stories in the *People’s Friend* and the like, if they were young; those who were older scanned the columns of the local newspaper, published in the county town, and believed firmly in the absolute truth of everything that was asserted there. But “news” meant something more intimate—something which affected our own immediate circle by its relation to the daily life and interests of those around us.

So, knowing this, I did not dream about any startling political crisis, recent mining disaster, or railway collision; Bell knew nothing about such events. Experience had taught me to allow her to enlighten me in her own way. So I put a question to that end.

“Have you heard some news?” I said.

Bell’s delight at being first in the field was evident.

“Christian Logan’s come intil a fortune!” she replied, with no little delight.

“That is good news, indeed!” I cried impulsively. For Christian was, beyond doubt, one of the poorest of our neighbors, and the most deserving.

“But where did the fortune come from, Bell?” I asked.

“Her mon,” explained Bell, “had a cousin oot in Ameriky as fowks allays said wes gey rich. But he niver so much as sent a word to Donal’ for years, till juist aboot a week afore the puir mon met wi’ his accident, ye ken. An’ he says in the letter,” continued the old woman, warming up with the interest attaching to her subject, “as Donal’ wes the only kin left him, an’ he’d find himsel’ nane the worse o’ that. Alexander Gowan, they callit him.”

“And so this cousin is dead, I suppose?”

“Na, na, sir,” replied Bell. “Gowan’s on his wye back frae Ameriky, ye ken, an’ Christian’s had word to expect him. Maybe he’ll be up here in twa, three days after he lands, like.”



This was news with a vengeance! An American who was “gey rich” might be a millionaire! All kinds of rosy visions began to float through my brain. Thoughts of the manifold additions and improvements which Val was dying to make in the church; of the shinty club we were so anxious to start, but could not for want of means; of the hall we planned to build some day for concerts and social gatherings in the long winter evenings—all started into new life at the prospect of a wealthy Catholic returning to his native land with gold in his pocket and a ready hand to scatter it liberally for the benefit of his kinsfolk!



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"I suppose he's a Catholic," was the remark to which my mental plans gave birth.

"Aye," said Bell, in a reproachful tone, "the Gowans wes all strict Catholics. The mon would nae turn agen his chapel oot there, I'm thinkin'."

(In Ardmuirland, be it known, "chapel" means the Catholic Church, and "church"—or more frequently "kirk"—denotes exclusively a Protestant place of worship; thus do penal laws leave their trail behind them!)

"Not likely!" I exclaimed boldly. For Bell began to look anxiously at me, as though the staunch Catholicism of this particular Gowan might be open to question. "Our religion is as free out there as any other; that's one good quality in republican America which our government lacks at present."

Still, my own mind misgave me a little. I knew of more than one of my countrymen who had been "strict Catholics" once, but who had lamentably fallen off through knocking about the world. However, we were not justified in classing Gowan with such.

"And will this good man put up at Christian's cottage?" I asked.

"Na, na, Mr. Edmund," said Bell, astonished, "Christian's nae ower weel provided wi' sheets and siclike, ye ken. Na! he's to stay wi' Mistress Dobie at Larrigie Inn. They've redded up the best rooms, and kindled fires and a', to be ready gin he comes soon. The fowks say as Gowan 'll likely have ane o' they motors, like the Squire's at the toon, so as he can drive about the countryside and see a' the changes that's come sin' he left."

The world was "turning golden," indeed! My cogitations as I made my way home were touched by the sheen.

Val took it all very calmly (as he is wont, dear boy! whenever I rhapsodize).

"If he happens to be a millionaire, Ted," he remarked—and a twinkle shone through his glasses—"you may give up all hope of getting anything out of him. It is proverbial that such gentry haggle over a six-pence when it comes to gratuities!"

During the week that followed the whole countryside had no more interesting subject of conversation than the coming of the rich cousin to "make a lady" of Christian Logan.

Christian certainly deserved any good fortune that might fall to her. She was the young widow of an under-gamekeeper at Taskerton, an estate in our neighborhood. Donald Logan had met with an accident, by the discharge of a gun, and had died of lock-jaw, consequent on the wound. He had not been very thrifty, poor fellow, for he was too fond of whiskey; the result was that very little means remained for the support of the family when the bread-winner had been taken. The proprietor of Taskerton was generally an



absentee, and the casual tenants of the place had little interest in those employed on the estate. Consequently, Christian had to do her best to support herself and her three young children by her own efforts. Tam and Kirsty, aged respectively twelve and eleven, had to continue at school for a year or two at least; the youngest, Jeemsie, who was only eight, had been deaf and dumb from his birth.



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Luckily, the agent of the estate, being a man of kindly feelings, was willing to allow the poor woman to remain for a time in the cottage they had occupied, and Val had approached the proprietor on the subject of a pension. At present, however, beyond a liberal donation for Christian's benefit, nothing definite had been settled. We had all subscribed to buy her a sewing-machine, and as she was a clever seamstress she was able to make ends meet by dressmaking. She had her cow, and her few hens, so altogether, with the sale of eggs and occasionally of milk, she was able to provide for her little ones for the present. She was such a cheery, kindly little body that every one at Ardmuirland was her friend; this accounted in great measure for the unusual interest in her prospects.

I felt that it would be but neighborly to offer Christian my congratulations upon her approaching good fortune. Her little house stood near a belt of trees on a rising ground, a few feet from the road that led higher up the hill. No other habitation was within a mile of it, and its solitary position was quite enough by itself to suggest to any one that a man who had made money across the "drink"—as I heard an American once irreverently style the Atlantic—would scarcely be likely to stay for any considerable time in such an out-of-the-world spot. To my mind it seemed incredible that he could be content for long with the comparative luxury of Mrs. Dobie's inn.

Christian sat at her machine in her clean little kitchen when I arrived there, and she called to me cheerily through the open doorway to enter, and rose to receive me. She was a plain little woman, about forty years old, probably; she bore the marks of her many anxieties on her brow—too early scored with wrinkles. I could not help thinking, as I saw her, that no fine clothes that her rich relative might buy for her would ever make her anything else than a plain country body; in silks and satins, even, she would still be the same homely Christian.

"I came over to say how glad I am to hear of your good fortune," I said when the usual greetings had passed, and I was seated in the chair of state by the fire—for the hillside was chilly, and fires were seldom wanting up there even in the summer weather.

"Thank you kindly, sir," was her answer. "Father Fleming was in himself yesterday, for the same reason. It is very good of the priest and yourself, sir, as well as our neighbors about, to take sic an interest in us. Indeed, I'm very thankful that God has been sae guid to us. It looks as though our troubles are coming to an end, with this guid news!"

"When do you expect your cousin?" I asked.

Christian took a letter from the mantelpiece, where a china dog had been guarding it.

"This is his last letter, sir," she said, with a touch of honest pride, as she handed it to me to read. "You will see what he says. He was to sail on the 14th, and that was about a

fortnight ago. Mistress Dobie had a message to say that he would be there about the first of June. He has business in Glasgow, which will keep him there a bit.”



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"It's a kind, friendly letter," I remarked, as I handed it back. "He speaks very nicely about you all."

"If only for the sake of the bairns, sir, I'm very thankful that we've foond sae guid a friend," she said with much feeling.

Jeemsie peeped in at the door just then. He was quite a handsome little chap, with regular features and a rather intelligent face.

"Jeemsie will be provided for now," I said, beckoning the child to me. He came, shyly smiling, and put his hand in mine.

"Yes, thank God!" was the poor mother's reply. "It's been a trouble to me to know what to do for him, and especially what'll happen to the bairn when I'm taken. But Father Fleming says his cousin can put him to some kind of institution for a year or two, where they can teach him to read and write and coont as well as any bairn wi' all his senses. For he's nae daft!" she exclaimed, with motherly pride. "He's just as sensible as can be aboot most things. He kens as weel as Tam aboot searching for the eggs, and he loves to fetch water from the well in his little pail for me, bless him!"

"Yes, it's a great thing for the child that his cousin is coming to look after you all. Jeemsie will be made a man of. I once knew a postman who was afflicted like Jeemsie, and he did his work better than any of the other men in the same office. The postmaster was quite proud of him. He couldn't talk, poor man, so there was no danger of his wasting time in gossip."

I took my leave after chatting a while, and rejoiced as I pictured to myself on the way home the lightening of so many burdens which had pressed heavily on the shoulders of that brave little woman.

A week later and we heard through Willy that Mr. Gowan had arrived at Larrigie Inn.

"An' a freer mon wi' his money, Mistress Dobie says, ye'd niver wish to see," was his estimate of the newcomer. "He was treatin' the fellows wi' drams a' roond, the nicht he cam'; he wes sae glad to be bock i' the auld place. He wes a loon o' fafteen when him an' his farther went an' to mak' their fortune in Ameriky, ye ken."

"I don't like to hear about that dramming business," was Val's comment to me later. "There's too much of that kind of thing already about here. However, we must make allowance for the man's natural joy at seeing his old haunts once more."

"Including the inn, I suppose! But he was too young when they left to have cultivated a very intimate acquaintance with that one!"



Gowan proved to be but one of our own rough crofters who had acquired so thin a veneer of civilization that it scarcely concealed the reality beneath. With a somewhat boisterous geniality he made instant friends with all of his former class in the neighborhood. With Val and myself he was not altogether at his ease. An abrupt awkwardness of manner, which we put down to shyness, characterized our intercourse, which was of rare occurrence.



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He drove up to Mass on a Sunday, not in a motor, but in the ordinary “machine” belonging to the inn—a kind of small wagonette, drawn by a single horse—in which he always occupied the seat next the driver, good-humoredly conveying any persons from that direction who might be coming up our way, either to kirk or “chapel.”

We heard glowing accounts of his kindness to Christian and the children—of constant excursions to the town; of the purchase of unlimited clothing for all the family, and of many costly presents, such as watches for Christian and Tam, pretty trinkets for little Kirsty, and toys for each of the bairns. He seemed to be never happy out of their company; when they were not driving about the country, visiting neighbors, or picnicking on the hills, they took their more important meals at the inn. The two elder children seemed to have left school for good; we heard later that Gowan had arranged matters with the authorities, stating that he meant to take the family back to America with him, or at any rate to find them a home elsewhere should he make a lengthy stay in Scotland.

Things had gone on thus for three weeks before Val alluded to Gowan, or anything connected with him. But his words showed me as soon as he began to speak that he had been thinking much on the subject.

“I don’t like this prolonged carnival of Gowan’s,” he remarked to me. “It’s doing no good. I hear of unlimited drinks at Larrigie day after day for all who choose to ask. Many of our young fellows are getting into the habit of dropping in there of nights and listening to the man’s stories of life ‘t’other side.’ He seems capable of standing a good deal of liquor himself, as he is never really overcome—only more coarse and noisy, the more he takes. I have had complaints from several of the fathers of families about the harm he is doing.”

“That’s rather bad!” was my answer. “But what about the Logans? I hear that he means to take them off with him, and he doesn’t appear to be a desirable guardian for those children, by all accounts.”

“It is that I’m most anxious about,” said Val.

And thereupon he became communicative. Things were really worse than I had thought. Gowan, it is true, still came to Mass, but he was fond of boasting to his boon companions that they had got beyond “all that nonsense in the States!” He had certainly, on his own showing, ceased to be a practical Catholic for years, and it was probable that his attendance at Mass and contribution of half a sovereign to the offertory every Sunday was merely the result of a desire to stand well in the estimation of the more staid members of the community, and might be classed with the free drinks and other signs of friendliness to the district. The character of the man rendered Val naturally anxious about the future of Christian Logan and her children, if they were to depend upon him for support in a strange land among strangers.



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“The one redeeming feature in his character,” summed up Val, “is his genuine affection for the children. His wife died about two years ago, it seems, and he is too old to marry again. So he appears to have devoted himself to the idea of practically adopting these three little Logans.”

“It seems to me a case of body versus soul for the poor little kids, if they are to trust to that old heathen for a proper bringing up. But the mother is a good woman, and has a will of her own.”

“That’s where it is so difficult to do anything,” said Val sadly. “She does not understand the state of the case properly, though I’ve tried to make it plain to her. The fellow is an avowed Free Mason. He can not practise his religion, and in a kind of self-defense he rails against it—though not openly to Catholics, I believe. She is deluded enough to imagine that the influence of herself and the children will win him over to the right path again. But it’s far more likely that he will win the children over to unbelief, if he is to become their practical parent. Christian acknowledges that his indulgence is spoiling Tam already.”

It was almost dramatic that at that moment a knock at the room door should prove to be from Elsie, who announced the presence of Christian Logan in the “priest’s room” asking for a few minutes’ conversation with his Reverence.

The interview proved to be somewhat long. Val gave me an account of it later in the day. Gowan had proposed that Jeemsie should be placed without delay in an English institution for the deaf and dumb, while the others traveled a little about Scotland before starting for America, as he had now decided to do. He had made his money in horse-dealing, it appeared, and was not satisfied with his present prosperous condition, but longed to make more money; probably, too, he was tired of idling, after a rather strenuous life spent in business.

Christian was willing to part with the little fellow for a time, but only on condition that he should go to a Catholic institution, of which Val had told her previously. The idea infuriated Gowan. What did religion matter? Protestant institutions of the kind were far in advance of Catholic. It was ridiculous to think of sending the boy anywhere except to a place thoroughly up-to-date. Finally he had refused to do anything in the matter unless he had free scope to place the child where he should think best.

The poor woman’s eyes were opened at last. She was absolutely determined that Jeemsie should be given up to no authority that was incapable of teaching him all that was necessary for the practice of his religion. She had come to pour out her difficulties to Val, and to ask further advice. He, of course, applauded her decision, and strengthened her in the resolution she had made, even though it might lead to a temporary withdrawal of Gowan’s liberality. Val was convinced that the man was too much attached to the children to break altogether with the Logans.



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Gowan had expressed his intention of going up to settle definitely with Christian about the matter of Jeemsie, and she was most anxious for Val to be present. To this he had at once consented; for he felt it a foremost duty to protect the faith of the little lad. So next morning the interview would come off.

“It was a stormy conference!” was Val’s first remark, when we met for lunch next day. “But we’ve won the victory for the little chap’s faith, though it has cost us Gowan’s further patronage!”

The man had refused to be persuaded to allow the priest to choose some institution to which Jeemsie might safely be sent—merely because it was a priest who wished to have a voice in the matter, Val was inclined to think; for the Protestant Home which Gowan favored was in no way superior. They discussed the question in all its bearings, and eventually Gowan lost his temper and showed his hand. He meant to bring up all the children Protestants! He had learned by experience what a hindrance it was to have to submit in everything to the dictation of priests, and he was determined to have no more of it!

It was at that stage that Christian interposed. Very quietly but firmly she spoke her mind.

“If you expect me to risk the loss of my children’s souls as well as my own for the sake of worldly advantages, Cousin Aleck, I may as well speak plainly. I would rather stay here and work myself to death than take your money.”

This produced a terrific storm of abuse from Gowan. He called her “priest-ridden” and every kind of fool and idiot. She would soon learn to repent of her folly, for he would go straightway to a lawyer and change his will! Not a penny would she get—now or later—from him, as she would find one day to her cost! Then he dashed away without further discussion.

“The fellow is a brute!” was Val’s conclusion. “They are well rid of him! What a blessing he showed himself in his true colors before it was too late!”

Gowan left the neighborhood that very day. No one knew his destination. Mrs. Dobie replied to all inquiries that Mr. Gowan had paid “like a gentleman,” and she was “sorry that some people did’na ken when they were well off!”—alluding, of course, to Christian. But Mrs. Dobie, not being “of the household of the Faith,” could not be expected to show sympathy toward a course of action which robbed her of so profitable a guest.

Thus were our golden dreams dispelled! Ardmuirland, indeed, took some little time to recover from the dazzling visions which the coming of “the millionaire”—as Val and I delighted to style him in private—had called up, but in a year or so Gowan’s name had



become a mere memory to most of us. Christian alone—true to her baptismal name—held that memory in benediction; every night she and her little ones gave a prominent place in their family prayers to the “Cousin Aleck” whom they all regarded as a generous benefactor. It was



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not difficult to interpret the mother's intention in thus making the man a constant object of prayer; to her the possession of God's grace appeared a good beyond all earthly riches and delights, and I can well believe that she even rejoiced that she had been called upon to give testimony of the faith that was in her. Her sentiments were doubtless those of Tobias of old: "For we are the children of saints, and look for the life which God will give to those that never change their faith from him."

V

"Dominie Dick"

"A light to guide, a rod
To check the erring and reprove."
(Wordsworth—"Ode to Duty")

Few of the many conversations I have had from time to time with old Willy have been more interesting than those upon the subject of schools and schoolmasters in the days when he was young.

In the early part of the nineteenth century education was conducted in a primitive fashion at Ardmuirland. In a small community, consisting almost entirely of Catholics, and those mostly in poor circumstances, a trained teacher was rarely to be found. In many country districts like ours the task of instructing the young devolved upon one or other of the better educated of the crofter class. For in those days even reading and writing—not to mention "counting," or arithmetic, as we style it—constituted a liberal education in Ardmuirland, and many of the people were unable to boast of possessing either. Hence when one of the community was sufficiently versed in such accomplishments he was looked up to as a qualified instructor.

Willy had passed through the hands of more than one of such schoolmasters, and his recollections on the subject are interesting. The one who seems to have made the most impression upon his memory was a better informed man than is usually found in the class to which he belonged.

"Finlay Farquharson was the best o' them a'! There wes saxty or siventy bairns went to his school at Carnavruick when I wes a loon. He'd been to Ameriky, ye ken, sir, and I doot he'd brought back wi' him a bit o' the Yankee tongue. Faix! He had a lively tongue! He niver wanted his answer when he had to come oot wi' it."

Farquharson's "Academy" was his little living-room—not over-spacious for such an assembly; but in those days no parental government legislated for so many cubic feet of

space for each child, and they seemed to keep in health and strength in spite of that fact. The school assembled in what we may term the winter months only, which in Scotland may be reckoned as nearly two-thirds of the year. The remaining months were occupied in farming work both by master and scholars.



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During the term (as we may call it) the procedure was as follows: Farquharson was accustomed to rise about four o'clock and to work for two or three hours at threshing corn. After an early breakfast he made preparations for his scholastic duties by clearing out of the way all unnecessary furniture—though there was little that was superfluous—and placing the long planks supported by big stones which served for forms. As some children were sure to be occupied with class work during the whole time, fewer seats were needed than would have been necessary otherwise. The schoolmaster's old mother, Margot, kept her own chair by the fire, where she kept an eye on the pot of soup and occupied herself with knitting. The one small table served as master's desk and as writing-table for those pupils who had advanced sufficiently in the art to be allowed to use a copy-book instead of a slate—but they were few.

The scholars arrived about eight o'clock. It was required of each, as part of the school fees, to bring a block of dried peat to serve as fuel for the fire. It was always the ambition of a boy of lively temperament, such as Willy represented himself to be, to choose as hard a "peat" as he could possibly find, to serve as a weapon in the mimic battles fought on the road to school. As the fire was composed wholly of peat, and the chimney was wide, the place would be often a difficult one to study in when the wind was in the wrong quarter. At such times, to use Willy's description:

"It wes juist a reeky hole! We wes all well learned to pit up wi' the reek! I niver thocht muckle o' reek aifter that schule!"

The proceedings began with reading; after that came spelling. "Coontin'" followed for those who were sufficiently accomplished.

"Them as wes best at the readin' spent nearly all day at the coontin' and writin'. The maister wes short enuch in the temper," remarked Willy on this point. "Aye, aye, he wes gey hot in the temper, I insure ye! I mind a loon comin' up to him ane day wi' a coont on his slate, ye ken, an' Farquharson wes that enraged at a mistak' i' the coont that he broke the slate on the laddie's heid an' left the frame hangin' like a horse's collar round his neck!"

Farquharson evidently held to the great principle that corporal punishment was part of a sound education. Behind the door was a stool, which served as a block upon which to stretch a victim whose offense deserved the extreme punishment, but that was not often required. A favorite instrument was the strap, or, as Willy termed it, "the belt." Should the master catch sight of an idler, or practical joker, he would throw the strap to the delinquent as a sign that a thrashing was due, and the boy or girl had to come up to his table and receive the punishment.

