

THE STARLING

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A Scottish Story

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"HERE HE IS! TAK' HIM AND FINISH HIM" Page 44

The Starling

A Scottish Story

BY
NORMAN MACLEOD

Author of
"Reminiscences of a Highland Parish" "Character Sketches"
"The Old Lieutenant and his Son" &c. &c.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Norman Macleod was born, in 1812, at Campbeltown, in Argyllshire, where his father was parish minister. Educated in Campbeltown and Campsie for a time, he entered the University of Glasgow in 1827, and in 1837 became a licensed minister of the Church of Scotland. From 1838 to 1843 ne was minister of Loudoun parish in Ayrshire, from 1843 to 1851 of Dalkeith parish, and from 1851 till his death in 1872 of the Barony Parish, Glasgow. He was appointed chaplain to Queen Victoria in 1857, and next year received the degree of D.D. from Glasgow University. He edited *Good Words* from its foundation in 1860 till his death, and he also gained great literary success with the following books: *The Gold Thread* (1861), *The Old Lieutenant and his Son* (1862), *Parish Papers* (1862), *Wee Davie* (1864), *Eastward* (1866), *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish* (1867), *The Starling* (1867), *Peeps at the Far East* (1871), *The Temptation of Our Lord* (1872), and *Character Sketches* (1872).

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"Here he is! Tak' him and finish him" *Frontispiece*

"Are you aware, Mr. Mercer, of what has just happened?"

"I'll keep Mary"

"I was but axin' a ceevil question, Mr. Spence"

THE STARLING

CHAPTER I ANTECEDENTS

"The man was aince a poacher!" So said, or rather breathed with his hard wheezing breath, Peter Smellie, shopkeeper and elder, into the ears of Robert Menzies, a brother elder, who was possessed of a more humane disposition. They were conversing in great confidence about the important "case" of Sergeant Adam Mercer. What that case was, the reader will learn by and by. The only reply of Robert Menzies was, "Is't possible!" accompanied by a start and a steady gaze at his well-informed brother. "It's a fac' I tell ye," continued Smellie, "but ye'll keep it to yersel'—keep it to yersel', for it doesna do to injure a brither wi'oot cause; yet it's richt ye should ken what a bad beginning our freen' has had. Pit your thumb on't, however, in the *meantime*—keep it, as the minister says, *in retentis*, which I suppose means, till needed."

Smellie went on his way to attend to some parochial duty, nodding and smiling, and again admonishing his brother to "keep it to himsel'." He seemed unwilling to part with the copyright of such a spicy bit of gossip. Menzies inwardly repeated, "A poacher! wha would have thocht it? At the same time, I see—" But I will not record the harmonies, real or imaginary, which Mr. Menzies so clearly perceived between the early and latter habits of the Sergeant.

And yet the gossiping Smellie, whose nose had tracked out the history of many people in the parish of Drumsylie, was in this, as in most cases, accurately

informed. The Sergeant of whom he spoke had been a poacher some thirty years before, in a district several miles off. The wonder was how Smellie had discovered the fact, or how, if true, it could affect the present character or position of one of the best men in the parish. Yet true it was, and it is as well to confess it, not with the view of excusing it, but only to account for Mercer's having become a soldier, and to show how one who became "meek as a sheathed sword" in his later years, had once been possessed of a very keen and ardent temperament, whose ruling passion was the love of excitement, in the shape of battle with game and keepers. I accidentally heard the whole story, which, on account of other circumstances in the Sergeant's later history, interested me more than I fear it may my readers.

Mercer did not care for money, nor seek to make a trade of the unlawful pleasure of shooting without a licence. Nor in the district in which he lived was the offence then looked upon in a light so very disreputable as it is now; neither was it pursued by the same disreputable class. The sport itself was what Mercer loved for its own sake, and it had become to him quite a passion. For two or three years he had frequently transgressed, but he was at last caught on the early dawn of a summer's morning by John Spence, the gamekeeper of Lord Bennock. John had often received reports from the underkeeper and watchers, of some unknown and mysterious poacher who had hitherto eluded every attempt to seize him. Though rather too old for very active service, Spence resolved to concentrate all his experience—for, like many a thoroughbred keeper, he had himself been a poacher in his youth—to discover and secure the transgressor; but how he did so it would take pages to tell. Adam never suspected John of troubling himself about such details as that of watching poachers, and John never suspected that Adam was the poacher. The keeper, we may add, was cousin-german to Mercer's mother. The capture itself was not difficult; for John, having lain in wait, suddenly confronted Adam, who, scorning the idea of flying, much more of struggling with his old cousin, quietly accosted him with, "Weel, John, ye hae catched me at last."

"Adam Mercer!" exclaimed the keeper, with a look of horror. "It canna be you! It's no' possible!"

"It's just me, John, and no mistak'," said Adam, quietly throwing himself down on the heather, and twisting a bit about his finger. "For better or waur, I'm in yer power; but had I been a ne'er-do-weel, like Willy Steel, or Tam M'Grath, I'd hae blackened my face, and whammel'd ye ower and pit yer head in a wallee afore ye could cheep as loud as a stane-chucker; but when I saw wha ye war, I gied in."

"I wad raither than a five-pun-note I had never seen yer face! Keep us! what's to be dune! What wull yer mither say? and his Lordship? Na, what wull onybody say wi' a spark o' decency when they hear--"

"Dinna fash yer thoomb, John; tak' me and send me to the jail."

"The jail! What gude will that do to you or me, laddie? I'm clean donnered about the business. Let me sit down aside ye; keep laigh, in case the keepers see ye, and tell me by what misshanter ye ever took to this wicked business, and under my nose, as if *I* couldna fin' ye oot!"

"Sport, sport!" was Mercer's reply. "Ye ken, John, I'm a shoemaker, and it's a dull trade, and squeezing the clams against the wame is ill for digestion; and when that fails, ane's speerits fail, and the warld gets black and dowie; and whan things gang wrang wi' me, I canna flee to drink: but I think o' the moors that I kent sae weel when my faither was a keeper to Murray o' Cultrain. Ye mind my faither? was he no' a han' at a gun!"

"He was that—the verra best," said John.

"Aweel," continued Adam, "when doon in the mouth, I ponder ower the brow days o' health and life I had when carrying his bag, and getting a shot noos and thans as a reward; and it's a truth I tell ye, that the *whirr kick-ic-ic* o' a covey o' grouse aye pits my bluid in a tingle. It's a sort o' madness that I canna accoot for; but I think I'm no responsible for't. Paitricks are maist as bad, though turnips and stubble are no' to be compared wi' the heather, nor walkin' among them like the far-aff braes, the win'y taps o' the hills, or the lown glens. Mony a time I hae promised to drap the gun and stick to the last; but when I'm no' weel, and wauken and see the sun glintin', and think o' the wide bleak muirs, and the fresh caller air o' the hill, wi' the scent o' the braes an' the bog myrtle, and thae whirrin' craturs—man, I canna help it! I spring up and grasp the gun, and I'm aff!"

The reformed poacher and keeper listened with a poorly-concealed smile, and said, "Nae doot, nae doot, Adam, it's a' natural—I'm no denyin' that; it's a glorious business; in fac', it's jist pairt o' every man that has a steady han' and a guid e'e and a feeling heart. Ay, ay. But, Adam, were ye no' frichtened?"

"For what?"

"For the keepers!"

"The keepers! Eh, John, that's half the sport! The thoct o' dodgin' keepers, jinkin' them roon' hills, and doon glens, and lyin' among the muir-hags, and nickin' a brace or twa, and then fleein' like mad doon ae brae and up anither; and keekin' here, and creepin' there, and cowerin' along a fail dyke, and scuddin' thro' the wood—that's mair than half the life o't, John! I'm no sure if I could shoot the birds if they were a' in my ain kailyard, and my ain property, and if I paid for them!"

"But war ye no' feared for me that kent ye?" asked John.

"Na!" replied Adam, "I was mair feared for yer auld cousin, my mither, gif she kent what I was aboot, for she's unco' prood o' you. But I didna think ye ever luiked efter poachers yersel'? Noo I hae telt ye a' about it."

"I' faith," said John, taking a snuff and handing the box to Adam, "it's human natur'! But ye ken, human natur's wicked, desperately wicked! and afore I was a keeper my natur' was fully as wicked as yours,—fully, Adam, if no waur. But I hae repented—ever sin' I was made keeper; and I wadna like to hinder your repentance. Na, na. We mauna be ower prood! Sae I'll— Wait a bit, man, be canny till I see if ony o' the lads are in sicht;" and John peeped over a knoll, and cautiously looked around in every direction until satisfied that he was alone. "—I'll no' mention this job," he continued, "if ye'll promise me, Adam, never to try this wark again; for it's no' respectable; and, warst o' a', it's no' safe, and ye wad get me into a habble as weel as yersel'. Sae promise me, like a guid cousin, as I may ca' ye,—and bluid is thicker than water, ye ken,—and then just creep doon the burn, and alang the plantin', and ower the wa', till ye get intil the peat road, and be aff like stoor afore the win'; but I canna wi' conscience let ye tak' the birds wi' ye."