"Some wad be stiff to come up wi't, ye ken," explained Willy; "but he'd niver let a loon off, though he wes mair merciful-like to the wee lassies. He'd larnt by experience, ye



ken; for in the auld days, afore I went there, ane o' the lassies wes a month awa' frae the schule—he throosh her that severe.”



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About midday there was a recess, and the children ate their “pieces,” which they had brought from home, and spent a little time outside at play, while the schoolmaster took his simple meal. The favorite game was a kind of shinty. It was played by the boys with a ball, driven with sticks, each with “a big lump o’ wood at the end o’t.”

The more advanced pupils learned grammar.

“I niver learned nae graymer maseel’,” said Willy. “I couldna’ onderstan’ a word o’t. I thocht it a gey-like leetany to hear the graymer. ‘I mak’, thou mak’s, he mak’s—seemed to me nae sense, ye ken!”

There were no holidays as a regular thing. School went on in the season every week-day. But there was one great day in the year, which was looked forward to by both parents and children; it was that set apart for what we more delicately reared folk in these days would regard as cruel sport—that of cock-fighting! Sometimes as many as thirty of the lads would each bring his bird under his arm, and these in turn would be placed in the ring. Neighbors from far and near would come to the school for that day.

“The best fichter,” said Willy, “wes callit the King; the second best, the Queen; the third, the Knave. Them as wouldna’ ficht we callit ‘fougie.’ Eh, what a day that wes!”

But it must not be thought that the duties of the schoolmaster were confined to his school. He was a personage in the community when he had assumed his position as pedagogue. Since he was instructor of youth, he was regarded as capable of assisting the literary pursuits of their parents and elders.

“We callit the schoolmaster ‘Dominie Dick,’” explained Willy. “He wes a big mon i’ the distric’, ye ken, sir! He’d oft write letters for the fowk roond about!”

I gathered from the same authority that the “Dominie,” for the time being, was also the reliable reader of the public newspaper. When the weekly paper had arrived, all the men who were interested in what the world was doing would gather at some specified house to listen to the schoolmaster as he read aloud choice extracts. In his absence the best reader of the party was requested to undertake the duty.

“My faither,” said Willy, “wes aye conseedered the best aifter the schulemaister. If he miscallit a word the dictionar’ wes allas consultit; it wes on the table ready.”

This recollection called up another in commendation of his father’s reading powers.

“The maister o’ the Strathdalgie Schule wes a Protestant, ye ken, but he wouldna’ hae ony person read till him but my faither. He had to gae till the schulemaister’s bedside when he wes dyin’; for the puir mon wouldna’ hae the menister, as he likit a’ the words clear.”



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Farquharson's quasi-official position was on one occasion the cause of rather an unpleasant experience. One of his predecessors in office, an old man named McConnachie, had been forced to retire from the teaching profession on account of failing intellect. After an illness, when he was already far advanced in years, his mind gradually gave way, until he was nothing better than a harmless lunatic. No one grudged the old man a little oatmeal or a bag of potatoes now and again, and he could get milk for the asking from any of those who owned a cow. He lived all by himself in a small house, and a kindly neighbor would go in occasionally to "redd up"—in other words, put the place in order.

But the poor old fellow's lunacy became less harmless as he grew older. It developed into a kind of kleptomania. Should a housewife have a family wash hanging on her clothes-lines, it was not infrequently the case that many of the articles would mysteriously disappear. The most extraordinary objects would vanish from the houses—chimney ornaments, cups, spoons, flatirons, buttons, photographs, and such like gear. For a time no one suspected old McConnachie; though, upon reflection, after the matter had been cleared up it appeared that many of the losers had missed articles after one of his calls. When a venturesome spirit undertook to search the old man's habitation during his absence, a store of miscellaneous objects came to light, which revealed the hitherto unknown pilferer.

In another way, too, McConnachie became a nuisance to the community. Perhaps some faint recollection of one of his duties as "Dominie" may have led to it; but he began to show so violent a dislike toward any of the children who might cross his path that he would do his best to give them a good drubbing with his stick. In the case of the more simple he sometimes succeeded in seizing hold before the child had attempted to escape his clutches, and in giving the unfortunate culprit a good reason for flying home in tears to exhibit to an angry mother the marks of "t' auld schulemaister's wand!"

Under such circumstances it became necessary to take counsel with the Inspector of the Poor with a view to getting McConnachie placed under restraint. Matters were easily settled and a time fixed for his deportation to the County Asylum.

But though the old fellow was mad enough in some respects, he was sharp enough in others! It required diplomacy to get him to leave his home and undertake a journey even in the conveyance which the Inspector had promised to provide to take him to the railway station some miles away. Farquharson, on account of his office, was the only person in the community who was on terms of cordiality with McConnachie; for the old man had a great idea of his position in Ardmuirland, and held himself somewhat above the common run of people. With Farquharson he could converse as with one who was *almost* an equal—not absolutely,

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for he himself had been through some little training which the other had not. To Farquharson, therefore, the Inspector looked for assistance. He arranged for him to travel with the old fellow, under the pretence of visiting a large school on the invitation of a master there whom he knew; this supposititious friend had included McConnachie in the letter (really written by the Inspector) which Farquharson had received on the subject.

The old schoolmaster was easily duped by this trick, and on an appointed day the two set off. The first obstacle arose at the station, when Farquharson had taken the tickets, for which the "friend" had provided the necessary money.

"I should like to have my own ticket," the older man remarked with an air of dignity. "I'm not a bairn to be likely to lose it."

Here was a slight difficulty! Farquharson had taken a single ticket for the other and a return for himself. It would never do to allow this to be known. On the other hand, McConnachie must be kept in good humor or he would give trouble to his guardian, who began now to see the weak points in the plot. So trusting to the certainty of being able to get back the remaining half-ticket when the old man was safely lodged in the Asylum, he retained the single ticket and gave McConnachie the other.

They reached the end of their railway journey successfully, and Farquharson managed to explain their destination to a porter privately, and asked him to get a cab for them. The man was either stupid or was disappointed at receiving an insignificant tip, since Farquharson was not one to waste money unnecessarily; for he gave the direction "Asylum" to the driver in a voice that McConnachie must have been deaf not to have heard distinctly. Farquharson glanced at once at his companion, but the old man's face was expressionless, and he persuaded himself, almost against his will, that McConnachie was too much taken up with the novelty of the situation to catch the words spoken. The eagerness with which the old man took notice of every feature of their progress tended to confirm the idea, and by the time the Asylum was reached Farquharson felt more at ease.

"The grounds are well kept," remarked McConnachie as they proceeded up the short avenue.

"Aye, aye, they are that!" was the other's ready answer.

"It seems a big building!" said the old man, as they drove up to the entrance.

"Far bigger than I expected," said Farquharson.



The cabby rang the bell, and the door was opened by a man-servant, who came down the steps and opened the carriage door. Farquharson got out first and incautiously walked up the steps toward the door of the building. With a madman's cunning, McConnachie whispered to the servant:

"That's the gentleman I was to bring. He's gone in, so I need not wait. Tell the man to drive back."

And the agonized Farquharson beheld his charge rapidly driving away and leaving him behind alone.



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“Stop! Stop!” he cried in an angry voice. “That’s the man I was bringing here! He’s not fit to be left alone. I tell you he’s the daft man! I’m only a friend!”

“Quite so, sir,” said the servant quietly. “It will be all right if you will step in for a few minutes. We can easily explain to the Governor.”

Two other attendants had appeared on the scene by this time, and the gentle pressure of the servant’s hand on his arm induced the hapless Farquharson to ascend the steps once more and enter the hall.

He repeated his explanation to the other men, who treated it in the same quiet way as the first had done. Then it began to dawn upon him that they really took him for the madman and McConnachie for his sane companion.

It was a natural mistake as far as they were concerned; for it was quite a common thing for patients to suppose every one else to be mentally afflicted except themselves. Moreover, McConnachie had a more cultured manner than Farquharson at any time, and when the latter showed so much excitement on account of the trick which had been played upon him, he did not appear to advantage. He was so intensely angry and so apprehensive of the consequences of the disaster that he was scarcely coherent, and this justified the attendants in their view of the situation.

The Governor had already been prejudiced against him, when Farquharson at last obtained an interview with him, and took the same view as the others. The fact of his having given the return ticket to McConnachie made it difficult to explain that the other had no right to it; the faint glimmer of a smile on the face of the attendant while he was attempting to clear up that point filled poor Farquharson with dismay and rendered him still more nervous and excited.

So the poor schoolmaster was detained in the Asylum and old McConnachie returned home in state. All was put right in a day or two, for the Inspector was informed of the turn affairs had taken, and lost no time in releasing Farquharson. The unfortunate man did not dare to return to the district for some time. When he at last ventured to appear, McConnachie had long left the place and was dead and almost forgotten, and neighbors were too glad to welcome Farquharson back among them to remind him of his humiliation.

“Things is gey different now, sir,” was Willy’s summing-up on the subject of education. “The bairns get mair teechin’ noo, and less o’ the beltin’, an’ I’m no sure but they learn a’ the better for it!”

VI

BILDY



“Tis not the whole of life to live;
Nor all of death to die.”
(Montgomery—“Issues of Life and Death”)



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Old Widow Lamont and her spinster daughter, Robina, lived in a bit of a house on the edge of the pine wood that sheltered our presbytery from the east winds; they were consequently our nearest neighbors with the exception of Willy and Bell. They possessed a cow and a few hens, and Robina, who was a sturdy woman of forty, did the work of their small croft with occasional help from one of the males of the community. For in Ardmuirland, be it known, one neighbor helps another in return for the like service when required; thus Robina would lend a hand at hay-time, harvest, potato planting, and the rest, and would be entitled to a few days' plowing and harrowing on her own land in compensation.

The Lamonts, though not exceedingly poor, could not be called well-to-do. The absence of a resident man in a small croft must be of necessity a difficulty; but they were upright, hard-working women, and managed to maintain themselves in a simple, frugal way. Oatmeal and potatoes were grown on the croft; bread could be obtained from the passing baker's cart in exchange for eggs; butter, and sometimes milk, could be sold to neighbors; the widow's knitted stockings fetched a fair price with the hosier in the county town; in these various ways they made ends meet.

Old-age pensions were then unheard of, and the Lamonts would have thought themselves insulted had any one suggested parish relief for the old woman; although her helpless condition would have justified it, for she never moved from her corner by the fire, to which she was carried from her bed in the morning to be borne back to bed at night. An accident which had befallen her when in the prime of life had rendered her a cripple without power to move her lower limbs.

Like many of their class, the Lamonts were full of an honest pride, and although they may have possibly felt the pinch of poverty now and again, they would have scorned to acknowledge it. By the exercise of diplomacy Penny has often managed to help them in little ways from time to time; she will visit the old woman to inquire after her health, and take with her in a neighborly way some little delicacy in the shape of soup or pudding. At one time she tried to furnish her with some orders for stockings, but it turned out that the Lamonts considered it next door to heresy to take payment from the priest's house, and Penny's charitable attempts were frustrated. She found it better to "borrow" a few eggs occasionally (even though she was not in great need of them), and to more than pay their value in little presents—an acknowledgment of the kindness of the lenders.

"The very thing for the Lamonts!" exclaimed Val at breakfast one morning. He had been reading his letters, just delivered, and I was glancing through that day's paper. I looked up in token of interest.

"I have an application from the Inspector of the Poor," he continued, "for a quiet, reliable family, who would be willing to take charge, for payment, of a poor daft fellow. He is about thirty, and has been in this state since he was eighteen, when he had a bad fever. He is perfectly tractable, quite inoffensive, and thoroughly good-tempered. The

only reason for moving him from his present home is that it is in a village, and the children tease and annoy him. I fancy the Lamonts would jump at the opportunity.”



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I quite agreed with him. To my mind, Robina Lamont was a match for a far more dangerous character. She would be equal in strength to many an able-bodied man. But I felt doubtful whether the arrangement would be satisfactory as regarded the old widow. She was so helpless that unless the man was actually as harmless as was supposed it might be risky to place him in such a house. I voiced my objection, but Val was not impressed by it. He had great confidence in the judgment of the Inspector—a thoroughly able man, and shrewd withal.

When the question was proposed to the Lamonts they at once warmed to the idea. It appeared that one of the lads of their own family—now long dead—had been in much the same state, though *he* was inclined to be unruly at times; consequently neither the widow nor her daughter felt the least apprehension of difficulties in managing their patient. Thus it came about that Bildy Gow became a member of our community.

In Scotland we have many more diminutive forms of ordinary Christian names than is the case in England. William, for example, figures as Willy, Wildy, Will, Bill, Billy, and Bildy. The variety is useful in cases, which are of frequent occurrence, where the same name belongs to grandfather, father, and son; William, Wildy, and Bill are perfectly distinct. It was as Bildy that William Gow became known among us; before long every one dropped the unnecessary surname and he was spoken of habitually as Bildy simply.

Robina brought her lodger to Mass with her in state on the very first Sunday. He was rather a good-looking fellow, tall and straight, with fresh complexion, regular features and light-brown hair and moustache. He was neatly dressed, too, for he had evidently been fitted out for his new home by the liberality of the Inspector. Beyond a shy, vacant expression, Bildy gave no evidence of mental incapacity in his appearance. He kept close to Robina when they emerged from church, and seemed to rely upon her protection with the air of a shy lad, which was rather pathetic to witness. He was not a Catholic, but he had shown such distress when Robina had told him to sit at home with her mother that they were forced to let him go to church to keep him quiet.

On further acquaintance, Bildy did not belie the good character given him by the Inspector. He was merely a grown-up child. In his youth he must have been of a thoroughly quiet, innocent nature, for he showed it in his aspect still; his character had never developed beyond that innocent adolescence, while his mind had retrograded to a state resembling early childhood. If one spoke to him on the road he at once assumed the air of an exceedingly shy bairn—frightened and embarrassed. It would have been amusing were it not so sad. I could never extract a word from him on such occasions, so overawed was he!

From the first, while looking upon Robina as the supreme authority to which he owed implicit obedience, Bildy seemed to give all his affection to the old widow. He liked nothing better than to sit opposite her by the fireside, watching the tireless swiftness of

her knitting needles as they flashed in the firelight. When summoned by Robina for any duty, he would promptly comply, returning as soon as free to his favorite attraction.



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I was passing by the Lamonts' house one afternoon, and as Robina was working in her garden I stopped for a chat. After asking after her mother and things in general, the conversation turned on Bildy. Robina praised him highly.

"He's as biddable as a bairn," she declared. "He carries a' the water for us frae the spring, an' takes oot the coo, an' fetches her hame as weel as I could mase!'. He's nae tribble to us whateever!"

She then launched into details concerning Bildy which were very entertaining, and gave much amusement to Val over our dinner. It appeared that the poor fellow had formed a most reverential opinion of the priest on his first visit to our church for Mass. On his return home he sat by the fire smiling delightedly and murmuring to himself. They did not catch what he said, but after repeated questioning Robina found that he was quite pleased with the "chapel."

"An' yon mon!" he exclaimed. "Isna' he dressed fine? Wha's yon mon wi' the fine dress?"

"Yen's the priest," explained Robina. "Father Fleming, he's callit."

"Father Fleming! Father Fleming!" repeated Bildy over and over again, as though to familiarize himself with the sound of it.

"Aye, aye! He's the boy! He can gab, canna' he? He's the boy to tell us what to dee!" he continued in his broad Scots.

"It's extraordinary how well he behaves at Mass—or at any rate during the sermon," said Val when he heard the story. "I wish some others were as good!"

That reminded me of another anecdote. After one or two Sundays, Bildy had got familiar with the church, and was inclined to gaze about more than Robina approved of. She therefore took it upon herself to instruct him upon the sacred character of the place, and to threaten to keep him at home if he did not behave better.

"Remember, Bildy," she said as they started next Sunday, "it's the hoose o' God ye're goin' tee. Ye musna' glower about! Juist sit ye still an' look straicht at Father Fleming a' the time."

After that his manner was irreproachable. But one Sunday, as Penny was leaving the church after Mass, she caught sight of Bildy furiously shaking his fist—at her, she thought! So she mentioned the fact quietly to Robina, who promised to investigate the matter. It turned out that poor Bildy had so thoroughly assimilated her instructions as to the requisite behavior in church that he had been silently reproving what he thought irreverence. He had seen a crofter whom he knew very well dozing during the sermon, and had "wagged his fist" at him—righteously indignant.



“Sleepin’ i’ the hoose o’ God!” cried Bilty. “Yon’s nae the place to sleep in! I waggit my fist, an’ I sair fleggit him!”

Bilty evidently congratulated himself on having so successfully “sore frightened” the delinquent that he would never dare to behave so badly again.

Bilty’s respect for Val never waned. He never caught sight of the priest, even at some little distance, but his hand flew up to his cap in salutation, and remained there until Val had seen him and had returned his salute. This would happen if he saw Val at a window of our house just the same as when outside.

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Penny took quite a motherly interest in the poor afflicted fellow. Whenever he came on any errand from the Lamonts he was always given a piece of cake or fruit—anything sweet, for he had a child's taste. But although Bildy was supremely delighted, he seldom said more than "thank you, Ma'am!" I once suggested that she should refer to Val, and the experiment was successful in opening Bildy's mouth. After that the conversation would almost invariably run thus:

"Did you see Father Fleming on Sunday, Bildy?"

"Aye, aye! He's the boy! Father Fleming's the boy!"

Next to the old widow, Bildy loved the cow. She was his particular charge, and he was soon on intimate terms with her. Not only did he carry on familiar conversations with her, on his part, but it appeared that the cow made him her confidant in return. If he began to murmur something to himself as he sat by the chimney corner, they would inquire what he was talking about. It was generally arrant nonsense that he told them. Once Robina asked:

"Wha tellit ye that rubbish, Bildy?"

"The coo," he gravely answered.

On a damp, misty morning he had gone out as usual to drive the cow out to the meadow to graze. Widow Lamont, from her place opposite the window, noticed that they did not pass out in the customary way, and notified the fact to Robina. The latter accordingly ran out at once to inquire the reason of the delay. She found Bildy quietly fastening the door of the byre before returning to the house.

"Ye havna' fetched oot the coo!" she exclaimed. "Gae in an' drive her oot, Bildy!"

"Na, na," replied he, solemnly shaking his head. "She says it's ower cauld the day. She'll bide inside."

Bildy's hero-worship of my brother increased as time went by. He regularly came to Mass, and obedient to Robina's instructions sat still and looked "straicht at Father Fleming." On one particular Sunday, when we had a priest staying with us (an old friend of Val's), the latter invited him to preach. This did not suit Bildy at all. After Mass he walked home alone, not waiting for Robina, who was chatting with her neighbors outside the church, and showed by his manner that something was amiss. Widow Lamont put down her book, in which she had been piously reading her "Prayers for Mass," and accosted him with the usual formula:

"Weel, Bildy, what kind o' preachin' had ye the day?"



But the answer was not that which they took a simple pleasure in drawing from him usually. Bildy began to bite his hand—a trick he had when annoyed.

“That’s nae preachin’,” he cried indignantly. “Yon monnie canna’ preach! Wha’s the reason Father Fleming canna’ preach the day? Eh!” (with withering contempt.) “Sic a monnie preach!”

The diminutive, in Bildy’s phraseology, implied depreciation; that was why he stigmatized a regular six-footer as a “monnie.”



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When Doddy came to Ardmuirland, Bilty discovered his real vocation! Doddy—or, in English, Georgie—was the orphan child of Robina's sister. His father had married a second wife and had gone out to Canada, and Widow Lamont had insisted upon having the little chap with her; for his father and step-mother were both Protestants, and Doddy stood little chance of being reared in the faith of his baptism. So the man agreed, and undertook to pay a trifle weekly for the child's keep, until he could earn something for himself.

Doddy was almost a baby—not more than four, and quite small of his age; but he soon discovered that he had a slave at his beck and call in the spellbound Bilty. The man seemed to worship the little fellow. Whenever Bilty was free from his ordinary occupations he was playing with Doddy, as though they were both children—with this difference: Doddy was always the tyrant, and Bilty the submissive subject.