Adam thought a little, and said, "Ye're a gude sowl, John, and I'll no' betray ye." After a while he added, gravely, "But I maun kill something. It's no in my heart as wickedness; but my fingers maun draw a trigger." After a pause, he continued, "Gie's yer hand, John; ye hae been a frien' to me, and I'll be a man o' honour to you. I'll never poach mair, but I'll 'list and be a sodger! Till I send hame money,—and it'll no' be lang,—be kind tae my mither, and I'll never forget it."

"A sodger!" exclaimed John.

But Adam, after seizing John by the hand and saying, "Fareweel for a year and a day," suddenly started off down the glen, leaving two brace of grouse, with his gun, at John's feet; as much as to say, Tell my Lord how you caught the wicked poacher, and how he fled the country.

Spence told indeed how he had caught a poacher, who had escaped, but never gave his name, nor ever hinted that Adam was the man.

It was thus Adam Mercer poached and enlisted.

One evening I was at the house of a magistrate with whom I was acquainted, when a man named Andrew Dick called to get my friend's signature to his pension paper, in the absence of the parish minister. Dick had been through the whole Peninsular campaign, and had retired as a corporal. I am fond of old soldiers, and never fail when an opportunity offers to have a talk with them about "the wars". On the evening in question, my friend Findlay, the magistrate, happened to say in a bluff kindly way, "Don't spend your pension in drink."

Dick replied, saluting him, "It's very hard, sir, that after fighting the battles of our country, we should be looked upon as worthless by gentlemen like you."

"No, no, Dick, I never said you were worthless," was the reply.

"Please your honour," said Dick, "ye did not say it, but I consider any man who spends his money in drink is worthless; and, what is mair, a fool; and, worse than all, is no Christian. He has no recovery in him, no supports to fall back on, but is in full retreat, as we would say, from common decency."

"But you know," said my friend, looking kindly on Dick, "the bravest soldiers, and none were braver than those who served in the Peninsula, often exceeded fearfully—shamefully; and were a disgrace to humanity."

"Well," replied Dick, "it's no easy to make evil good, and I won't try to do so; but yet ye forget our difficulties and temptations. Consider only, sir, that there we were, not in bed for months and months; marching at all hours; ill-fed, ill-clothed, and uncertain of life—which I assure your honour makes men indifferent to it; and we had often to get our mess as we best could,—sometimes a tough steak out of a dead horse or mule, for when the beast was skinned it was difficult to make oot its kind; and after toiling and moiling, up and down, here and there and everywhere, summer and winter, when at last we took a town with blood and wounds, and when a cask of wine or spirits fell in the way of the troops, I don't believe that you, sir, or the justices of the peace, or, with reverence be it spoken, the ministers themselves, would have said 'No', to a drop. You'll excuse me, sir; I'm perhaps too free with you."

"I didn't mean to lecture you, or to blame you, Dick, for I know the army is not the place for Christians."

"Begging your honour's pardon, sir," said Dick, "the best Christians I ever knowed were in the army—men who would do their dooty to their king, their country, and their God."

"You have known such?" I asked, breaking into the conversation, to turn it aside from what threatened to be a dispute.

"I have, sir! There's ane Adam Mercer, in this very parish, an elder of the Church—I'm a Dissenter mysel', on principle, for I consider—"

"Go on, Dick, about Mercer; never mind your Church principles."

"Well, sir, as I was saying—though, mind you, I'm not ashamed of being a Dissenter, and, I houp, a Christian too—Adam was our sergeant; and a worthier man never shouldered a bayonet. He was nae great speaker, and was quiet as his gun when piled; but when he shot, he shot! that did he, short and pithy, a crack, and right into the argument. He was weel respeckit, for he was just and mercifu'—never bothered the men, and never picked oot fauts, but covered them; never preached, but could gie an advice in two or three words that gripped firm about the heart, and took the breath frae ye. He was extraordinar' brave! If there was any work to do by ordinar', up to leading a forlorn hope, Adam was sure to be on't; and them that kent him even better than I did then, said that he never

got courage frae brandy, but, as they assured me, though ye'll maybe no' believe it, his preparation was a prayer! I canna tell hoo they fan' this oot, for Adam was unco quiet; but they say a drummer caught him on his knees afore he mounted the ladder wi' Cansh at the siege o' Badajoz, and that Adam told him no' to say a word about it, but yet to tak' his advice and aye to seek God's help mair than man's."

This narrative interested me much, so that I remembered its facts, and connected them with what I afterwards heard about Adam Mercer many years ago, when on a visit to Drumsylie.