It was a proof of the man's absolute harmlessness that he never so much as touched any one who angered him. Sometimes other children, attracted by Doddy, would come to join in the games, and often drove poor Bilty away. He would slink off, the picture of misery, and make his way home, biting his hand—his only sign of displeasure.

When Doddy was five, and had to attend school, Bilty would watch with the utmost patience the road by which the child had to return, until he caught sight of the tiny figure in the distance; then he would run to meet Doddy with every demonstration of joy, pick him up, set him on his shoulder, and amble off up the hill to the cottage.

Bilty had been about six years in Ardmuirland, and had become a favorite with every one. The poor fellow was so unfeignedly pleased to receive any little notice from any one that all accosted him kindly, and no one in the district would have dreamed of causing him unhappiness. Doddy had grown into a sharp little lad of seven, and was no longer so dependent upon Bilty for companionship. Yet Bilty did not relinquish altogether his post of guardian, but kept a wary eye upon the movements of his little master, ready at all times to do his bidding.

Winter set in that year unusually early. At the beginning of December earth and water were bound in the chains of a very hard frost. Nothing could more delight the heart of a schoolboy, and those of Ardmuirland were in their element. There was a small, shallow pond close by the schoolhouse, and there they were able to slide and sport about to their hearts' content. But children are changeful. When the frost had lasted more than two whole weeks, the little pond was not exciting enough. There was a mountain lake about a mile farther on, a much larger piece of water. Thither the more adventurous spirits determined to go one holiday afternoon. Doddy, who was precocious for his years, made up his mind to go too, proud in being the companion of much bigger boys. Unluckily, none of the parents of the boys had any idea of the proposed adventure; had they known, the project would have been sternly prohibited. It is possible that the young adventurers knew this and kept the matter quiet.



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But Doddy's faithful guardian had watched the boy steal off, to be met by five or six others, and followed them at a distance. He did not venture to join the party openly, fearing to be driven off ignominiously, as he often had been before on other occasions. By the time he reached them they had been some half-hour at the lake, and had most of them ventured cautiously to try the bearing power of the ice. The long frost had made this quite safe in most parts; but, unluckily, the lads were not aware that there were other portions where rising springs prevented the water from freezing much, if at all. As long as they kept near to the place upon which they had first set foot all was well; but security made them venturesome. They started a game of shinty, and threw themselves into the sport with fervor.

Bildy, partly hidden behind the bushes which skirted the water, watched the game with interest, his eyes on his beloved Doddy. Suddenly, while he looked on, Doddy disappeared, and a shout of terror arose from the other boys, who were too full of fear to do much toward helping the unfortunate child, though one or two slid down prostrate and tried to crawl to the hole into which Doddy had fallen, in order to help him out with their sticks.

It remained for Bildy to come to their assistance. With a frightened cry the man rushed over the ice to the spot, and regardless of the cautions which the others shrilled at him, plunged into the water. Doddy had fallen in where there was only very thin ice around the edge of an open sheet of water. Luckily, it was shallow for a man, though it covered the child. Bildy managed to seize the boy and rose up gasping from the pool, holding Doddy aloft. He seated the frightened child on his shoulder, and was able to keep half his own body out of the water. Thus they remained till help came in the shape of one or two farm-servants, who had been summoned by the screams of the boys.

It was not a difficult matter to get the two out of the water safely; indeed, any one more sensible than poor Bildy could have lifted the child onto thicker ice, after wading some paces in the water. Both were shivering with cold and drenched with water, which froze on their clothes during their hurried progress home to bed.

The after-effects were not serious, as far as Doddy was concerned. He got a severe cold, but nothing worse—not taking into account the castigation administered with a good-will by his "auntie." With poor Bildy it was different. He had been in the ice-cold water far longer than the boy, and a serious attack of pneumonia was the result. The poor fellow had probably little stamina. He did not rally, even when the climax seemed to have been successfully passed, but grew weaker every day.

"Robina Lamont wants me to go to that poor fellow," Val said one day. "She wants me to do what I can for him, as the doctor gives no hope of recovery. I can baptize him conditionally, of course, and I am starting now. Would you like to come, Ted?"



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I was most anxious to accompany him, and we set out at once for the Lamonts' cottage.

Bildy looked frightfully wasted; his face was the color of parchment, and his brown eyes looked enormously large and startlingly bright. But what touched me more than his emaciated appearance was the wonderful expression of emotion which shone from those large eyes as we appeared at the bedside; they looked at Val with the yearning affection that one sees sometimes in a faithful dog. The poor fellow put out his white, wasted hand to Val with evident delight.

"Bildy's been wearyin' for ye, Father," said Robina. "He's often cried out for Father Fleming."

The dying man's eyes were proof that she spoke truly.

The short ceremony was soon over, and after some prayers for the sick man we took our leave. For the few days that he lingered after that, the visit of the priest—twice every day and sometimes oftener—was the culminating point of satisfaction for poor Bildy.

I was there with Val when the end came. Bildy passed away quite peacefully while we joined in the prayers for the dying; a calm smile was on his face, and some vision of delight before his wide-open eyes, which it is not for mortals to attempt to fathom.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Val, as we took our way home; "life has held little of happiness for him. Indeed, one can hardly call it life in the full sense of the word; it was mere existence, as far as we can see."

"Let's hope that life has begun for him at last," I said reverently.

"I have little doubt of that," replied the priest.

VII

SMUGGLERS

"My enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire."
(*"King Lear"*—Act IV, Sc. 7.)

"Aebody kent Davie Forbes was tarrible at the smugglin'," said Willy.

We had been discussing the *pros* and *cons* of illicit distilling—known inland as "smuggling"—and I found that Willy agreed with the general opinion of the district that



the only harm in it was the penalty due “gin ye get foond oot by the gauger.” He assured me that in his young days the practice was widespread. This had brought us to Davie Forbes and his persistence in escaping government dues, and led on to the narrative which I here set down in intelligible English.

Davie was a fine, hearty specimen of a Scottish crofter, whose appearance did not tally with his acknowledged seventy-nine years; for his handsome, ruddy face, framed by white whiskers, and crowned with abundant, curly white locks, showed scarcely a wrinkle. He was stalwart and straight, too, as many a man twenty years his junior would dearly love to be.

Davie’s wife had been dead many years at the date of this story; his only daughter, Maggie Jean, was housekeeper for him and her two unmarried brothers, Jock and Peter. Like many of his fellows who might have to support a widowed mother or other helpless relatives, he had not married until rather late in life. Consequently, Maggie Jean, the youngest of the family, was a strapping lass of thirty, and Jock, the eldest, a “lad” of thirty-six; for an unmarried man in our neighborhood, be it known, is a lad till he becomes decrepit!

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The family residence of the Forbes stood about half-way up Ben Sgurrach, the highest hill in the district, and the house was at least 1,000 feet above the sea. It was sheltered from the east wind by a clump of scarecrow-looking pine trees, and a spur of barren rock rose behind it on the north. I could imagine those trees, though I have never seen them; we have some such in our little wood behind the presbytery. Gaunt-looking figures they are indeed! Some have been twisted into uncouth shapes by adverse winds; others stand draped in veritable garments of gray lichen—weird and shaggy. The latter, seen in the dusk, are calculated to terrify a chance comer who might find himself in their neighborhood; for he would probably mistake them for goblins.

A copious spring of excellent water and several convenient crevices in the surrounding rocks made Davie's place an excellent site for a still. His son Jock was occupied with odd jobs provided for him as handy man at a shooting lodge not far from the foot of the hill, where he tended the garden and looked after the pony at ordinary times, and acted as gillie when the shooting season came round. Peter did most of the work on the croft, lower down the hill; for David himself was getting past arduous labors, though he directed the distilling, in which Peter, and occasionally Jock, did the greater part of the work. Much of the barley for the still grew on their own land, where also they raised corn for their own oatmeal and for Maggie Jean's chickens, as well as turnips for her "coo." The customers for whiskey were many; for owing to its innocence of government duty it was cheaper than could be got from a merchant, while for quality it was renowned. Davie was a past master in the art of distilling, and the secluded nature of his storehouses enabled him to keep it until its rawness had worn off with age.

Many a tale was told of Davie's adventures in his contraband trade. In days when he was young and strong revenue officers would scour the hills with a small band of soldiers in their company, the better to over-awe the country folk. On one such occasion Davie had the misfortune to be apprehended in his house, when off his guard; for he was well known to the preventive men of the district, who had long been seeking to trap him. They had tracked him from his still, which they then took charge of, and surrounded his house to prevent escape. But Davie was too wary for them in the end. He feigned submission, and got his old mother to bring out refreshments for the party within the house, and went himself to the door with glasses and whiskey for the two soldiers on guard there. But they never tasted their dram; Davie was the renowned wrestler of the neighborhood, and in a second or two he had tripped up both men and had made off for some secret hiding-place in the hills before the party inside, aroused by the cries of the sentinels, were able to understand what had happened. Both the unfortunate soldiers had been so badly bruised by their fall on the flagstones near the doorway that they were unable to rise without help.

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At another time he was still more successful. The revenue officers and their escort surprised his house at midnight, and demanded admission in the King's name. Old Jeandy, his mother, who was then alive, made as much difficulty as possible in getting the door open in order to give Davie time to conceal himself. But he did better than hide in the house. Springing out of bed, he actually broke a hole through the "divets" or turfs of the thatch, and creeping through it, climbed down outside, just as his adversaries, certain of capturing their prize, were mounting the ladder which led to his bed-chamber. When the exciseman saw the empty bed he cried with an angry oath:

"Here's the nest—still warm; but the bird's awa'!" The "bird" had flown to a more hidden place of retirement under cover of the darkness!

In later years Davie was not much molested by the representatives of the excise. A gauger was indeed stationed in a town ten miles distant, but he was elderly, and not over energetic. He would make a formal visit now and again to suspected districts, and content himself with a few casual inquiries. As a matter of fact, he was personally quite inadequate to the task of searching for illicit stills in a district of such abundant hidden recesses.

But there was a change of front when the old officer retired and a young and energetic man succeeded him. A "new broom" is eulogized in proverb; and Mr. Michael Bonar, being new to his district, and a man of youth and determination, boasted that he meant to sweep away the taint of smuggling from the neighborhood of Ardmuirland, which bore a bad name in that respect.

The boast of the incautious gauger was repeated far and wide, and a strong spirit of opposition was aroused. Many a wary practitioner began to devise cunning means of concealment, and to invent traps to catch their adversary and turn him into ridicule. Davie Forbes was not behindhand in making remote preparations for the ganger's certain visit to him. But it was then mid-winter, and if Bonar was the canny man that he was said to be, there would be little fear of any attempted search for Davie's implements and stores before spring had set in. So the Forbes family congratulated themselves upon the security of their airy nest, and would smile grimly when the name of Bonar was mentioned.

The gauger was, it is true, canny, but his youth made him perhaps a trifle too venturesome. He was not unused to climbing, and had scaled many a mountain more imposing than Ben Sguarrach; but it was not in winter; forgetfulness of that trifling circumstance led to his discomfiture. Ben Sguarrach was indeed no pleasant place in wintry weather. Its open spaces were swept by icy blasts; snow often drifted to unparalleled depths, and made the ascent dangerous to those who were not familiar with the mountain in its more peaceful aspects.



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To Bonar's ardent mind the season of the year seemed likely to assist rather than hinder him. Days were short; nights were dark (if the moon should happen to be unpropitious), but they were long. No work was possible at such a time in a mountain distillery, and stores could not be shifted so readily as in summer time. So he determined to bide his opportunity and make a secret visit to Davie Forbes' dwelling, just to reconnoiter. He would thus be enabled to form his plan of campaign for a more bold attack.

Unfortunately, the gauger did not thoroughly know the people he had to deal with or he would have made allowance for their clannish devotion to each other's interests. Every one recognized him as a public enemy, and however politely he might be treated public sympathy was on the side of his opponents. He might flatter himself that he was keeping his intentions and movements absolutely secret, yet it was impossible not to take some one or other into his confidence; thus it came about that tidings of his intended visit flew to Davie at least a week before his attempt.

In consequence of this fact, all incriminating evidence was carefully concealed by the old man and his sons, and it would have taken a sharper man than Bonar—intelligent as he was—to discover any traces of illicit distilling in the neighborhood of their house. There was one suspicious feature only; a large eighteen-gallon barrel, full of something—whatever the liquid might be—was barely covered by peat-turfs heaped over it under the shelter of the end wall of the byre. But it had not been overlooked; arrangements had been made in its regard, should circumstances demand its more thorough concealment, otherwise it must not be disturbed. For—if the truth must be told—that particular cask contained the store of whiskey which Davie had been carefully preserving for his last act of hospitality; it was for the entertainment of those who would attend his funeral. Who, indeed, was able to provide refreshment for the crowd of mourners who would surely assemble on such an occasion, if not Davie, whose “whuskey” was renowned in the whole countryside?

Bonar had the good sense to keep from every one the actual date of his intended visit, lest tidings should reach the Forbes. He fixed upon a night when there would be an early rising moon to light him. On the morning of the day he made all his preparations very carefully. In view of an absence of some hours, he provided himself with a good packet of sandwiches and a flask of spirits. He then set out for Fouranbuie Inn, a dreary hostel about four miles distant from the foot of the mountain. There he made a substantial meal, and about four in the afternoon started on his quest. He had resolved to ride off from the inn on his bicycle, ostensibly toward a village farther on; then to dismount at the foot of Ben Sgurrach, and, hiding his machine in some bushes, to start the climb as dusk fell. Jock, as he had found out, was accustomed to approach from another direction when returning from work.



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The January day was already closing when Bonar began the ascent. The climb was decidedly pleasant; the wintry air, the excitement coming from the spirit of adventure, the vigorous exercise—all tended to raise the young man's ardor, and he trod the upward path with the steady, swinging pace of a Highlander.

The moon had scarcely risen when clouds began to drift across the sky, and the wind became more boisterous. The darkness increased, and soon it became almost impossible to discern the path. Then cold, soft particles brushed his cheek, and he realized that snow was beginning to fall. In a snowstorm he had no better prospect of finding his way to his bicycle down below than up to Davie Forbes' house. So he kept mechanically groping his way upward, although the storm had commenced in earnest now.

There was less difficulty in progressing while the pretty well-defined pathway could be kept to; but the falling snow began to obliterate its traces. His entire surroundings soon became shut out from the man's vision. He moved on resolutely, although his face smarted and his eyes were blinded by the steadily descending snow, which surrounded him on all sides like a moving curtain of grayish white. He owned to himself that it was impossible to proceed, but what was he to do? To return was just as impossible!

Fortune at last favored him. Staggering through the wind and snow of the ever-increasing storm, he ran unexpectedly upon a lofty wall of rock looking to him like a high cliff. He had evidently lost the path, for here was an insurmountable obstacle. Clinging to the rough surface, he cautiously felt his way along the rock for some yards. He was still ascending, but the ground was rough and piled with small stones, which had crumbled off from the main wall and lay in heaps beneath it. He knew enough about Scottish mountains to expect to find an opening in the wall large enough to enable him to creep into some kind of shelter; he was not disappointed, for soon he came upon a crevice—not deep enough to be called a cave, but affording some temporary relief from the storm, which had by this time assumed a furious aspect.

The retreat happened to be under the lee of the rock, so that although it had little depth, he was protected from the violence of the storm; the relief was great after the fatiguing struggle he had been undergoing. He managed to strike a match and look at his watch; it was only six o'clock. Had he to pass the night in that chill and dreary region?

Gruesome anecdotes rushed tormentingly to memory. It was but last winter that he had read of the finding of a man's body, stark and cold, not fifty yards from his own threshold; he had fallen helpless, faint from incessant struggling through the snow-drifts and too weak to make his cries for help heard above the rushing of the wind and the swish of the snow on the window behind which his terrified wife was anxiously awaiting his coming.



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And what of Bonar himself? He might at that instant be miles away from any human habitation; it might be days before a human being chanced to pass that way! Would his body confront some wandering shepherd or some sportsman months hence, when the snows had gone, and, perhaps—horrible thought, yet possible to be realized!—after carrion birds had made their onslaught on the foul thing it had become?

Be sure he called himself every kind of idiot for venturing on such a fool's errand at such a time. But that did not warm his shivering limbs or infuse patience into his almost despairing heart. The cold was intense. He was obliged at last to move away from his shelter—such as it was—and in spite of the thick snow beneath his feet, and the hurrying flakes still noiselessly but relentlessly falling, to trample some kind of pathway in which he might pace backwards and forwards to keep the blood circulating in his veins.

It was not quite dark, but the gray curtain of falling snow shut out everything from his vision; no sound could be heard but the rush of the wind over the slopes, and an occasional wail nearer at hand, as it swished round a corner of the rocks behind him. He dare not attempt to climb higher, nor dare he descend. What unexplored expanses of moorland might lie beyond, to lure him farther away from the chance of shelter or rescue? What hidden pitfalls might not lurk below, to trap his inexperienced feet and hurl him to his death?

Warmed by his exercise, he crept back into his recess to await the possibility of some cessation of the storm. Busied with anxious thoughts, he failed to notice the gradual lessening of the snow-flakes and the lull in the wind beyond the rocks. It was only when the moon shone out clearly once more that he perceived that the storm was over.

Courage returned at once. He left his shelter and tried to find the direction of the upward path. Light had dispelled his fears. It was better to trust himself to the dangers of the higher level than to risk a fall into some crevice on the downward way. Before his eyes lay stretched out a vast snowfield! More dazzlingly white in the moonlight than before, a thick carpet of snow lessened every inequality of surface; it softened every hard outline, while it filled up depressions. Sounding every step as he advanced, he trod slowly upwards; plowing now and again into drifts waist-deep, staggering over submerged boulders and stony heaps whose unexpected existence would often imperil his balance, he managed to climb considerably higher. But his progress was necessarily slow. He kept as near as possible to the rocky ridge which had sheltered him; for on his other hand the ground sloped downwards in a steep gradient, and the treacherous snow might well conceal many a deadly peril.



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His strength was becoming exhausted by the severe strain of wading through the deep drifts when, turning round a corner of the wall of rock beside him, his eyes were gladdened by a welcome sight. Across the expanse of snow he could see shining a tiny bright light. It was no reflection from the moonbeams, for it burned with a reddish glow amid the dazzling whiteness all around. His courage revived; he was certainly not far from some habitation—perhaps the very one he sought! The thought filled him with fresh vigor; his wearied limbs gained new strength, and he climbed forward with energy and decision. But, alas! in spite of his efforts, the light seemed to recede; it grew gradually smaller and less bright until he lost sight of it altogether.

The man's powers of endurance were well-nigh spent. His food had been eaten long before while he lay in shelter; his flask—more carefully husbanded—was now empty. He almost gave up striving. Why not give way to the almost uncontrollable desire to lie down and rest in the snow? He could hold out no longer!

It was at that critical moment that through the intense stillness of the mountain solitudes he heard the bark of a dog! Once more he picked up courage. Staggering on a few steps further, he saw from behind an intervening rock, which had concealed it till then, the light from a window not far ahead!

All interest in his errand had departed long before. What did he care if the mountain were full of illicit stills? The only desire that possessed him now was that roused by the human instinct in every man in peril of his life—the desire to escape from danger. Oh, for sufficient strength to creep onwards! If he could but hold out a little, shelter and warmth, and—above all—safety would be his! So once again, wearily, painfully, and slowly, he plowed his way through the drifts toward the beacon that shone ahead.

* * * * *

Within the modest dwelling to which Davie Forbes was wont to refer as his “hoosachie” (little house), on snow-clad Ben Sguarrach, the living-room looked cosy enough on that wild evening. By the two windows—one at the gable-end of the house, the other near the door—no icy draught could enter, for both apertures were hermetically sealed! All the ventilation deemed necessary during the daytime came through the usually open door, by which Maggie Jean was continually passing in and out, bent on domestic duties. (Like other Scottish housewives, she carried out much of her rougher and dirtier housework in the open.) At night, when work was over, the bright lamp and fire of glowing peat and blazing logs kept the house warm and snug; the pungent “reek” from the peat, too, acted as a healthy disinfectant.

Everything was scrupulously clean. The flagged floor, the deal table, the dresser, with its shelves filled with crockery—all spoke of frequent and thorough scrubbing. The high mantel-shelf bore brass candlesticks—more for ornament than use—which had been

polished till they shone like gold. The very walls had been so often subjected to Maggie Jean's whitewashing brush that they were spotless.