CHAPTER II

THE ELDER AND HIS STARLING

When Adam Mercer returned from the wars, more than half a century ago, he settled in the village of Drumsylie, situated in a county bordering on the Highlands, and about twenty miles from the scene of his poaching habits, of which he had long ago repented. His hot young blood had been cooled down by hard service, and his vehement temperament subdued by military discipline; but there remained an admirable mixture in him of deepest feeling, regulated by habitual self-restraint, and expressed in a manner outwardly calm but not cold, undemonstrative but not unkind. His whole bearing was that of a man accustomed at once to command and to obey. Corporal Dick had not formed a wrong estimate of his Christianity. The lessons taught by his mother, whom he fondly loved, and whom he had in her widowhood supported to the utmost of his means from pay and prize-money, and her example of a simple, cheerful, and true life, had sunk deeper than he knew into his heart, and, taking root, had sprung up amidst the stormy scenes of war, bringing forth the fruits of stern self-denial and moral courage tempered by strong social affections.

Adam had resumed his old trade of shoemaker. He occupied a small cottage, which, with the aid of a poor old woman in the neighbourhood, who for an hour morning and evening did the work of a servant, he kept with singular neatness. His little parlour was ornamented with several memorials of the war—a sword or two picked up on memorable battle-fields; a French cuirass from Waterloo, with a gaudy print of Wellington, and one also of the meeting with Blücher at La Belle Alliance.

The Sergeant attended the parish church as regularly as he used to do parade. Anyone could have set his watch by the regularity of his movements on Sunday mornings. At the same minute on each succeeding day of holy rest and worship, the tall, erect figure, with well-braced shoulders, might be seen stepping out of the cottage door—where he stood erect for a moment to survey the weather—dressed in the same suit of black trousers, brown surtout, buff waistcoat, black stock, white cotton gloves, with a yellow cane under his arm—everything so neat and clean, from the polished boots to the polished hat, from the well-brushed grey whiskers to the well-arranged locks that met in a peak over his high forehead and soldier-like face. And once within the church there was no more sedate or attentive listener.

There were few week-days and no Sunday evenings on which the Sergeant did not pay a visit to some neighbour confined to bed from sickness, or suffering from distress of some kind. He manifested rare tact—made up of common sense and genuine benevolence—on such occasions. His strong sympathies put him instantly *en rapport* with those whom he visited, enabling him at once to meet them on some common ground. Yet in whatever way the Sergeant began his intercourse, whether by listening patiently—and what a comfort such listening silence is!—to the history of the sickness or the sorrow which had induced him to enter the house, or by telling some of his own adventures, or by reading aloud the newspaper—he in the end managed with perfect naturalness to convey truths of weightiest import, and fraught with enduring good and comfort—all backed up by a humanity, an unselfishness, and a gentleman-like respect for others, which made him a most welcome guest. The humble were made glad, and the proud were subdued—they knew not how, nor probably did the Sergeant himself, for he but felt aright and acted as he felt, rather than endeavoured to devise a plan as to *how* he should speak or act in order to produce a definite result. He numbered many true friends; but it was not possible for him to avoid being secretly disliked by those with whom, from their character, he would not associate, or whom he tacitly rebuked by his own orderly life and good manners.

Two events, in no way connected, but both of some consequence to the Sergeant, turned the current of his life after he had resided a few years in Drumsylie. One was, that by the unanimous choice of the congregation, to whom the power was committed by the minister and his Kirk Session, Mercer was elected to the office of elder in the parish.[#] This was a most unexpected compliment, and one which the Sergeant for a time declined; indeed, he accepted it only after many arguments addressed to his sense of duty, and enforced by pressing personal reasons brought to bear on his kind heart by his minister, Mr. Porteous.

[#] Every congregation in the Church of Scotland is governed by a court, recognized by civil law, composed of the minister, who acts as "Moderator", and has only a casting vote, and elders ordained to the office, which is for life. This court determines, subject to appeal to higher courts, who are to receive the Sacrament, and all cases of Church discipline. No lawyer is allowed to plead in it. Its freedom from civil consequences is secured by law. In many cases it also takes charge of the poor. The eldership has been an unspeakable blessing to Scotland.

The other event, of equal—may we not safely say of greater importance to him?—was his marriage! We need not tell the reader how this came about; or unfold all the subtle magic ways by which a woman worthy to be loved loosed the cords that had hitherto tied up the Sergeant's heart; or how she tapped the deep well of his affections into which the purest drops had for years been falling, until it gushed out with a freshness, fulness, and strength, which are, perhaps, oftenest to be found in an old heart, when it is touched by one whom it dares to love, as that old heart of Adam Mercer's must do if it loved at all.

Katie Mitchell was out of her teens when Adam, in a happy moment of his life, met her in the house of her widowed mother, who had been confined to a bed of feebleness and pain for years, and whom she had tended with a patience, cheerfulness, and unwearied goodness which makes many a humble and unknown home a very Eden of beauty and peace. Her father had been a leading member of a very strict Presbyterian body, called the "Old Light", in which he shone with a brightness which no Church on earth could of itself either kindle or extinguish, and which, when it passed out of the earthly dwelling, left a subdued glory behind it which never passed away. "Faither" was always an authority with Katie and her mother, his ways a constant teaching, and his words were to them as echoes from the Rock of Ages.