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Under the overhanging ingle-nook, in which a ham or two were hanging overhead, sat Davie in his own special corner and his own special chair, calmly smoking; opposite sat Jock, a black-bearded man of sturdy build, who was also smoking. Both were listening to Maggie Jean, who, seated near her father, was reading in a monotonous voice the choice extracts from a three-days-old local paper. Now and again, as the snow beat more forcibly upon the window, or the wind moaned round the corner of the house, or drove the peat reek in gusts into the room, she would pause and glance anxiously through the uncurtained window near the door. For Peter had gone down to the croft to bring back a bag of turnips for her “coo” during this unforeseen spell of fierce weather. The storm had come on suddenly, and provender was low; so Peter had volunteered his services in his characteristically shy way (which a southron, perhaps, would have taken for an indication of surliness), and his sister, in equally characteristic Scottish fashion, had accepted the offer with the air of one who had a right to it. Yet all the while (I am sure, for I know the type well!) Peter was full of tender compassion for the poor beast, and Maggie Jean’s heart overflowed with solicitude for her brother’s safe return.

“Eh! But it’s a fearfu’ nicht, and nae mistak’!” old Davie would exclaim, as the storm made itself felt more than usual.

“Aye, aye, it is thot,” was Jock’s imperturbable reply.

And Maggie Jean, with an anxious sigh, would resume her slow chant, punctuated by occasional glances outside.

But a dash at the door from without, and Don’s joyful barking, told of the return of the dog and his master. Snow-clad Peter, with his lantern, looking like some rustic Santa Claus—all white from head to foot—made his appearance, and with much stamping and shaking off of the snow from his garments, divested himself of his wraps, and joined the family circle, pushing his way past Jock to the corner nearest the fire, his dog following at his heels.

“Eh! But it’s bin gey stormy!” he said as he filled his pipe.

“Nae doot o’ thot!” hazarded Jock, solemnly sucking away at his.

“The sna’s gey deep, I doot,” remarked Davie interrogatively.

“Some o’ the reefs is fower foot an’ mair,” answered Peter nonchalantly, between puffs of smoke.

The announcement caused no visible surprise. Maggie Jean made a diversion.

“It’s fair noo,” she said, glancing through the window, “and there’s a bonny moon!”

“Aye,” responded Peter. “There’s bin nae sna’ this guid while.”

The party had settled down to silent contemplation of the cheery fire, the men enjoying their pipes, Maggie Jean busy with her knitting. No sound disturbed the peaceful calm except the regular faint click of the rapidly moving knitting-pins.



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Suddenly there was a loud noise at the door. It was not so much a knock as the fall of some heavy body against it. Don's startled bark roused all from their seats, and Peter made for the door at once, having first quieted the dog by the forcible argument of a well-directed kick. "It's a mon," he cried in surprise as he opened the door, "faint wi' the cauld!" And at once strong arms lifted the prostrate form out of the snow and bore it to the warm hearthside.

It was a man—young and handsome. He was well dressed, and his thick gloves, gaiters and strong boots, together with his warm clothing, showed him to be not altogether unprovided against the cold whose unusual potency had overcome him. He had evidently tramped for some distance in deep snow, and gave proofs of more than one fall into the drifts.

The men busied themselves in efforts for his restoration. Maggie Jean produced whiskey, which they administered in small doses; Jock and Peter drew off the man's sodden boots and socks, and chafed his hands and feet in the warmth of the fire. Old Davie stood regarding the stranger attentively during these proceedings.

"It's himsel', I doot," he remarked to Jock at last. "D'ye ken him?"

"Aye, aye," said Jock dispassionately. "I ken him fine. I see him in the toon last market-day. It's himsel', sure enough!"

"Eh! Puir body!" exclaimed old Davie. "And mayhe the creetur wes on his wye t' oor still."

"Nae doot o' thot," remarked Peter, while Jock wisely nodded assent.

"No' but what he'd find it gey hard to come up wi't in the sna' and a'!" added the latter, in a tone of unrestrained congratulation.

They spoke in half-whispers, and never ceased their charitable ministrations the while. Not a word passed on the subject again, for in a few minutes the stranger had gained consciousness. He looked in a puzzled way from one face to another, not realizing for the moment where he was. Davie was the first to speak.

"The storm's bin ower muckle for ye, sir, I'm thinkin'," he said kindly. "It's weel ye chanced to find y'r wye t' oor wee hoosachie. It's nae muckle to be prood on; but it's better ner bein' outside in siclike weather, I doot!"

Bonar suddenly became aware of the identity of his hosts. He had no doubt that this was Davie Forbes, whom he had come to spy upon and denounce! But he was no coward, and quickly reassured himself that duty alone had led him. Still, he was indebted to his enemies!



“I’m greatly obliged to you, indeed,” he said with genuine gratitude. “I probably owe my life to the good luck that led me to your door.”

“Na, na, mon,” replied Davie. “Ye’ve naething to thank us for. But ye’ll need a bit supper!” he added, as Bonar rose to his feet and seemed about to prepare for departure. (He felt rather unsteady on his legs, but go he must, as he assured himself resolutely.)



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“Aye, sure!” cried Maggie Jean, seconding her father’s hospitable invitation. And without another word she produced from various hidden receptacles tablecloth, knives and forks, bread, oatcake, butter, cheese, and jam, with the rapidity of a conjurer—as the dazed Bonar thought. Then down came a frying-pan, and she began to cook eggs and ham over the bright fire.

It was impossible to resist, and Bonar had no wish to refuse the food he needed so badly.

“You’re very good, I’m sure!” he faltered out. “I really think it was hunger alone that made me faint. I’ve never done such a thing in my life before!”

“Ye’d be nane the worse for a wee drappie sperrits afore y’r supper,” said Davie. “Peter, lad, fetch oot a drap frae yon jar beyont!”

Peter dutifully obeyed, retiring into some back recess and returning with a small jug of whiskey, from which his father poured out drams for the guest and himself.

“Y’r guid health, sir!” he said hospitably, lifting his glass. “May ye be nane the worse for y’r wettin’, the nicht!”

Bonar would have been less than human to have refused. He quietly sipped his whiskey, which was excellent. The spirit gave him renewed strength; the savor of Maggie Jean’s cooking whetted his appetite. He owed it to himself to take ordinary care of his health, he reasoned interiorly. He would tell them who he was, though, before he left.

He had indeed been saved from serious disaster, if not from death, by means of this family. Peter’s lantern—which he had not troubled to extinguish when the moon rendered it no longer necessary—had been Bonar’s first guiding-star. Don’s bark had renewed his energy, and the result was shelter and hospitality. Like a sensible man he accepted the good fortune which had fallen to him, and ate a hearty meal.

When it came to the question of starting out again, he found it less easy than he had anticipated.

“Ye’ll nae think o’ leavin’ this hoose the nicht!” the old man declared, when, after his supper and a pipe, Bonar touched on the subject.

“It’s an impossibeelity for ony mon as disna’ ken the hill yon to find his wye up or doon in siclike weather,” Jock added grimly.

Bonar knew how true was Jock’s remark. Nevertheless, he felt very uncomfortable at the prospect of remaining there for the night, as Davie had proposed. Did they know

who he was? It seemed most unlikely, with the kindness they had shown him! Yet he could not stay, he told himself, under false pretences.

“It’s more than kind of you to treat me like this,” he said. “I could never have expected such a friendly welcome to one who is a perfect stranger to you all.”

“Nae altogether a stranger, whateever,” returned Davie—and for a moment there was ever so slight a suspicion of a twinkle in his kindly old eyes. “Ye’re the new gauger we’ve haired sae muckle about, I’m thinkin’.”



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“Quite so,” stammered Bonar, rather shamefacedly, “and—it’s really very good of you to show me so much kindness.”

“Na, na, sir,” said the old man warmly. “I should be wantin’ in human feelin’ if I wes to turn a dog oot sic a nicht—still mair a fellow-creetur. Na, na, sir! Juist ye sit still, and Maggie Jean’ll redd up the bed for ye beyont for y’r nicht’s rest!”

So in the smuggler’s very house the smuggler’s natural enemy was bound to rest for the night, having been warmed at the smuggler’s hearth and cheered and invigorated by whiskey that had paid no duty!

It was with changed mien that Bonar trod his downward path next morning under Peter’s guidance.

Be sure he lost no time in applying for removal to a new sphere of labor! Let others tackle Davie Forbes and his sons if they wished; as for himself, he could never so repay the fearless generosity to which he owed—as he firmly believed—the saving of his life!

VIII

PHENOMENA

“This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.”
(*“Hamlet” Act I, Sc. 1.*)

Strolling across the little stableyard one day to have a look at Tim, our pony, I heard from the open door of the kitchen Penny’s voice, raised in expostulation.

“*Ghost*, indeed!” And withering scorn was expressed in the very tone of her ejaculation. “When you’re my *hage* you’ll have learned to take no ’eed of such nonsense! There’s no such a thing; and I’m surprised as a Catholic girl, born and bred, should be that superstitious! You mustn’t believe such rubbish!”

I scented entertainment, for Penny dogmatizing on spiritualism was likely to prove interesting.

“What’s up, Penny?” I inquired with an air of innocence, as she suddenly emerged from the kitchen, wrathfully brandishing a huge knife—as who should say, in Hamlet’s words:

“I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me!”

had she not been bent upon the more peaceful, if prosaic, slaughter of a lettuce for the luncheon salad.



Penny was just in the mood to give vent to her theological opinions concerning the possibility of visits from another world, and at once seized the opportunity of imparting a little wholesome instruction to any audience obtainable.

“The nonsense that folks get into their ’eads nowadays, Mr. Edmund—what with these trashy novels and ’apenny papers—is something past belief! Not but what Elsie is a good, quiet girl enough, and reg’lar at her duties every first Sunday in the month; but she’s young, and I suppose we ’ave to make allowance for young folk.”

I murmured in token of acquiescence.

“I let her off for the afternoon yesterday, to take tea with her *haunt* from America, and back she comes with a cock-and-bull story of a *happarition* her youngest brother Aleck imagined he saw the night before last.”



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“An apparition!” I cried. “That’s strange! Where did the boy see it?”

“He couldn’t have seen it, Mr. Edmund, as you must know very well, with your *h*education and experience. He was running home in the moonlight and thought he saw some figure in the old mill, which, of course, he says must have been a ghost.”

“A ghost at the old mill!” I laughed heartily myself at the notion. “It couldn’t have been poor old Archie. It’s not like him to terrify his neighbors in that way.”

“I gave the girl a good talking to,” continued Penny. (I did not doubt it!) “‘Read your Penny Catechism,’ I said, ‘and see how strong it is against dealing with the Devil by consulting spiritualists, and don’t let me hear another word about it.’”

It seemed rather hard on poor Elsie, who was, beyond doubt, innocent of any such forbidden practices. But I refrained from comment, for I wanted to hear more about the *h*apparition.

But Penny could not be drawn out. She professed herself so disgusted at Elsie’s “superstition” that I could get no coherent account of what Aleck was supposed to have seen. So I left her to vent her wrath on the defenceless vegetables, and determined to seek a more copious source of information.

Willy and Bell would be capable of second-hand descriptions only, so I resolved to approach the fountain-head and interrogate Aleck in person. I found the youth in the garden of Fanellan farm, evidently just passing the time by a cursory pruning of berry bushes. He had on his Sunday suit, and was unusually smartened up for a weekday; for it was but natural that neighbors might be expected to drop in for information as to the supernatural manifestations he had experienced, and it was well to be prepared. He was a fresh-looking, fair-haired lad of eighteen or thereabouts. I had often noticed him on Sundays among the gathering under the pine-trees near the church door, but had never spoken to him.

Aleck had not expected so illustrious a visitor as “the priest’s brother,” and, though evidently gratified by my interest, was so painfully shy that it would have needed an expert barrister to draw out any satisfactory information from so bashful a witness. Luckily his mother had espied me from the window, and promptly appeared on the scene, and by means of her judicious prompting the youth was induced to tell his tale.

It appeared that Aleck was out on the night in question at the unusual hour of twelve. He had been “bidden,” as his mother explained, to a marriage in the neighborhood, and his father had allowed him to accept the invitation on the condition of his return home by midnight. As is not unusual in such cases, the attractions of the dance had led the youth to postpone his departure, minute by minute, until it was questionable whether he

could possibly reach home by the appointed time, even if he ran his best. Consequently he took all the short cuts he knew, and one of them led him by the old mill.



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I was well aware, from an anecdote related to me by Penny, that John Farquhar, the lad's father, was a stern disciplinarian. Elsie's elder sister, Jean, a lass of nineteen, had once happened to return home from confession rather later than usual one Saturday evening, owing to the exceptionally large number awaiting their turn in the church. On reaching home about half-past eight on a spring evening, she became aware of her father standing in the dusk at the garden gate, holding an ominously slender walking-stick in his hand. With this he proceeded to deal several far from gentle strokes upon the girl's shoulders, regardless of her frightened remonstrances and explanations.

"I dinna' care wha ye come frae, chaipel or nae chaipel; ye'll nae be allowed oot at sic an hoor!"

In the light of this circumstance it was not difficult to understand Aleck's desire to reach Fanellan punctually. But to return to his adventure.

As he approached the old mill he became aware of a light shining from one of the windows. Thinking that some traveling tinkers had taken up free lodgings there, he was preparing to pass as quickly and quietly as possible, to avoid drawing attention upon himself and delaying his progress. But, to his astonishment, the light suddenly went out, and by the time he reached the house it was wrapped in darkness. There was little moonlight (spite of Penny's indignant insinuations), for it was a cloudy night, and the lad would have had difficulty in finding his way had it not been so familiar. Curiosity urged Aleck to investigate the mystery of the light, and, forgetful for the moment of his father's injunction, he crept quietly to the unglazed window and looked through the opening. Not a sound revealed the presence of any human being within. A silence, accentuated no doubt by his startled imagination, seemed to hang over the place. He was starting on again when a strange sight met his eyes. Suddenly out of the darkness of the cottage shone out the figure of a human hand! It seemed to glow with a faint greenish light, and it held a long pointed knife, which burned with the same pale hue. Nothing else could be seen except a kind of gauzy floating sleeve, from which the mysterious hand emerged. Aleck had no wish to investigate further, but promptly took to his heels, and made for home with all speed, frightened out of his wits.

As luck would have it, the clock by which he had started was fast, and he was home in good time. The circumstance tended to render his story more worthy of credence than it might otherwise have proved. But his evident terror, and the very incoherence of his narrative, told in his favor.

"He's been a truthful lad all his days," his mother proudly testified; "while as to drink—not a drop of spirits has passed his lips sin' I gev' him a wee drop for the spasms when he wes a wean!"

And Aleck's blushing approval of the maternal statement bore witness to its truth.



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I confess that the story did not in the least rouse any superstitious credence in my mind. Luminous paint was not such an unknown quantity to me as it would be to this country-bred lad and his family. I took care, however, to breathe no word of my suspicions; for I meant to make a few investigations on my own account. So with the looked-for expressions of astonishment, I took my leave.

I had been asked to dine at Ardmuir House that evening, and as it was a matter of eight miles distant, I was to stay the night. Accordingly, I started in good time in the pony cart, old Willy by my side to bring back the trap. Colonel Ashol was by way of being civil to Val and myself, and frequently invited us; my brother, however, seldom accepted, and was always glad when I undertook to represent the Flemings there. The Ashols, though a family of a feeble type of Protestants, showed no decided bigotry. They had a few Catholics in their employ on the estate, and were cordial enough with us.

Ardmuir House and some of its land had been Church property before the Reformation. Val looked the matter up once, and discovered that it had been a dependency upon one of the larger abbeys, and was itself a place of no little importance.

The mansion itself was rather picturesque; it had been rebuilt in a later century on the site and from the materials of the former church and monastery. You drove for some distance up a stately avenue of beeches before sighting the house. It was a big, roomy place, with fine large windows and handsome moldings round them—probably portions of the spoils of the ancient erection. A wide portico, supported on stone pillars, stood in front of the chief entrance, and carriages might drive under its shelter to set down the occupants at the doorstep. An air of gloom seemed to hang about it, owing to the huge trees which grew pretty close to it in places.

The one striking feature about the house was the parapet, which ran round the entire roof. This was pierced in such a way as to form the letters composing a text of Scripture. The inscription, in huge characters, ran thus:

EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE THEY
LABOR IN VAIN THAT BUILD IT

The idea of such a decoration doubtless originated with the desire of some pious Presbyterian ancestor of the present owners to emphasize the fact that the ancient builders had not made pure Gospel teaching their sure foundation. But, by the irony of fate, the text had become a striking commentary upon the fortunes of later possessors of sacrilegious spoils; for it was a tradition—upon which the family kept a discreet silence—that three male heirs in direct succession had never lived to inherit the property. At the very time of which I am writing, Colonel Ashol's only son was suffering from what doctors had pronounced to be incipient spinal disease, which, should it develop, would render him a helpless cripple for life—should life be granted to him.



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I was rather more keen than usual about that particular visit, as I expected to meet a young Catholic priest, who was to stay with the Ashols for a day or two in company with his mother, an old friend of the hostess. For that reason Val would have accompanied me that evening, in spite of his aversion to such “inaneities,” as he chose to call dinner parties, had he not been otherwise engaged. He had already made an appointment to interview for the first time a girl who lived some distance away and could not be easily postponed; moreover, the occasion was important, being the commencement of a series of instructions preparatory to her reception into the Church. For the lassie in question—to use the terminology of Ardmuirland—“had gotten a Catholic man”; in other words, was engaged to be married to a Catholic, who had inspired her with the desire of sharing his faith as well as his worldly goods.

It was early when I arrived. The Colonel and some of the men were still out on the moors, but a few guests were sitting about in the big, cool entrance hall, waiting for tea. Among them were Mrs. Vansome and her son, to both of whom I was at once presented. They happened to be the only Catholics of the house party. We chatted amicably for some time, until the dressing-bell broke up the gathering for the nonce.

I happened to remain for a few minutes in the hall after the rest had left; I wanted to look into a paper which was there, and I knew my room from previous visits. The staircase ran along two sides of the hall and led to a broad corridor, upon which the rooms opened. Another passage at right angles joined this corridor, and to reach my room I had to pass by the end of it.

It was just between daylight and dusk, on a September evening, and no lamps were yet needed. As I passed the passage on my way I saw an elderly lady coming toward the main corridor. I am no great observer of feminine costume—perhaps because I am not much in ladies’ company, or, it may be, because I never had a sister to instruct me; I can only say of this lady’s dress, therefore, that it struck me as differing from those I had lately seen in the hall, both in fashion and material. I remember hearing a rustling as of silk, and I think there was some white lace about the neck and hair.

But what struck me most was the woman’s face. I had looked in her direction, lest I might seem discourteous to some acquaintance; but this was a stranger. The face was that of a woman in an agony of suffering! The wide-open eyes were full of trouble; the whole countenance expressed pain and something like terror. (I am describing the impression made upon me at the moment, for the incident passed more quickly than it takes to tell, however brief the narration.)

As my eyes met hers, the woman stretched out her hands with an appealing gesture, and seemed to be hastening swiftly toward me. But just as she was almost near enough to touch me, she suddenly disappeared—having turned, as it seemed to me, into a door close by.



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For a moment I stood bewildered. Then that look of appeal for help came back to mind; it was evident something was wrong. I at once entered the open door into which the figure had passed, determined to do what I could to assist one in such unmistakable need of help. To my astonishment I found that the place was a mere housemaid's closet, for the keeping of brooms, dusting appliances, and the like. It was but a tiny room, too; a glance from the threshold was enough to convince me that no human being was there!

It was not so much surprise as terror that seized me at such a discovery. I found myself wiping from my brow the cold sweat that stood there in great drops. I felt certain that I had been face to face with something unexplainable by the ordinary laws of nature. I was as well as usual. I had read nothing of late that could have conjured up such a figure. As to preternatural manifestations of such a kind—I had but that very day, and but an hour or two ago, passed supercilious judgment on what I thought the credulity of ignorant rustics. And yet here I was, the victim to some such hallucination—unless it was possible that I had really seen the figure with my bodily eyes! My knees were shaking under me as I managed to reach my room, my whole being agitated by an unaccountable sense of fear.