The marriage took place after the death of Kate's mother, and soon after Adam had been ordained to the eldership.

A boy was born to the worthy couple, and named Charles, after the Sergeant's father.

It was a sight to banish bachelorship from the world, to watch the joy of the Sergeant with Charlie from the day he experienced the new and indescribable feelings of being a father, until the flaxen-haired blue-eyed boy was able to *toddle* to his waiting arms, and then be mounted on his shoulders, while he stepped round the room to the tune of the old familiar regimental march, performed by him with half-whistle half-trumpet tones, which vainly expressed the roll of the band that crashed harmoniously in memory's ear. Katie "didna let on" her motherly pride and delight at the spectacle, which never became stale or common-place.

Adam had a weakness for pets. Dare we call such tastes a weakness, and not rather a minor part of his religion, which included within its wide embrace a love of domestic animals, in which he saw, in their willing dependence on himself, a reflection of more than they could know, or himself even fully understand? At the time we write a starling was his special friend. It had been caught and tamed for his boy Charlie. Adam had taught the creature with greatest care to speak with precision. Its first and most important lesson, was, "I'm Charlie's bairn". And one can picture the delight with which the child heard this innocent confession, as the bird put his head askance, looked at him with his round full eye, and in clear accents acknowledged his parentage: "I'm Charlie's bairn!" The boy fully appreciated his feathered confidant, and soon began to look upon him as essential to his daily enjoyment. The Sergeant had also taught the starling to repeat the words, "A man's a man for a' that", and to whistle a bar or two of the ditty, "Wha'll be king but Charlie!"

Katie had more than once confessed that she "wasna unco' fond o' this kind o' diversion". She pronounced it to be "neither natural nor canny", and had often remonstrated with the Sergeant for what she called his "idle, foolish, and even profane" painstaking in teaching the bird. But one night, when the Sergeant announced that the education of the starling was complete, she became more vehement than usual on this assumed perversion of the will of Providence.

"Nothing," said the Sergeant, "can be more beautiful than his 'A man's a man for a' that'."

"The mair's the pity, Adam!" said Katie. "It's wrang-clean wrang—I tell ye; and ye'll live tae rue't. What right has *he* to speak? cock him up wi' his impudence! There's mony a bairn aulder than him canna speak sae weel. It's no' a safe business, I can tell you, Adam."

"Gi' ower, gi' ower, woman," said the Sergeant; "the cratur' has its ain gifts, as we hae oors, and I'm thankfu' for them. It does me mair gude than ye ken whan I tak' the boy on my lap, and see hoo his e'e blinks, and his bit feet gang, and hoo he laughs when he hears the bird say, 'I'm Charlie's bairn'. And whan I'm cuttin', and stitchin', and hammerin', at the window, and dreamin' o' auld langsyne, and fechtin' my battles ower again, and when I think o' that awfu' time that I hae seen wi' brave comrades noo lying in some neuk in Spain; and when I hear the roar o' the big guns, and the splutterin' crackle o' the wee anes, and see the crood o' red coats, and the flashin' o' bagnets, and the awfu' hell-excuse me—o' the fecht, I tell you it's like a sermon to me when the cratur' says 'A man's a man for a' that!'" The Sergeant would say this, standing up, and erect, with one foot forward as if at the first step of the scaling ladder. "Mind ye, Katie, that it's no' every man that's 'a man for a' that'; but mair than ye wad believe are a set o' fushionless, water-gruel, useless cloots, cauld soons, when it comes to

the real bit—the grip atween life and death! O ye wad wunner, woman, hoo many men when on parade, or when singin' sangs about the war, are gran' hands, but wha lie flat as scones on the grass when they see the cauld iron! Gie me the man that does his duty, whether he meets man or deevil—that's the man for me in war or peace; and that's the reason I teacht the bird thae words. It's a testimony for auld freends that I focht wi', and that I'll never forget—no, never! Dinna be sair, gudewife, on the puir bird."—"Eh, Katie," he added, one night, when the bird had retired to roost, "just look at the cratur'! Is'na he beautifu'? There he sits on his bawk as roon' as a clew, wi' his bit head under his wing, dreamin' about the wuds maybe—or aboot wee Charlie—or aiblins aboot naething. But he is God's ain bird, wonderfu' and fearfully made."

Still Katie, feeling that "a principle"—as she, *à la mode*, called her opinion—was involved in the bird's linguistic habits, would still maintain her cause with the same arguments, put in a variety of forms. "Na, na, Adam!" she would persistingly affirm, "I *will* say that for a sensible man an' an elder o' the kirk, ye're ower muckle ta'en up wi' that cratur'. I'll stick to't, that it's no' fair, no' richt, but a mockery o' man. I'm sure faither wadna hae pitten up wi't!"

"Dinna be flyting on the wee thing wi' its speckled breast and bonnie e'e. Charlie's bairn, ye ken—mind that!"

"I'm no flyting on him, for it's you, no' him, that's wrang. Mony a time when I spak' to you mysel', ye were as deaf as a door nail to *me*, and can hear naething in the house but that wee neb o' his fechtin' awa' wi' its lesson. Na, ye needna glower at me, and look sae astonished, for I'm perfect serious."

"Ye're speaking perfect nonsense, gudewife, let me assure you; and I *am* astonished at ye," replied Adam, resuming his work on the bench.

"I'm no sic' a thing, Adam, as spakin' nonsense," retorted his wife, sitting down with her seam beside him. "I ken mair aboot they jabbering birds maybe than yersel'. For I'll never forget an awfu' job wi' ane o' them that made a stramash atween Mr. Carruthers, our Auld Licht minister, and Willy Jamieson the Customer Weaver. The minister happened to be veesitin' in Willy's house, and exhortin' him and some neebours that had gaithered to hear. Weel, what hae ye o't, but ane o' thae parrots, or Kickcuckkoo birds—or whatever ye ca' them—had been brocht hame by Willy's brither's son—him that was in the Indies—and didna this cratur' cry oot 'Stap yer blethers!' just ahint the minister, wha gied sic a loup, and thocht it a cunning device o' Satan!"

"Gudewife, gudewife!" struck in the Sergeant, as he turned to her with a laugh, "O dinna blether yoursel', for ye never did it afore. They micht hae hung the birdcage oot while the minister was in. But what had the puir bird to do wi' Satan or religion? Wae's me for the religion that could be hurt by a bird's cracks! The cratur' didna ken what it was saying."

"Didna ken what it was saying!" exclaimed Katie, with evident amazement. "I tell ye, I've see'd it mony a time, and heard it, too; and it was a hantle sensibler than maist bairns ten times its size. I was watchin' it that day when it disturbed Mr. Carruthers, and I see'd it lookin' roon', and winkin' its een, and scartin' its head lang afore it spak'; and it tried its tongue—and black it was, as ye micht expek, and dry as ben leather—three or four times afore it got a soond out; and tho' a' the forenoon it had never spak a word, yet when the minister began, its tongue was lowsed, and it yoked on him wi' its gowk's sang, 'Stap yer blethers, stap yer blethers!' It was maist awfu' tae hear't! I maun alloo, hooever, that it cam' frae a heathen land, an wasna therefore sae muckle to be blamed. But I couldna mak' the same excuse for *your* bird, Adam!"

A loud laugh from Adam proved at once to Katie that she had neither offended nor convinced him by her arguments.

But all real or imaginary differences between the Sergeant and his wife about the starling, ended with the death of their boy. What that was to them both, parents only who have lost a child—an only child—can tell. It "cut up", as they say, the Sergeant terribly. Katie seemed suddenly to become old. She kept all her boy's clothes in a press, and it was her wont for a time to open it as if for worship, every night, and to "get her greet out". The Sergeant never looked into it. Once, when his wife awoke at night and found him weeping bitterly, he told his first and only fib; for he said that he had an excruciating headache. A headache! He would no more have wept for a headache of his own than he would for one endured by his old foe, Napoleon.

This great bereavement made the starling a painful but almost a holy remembrancer of the child. "I'm Charlie's bairn!" was a death-knell in the house. When repeated, no comment was made. It was generally heard in silence; but one day, Adam and his wife were sitting at the fireside taking their meal in a sad mood, and the starling, perhaps under the influence of hunger, or—who knows?—from an uneasy instinctive sense of the absence of the child, began to repeat rapidly the sentence, "I'm Charlie's bairn!" The Sergeant rose and went to its cage with some food, and said, with as much earnestness as if the bird had understood him, "Ay, ye're jist *his* bairn, and ye'll be *my* bairn tae as lang as ye live!"

"A man's a man for a' that!" quoth the bird.

"Sometimes no'," murmured the Sergeant.

CHAPTER III

THE STARLING A DISTURBER OF THE PEACE

It was a beautiful Sunday morning in spring. The dew was glittering on every blade of grass; the trees were bursting into buds for coming leaves, or into flower for coming fruit; the birds were "busy in the wood" building their nests, and singing jubilate; the streams were flashing to the sea; the clouds, moisture laden, were moving across the blue heavens, guided by the winds; and signs of life, activity, and joy filled the earth and sky.