Luckily we were allowed an unusually long time for dressing, and I was able to get a smoke and take a bath; by dinner-time I was more like myself.

I tried hard at first to persuade myself that the entire scene had been imaginary; but I could not succeed. I was too firmly convinced that I had actually seen such a figure to entertain the idea.

Dinner passed without particular incident. I had an interesting chat after with young Father Vansome. I discovered that he was a Benedictine attached to one of the English monasteries, and had been permitted, as a relief from a long spell of heavy teaching work, to spend a few days at Ardmuir House, where his mother was then staying. He was dressed like an ordinary priest; this, as he explained, was out of consideration for the Ashols, who were entertaining among their guests that day some of ultra-Protestant views, who might have resented the intrusion into their midst of a real live monk, "in habit as he lived."

More than once during our conversation the extraordinary occurrence which had disturbed my peace of mind kept intruding itself upon my mental vision, and again and again it was almost divulged to my companion; but I shrank from being laughed at as a victim to superstitious imaginings. I had a priest for a brother, and no one knew better than I how sceptical were our own clergy with regard to any supernatural happenings that had not been corroborated by the testimony of reliable authority.

There was the usual smoke, with the usual billiards, and bedtime arrived without any disclosure on my part of the mysterious incident. I did not fear further revelations, for



my bedroom was nowhere near the scene of the apparition. I must confess to a momentary creepy sensation as I passed, in company with other men, the corridor of the adventure; but nothing happened to disturb my rest materially.



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I like to be stirring at a pretty early hour, to get a morning pipe of peace. But in a strange house it is not always convenient to prowling about too soon; however, I could not interfere with any one in the garden, so to the garden I promptly betook myself. It wanted an hour until breakfast, and I was rather surprised to find the Benedictine already pacing the broad walk under the terrace, which was out of view of the windows. He was not smoking, though, and when I accosted him it seemed to me that he looked somewhat disturbed and embarrassed. We passed a few desultory remarks, and then he asked whether I intended to leave early after breakfast or stay for lunch. As it happened, I had arranged for Willy to bring the cart in time to start soon after ten; for Val had to drive somewhere in the afternoon, and it was as well to give Tim a rest before starting out again. This I explained to Father Vansome.

"I wonder whether you could give me a lift," was his remark. "I should very much like to consult Father Fleming upon a certain matter, and if you could take me, it would avoid a fuss here. I shall enjoy the tramp back again."

Of course I was delighted to give him a lift. So we set off in due time with Willy on the back seat. I had been rejoicing in the prospect of an agreeable drive with a pleasant companion, for I had been greatly attracted by the young monk; but I was doomed to disappointment. My constant efforts at conversation fell flat; for the priest seemed preoccupied, and his responses were evidently merely mechanical.

Father Vansome was closeted with Val up to lunch time. He sat down to table with us, and after the meal he and Val drove off together in the trap; they had arranged that Father Vansome should get down at a point where their roads diverged. I was rather astonished to learn, when I took leave of him, that he hoped to return that same evening, as he had a particular reason for wishing to say Mass next day.

Left to myself, I turned my steps in the direction of Archie's former dwelling at the old mill; for I hoped to light upon some evidence which would clear up to my own satisfaction at least the apparent mystery of Aleck Farquhar's ghost story. Although I could not account by any natural means for the event which had startled me at Ardmuir House, I was nevertheless still sceptical with regard to the supposed apparition at the mill-house. Indeed, I felt more certain than ever that a living person had been playing pranks in the latter case, to serve some purpose of his own; the impossibility of fraud in my regard contrasted strongly with its probability at the old mill.

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I was not deceived in my expectation. I found that the boards that usually covered the window opening had been carefully removed, and were standing in a corner awaiting replacement, probably. Here was a sign that the midnight visitor had been surprised, and had not dared to wait to cover up the window again—unless, indeed, it meant that another “apparition” was intended. But a more close investigation convinced me of trickery. Flung away into a corner was a small brush bearing traces of luminous paint, and in a heap of rubbish I discerned the very lid of a small tin of that effective spiritualistic medium. No further proof was needed. By lucky chance I discovered what appeared to be a clue to the reason of all this mystification. Loosened stones in the chimney and by the hearth suggested that a search had been made for something supposed to be hidden in the hut. The spiritual visitor had evidently been bent upon seizing the material riches which rumor had doubtless located in the dwelling of one whom those not in his confidence would have reason to regard as a miser. Here then was one illusion dissipated by my discoveries.

Father Vansome was driven over again in time for dinner. During the progress of the meal I was inclined to make merry over my find; but I had little success in gaining the interest either of Val or our guest, who both seemed to shun the topic.

When dinner was over, it occurred to me to introduce the subject of my own ghostly experience, for I was curious to hear what the priests would think of it. As I led up to it by degrees I saw the dark eyes of Father Vansome light up with expectation. Both he and Val listened with keen interest, neither attempting to interrupt the narration. Then they looked spontaneously at each other.

“I am quite as convinced as yourself,” said the Benedictine to me as I finished my relation, “that what you saw was neither an hallucination nor a human figure. I have seen it also, and that is why I am here now.”

He then gave, in turn, his experience. During the early part of the night he had been unusually restless. When he did at last fall asleep he had a strange dream. He saw the figure of an elderly woman, clad in antique garb, holding by the hand a young man, who wore the habit of his own Order. The woman fixed upon him eyes full of entreaty, and implored him in piteous accents to offer Mass for her soul, for it was in his power to release her from grievous torments. Father Vansome then awoke, the impression made by his dream still vivid. He struck a light and looked at his watch. It was two o'clock only; but his nerves were too highly strung to suffer him to sleep again, and he lay wondering what the dream could signify.

Suddenly, while still wide awake, he was aware of the figure of the woman of his dream standing by his bed. Her eyes were full of intense supplication, and her hands stretched out to him in eager entreaty. Yielding to a sudden, irresistible impulse, he exclaimed:



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“Tell me, in God's name, who you are and what you want of me?”

The answer came in a clear, distinct voice:

“I am Elizabeth Ashol. I am suffering for a wrong done to my stepson, Gilbert, a monk of your Order. Say Mass for my soul and I shall have rest.”

Then the figure vanished.

Father Vansome naturally had no more sleep that morning. Very early, indeed, he was summoned to his mother's bedside by her maid, and found her as agitated as himself. From her lips he learned that she too had been visited by the figure he had himself seen. The woman, answering to the description of his ghostly visitor, had approached Mrs. Vansome's bed, when she was still wide awake, with outstretched hands and entreating eyes, but no voice had been heard.

The apparition to his mother had convinced Father Vansome that what he had experienced was no trick of the imagination. He had, however, taken counsel with Val, who, like himself, was of opinion that the Mass ought to be said. He had found on returning to Ardmuir House that morning that his mother had confided the matter to Mrs. Ashol, and had heard from her that previous visitors had experienced similar apparitions; on further consideration it was discovered—though Mrs. Ashol had not realized it before—that such persons had been invariably Catholics. There was, however, no record of the figure having spoken; this had happened for the first time to the only Benedictine monk who had ever entered the house since Elizabeth Ashol's death, two centuries before.

It appeared that a certain Dame Elizabeth Ashol, second wife of Gilbert Ashol, lived in the latter part of the seventeenth century. She had one son, Laurence, to whom his father left the estate, to the exclusion of his eldest son, Gilbert, the offspring of the first marriage. This youth, to his father's intense indignation, had reverted to the faith of his ancestors; soon after his conversion he had entered a monastery on the continent, with a view to returning, as so many of his religious brethren were then doing, to work for the restoration of his fellow-countrymen to the Church. It was generally thought that Dame Elizabeth, in her ambition for the welfare of her own son, had encouraged her husband in his religious bias, and secured the succession for Laurence. It was held in the family that the disasters which had always befallen the first-born of the house dated from the unjust acquisition of the estate by this Laurence, and the entire disinheriting of Gilbert; it was from a kind of superstitious dread attaching to the name that no Ashol for a long term of years had ever been baptized Laurence.

Father Vansome said the required Mass next morning, and his mother drove over to assist at it. Her prayers and mine were thus united with the supreme Sacrifice on behalf of the soul so greatly in need.



The apparition has never been seen again, though many a Catholic guest has visited Ardmuir House. More wonderful still—the curse seems to have been averted by the laying of the ghost; for young Gilbert Ashol has so greatly improved in health and strength that his doctors predict for him a probably long and useful life.



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The family has indeed been thoroughly impressed by the strange circumstances just related. In the light of their increasing interest in all things Catholic, Val is beginning to entertain hopes of the ultimate return of the Ashols to the Faith their fathers abandoned more than three hundred years ago.

IX

SPRING'S RETURN

“Now Ariel goes a-singing, by the olden
Dark yews, where flitter-mice were wont to cling.
All the world is turning golden, turning golden
In the spring.”
(*Nora Hopper—“April”*)

“Guess the latest news, Ted,” said my brother, coming in from parochial visits.

I shook my head.

“I’m no hand at riddles.”

“Well, there’s a marriage to come off in our parish before long, if matters can be satisfactorily arranged.”

“A marriage!” That roused me; it would be the first function of the kind I had seen in Ardmuirland. For our lads usually fetched partners from elsewhere, and maidens being accustomed to migrate to service in the south, found mates there—even as the swallows.

“I thought that would fetch you!” cried Val triumphant. “And now give a guess.”

But I racked my brains to no purpose.

“It’s not Widow Lamont, and it’s not Robina——”

“Why not?” he asked. But I saw he was quizzing.

“It’s a widow,” he said. “I’ll tell you that much.”

Even then I was nonplussed.

“Ted, you’ve no imagination! Is Christian Logan too old?”

“Christian Logan! Of course not! Who’s the happy man?”



“He’s not altogether happy yet,” returned Val. “There are obstacles in the way at present. Do you know the Camerons of Redbank Farm at all?”

“Camerons of Redbank! Why, they’re Protestants!”

“Tell me something I don’t know already,” he retorted.

“I can say very little about them. There are two brothers, I believe—one very middle-aged and the other less so. I may have passed the time of day with one or the other.”

“Well, it’s the less middle-aged one—Lachlan by name—who wants to marry Christian. It’s all right about religion. He’s ready to make all the necessary promises, and moreover, remarked quite spontaneously that he intended coming to church with his wife after they were married—a most unusual undertaking in these cases. He’s evidently merely ignorant of everything Catholic; not bigoted, really. With a wife like Christian, he is most likely to enter the Church himself eventually.”

“But what are these almost insurmountable obstacles?”



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“Chiefly financial. It seems that the elder brother is the actual tenant of Redbank, and Lachlan is little better than a farm-servant at present. It would be scarcely possible for the poor chap to support a wife and three of a ready-made family on the wages of a mere plowman—except, of course, in the style of a common laborer, and he is far above that. The best way out of the difficulty would be for Christian to manage the house at Redbank, instead of a paid housekeeper; but the old brother is bitter against Catholics, and more opposed to young children in the house. Hence these tears! Don’t you think there are rather respectable obstacles to be overcome?”

“Quite. So what did you suggest?”

“Cameron himself suggested what I think a reasonable solution: to try for some situation as farm bailiff or manager. He is thoroughly up to it all, for he has been practically managing things at Redbank for the last year or two, and has plenty of experience in farm work.”

“He ought to be able to find something of the sort. Could the factor at Taskerton do anything for him, do you think? Christian has already lost a husband in the service of the estate, and it would be but restitution to provide her with another.”

“The idea struck me, too, though not in precisely the same terms,” said Val with an amused laugh. “I am thinking of writing to him about the matter.”

“You are really satisfied with the man, then?”

“Decidedly so! He struck me as being a very decent sort of fellow. He has a straightforward, pleasant manner with him, and is altogether superior to an ordinary crofter. It would be a good match for Christian. Poor soul! She deserves a better lot than she enjoys at present.”

“What’s his age, do you suppose?”

“Forty-six. Quite a lad, for these parts!”

“Things look all right, certainly,” was my summing up.

Val wrote to the factor, but the result was not over-promising. He knew of nothing suitable at present. But he would keep the case in mind, and write at once should he hear of anything available.

Both Val and I were keen on getting the matter settled, and often talked it over together, discussing ways and means. But the weeks slipped by, and we found ourselves no nearer to a solution of the difficulty. We little dreamed of the quarter from which it was eventually to come!



One day as we sat at breakfast Elsie brought in a telegram for Val. It was a somewhat unusual occurrence; for we were a good way from the office, and, portorage being expensive, we had carefully instructed our ordinary correspondents that we preferred the humbler post-card, as a rule. When a telegram did arrive, therefore, it generally presaged something of unusual importance. I saw Val's face change as he read it. He passed it over to me as he rose to write a reply. This is what I saw:

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“Gowan dying wants to see you come immediately.”

It was signed by a Glasgow doctor, and sent from one of the chief hotels of the city.

I followed Val to his den, where he was writing the answer.

“Would you mind my coming with you?” I asked.

“I should like it of all things,” was his reply.

In less than half an hour we had started, and before night had arrived at our destination.

It always seems to me that one feels one’s personal insignificance more keenly in a big city than anywhere else. The hurry and bustle on all sides witness to the self-interest which rules every individual of the crowd, to the exclusion of any sincere concern for others. The feeling was accentuated when we reached the hotel. There all was brightness and movement; in the brilliantly lighted dining-room guests were eating, drinking, chatting, and enjoying life; in the hall and on the staircases attendants were moving swiftly about, visitors were coming and going. Each one’s pleasures, comforts, and advantages were the business of the hour. Yet in some chamber overhead a momentous crisis was at hand for one poor, lonely man, who had to leave behind him this scene of busy life, to enter upon an eternity of weal or woe. Upon the passing moments everything depended for him; he had to prepare to meet his God. Around him things were taking their usual course; it mattered little to the majority of the people under that roof whether he lived or died, and less still how his soul would fare in that passage. Yet the things which made up the present happiness of the crowd were those which he had labored so strenuously to procure—ease, enjoyment, freedom from care—the companions of wealth. For these he had bartered not only the toil and stress of his best years, but something infinitely more precious; part of the price had been the favour of his God! Now he had to part with all these gains, willing or unwilling; would he have the grace to sue for the mercy which might still be his for the asking?

We had ascertained that Gowan still lived, though there was no hope for his recovery, and were ascending the staircase to our rooms when we encountered a priest coming down. He regarded Val with evident interest, then stopped and accosted him. He proved to be one of the neighboring parochial clergy, who had just been visiting the dying man. Val invited him to our room, and there we learned the circumstances of the case.

Gowan had been in Glasgow about a fortnight, having come thither immediately after landing in Liverpool. He was seriously ill when he arrived at the hotel, and was compelled to take to his bed at once. A doctor was sent for, and found him suffering from heart disease, which had already reached an advanced stage. In spite of every attention the patient became rapidly worse. He would not infrequently fall into fits of

unconsciousness, which were the prelude to a state of coma in which he would eventually pass away from life.



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To the man's credit, be it said, he at once asked for a priest when he became aware of his danger, and had afterward desired to see Val. All the Sacraments had been administered, and Gowan lay in a weak state, hovering between life and death. I could not but think of the lasting gratitude of Christian Logan and her children, which had led them to remember this man daily in their prayers; who could tell how great a part those prayers had had in securing for him the grace to make his peace with God at the eleventh hour?

Val went in alone to Gowan's room; it was not for me to take any part in such an interview. It was not long before he was back again in our own apartment. Gowan's reception of him had been all that could have been desired. The man expressed sincere sorrow for his ill behavior, and begged Val's forgiveness. But what was still more satisfactory was his message to Christian and her children. He asked pardon for his unkindness in deserting them; they would soon see, he said, how dear they were to him.

"He has made his will in their favor," was Val's summing up of the matter. "He was just explaining that fact when he had another bad attack quite suddenly, and I came away, after summoning the nurse."

That conversation, short as it was, proved to be the last in which the dying man was to take part with my brother. He passed away a short time after, having never recovered consciousness. The Catholic nurse had sent for Val a few minutes after he had rejoined me. We both went to the sick-room, and my brother had said the prayers for the dying, followed by those for the repose of his soul when Gowan ceased to breathe.

The funeral was over and we had been back in Ardmuirland for some weeks before any tidings arrived about the dead man's affairs. All arrangements as to payment of expenses and the like were carried out by a Glasgow lawyer, who had been empowered to act for Gowan's agent in America. The most thorough search had failed to discover anything in the shape of a will among the dead man's effects in Glasgow, and it was supposed to be in the keeping of the American lawyer. When tidings did arrive, they were such as to fill us with consternation. The will in the lawyer's possession was dated more than two years before, after Gowan's return to America from Ardmuirland. Its terms, moreover, by no means tallied with the information given by the dying man to Val; for in it there was no mention of the Logans at all, everything being bequeathed to the Freemason's lodge of which Gowan had been a member.

Val was puzzled, but not convinced.

"It's a mystery, certainly," he said; "but I feel absolutely satisfied that there is another will somewhere. Poor Gowan said so, unmistakably."

"Can you recall his exact words?" I asked.



Val had an idea that Gowan had said: "I have settled everything on Cousin Christian." He fancied that just before the attack occurred he had added: "You will have to see about it," or words to that effect.



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We both felt convinced that Gowan had been too good a man of business to make such a remark unless he had made his bequest legally secure.

The obvious thing to do was to cable at once to the lawyer to delay action until the new will should turn up. This we did; a letter followed, detailing circumstances.

Our next communication was from the Glasgow lawyer, who requested Val's presence there to consult about matters, as my brother was the only person to whom Gowan had spoken on the subject of a second will. I was too much interested in the mystery to let Val go alone, and he was delighted to have my company, so once more we set off for the distant city.

Dalziel, the lawyer in question, received us in his private office on the morning after our arrival. He was a small gray man, with keen black eyes that twinkled behind his gold-rimmed spectacles now and again when an ordinary man would have smiled. His statement of affairs was indeed not reassuring. Every scrap of paper left behind by Gowan had been carefully examined by one of his responsible clerks, but nothing in the shape of a will had been discovered. Had there been no previous will, Christian Logan's boy might have claimed the estate as next of kin; but that was now not possible. To bring the matter before the law courts was equally futile; the law took cognizance of a man's wishes expressed in writing, and no evidence of a verbal declaration on his part would suffice to set aside a written document.

"I am afraid, Father Fleming," said the lawyer, summing up his report, "that there is no case to go upon for the Logan family."

"But I am convinced," replied Val, "that Gowan has made another will. He sent for me to tell me so, and to ask me to help the Logans in the matter. The will must be somewhere. The question is: Where?"

"I am inclined to think that he never made a second will," the lawyer went on to say. "Not that I think he meant to deceive you," he added hastily, as he noticed Val's air of protest. "But it has often come within my experience that a man in such a weak state may persuade himself that he has already accomplished something which he has fixed his mind upon doing, while all the time nothing has been actually done."

Val, however, could not be convinced that such was the case in the present instance, and I could not help agreeing with him.

"It would be as well if you would call at Gowan's hotel before you leave Glasgow," said Dalziel, as our interview came to an end. "There are some clothes, traveling-cases, rugs, and such like, which it would be absurd to send to America, and equally absurd to sell. They will be something for the Logons if you think well to take them. I can easily arrange with the legatees on the other side, who will certainly make no difficulty."

It was a good idea, and we resolved to act upon it. The lawyer drove with us to the hotel, to introduce us to the manager, and left us when we ascended to the room occupied by the dead man, which was still being retained by the executor until the property should be removed.

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The manager himself very civilly accompanied us, directing us to summon a servant, when we had examined things to our satisfaction, and to give orders about packing and removal.

I must confess that I had not altogether given up hope of discovering the lost document among the clothes and packing-cases. But my anticipations were dispelled when we entered. Everything had been neatly folded and placed on the bed and the two tables; it was evident that no document could have been passed unnoticed. The room, too, was quite clean and in order. Val, like myself, seemed rather depressed at the state of things. There was no receptacle where any paper could have been stowed away that had not been thoroughly ransacked by the lawyer's men, whose interest it was to discover the will. A wardrobe for hanging clothes, a chest of drawers, dressing-table, and washstand were the only articles of furniture besides bed, tables, and chairs; none of them looked like possible receptacles of a hidden paper.

Scarcely realizing what I did, I began opening one after another the drawers in the chest. Each was neatly lined with paper, but otherwise empty. As though possessed by a mania for searching, I took out each paper and carefully assured myself that nothing had slipped underneath. Val, roused by my action, began to poke into the drawers of the dressing-table; but his search was just as fruitless. There was nothing to be done but to settle as to the packing of the clothes and take our departure.

Suddenly an idea struck me. How often does a small article get lost in a chest of drawers by slipping behind the drawers themselves. At once I acted on the suggestion. I did not want to consider that others had probably searched as thoroughly as I could do. Out came the drawers, one after the other, and were deposited on the floor. The bottom drawer was rather tight, and would not come out easily; but I got it out with an extra expenditure of muscle. Positively, there was a small folded paper—like a letter—lying behind it; my heart sank, for it was too small for such a document as I was anxious to find. I picked it up listlessly and unfolded it.

“By Jove, Val! Here it is!” I cried exultantly.

He skipped across the room to read the paper over my shoulder.

“That's it, all right!” was his exclamation. “Thank God!”

It was but a sheet of common note-paper, bearing the printed heading of the hotel. Across it was written in shaky characters the following:

“This is the last will and testament of me, Alexander Gowan, of 269 Heniker Street, Chicago, U. S. A. I revoke all former testaments, and hereby bequeath the whole of the property of which I die possessed to Rev. Valentine Fleming of Ardmuirland, Scotland, in trust for Christian McRae, widow of Donald Logan, of Ardmuirland, and her children.

“ALEXANDER JOHN GOWAN.

“May 16, 1912.”



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“Blessed Scottish law!” cried Val, when he had scanned the scrap of paper that meant so much to us. “It’s not an imposing document, but it’ll stand good in this country. Let’s take it to Dalziel at once.”

The lawyer corroborated Vat’s declaration. It was a holograph will, and therefore needed no witness; Gowan was man of business enough to realize that. He had probably slipped it into the drawer where some of his clothes were, meaning to hand it to Val. The drawer must have been over-full, and the mere opening of it would sweep the bit of paper to the back, where it had fallen behind the other drawers.

* * * * *

Six months later we had a Catholic wedding in the little church at Ardmuirland. All the congregation flocked up for the ceremony and the nuptial Mass—for the bridegroom had suggested that it would be well to begin his married life in perfect union with his wife, and he had been received into the Church a month before.

The Camerons are very well off; for poor old Gowan, though not a millionaire, had put by pots of money. But it would suit neither Lachlan nor his wife to lead an idle life. They have got Redbank into their own hands and are turning it into quite a model farm.

The children are at school. Jeemsie is said to be able to do everything except talk. Tam is bent on being a priest.

Val got his shinty club and his parish hall, and if he wants anything for the church or for himself he has but to mention it. Indeed, he had almost to use force to prevent Christian handing over half her fortune.

Golden dreams do, now and again, it seems, get realized!

X

A RUSTIC PASTOR

“In sober state,
Through the sequestered vale of rural life,
The venerable patriarch guileless held
The tenor of his way.”
(*Porteus—“Death.”*)

The priest who ministered to the Catholic flock of Ardmuirland in the far-off days when “Bell o’ the Burn” was a lassie was known as “Mr. McGillivray”; for the repeal of the penal laws had not yet emancipated the people from the cautious reticence of the days



of persecution, and they still spoke of “prayers” instead of “Mass,” and of “speaking to the priest” and “going forward” to intimate Confession and Holy Communion.

“He wes a stoot, broad-shouldered gentleman o’ middle size,” said Bell in one of her reminiscent moods; “when I first knew him he wes gettin’ bent wi’ age, and his hair wes snow-white and lang on his shoulders like. I couldna’ ha’ been muckle mair ner five or sax year auld when he took me by the hand and askit me if I’d like to come an’ herd his coos an’ leeve wi’ his niece at the chapel hoose. That wes in 1847, sir, ten years aifter Queen Victoria (God rest her!) cam’ to the throne. That’s a good bit back, ye ken.”



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Bell dwelt under the same roof as the priest until she was needed at home, a few years later. Although chiefly employed during the day in looking after the two cows that grazed on the hillside about a mile distant, and driving them out and in, she was sufficiently within doors to be able to gain much knowledge of the daily life of a simple Scottish pastor of the old school.

That life, as her reminiscences witness, was one of extreme homeliness—not to say austerity. The food of the priest was that of the ordinary peasant class among which he lived. “His denner,” said Bell, “wes juist tatties, taken in their skins; his supper wes brochan an’ sometimes tatties as weel. Some o’ the neebors would come an’ join him, whiles, an’ share the supper wi’ him, as they sat roond the hearth.” (In answer to my query Bell explained that “brochan” was a kind of soup or gruel, made from oatmeal.)

“My faither an’ mither,” Bell remarked with some pride, “usit often to tak’ denner wi’ the priest o’ Sundays. They wes bidin’ a good bit awa’ frae the chapel, ye ken, sir, an’ they aye likit a talk wi’ me aifter Mass. So Mr. McGillivray wouldna’ aloo them to fast till they got hame, but aye pressit them to stay. For they wouldna’ break their fast till the priest did, ye ken; it had aye been the custom in their young days, and they keepit it till they wes too weak to fast sae lang.”

Besides the Ardmuirland district, the priest had charge of two others at some little distance over the hills in different directions. It was his duty to say Mass at one or other of these stations occasionally, and the Ardmuirland folk who could conveniently manage the journey would generally accompany him on a Sunday. They would walk over the hill in a kind of unorganized procession, reciting the Rosary and litany as they went.

During the week the priest kept daily moving about among his people, and little of interest could happen which did not soon come to his knowledge. “The fowk aye enjoyit a chat wi’ the priest,” said Bell, “for Mr. McGillivray wes the best oot at tellin’ auld-fashioned stories.” His figure was a familiar one in all the countryside, as he walked slowly along, leaning on his silver-mounted walking-stick, and wrapped in the ample folds of a well-worn Spanish cloak, buckled at the neck by a silver clasp. Under that same cloak he would often carry tit-bits of oatcake for the horses he might come across in the farms he visited—for he was a lover of all dumb creatures.

Mr. McGillivray’s only outdoor recreation was fishing. Children knew his ways, and would shyly steal after him down to the side of the burn and watch him from a distance. When his rod happened to get caught in the branches of the stunted birches which bordered the stream—which was not of infrequent occurrence—they would run to his assistance and help to untangle the hook; they would often search for and carry to him worms to serve as bait. Both kinds of service were sure to be rewarded by a piece of “black sugar,” as Bell styled licorice, which he always carried with him for use in such emergencies.



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“We bairns,” she explained, “were niver feared o’ the priest. I weel remember hoo my mither chided me for usin’ sic freedom wi’ him—I had lived sae lang in the hoose wi’ him, ye ken, that I wes whiles gey familiar in my speech. Well, when he askit me one day—juist as a joke, ye ken—to tak’ a snuff oot o’ the wee boxie he aye carrit, I tossit my head and said (ill bred as I wes!), ‘Fuich!’ Mr. McGillivray wesna’ angered; he juist laughed oot an’ says he: ‘Weel, lassie, ye couldna’ ha’ said worse to a dog!’ But I got mair words frae my mither aifter, an’ a strappin’ as weel, an’ to bed wi’oot supper. It learned me to be mair respectful-like to the priest!”

This anecdote recalled another. “I mind weel hoo I got my first bonnet through Mr. McGillivray. In they times, ye ken, sir, it wes aye the fashion to wear large bonnets o’ Tuscan straw, an’ a lassie o’ foorteen wes surely auld enough for siclike—I said to mysel’. So when the priest cam’ to oor hoose aince, I made sae bold as to get him to ask my faither to buy me a bonnet for Sundays, next time he went to the toon o’ Aberdeen. My faither wouldna’ ha’ done it for me, but he did when the priest askit him, and I got my bonnet! But I doot I wes a bit o’ a favorite with the priest, sin’ I herdit his coos sae lang.”

However free the children may have been in their intercourse with the old priest, I gathered from Bell’s narrative that the grown-ups rather feared him. His methods were certainly such as would be considered unnecessarily severe in these days; still, there is no doubt he managed by them to keep his people well in hand.

“I canna’ mind muckle aboot Mr. McGillivray’s discoorses,” she answered, when I questioned her on that subject. “I wes but a bit lassie, an’ I couldna’ onderstand weel. He seemed to me to stan’ an’ drone awa’ mostly. Whiles, he wud gi’ great scoldin’s, an’ then I usit to think it wes splendid! He could be eloquent then, I assure ye, sir! I mind weel when there wes a marriage in Advent in a Protestant family, an’ Mr. McGillivray warned the fowk that they mightna’ attend it; some o’ them, in spite o’ that, went to the marriage, an’ I could niver forget the awfu’ way he chided them in the chapel on the Sunday aifter! It wes tarrible!

“If ony o’ the fowk cam’ to the chapel in their working clothes he would be greatly pit aboot. He would ca’ them up to the rail at catechism time an’ reprove them before a’ the congregation.”

“So you said your catechism in public!” I asked.

“There wes aye catechism, atween the Mass an’ the preachin’. Aebody had to be prepared to be callit up till they wes marrit, at least! Even aifter that, a body couldna’ be sure o’ bein’ left alane! I mind him callin’ a mon o’ saxty years o’ age ane Sunday! He wes a mon greatly thought of by the congregation, an’ maybe the priest wes afeared he wes gettin’ prood. Onyways, Mr. McGillivray had him at the rails wi’ the bairns. ‘Are you



ashamed,' he says, 'to learn your Christian Doctrine?' 'Na, na, sir,' says he. 'Then gae back an' sit ye doon,' says the priest."



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Such treatment would scarcely be appreciated in these days, but perhaps the reason is that we are less endowed with humility than our fathers in the Faith.

Bell had other anecdotes of a like kind.

“If ony o’ the bairns wes restless or trifling-kind, during the preachin’, Mr. McGillivray would stop his discourse an’ ca’ them up to the rail an’ reprove them severely. I mind him summoning a grown man from the choir aince, and mak’ him own his fault. Hey! He wer a graund priest, an’ nae mistak’—wer Mr. McGillivray!”

On stormy days, when it was difficult for the aged pastor to wade through the deep snow down to the chapel, Mass was said in his own house. The people crowded in at the door of his little living-room, and would fill the kitchen. When he grew old and infirm it was impossible for the greater number to hear anything of the sermon; yet he never omitted to preach.

“An’ I mind,” naively added Bell, “that there wes aye a collection made.”

People went to Confession in the house at such times; otherwise the priest heard them in the chapel on Saturdays or Sundays, and on the eves of feasts.

It can not be denied that Mr. McGillivray was a militant churchman, whenever the interests of his flock or of the Catholic Church were at stake. Bell had more than one anecdote to prove it.

A poor woman who was at the point of death had been induced by two good old Catholic spinsters who lived near her to send for the priest to reconcile her to the Church. She was the offspring of a mixed marriage; her mother—the Catholic party—had died when the child was quite young, and the father had at once taken the girl to kirk with him. She had once been to Confession, but had received no other Sacrament except Baptism. When she had grown to womanhood, she married a Presbyterian, and all her family had been brought up in that religion. Yet the grace of her Baptism seemed to cling to her. After her husband’s death she would now and again attend at Mass, driven the six miles by her Protestant son; but she was not known to the priest, and so she remained outside the pale. Her intimacy with Jeannie and Katie Ann McGruer was the means of keeping her in touch with Catholic matters, and eventually resulted in her reconciliation.

This was not accomplished, however, without a stiff skirmish between the old priest and the members of her family—not to mention the minister of their particular kirk.

In compliance with the summons conveyed by one of the McGruers (Bell spoke of them as “guid Catholic lassies,” but in answer to my query explained that Katie Ann, the younger sister, would be “risin’ sixty!”), Mr. McGillivray betook himself to the house of



the invalid. The door was opened by her eldest son, Adam Fordyce—a burly, black-browed, bearded man of forty. He had charge of the roads in the district, so that he and the priest were on speaking terms, at least.



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Adam held the door in one hand and the door-post in the other, and his portly figure filled up the opening fairly well.

“I am sorry to hear that your mother is unwell,” said the priest sympathetically.

“Aye, aye, sir, she’s nae weel at all,” was the answer.

“I would like to see her, if she’s well enough,” said Mr. McGillivray.

“Weel, sir, I wouldna’ like to say she’s nae fit to see a veesitor—but—ye ken, sir——”

“You mean she’s not well enough to see me.”

“Weel, it’s this wye, Mr. McGillivray,” answered Adam, lowering his voice; “I’m nae ohjectin’ mysel’, sin she askit me to let ye come; but the ithers is awfu’ set again’ it. That’s the wye it is, sir.”

The fact was, the “Cerberus” was not at all fierce—quite the contrary! He had been deputed by the others to confront the unwelcome visitor, as being the eldest, and therefore responsible for all unpleasant duties; but as far as he was concerned, he had no feeling in the matter. Like any Scotsman who had lived with his mother from childhood to mature manhood, he was deeply attached to her, and willing to agree to anything that might give her satisfaction in her present weak state; that the visit of the priest would be a comfort to her he strongly suspected, and hence the conflict between duty—as he regarded it—and affection.

It took very little persuasion from the priest to overcome Adam’s scruples and gain admittance to the sick-room; this accomplished, it might seem that the battle had been won for religion, but the victory was not yet complete!

Adam had relented so far as to admit the priest, but no argument could persuade him to leave him alone with the invalid. He was the agent of the family, and it was his duty to see everything that went on. He would have nothing underhand in the matter!

Mr. McGillivray easily interpreted his action. He was afraid of what the others might say should he desert his post—that was all. Diplomacy was necessary and the priest rose to the occasion.

“Look here, Adam,” he said; “I know you are merely carrying out what you feel to be a duty to your family in staying here. We can arrange matters without any difficulty. I must have a few minutes’ private talk with your mother on religious matters which concern herself and no one else. Just leave me with her for a bit and you can come back and stay here as long as I do.”



But Adam was obstinate. He acknowledged that the others “wouldna’ be pleased” should he relinquish his post of watch-dog. He must “bide” in the room as long as the priest remained.

As in many houses of that class, there was what is called a “bed-closet” opening out of the room in which the sick woman lay. It was literally a closet, containing nothing except the bed, and lighted by a tiny window. Without more ado, Mr. McGillivray seized the man by the arm and led him to the closet.



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“Just jump onto the bed,” he whispered. “No one will know that you have not remained in the room. You shall come out in a few minutes.”

So the burly Adam climbed onto the bed, and the priest shut the door upon his prisoner and fastened the “sneck.” After hearing the mother’s Confession, he released his captive, and Adam stood by while the saving unction was administered to prepare the poor woman for her last journey. It was soon over and the priest took his leave.

Adam was quite relieved to find that his mother had been gladdened by the priest’s ministrations—for she had poured forth grateful thanks for his kindness—while he had not been compromised in the eyes of his brothers and sisters. He willingly consented for Mr. McGillivray to return next day to administer Holy Communion for the first—and probably the last—time in the life of the dying woman.

“I’ve only one more office to do for your mother, Adam,” the priest had explained, “and then she will be quite at rest. So I will call to-morrow about this time.” And Adam had cordially agreed.

But there were others to be reckoned with. The news of the priest’s visit was soon carried to the Free Church minister, and down he swooped upon the luckless Fordyces that very afternoon. Poor Adam was the scapegoat. He it was who had to bear the whole of the blame. The minister congratulated himself, when he took his leave (without venturing into the sick-room, for the present), that he had successfully prevented any further “popish antics” in that house!

Consequently, when Mr. McGillivray returned next day, according to promise, he was met, not by Adam, but by the younger son—a dour Presbyterian, of pronounced type. He absolutely refused to allow the priest to cross the threshold again. His brother was “oot”; but he had left word that he must not be allowed to enter the house. The minister, as the brother explained, “had been sair angered” on account of the proceedings of the previous day. He had threatened to remove Adam from his post of “precentor” should he allow any more intercourse between his mother and any “popish minister.”

Remonstrances, persuasions, entreaties were all unavailing. The man declared that his mother “didna’ wish to see” Mr. McGillivray. The latter had therefore reluctantly to submit to circumstances and return home with the Blessed Sacrament, leaving the poor woman “unhouselled”—although not “unanointed.” He feared that she had given in to the persuasions of the minister to refuse further help. But after her death, which occurred a few days later, the good priest ascertained that she had died in most edifying dispositions. The minister had not visited her, and she had thought it best to wait a little before seeing the priest again, merely on account of her family. The McGruers, who were present at the last, assured him that she had died a good Catholic—her only regret the deprivation of Holy Communion.

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Some remarks dropped by the Free Church minister as to the priest's "interference" with a member of his congregation drew forth so vehement a denial from Mr. McGillivray, and a demand for a public contradiction of the statement from the pulpit on the following Sunday, that the crestfallen minister had to eat his words.

The priest was indeed a match for any of his opponents in whatever way they chose to attack him. Once at a dinner, when three ministers were present as well as Mr. McGillivray, one of them thought to make a butt of the priest, and during the after-dinner toasts proposed suddenly: "The Auld Kirk!" But the priest was too quick for him. Raising his glass, he responded promptly: "The Auld Kirk—the True Kirk!"

"No! No!" cried the entrapped Presbyterian.

"Then I'm sorry for *you!*" was the quiet retort.

One feature in Bell's recollections must not be passed over. The priest was renowned as a peacemaker. Anything like family strife was speedily put an end to by his tactful intervention. Even by Protestants his services were not infrequently asked for in this respect, and the result was a great popularity with all classes in the district of Ardmuirland. There was much pathos about the old man's last days; for he hastened his end by his self-denying charity in the cause of peace.

A violent quarrel had taken place some years before between two Protestant farmers, both living some distance away from the priest's house. They had married two sisters, and a dispute had arisen on the subject of a legacy left to one of these nieces by their father's brother, while the other was passed over entirely. Suspicions and insinuations of underhand dealing on the part of the successful legatee had aroused strong feelings, with the result that all communication between the two families had ceased.

At length the wife of one of the belligerents lay upon her deathbed, and under the softening influence of that solemn hour she begged that her sister should be asked to visit her, that they might part as sisters should. The other woman was just as anxious for a reconciliation, but their respective husbands could not be brought to terms.

In her distress the dying woman sent a message to the priest, begging for his intervention. It was the dead of winter, and a severe frost had set in. The old priest had to drive in a friendly farmer's open vehicle for ten miles in a keen wind. He succeeded in persuading one of the men to seek for peace and friendship, then drove on five miles farther to interview the other. Through his earnest remonstrances the strife was entirely brought to an end. But it was at the cost of the life of the aged peacemaker. He caught a severe chill, which he was never able to throw off, and after two or three months he bade farewell to earth.



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Mr. McGillivray had desired, when old age should have rendered him incapable of his priestly charge, to be allowed to retire from active work, and end his days in the quiet seclusion of his native district—a strath shut in by hills, many miles to the north of Ardmuirland. But the family from which the priest had sprung were no great favorites there, and his wish, when made known, had not been cordially received by the people. This had been sufficient to excite the wrath of the Ardmuirland folk; they had risen up as one man against any such arrangement. An appeal was made to the Bishop to prevent their beloved pastor from leaving his flock to die among comparative strangers. So it had been settled by authority that Mr. McGillivray should continue his ministrations among them as long as he was able, and should then receive a helper; thus he was never to take leave of Ardmuirland except to receive his heavenly reward. As we have seen, he died in harness, before there could be any question of retirement.

And now another difficulty arose. His own native district naturally laid claim to his mortal remains, and his relatives had speedily made arrangements for his burial in the family grave. Then, indeed, Ardmuirland was stirred.

“They wouldna’ tak’ him leevin’; they’ll nae get him deid!” was the universal cry.

So in the bright springtime, after a late fall of snow had clothed the countryside in dazzling whiteness, his people bore him to the grave. An immense gathering—of both Catholics and Protestants—had assembled; in Bell’s expressive phrase—“the country was full o’ men!” Every man took his turn in helping to bear the coffin shoulder-high all the five miles which lay between the priest’s house and the ancient burial-ground of St. Michael below the hill. There, surrounded by the flock he had tended so long and so faithfully, the body of the pastor awaits with them the general awakening to life eternal.