The Sergeant hung out Charlie in his cage to enjoy the air and sunlight. He had not of late been so lively as usual; his confession as to his parentage was more hesitating; and when giving his testimony as to a man being a man, or as to the exclusive right of Charlie to be king, he often paused as if in doubt. All his utterances were accompanied by a spasmodic chirp and jerk, evidencing a great indifference to humanity. A glimpse of nature might possibly recover him. And so it did; for he had not been long outside before he began to spread his wings and tail feathers to the warm sun, and to pour out more confessions and testimonies than had been heard for weeks.

Charlie soon gathered round him a crowd of young children with rosy faces and tattered garments who had clattered down from lanes and garrets to listen to his performances. Every face in the group became a picture of wonder and delight, as intelligible sounds were heard coming from a hard bill; and any one of the crowd would have sold all he had on earth—not a great sacrifice after all, perhaps a penny—to possess such a bird. "D'ye hear it, Archy?" a boy would say, lifting up his little brother on his shoulder, to be near the cage. Another would repeat the words uttered by the distinguished speaker, and direct attention to them. Then, when all were hushed into silent and eager expectancy awaiting the next oracular statement, and the starling repeated "I'm Charlie's bairn!" and whistled "Wha'll be king but Charlie!" a shout of joyous merriment followed, with sundry imitations of the bird's peculiar guttural and rather rude pronunciation. "It's a witch, I'll wager!" one boy exclaimed. "Dinna say that," replied another, "for wee Charlie's dead." Yet it would be difficult to trace any logical contradiction between the supposed and the real fact.

This audience about the cage was disturbed by the sudden and unexpected appearance from round the corner, of a rather portly man, dressed in black clothes; his head erect; his face intensely grave; an umbrella, handle foremost, under his right arm; his left arm swinging like a pendulum; a pair of black spats covering broad flat feet, that advanced with the regular beat of slow music, and seemed to impress the pavement with their weight. This was the Rev. Daniel Porteous, the parish minister.

No sooner did he see the crowd of children at the elder's door than he paused for a moment, as if he had unexpectedly come across the execution of a criminal; and no sooner did the children see him, than with a terrified shout of "There's the minister!" they ran off as if they had seen a wild beast, leaving one or two of the younger ones sprawling and bawling on the road, their natural protectors being far too intent on saving their own lives, to think of those of their nearest relatives.

The sudden dispersion of these lambs by the shepherd soon attracted the attention of their parents; and accordingly several half-clad, slatternly women rushed from their respective "closes". Flying to the rescue of their children, they carried some and dragged others to their several corners within the dark caves. But while rescuing their wicked cubs, they religiously beat them, and manifested their zeal by many stripes and not a few admonitions:—"Tak' that—and that—and that—ye bad—bad—wicked wean! Hoo daur ye! I'll gie ye yer pay! I'll mak' ye! I'se warrant ye!" &c. &c. These were some of the motherly teachings to the terrified babes; while cries of "Archie!" "Peter!" "Jamie!" with threatening shakes of the fist, and commands to come home "immeditly", were addressed to the elder ones, who had run off to a safe distance. One tall woman, whose brown hair escaped from beneath a cap black enough to give one the impression that she had been humbling herself in sackcloth and ashes, proved the strength of her convictions by complaining very vehemently to Mr. Porteous of the Sergeant for having thrown such a temptation as the starling in the way of her children, whom she loved so tenderly and wished to bring up so piously. All the time she held a child firmly by the hand, who attempted to hide its face and tears from the minister. Her zeal we must assume was very real, since her boy had clattered off from the cage on shoes made by the Sergeant, which his mother had never paid for, nor was likely to do now, for conscience' sake, on account of this bad conduct of the shoemaker. We do not affirm that Mrs. Dalrymple never *liquidated* her debts, but she did so after her own fashion.

It was edifying to hear other mothers declare their belief that their children had been at the morning Sabbath School, and express their wonder and anger at discovering for the first time their absence from it; more especially as this—the only day, of course, on which it had occurred—should be the day that the minister

accidentally passed to church along their street!

The minister listened to the story of their good intentions, and of the ill doings of his elder with an uneasy look, but promised speedy redress.