XI

A SPRIG OF SHAMROCK

“Amid the roses fierce Repentance rears
Her snaky crest.”
(*Thomson’s Seasons*—“*Spring*”)

“Shamrock in Scotland!” I seem to hear some captious critic exclaim. I do not attribute Scottish birth to the particular sprig of shamrock which is to figure in these pages, dear reader. Like all true shamrock, it was grown in the Emerald Isle. Nevertheless, it was by its means that the subject of this story migrated to Ardmuirland; hence it is responsible for my narrative.

* * * * *



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It was no fault on Bernard Murray's part that all his acquaintances should without exception imagine that he was of Scottish race. For every one who knew him well—and they numbered not a few—dubbed him “a canny Scot.” He had not started the fiction, even if he had done nothing toward contradicting it. For what did it matter to any one else that his nationality should be so widely misinterpreted? He did not care a straw. Indeed, it is possible that in his secret heart he was rather pleased that the illusion had grown up. For it might prove awkward to be known as Irish; Ireland, among the set in which he moved, was looked upon as so impossibly retrograde! So when he was hailed as “a canny Scot” Bernard merely smiled pleasantly and held his peace.

No doubt Violet Rossall thought that smile well worth awakening. It was so sunny—lighting up to classical beauty Bernard's usually grave yet always handsome features. The rarity of his smile, too, rendered it all the more precious. His habitual quiet thoughtfulness of expression helped to settle so definitely his supposed origin; yet had his admirers been better learned in physiognomy they could never have guessed so wide of the mark. The clear, pale skin, the black hair and dark blue eyes so palpably proclaimed him Irish! Moreover, it was to his native traits that he really owed his wide popularity. The quiet reserve which usually characterized him hid a fund of brilliant humor, which would occasionally, and often unexpectedly, flash out in some quick retort or witty jest; nor was there ever wanting that indefinable attraction which is the special charm of Erin's sons and daughters all the world over.

Even Cuthbert Aston was not proof against that charm, although in a sense he and Bernard were rivals. For it must have been as evident to Violet Rossall as it was to all onlookers that both Murray and Aston sought her company in preference to that of any other maiden of their acquaintance; which of the two was preferred by her was not so evident, since she seemed to favor both alike.

Violet was, indeed, the center of attraction for all the unattached males of her particular set. For one reason, she was undeniably beautiful. An oval face, creamy complexion, large, changeful gray eyes, abundant hair of bright chestnut hue, a slim and graceful figure—these were but the half of her charms; there was beauty in her ever-changing expression, and beauty, above all, in that radiant, winning smile, apart from all loveliness of form or feature. She was so undeniably clever, too. She had passed through school and college with flying colors, carrying off one distinction after another; now she held a prominent position as teacher in a secondary school, with the certain prospect of advancement in course of time to spheres of higher responsibility and social position. Violet, therefore, was well pleased with her lot, and felt, it may be taken for granted, little anxiety about her future.

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As regards a life-partner, were she disposed to relinquish the chance of future honors for present ease and happiness, there were many aspirants to the distinction; she might choose freely among the eligible bachelors of her acquaintance. Two only of these, however, seemed to appeal to her sense of fitness—Murray and Aston.

The former, a year or two older than herself, was a master at the same school; clever and capable, he was evidently destined to rise rapidly in his profession, and his future promise, together with his attractive personality, might well render him the more favored suitor.

Cuthbert Aston could not be compared with Murray as regarded intellect, attainments, or personal charm; but he had other attractions of no less weight in the eyes of a girl who had social ambitions. His father had made money in business, and bore the reputation of possessing great wealth. Cuthbert, was the only child of infatuated parents, who had spared no expense in his upbringing, and were ready to gratify his every whim. For a genteel occupation he had been placed in a bank—"not that it would be necessary for him to earn his living at it," as Mrs. Aston was careful to inform her lady friends; "but it was well to give him something to do, and banking is not trade! If the dear boy should get tired of the routine, he could easily take up something else more to his taste."

Apart from his worldly prospects, there was little to attract a girl of Violet's character toward Cuthbert Aston. He was what men technically style "a bounder!" Yet, empty-headed, arrogant, self-centered though he might be, he was a rich man's only son. In Violet's eyes that in itself condoned many flagrant defects. The Astons moved in the highest circles of the city—spite of Mrs. Aston's "flamboyant" style and her husband's demonstrative vulgarity; as a member of their family, therefore, her social status would be secure.

If the girl had any heart it must have pleaded on behalf of Bernard Murray—young, handsome, lovable, as he was. Nothing else except ambition could have allowed her to compare Aston with him. There might, it is true, have been a spice of adventure connected with her encouragement of the latter; it was well known that his parents looked with dismay upon the prospect of their idolized boy "throwing himself away on that little school-teacher," as his mother phrased it.

To do the Astons credit, their objection to Violet did not rest wholly upon an imagined social disparity; there was a much graver reason. The girl lost no opportunity in proclaiming herself a pronounced Free-thinker. Her mother had died while she was quite a child, and for her upbringing Violet had depended wholly upon her father—an ardent Socialist as well as Atheist. Thus she had grown up in an atmosphere thoroughly anti-religious, until death had claimed her father also. Socialism had never strongly appealed to her, and was not likely to do so, under present circumstances; for religion she entertained a supercilious disdain, as "out-of-date nonsense."



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Here, then, were three young people kept in contact by the evident attraction of both men for the same girl, and by the diplomatic encouragement which the latter seemed to give to each in equal proportion. Had Violet not been in question, Murray would have given the cold shoulder to Aston; but as Violet tolerated Aston, he perforce must put up with him. Aston, on his part, admired and feared Murray, whom he regarded as a formidable rival.

“What puzzles me about Murray,” he exclaimed once to a boon companion, “is his jolly good English! Why, the chap has positively no kind of provincial accent!” (Cuthbert’s English, by the way, was not regarded by his intimates as the perfect thing!) “He doesn’t speak like a Scotch Johnny at all! You never hear an ‘Aye, aye’ or ‘d’ye ken?’—not a broad vowel even! Why, he might have lived all his life this side the border, to judge by his tongue, confound him!”

There could be no doubt of Cuthbert’s attachment to Violet. No remonstrances of his mother—and they were but mild, in spite of her objection to Violet, since she recognized the futility of opposing her son’s determined will—had the slightest effect with him. He felt confident in the final acquiescence of both parents in whatever he might choose to do with regard to marriage. Everything, as he saw, rested with Violet, and he was shrewd enough to appreciate the advantages—not so much personal as social—involved in her ultimate decision.

An amateur operatic company had been started in the town, and all the musical talent among the younger generation had been stirred up to take part in what was regarded as a pleasant occupation for winter evenings with the pleasurable anticipation of the excitement of a public performance as the outcome of practices. Our human triangle formed part of the company. All three were musical, and two of them more than usually talented both in singing and acting—Violet and Bernard. The former especially—endowed with a beautiful soprano voice, which had been well cultivated, added to what is styled by the initiated “a good stage presence”—was much in request on all such occasions. She had filled more than one title-role in popular operas presented by their little company, and no one would dream of casting her for any other than the leading part. Bernard had a good tenor voice, and Cuthbert a very fair bass.

It happened that the particular opera chosen for presentation during the Easter holidays was to be performed by a capable traveling company in a neighboring town a month or so before. Consequently our amateurs felt it their duty to witness the performance, and thus pick up some valuable hints for future use by such a mild form of “under-study.” Not only our three friends, but two others of the company—the second soprano and the contralto—started on their short railway journey on a certain evening in March, intending to return by the last train.



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It was scarcely possible, without giving offense to some one or other of the party, to arrange beforehand who was to escort whom. One of the men must inevitably take charge of two of the ladies; fate must determine which! Cuthbert Aston—a youth unaccustomed to deny himself any gratification upon which he had set his mind—had probably resolved that it would not be he! But fortune is proverbially fickle. The train was crowded and seats were at a discount. It was impossible for all five to travel together. Violet—with a woman's perversity, perhaps, because of Cuthbert's evident intention, or, it may be, to show a deliberate preference for Murray—contrived that the latter should accompany herself. The other cavalier was therefore compelled, with as good grace as he could manage, to find places in another compartment for himself and the two very uninteresting maidens thus thrust upon him. No wonder he was nettled! Like a spoiled boy he determined to leave Violet to herself—or rather to her chosen escort—for the rest of the evening. Glum as an owl, he took his place in the theater between the two girls, keeping himself severely aloof from the fickle lady of his dreams. She, on the contrary, stirred by the pleasurable excitement of her surroundings, and possibly not displeased by so evident a proof of Cuthbert's appreciation of her, gave herself wholly to the enjoyment of the hour.

Bernard, on his part, could not fail to be struck by the preference manifested in his regard; he, too, was consequently in high spirits. No better companion—apart from his personal attraction for her—could have been allotted to him for such an occasion. Violet's sunny presence, her clever criticisms of the acting and singing—which he had learned of old to expect—promised for him a thoroughly enjoyable evening. His heart took courage; was it possible that this charming girl really preferred him—a man who had to make his way in the world, and work hard to provide a home for her such as befitted her hopes and ambitions—to this rich man's only son, who had it in his power to give her at once wealth, position, and admiration?

The first act was over. They both had been charmed with what they had seen and heard, and it was pleasurable to compare impressions and to anticipate further gratifying experiences. The theater was warm, and Violet unwound from her neck a lace scarf which she had been wearing. Pinned to the bosom of her pretty mauve dress was a tiny spray of dull green leaves.

"What have you there?" he asked all unthinkingly.

But before she could answer he knew, and a wave of mingled remorse, shame, and self-condemnation swept over his soul.

"What is it? Why, shamrock, of course!"

"Shamrock!" was all he could falter lamely in reply.



“Yes, shamrock. Queen Alexandra set the fashion, you know. Every one who wants to do the correct thing wears shamrock today. But of course you are a Scotchman; you probably have no idea what day it is! So I don’t mind instructing you. It’s St. Patrick’s Day.”



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He dare not speak. She took his silence and his rapt gaze on the little spray of green as token of his admiration of her.

“Perhaps,” she rattled on lightly, “you never heard of Patrick, or if you did, you are inclined to share the modern opinion that ‘there never was no sich a person’—to quote an immortal! If you were an Irishman I should not dare to whisper such a thing; but a canny Scot could have no regard for Patrick, even should he believe in him ever so much!”

Bernard kept his self-control, though he was deadly pale as he spoke.

“If it is so correct to wear it, you might give me a bit of it.”

Smilingly she complied. He placed it in his buttonhole with what must have seemed to her elaborate care. Luckily the curtain rose, and he was free to indulge his thoughts.

Oh, it was almost sacramental—that tiny sprig! How it called up dead memories—memories of the old land, of his dear ones now gone, of his boyhood’s simple faith!

“If you were an Irishman! . . . Perhaps you never heard of Patrick!” The frivolous words burned his brain.

O God! Believe in Patrick! His breath came and went. He could hardly refrain from pressing his lips to the tiny leaves he was wearing on his breast.

An Irishman, indeed, he was; but how unworthy of the name! He, a child of that dear land which Patrick’s blessed feet had trodden—he, a son of that race to whom the saint’s words of grace had made known the Truth—what was he now? A renegade! A false deserter from the ranks of his faithful countrymen! He had been ashamed of his nationality! He had ceased to practise or to cherish the faith which Patrick had brought to the Isle of Saints!

The curtain fell upon the second act, and he had to be ready to listen to frivolities and to respond. He did it with a bad grace, as he well knew. Indeed, he would gladly have been far away—hidden in the dark corner of some deserted church, where freely and unrestrainedly he might pour forth penitential tears, and beg forgiveness of the Father he had so wantonly offended.

“How deadly dull you are to-night!” cried his companion. “I believe Cuthbert Aston, glum as he looks, would have been more entertaining! What can be the matter with you?”

Her banter failed to provoke the always ready apology—usually so charmingly proffered.



He could only mutter something about an awful headache; luckily Violet's attention was drawn for the moment to an acquaintance who caught her eye, and there was a speedy change of subject. Did he ever see such execrable taste as that girl's dress? It was positively hideous! The colors did not suit either the wearer or each other, *etc.*, *etc.*

It was a relief when the curtain rose once more. The music and the action of the piece engrossed the attention of Violet; to Bernard they were God-sent helps. His mind could range back over the past without restraint, while outwardly he appeared absorbed in the play.



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What torrents of self-reproach swept over him as he retraced the wanderings of his misspent years—misspent as regarded the service of his Creator, however prosperous in the eyes of the world! The past came back like a dream. His innocent childhood, spent under the vigilant care of a saintly mother; his boyhood, with its keener joys—all tempered by religion; his school-days, his college career—both dominated by faith; in minute detail the pictures passed before his mental vision as he sat there, silent and solitary—heedless of the throng of pleasure-seekers all around him. The sorrow with which such recollections filled his heart was caused by the contrast which after years presented. He could recall his first falling-away from grace, when the successful attainment of a coveted appointment had brought with it the necessity of concealing his Catholic upbringing and convictions. How rapidly had he descended after that turning point had been passed! Conscience had been stifled until its voice no longer troubled him. Ambition became his goal, worldly success his God. Far away in Ireland his mother had died blessing him for his generous provision for her, ignorant of her darling's downfall. None were now left for whose opinion he had cared one straw, even should they learn of his apostasy.

Shrouded as they were in the gloom of the auditorium, his face, kept resolutely toward the stage, could not be seen by his companion, much less his eyes, which were wells of misery. In his overwhelming grief he almost forgot the girl beside him until a whispered remark upon some beautiful passage in the music recalled her presence. It did but add fresh stings to his remorse. Could it be possible that he—a son of a sainted mother, child of a faithful Catholic race—could have contemplated marriage with a professed atheist? Had he indeed been planning to take to wife, to make the mother of his possible children, one who openly flouted the idea of a personal God—he, who had drunk in at his mother's breast the burning love of the Faith which is the birthright of every true son of Ireland?

The pain and the shame which filled his heart were well-nigh unendurable! Oh, if he could but manage to keep his self-control for an hour or two! If he could but hold out until he was alone; for at times it seemed as though he must betray himself—there, in that public assembly—by crying aloud in his anguish, or even by breaking out into unmanly weeping.

How he got through that miserable evening he never could recall. He realized by her coldness on the return journey, and by the demonstrative encouragement shown to Aston, that he had woefully offended Violet.

Bernard never played his allotted part in the opera; for to every one's astonishment he threw up his appointment and left the town, bound no one knew whither. So the course was clear for Cuthbert Aston, and he lost no time in making good his opportunity. His engagement to Violet took no one by surprise, when his only possible rival was out of the way.



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It does not need a very vivid imagination to voice the sentiments of Aston and his *fiancee* on the subject of Bernard's extraordinary conduct—as it would appear to them.

"I was always afraid," the successful suitor would doubtless exclaim, "that Murray would be the fortunate chap; he was so jolly clever—and good looking, too!"

"Of course," we may imagine the lady responding, "he was all right in that way—handsome, and well-bred, and all that sort of thing. But surely affection is the only thing one really values, dear, and you were always so faithful," *etc., etc., etc.*

Meanwhile, in the great Trappist monastery beyond the Irish Sea a Brother Patrick labored and prayed—if so be he might make some reparation, at least for past unfaithfulness to so bountiful a Lord.

* * * * *

"You must have been working hard at your prayers, Ted," was Val's morning salutation to me when I went in to breakfast one day.

"What, am I late?" I asked, glancing at my watch.

"Oh, that's nothing unusual," was the unkind response, "But I was not thinking of this morning in particular. Don't you remember what I asked you to pray for?"

"To be sure I do. For a particularly good mistress for the school." (For we had just had the misfortune to lose one who was next door to perfection, and wanted to increase in perfection by entering a convent, and Val had been worrying himself to replace her before the holidays were over.)

"So you've heard of one? That's good!" I continued.

"Well, not exactly," said Val. "I've heard of a person who is on the lookout for a place of this kind, and reference seem quite correct, but——"

"But what? If she is all right, why hesitate? Write at once, my dear fellow, and snap her up before some one else does!"

Val's eyes twinkled.

"It's not a *she* at all. That's the difficulty. It's a master who is applying."

I whistled my astonishment, then shook my head in distrust.

"If he's not a fraud he must be fooling you!" I rejoined irreverently. "No capable master would come up here."



“Read that before you make a pronouncement,” said Val, as he threw a letter across the table to me.

It proved to be from an old college friend of Val’s, and backed up very warmly the application for our vacant post of a young man who was an excellent trained teacher, who had tried his vocation as a monk, and had failed through a breakdown in health. He was in want of an easy berth in good country air, where he could pick up his strength and fit himself for entering college to train for the secular priesthood in a couple of years. No man with sense in his head would think twice about closing with such a promising candidate; Val wrote back gladly accepting the young man.

So Bernard Murray came to Ardmuirland, and won all our hearts in no time.



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“That gentleman’s got the face of a priest, Mr. Edmund,” was Penny’s remark at first sight of him.

“Murray’s a treasure!” cried Val in delight. “He’ll do wonders with our bairns, Ted!”

It was a true forecast. The children all took to him at once; the little lassies loved him; for he had a gentle way with them—like that of a kindly, grown-up brother; the boys regarded him with more awe, but were ready to stand up for him against any adversary, as the best shinty player in the district. He thoroughly transformed our little choir of children—leading them and accompanying them with taste and skill.

To Val as well as to myself he grew inexpressibly dear. It became the regular custom for one or other of us to look in at the schoolhouse of an evening, to smoke a pipe with the master, or to lure him for a walk—should the weather be favorable; while on Sunday evenings after service Murray dined with us as a matter of course. It was in the intimate fellowship thus engendered that he confided to me his life story as detailed above.

It was a wrench to all three of us when the parting came, and the dear boy left us to begin his training for the Foreign Missions—his elected field of labor; but we could not grudge our sacrifice when we compared it with the immensity of his.

Bernard is devoting rare talents, ceaseless energy, abundant tenderness to the winning of souls to God. Difficult and hopeless as his efforts appear, yet his rare letters breathe patience and cheerful content. Like every true missionary, he is prodigal of labor, in spite of the apparent scarcity of the harvest gathered; for like his fellows, he relies upon those inspired words which promise a plentiful reaping before the great Harvest-home.

“They went forth on their way and wept: scattering
their seed.

But returning, they shall come with joy: carrying
their sheaves.”

XII

PENNY

“While memory watches o’er the sad review
Of joys that faded like the morning dew.”
(Campbell—*“Pleasures of Hope”*)

Although Penny’s early history is not concerned with Ardmuirland or its neighborhood, yet her long residence in the district will serve as an excuse for its introduction here, apart from the fact of its undoubted interest. Indeed, any account of Ardmuirland which should ignore so prominent a figure in its social life would fail to give a perfect picture of



the place; yet but for the circumstances of her youthful career Penny would never have appeared there at all. Her story, as given here, is pieced together from knowledge gained at various times in intimate conversation; in such a form it is more likely to meet with the reader's appreciation than related in her own words.

Lanedon, in the Midlands, was a humble village enough half a century ago. It lay low, amid gently swelling green hills, and was shaded by luxuriant woodlands; out of the beaten track it slept in rustic seclusion, undisturbed by the events of the outside world, its knowledge of such things being confined to scraps of information which the local newspaper might cull from more up-to-date journals.



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It had but one street—if a single straggling line of dwellings along a roadside might be so termed; on one side were cottages, each in its embowering garden, and on the other ran a clear streamlet, which supplied all the residents with abundance of fresh water. Besides these habitations in the village proper, there were others, more pretentious, though simple enough, in the shape of small farms situated in outlying districts which claimed to belong to Lanedon parish, whose dwellers worshiped in the little Norman church.

At one end of the village stood the “British Lion” public-house. It was a quaint old homestead of two stories, with black, oaken interlacing beams in its wattled walls and mullioned windows, retaining the small diamond, leaded panes, long ago discarded by more pretentious contemporaries. Before the door still stood an ancient horse-block, which had served in its time to mount many a lady of olden days; for the inn had once been of no little importance when stage-coaches plying between London and the north, along the old Roman road, daily passed the end of the lane leading to the village. Many a guest of quality, in those days, spent a night in the “British Lion.”

Opposite the inn door, on the other side of the road, a signboard swung in a frame upheld by a massive oaken pillar, under the shelter of a cluster of tall elms; on a marine background, the noble beast that stands for the type of national courage and strength was depicted rampant, his fierce claws raised in defiance of all invaders. Under the sign shone out in golden letters the name, “Stephen Dale.”

The other end of the straggling street was closed by the old church with its squat tower, whose carven doorways and capitals were wont to attract to the place many a traveler learned in archaeology; for it was a famous building in its way, and was honorably mentioned in most manuals of architecture.

The inn and the church had little in common—less, indeed, than an inn and a church in other villages. Stephen Dale’s sole interest in the sacred building was of a temporal nature; he regarded its attractions with satisfaction because they served to bring past his door many a wayfarer who would otherwise never set foot in Lanedon. Such might pass on their way to the church, but would seldom omit to enter the inn on their return journey for a few minutes of rest and refreshment. And a charming place of rest it was! From a stone-paved passage you entered the “house-place,” a large square room, also stone-paved, a step lower than the passage. Its wide chimney had settled on either side, where one could sit warm and comfortable—heedless of winter winds—in the glow of the log-fire burning on the iron “dogs” of the low hearth. In summer its sanded pavement made it a gratefully cool retreat from the sunshine outside. Moreover, Stephen Dale’s renowned home-brewed ale added to the attractions of the house.

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Neither Stephen nor any of his household ever set foot in the church for the purposes of worship; for, strange as it may seem, the Dales, surrounded by English country yokels, whose sole notion of religion lay in a perfunctory attendance at church once on a Sunday—afternoon for preference—to listen uncomprehending to the service, and slumber through the sermon, came of a Catholic stock. Both Stephen and his wife hailed from Lancashire; they had spent many years in service together in a Catholic household about fifty miles distant from Lanedon before they had married and set up housekeeping at the “British Lion.” Nor were they so utterly deprived of the consolations of religion as at first sight might appear; four miles away were the military barracks of Melliford, and a Catholic chapel which had been built there—principally on account of the soldiers—was served every Sunday and holiday from a larger center, and thither the Dales regularly drove to worship.

Seven children had been born to the worthy couple, but death had snatched all in turn except the last; this was Penelope (our Penny), who, needless to say, was the idol of both parents. The result of their devotion was a rather strict surveillance, to which she was subjected, not only during childhood’s years, but with even greater insistence when she had reached maidenhood. For it became necessary then to guard their treasure from any adventurer who might seek to win her in marriage for the sake of the goodly dowry which every one knew must fall to her lot. Her father would often remark with no little show of determination: “Penny shall never throw herself away on any whipper-snapper of a fellow! She’ll not be a pauper, and she can afford to wait a bit till she meets her match!”

It is not to be surprised, therefore, that Penny should hold her pretty head rather high. No mere plowman would dare to aspire to the hand of a landlord’s only daughter, and no marriageable farmer to whom Penny might aspire was to be found in the neighborhood. As to the military—Penny would have scouted the idea of wedding a common soldier, and was sensible enough to turn a cold shoulder upon the undisguised glances of admiration of youthful and impressionable officers. Thus it came about that she had blossomed into a graceful girl of twenty—small in stature, yet not without good looks—and yet remained heart-whole.

Among their few intimate acquaintances the Dales had a particular attraction for one of the married sergeants of the barracks and his wife—both Catholics. Sergeant Pike and his better-half would not infrequently, especially during the summer months, stroll over to the inn of an evening—sure of a hearty welcome to a cup of tea and a chat. Pike had seen service in India, and his adventures would thrill his rustic audience in the inn, as they listened over pipe and mug to his stirring narratives. His wife was equally entertaining toward Sarah Dale and

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her daughter, in the little glass-partitioned bar in the corner of the “house-place”; she had been maid to many an officer’s lady, and had traveled as far abroad as her husband. Thus while “the tented field” and its dangers held enthralled the larger company of men, present fashions and past adventures—though less exciting than those of the sergeant—were entertaining enough to the smaller audience in the bar. Even ‘Melia, the maid-servant of tender years, would share in the social enjoyment, as knitting in hand she stole furtively in from the kitchen and listened unreprieved to the interesting discourse. Sometimes it might happen that the Pikes had been able to drive over in a borrowed conveyance on a winter afternoon; in such case a cosy supper in the snug little bar, after the ordinary company had departed, would take the place of tea. The Pikes, in their turn, were always hospitably inclined whenever Stephen Dale, his wife, or daughter, or all of them together, might look in upon them of a Sunday after Mass.

The acquaintance, thus ripened, was destined to influence Penny’s future beyond any anticipation on the part of either family. It fell out on one occasion that Mrs. Pike was unable to accompany the sergeant on a visit to the Dales, and to serve as a companion on the walk he brought with him a fellow-sergeant, much younger, whom he introduced to the Dales as “my particular chum—Sergeant Spence.” The newcomer was a decidedly handsome, strapping young soldier, with a merry dark eye, rendered still more striking by his fair hair and tawny moustache. His skin would have been fair, too, had it not undergone a process of bronzing under tropical suns. He could not have been thirty, and looked even younger. He proved also to be unmarried; a fact playfully made known by his companion. “Arthur’s never met with a missus to suit him since he got his stripes,” he said laughing, as they sat at supper; “he’s like me—a bit particular in that respect.” Spence merely greeted the remark with a quiet smile. He seemed a silent young fellow, with a manner superior to his companion’s.

Perhaps it was a want of circumspection on the part of Stephen Dale that he should welcome a stranger, and a soldier, too, as a guest at his family meal. But it was his favorite axiom that a sergeant might not be looked down upon “like as if he was a common Tom, Dick, or Harry in the ranks”; so that his hospitality was to be expected in the present instance. Had either anxious parent had the slightest fear of the attractive sergeant’s pleasing qualities proving too strong for Penny’s “proper pride,” their welcome would have been less genuine; but they were altogether without suspicion. Yet, as to Penny herself, it must have been evident from the first that the dark eyes often strayed in her direction, and that with unmistakable interest, even on so short an acquaintance.



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After that first visit the handsome young sergeant became a frequent partaker of the hospitality of the “British Lion.” He never omitted to accompany the Pikes, and not seldom walked over on a summer’s evening to smoke a pipe with Stephen and feast his eyes surreptitiously upon Stephen’s attractive daughter. He proved, on acquaintance, to be an intelligent, well-spoken young fellow, evidently superior to most of his class; this was owing to the fact that he was a farmer’s son, left, through a combination of circumstances, orphaned and almost destitute, who had found in the army a welcome means of livelihood.

It was not long before Spence was on as familiar a footing at the “British Lion” as his fellow-sergeant. It was strange that both Stephen Dale and his wife were altogether blind to the real reason for his frequent visits. Penny, on the other hand, had early discerned the state of the young man’s feelings toward her; but instinctively she guarded her secret from all. Even when Spence had spoken, and had learned her strong affection for him, she insisted that all knowledge of their mutual understanding should be kept from her parents until she could gauge their feelings in the matter. She was not without uneasiness; for it seemed extremely doubtful whether her father—much as he liked her lover—would consider him suitable as a son-in-law. For her mother’s opinion she felt no anxiety; since Sarah Dale was thoroughly under her husband’s thumb. Penny’s own strong will had come to her from her father alone.

The course of events was much like that of other instances of the kind. Clandestine letters, less frequent meetings—as opportunity offered—ran the usual risk; in due time, as might have been expected by any but ardent lovers, the secret oozed out. Some busybody or other lost no time in conveying the startling news to Stephen Dale, who had hitherto had no suspicion of the state of things.

To say that Penny’s father was disappointed would be an altogether inadequate description of his state of mind; he was thoroughly enraged. Never in her life had his daughter seen him give way to such unrestrained passion; for never before had his hopes and aspirations been so entirely thrown over. He had set his heart upon establishing his darling in a position in life as far above his own as might be possible; now, by her own initiative, she had paved the way to an evident descent in the social scale. Not content with choosing one far beneath her, she had even chosen a Protestant! Yet Stephen had too strong a will to be easily contravened. He was determined to prevent, at all costs, such a disaster. His first impulse was to relieve his mind by telling Spence in no measured language what he thought of his conduct; the latter had perforce to keep silent, however exaggerated the abuse heaped upon him, for his conscience told him that he was in fault. Penny was the next to listen to some very candid truths as to the uprightness of her part

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in the proceedings. Then when he had given full play to his indignation, Stephen began to make plans for the future which might effectually defeat any attempts on the part of the young people to renew their intimacy. Spence, of course, was absolutely forbidden to set foot again over the threshold of the inn. Penny was kept under strict surveillance until her father was able to carry her off to a sister of his own in distant Lancashire, who could be depended upon to prevent any communication between the lovers. The Pikes—poor people—though absolutely innocent of any complicity, since they knew no more of what was going on than Stephen himself, were made to share in Spence's interdict. No assurances of their total ignorance of the affair would avail; the fact that Pike had been the unfortunate instrument in introducing his comrade to the Dale family was in itself sufficient to kindle Stephen's wrath against him. To add to the sergeant's discomfiture, he could not forget that in his admiration for his "chum" he had been unstinting in his praises; for he had a genuine affectionate regard for Spence, as a thoroughly upright young fellow, and a striking contrast to the majority of the Protestants with whom he was daily brought into contact.

The unhappy Penny, placed under her aunt's vigilant guardianship, was inconsolable. She languished and drooped, during the first week or two of her exile, as though her usually firm will had died within her. So utterly broken did she seem that her aunt began to lose all hope of rousing her to any interest in life; apparently she was submitting in a spirit of blank despair to a fate which she regarded as inevitable. But soon a change came over her. Though still quiet and seemingly docile, she gained by degrees some vestiges of her old cheerfulness and gaiety. Her guardian's watchfulness inadvertently relaxed, for it appeared no longer necessary.

But the unfortunate woman had a sad awakening. One morning the girl went out alone—ostensibly to Mass; the day wore on, and to her aunt's consternation no Penny put in an appearance. An explanation arrived next morning by letter. Penny's lover had contrived to communicate with her and to arrange a meeting in Liverpool, where they had been married; by the time the letter arrived at its destination the couple were on the way to Ireland, whither Spence's regiment had been just transferred.

The two years that followed were, for the most part, years of happiness for the sergeant and his bride. Penny's conscience had been at first greatly troubled by her sacrilegious marriage before a registrar, on account of the inevitable haste with which it had to be carried through. She bitterly deplored her weakness for many a long day, even after she had done all that was possible to atone for her sin by a sincere Confession. Her husband could not be expected to realize as she did the gravity of her offense against religion; but he sympathized with her distress, and did all that lay in his power, by unceasing care and devotion, to comfort her. By degrees his lavish affection tended to deaden for the time the keenness of her remorse.



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Their happiness was increased by the birth of a little daughter. The child was the idol of her father, and Penny's life was brightened by the joys of motherhood, in spite of the persistent refusal of Stephen Dale to hold any communication with her or allow his wife to do so.

But all too soon that happiness was to be rudely shattered, and that in a way entirely unforeseen.

Like many another family on the strength of the regiment, the Spences, for lack of accommodation in barracks, were lodged in apartments in the city. One dreary winter evening, when little Annie was about a year old, Penny sat at her knitting by the fireside, the baby in her cot close by, fast asleep. Spence had been taking part in a concert, and was later than usual in coming in, for it was past ten o'clock. In the silence Penny heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs outside; they halted at her door, and there was a gentle rapping. She rose and opened the door in response.

On the landing without stood a woman, whom she had never before seen—a shabby-looking woman, dressed in soiled and worn garments, which had once been bright and stylish. Her appearance, apart from her dress, was far from attractive; her lean face had dull red blotches upon it, her eyes looked wild and shining, and her gray hair straggled out from her tawdry bonnet. It scarcely needed the evidence of a strong smell of spirits to prove that she had been taking drink.

Penny instinctively shrank back from the threshold, but still held the door in her hand. The woman made no attempt to enter. Fixing her too bright eyes upon Penny's face with a scrutinizing glance, she said in a raucous whisper:

"I was told that Sergeant Spence was likely to be here; but it seems I've come to the wrong rooms."

Penny was silent for a moment, dreading she knew not what.

"Sergeant Spence may be here any moment," she answered, rousing herself. She was praying that he might come quickly.

"Oh, indeed! So he may be here any moment," said the woman in louder tones. "I suppose my fine fellow is courting you now," she went on, staring boldly into Penny's frightened face. "Well, I've no fault to find with his taste. He used to have an eye for a pretty face, and you're a good-looking girl, though you're but a little one."

"What do you want with Sergeant Spence?" asked Penny, as her courage began to return. Why should she fear this coarse, black-eyed woman. She could have nothing in common with Arthur. But why should she seek him thus openly in his own dwelling? Her fears began to return.



The strange visitor advanced across the threshold; Penny retreated before her. The color deepened in her already florid face as the woman cried fiercely:

“What do I want with him? I mean to force him to take me back to my rightful place, that’s what I want with him!”

Her voice, raised angrily, awoke the child, who gave a shrill cry of fright. The woman stared at the cot in astonishment. Penny stooped and lifted the little one, and faced the stranger once more as she pressed the child to her bosom.



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"Is that your baby?" the woman almost whispered, as she caught the gleam of Penny's wedding ring. Then she cried wrathfully:

"What! Has he dared to marry you? Oh, the treacherous villain! Surely you're not Arthur Spence's wife!"

In spite of the fear that fell upon her, Penny grew at once strangely calm. This must be some disreputable relative of her husband's—though she had thought him alone in the world. He was an orphan. This could not be Arthur's mother! He could have nothing in common with a woman so low as this! It was some bold, bad creature trying to frighten her. Thus spoke her trembling heart, but her voice was quiet and restrained as she said in reply:

"I do not see how it affects you that Arthur Spence is my husband, and this is our child."

The simple dignity with which she spoke and her apparent calmness seemed to soften the woman and still her anger somewhat. Drawing nearer, she laid her hand with something of gentleness upon Penny's arm, and tears started to her eyes as she exclaimed:

"My dear, the man's a scoundrel! You are no wife of his. He married me when he was a stripling of eighteen, and he cast me off in less than a year. He ruined me, and now he's ruined you—poor dear!"

"It's false, it's false!" cried Penny with fierce eyes and glowing color. "You certainly know nothing of my husband. You'll never turn me against him with your wicked lies! He's good and true—I'm sure of it, say what you like!"

"I only wish you were right, my dear," replied the other, evidently softened by Penny's unshaken fidelity. "But God knows I'm speaking the truth; for here is the proof."

She drew from her pocket a folded paper and held it open before Penny's eyes.

It was a marriage certificate. It described Arthur Spence as wedded to Clara Millar, and the date was twelve years ago. The shock, though intense, was merely momentary. So strong was Penny's trust in her husband that not even this manifest evidence, as it seemed, could shake it. Another man might bear the same name—Arthur might have some disreputable cousin or other relative. She would believe nothing against the uprightness of her Arthur.

"I do not believe," she said firmly, looking steadfastly at the other woman, "that my husband could wrong any woman."

"I declare to you before God," cried the stranger excitedly, "that Sergeant Arthur Spence, whom you call your husband, married me on the day set down here!" And she



rapped with one hand on the paper she held in the other. “But I have a stronger proof. Read that!”

She had taken an envelope from her pocket as she spoke, and drawing from it a paper she held it before Penny.

With shaking hands the poor little wife took it. It was a letter—the handwriting familiar to her. She turned to the signature; it was her husband’s own.



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“Read it through,” persisted the woman. “See whether I am telling the truth or lies.”

Penny’s knees were shaking under her. She sank into a chair, and clasping her baby more closely to her breast she read the letter. It was dated a few days before she and Arthur were married.

“Dear Clara,” it ran. “This is the last time I shall write to you. Unless you stick to the agreement we made, I shall stop sending you money. Do not try to meet me, and do not mention again our unhappy marriage—even to me—or I shall shake you off entirely. So use your common-sense, and keep quiet. You will find that I shall do something desperate if you keep on annoying me as you have done lately. I tell you plainly: I will never see you again.”

What a moment of agony for the poor stricken wife! There could no longer be room for doubt. She had indeed been fooled and deceived! Her innate courage rose and sustained her under the weight of the trial. She would leave that house—now, once and for all—before her betrayer could return! Never, never would she look upon his smiling, treacherous face again!

Animated with fresh strength, she rose and hastily began her preparations. She fetched the baby’s warm wraps from the inner room and began to dress the child. The other woman looked on in silence—dazed for the moment by Penny’s brisk movements. At last she found a voice.

“What are you doing?” she cried. “Surely you will not take the child out to-night!”

Penny made no answer, but fetched her own outdoor clothes and dressed hastily.

“Where are you going, on such a night?” cried the other excitedly.

“Anywhere,” answered Penny, her lips white and her eyes flashing. “Anywhere out of reach of that man.”

“No, no!” the woman expostulated. “Wait till morning! I’ll see him then and settle everything.”

“What can you settle that can make me stay?” asked Penny, in bitter wrath. “Do you think that I would spend another night under this roof? Wait here and see him, if you wish—you have the right to be here, not I! He will never see me again.”

She ran back into her bedroom for the little purse. In it were a few pounds she had saved up to buy the man an easy chair for his coming birthday. How often she had pictured his pleasure when he would be able to lean back comfortably in it on the opposite side of the fireplace and smoke his evening pipe, his handsome face beaming love and admiration. The vision filled her with fresh loathing. She scarcely bade the



other woman good-night, but clasping her babe hurried from the room. Swiftly down the stairs she ran, heedless of the cries of the woman she had left behind, and out into the wind and rain of the dreary street—fit emblem, in its forlorn wretchedness, of the future which loomed hopeless before her.

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Two things added to the poignancy of Penny's unavailing grief in after years: the innocence of Arthur Spence of any deception (except silence regarding his past), and the fact that she never knew this until he had given his life in his country's service. It was then too late to reap comfort in her supreme sorrow from the knowledge of his uprightness both to herself and to the wretched woman who had caused her unreflecting flight on that fatal night.



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For many months she had been hidden from all her former acquaintances in the Convent of Mercy, whose Superior she had long been intimate with. There she had nursed her baby through an illness which at last proved fatal. Grief at the loss of her little one, added to her already heavy burden of trouble, had told upon her own health, and for weeks she had needed to be nursed herself. After her recovery, as she shrank from returning home, the good Sisters obtained for her the post of nurse with our family.

Two years later Stephen Dale died suddenly. Penny had written to him and to her mother more than once, but got no answer; the intimation of her father's death was the first communication she had received since leaving home. Later on a letter was forwarded to her, which had been found among her father's papers. It was from Spence, and was dated the day following her flight. In an agony of mind the man had searched for her everywhere, and failing to discover any trace of her whereabouts, had written to her under cover to her father. He, poor man, could not send it—even had he been willing—having no idea of her address.

The letter was a pitiful appeal to Penny to return, and contained a full explanation of his conduct. The marriage with the woman Millar—never a happy one—had proved invalid, owing to the survival of her former husband to a later date. This, however, only became known to Spence after the woman's intemperate habits had told upon her brain, and landed her in an asylum. She had really believed that her husband—a worthless fellow—had died on the day stated. It was characteristic of the chivalrous nature of the man that Spence shrank from telling her, after her recovery, of the error; content to send her an annual allowance on condition that they should remain apart—as they had agreed to do long before. Although the woman had no legal claim upon him, he had continued this allowance even after his marriage with Penny, hoping to secure by this means freedom from molestation.

It was natural that Penny, knowing all the circumstances, should desire to communicate with her husband and become reconciled. My dear old father, to whom she had confided her trouble, at once inquired through the War Office as to where Arthur Spence was then stationed. The answer told of his death in action three months earlier.

Penny—poor soul!—when giving me these details many years later, utterly broke down, as she accused herself of having wronged—however unwittingly—by her suspicions the brave and upright man whose loss she still keenly deplored, and whose soul (I make no doubt) she will never omit to recommend to God in her daily prayers as long as life is granted to her.