CHAPTER IV

THE REV. DANIEL PORTEOUS

Mr. Porteous had been minister of the parish for upwards of thirty years. Previously he had been tutor in the family of a small laird who had political interest in those old times, and through whose influence with the patron of the parish he had obtained the living of Drumsylie. He was a man of unimpeachable character. No one could charge him with any act throughout his whole life inconsistent with the "walk and conversation" becoming his profession. He performed all the duties of his office with the regularity of a well-adjusted, well-oiled machine. He visited the sick, and spoke the right words to the afflicted, the widow, and the orphan, very much in the same calm, regular, and orderly manner in which he addressed the Presbytery or wrote out a minute of Kirk Session. Never did a man possess a larger or better-assorted collection of what he called "principles" in the carefully-locked cabinet of his brain, applicable at any moment to any given ecclesiastical or theological question which was likely to come before him. He made no distinction between "principles" and his own mere opinions. The *dixit* of truth and the *dixit* of Porteous were looked upon by him as one. He had never been accused of error on any point, however trivial, except on one occasion when, in the Presbytery, a learned clerk of great authority interrupted a speech of his by suggesting that their respected friend was speaking heresy. Mr. Porteous exclaimed, to the satisfaction of all, "I was not aware of it, Moderator! but if such is the opinion of the Presbytery, I have no hesitation in instantly withdrawing my unfortunate and unintentional assertion". His mind ever after was a round, compact ball of logically spun theological worsted, wound up, and "made up". The glacier, clear, cold, and stern, descends into the valley full of human habitations, corn-fields, and vineyards, with flowers and fruit-trees on every side; and though its surface melts occasionally, it remains the glacier still. So it had hitherto been with him. He preached the truth—truth which is the world's life and which stirs the angels—but too often as a telegraphic wire transmits the most momentous intelligence: and he grasped it as a sparrow grasps the wire

by which the message is conveyed. The parish looked up to him, obeyed him, feared him, and so respected him that they were hardly conscious of not quite loving him. Nor was he conscious of this blank in their feelings; for feelings and tender affections were in his estimation generally dangerous and always weak commodities,—a species of womanly sentimentalism, and apt sometimes to be rebellious against his "principles", as the stream will sometimes overflow the rocky sides that hem it in and direct its course. It would be wrong to deny that he possessed his own "fair humanities". He had friends who sympathised with him; and followers who thankfully accepted him as a safe light to guide them, as one stronger than themselves to lean on, and as one whose word was law to them. To all such he could be bland and courteous; and in their society he would even relax, and indulge in such anecdotes and laughter as bordered on genuine hilarity. As to what was deepest and truest in the man we know not, but we believe there was real good beneath the wood, hay, and stubble of formalism and pedantry. There was doubtless a kernel within the hard shell, if only the shell could be cracked. Might not this be done? We shall see.

It was this worthy man who, after visiting a sick parishioner, suddenly came round the corner of the street in which the Sergeant lived. He was, as we said, on his way to church, and the bell had not yet begun to ring for morning worship. Before entering the Sergeant's house (to do which, after the scene he had witnessed, was recognized by him to be an important duty), he went up to the cage to make himself acquainted with all the facts of the case, so as to proceed with it regularly. He accordingly put on his spectacles and looked at the bird, and the bird, without any spectacles, returned the inquiring gaze with most wonderful composure. Walking sideways along his perch, until near the minister, he peered at him full in the face, and confessed that he was Charlie's bairn. Then, after a preliminary *kic* and *kirr*, as if clearing his throat, he whistled two bars of the air, "Wha'll be king but Charlie!" and, concluding with his aphorism, "A man's a man for a' that!" he whetted his beak and retired to feed in the presence of the Church dignitary.

"I could not have believed it!" exclaimed the minister, as he walked into the Sergeant's house, with a countenance by no means indicating the sway of amiable feelings.

CHAPTER V

THE SERGEANT AND HIS STARLING IN TROUBLE

The Sergeant and his wife, after having joined, as was their wont, in private morning worship, had retired, to prepare for church, to their bedroom in the back part of the cottage, and the door was shut. Not until a loud knock was twice repeated on the kitchen-table, did the Sergeant emerge in his shirt-sleeves to reply to the summons. His surprise was great as he exclaimed, "Mr. Porteous! can it be you? Beg pardon, sir, if I have kept you waiting; please be seated. No bad news, I hope?"

Mr. Porteous, with a cold nod, and remaining where he stood, pointed with his umbrella to the cage hanging outside the window, and asked the Sergeant if that was his bird.

"It is, sir," replied the Sergeant, more puzzled than ever; "it is a favourite starling of mine, and I hung it out this morning to enjoy the air, because—"

"You need not proceed, Mr. Mercer," interrupted the minister; "it is enough for me to know from yourself that you acknowledge that bird as yours, and that *you* hung it there."

"There is no doubt about that, sir; and what then? I really am puzzled to know why you ask," said the Sergeant.

"I won't leave you long in doubt upon that point," continued the minister, more stern and calm if possible than before, "nor on some others which it involves."

Katie, at this crisis of the conversation, joined them in her black silk gown. She entered the kitchen with a familiar smile and respectful curtsy, and approached the minister, who, barely noticing her, resumed his subject. Katie, somewhat bewildered, sat down in the large chair beside the fire, watching the scene with curious perplexity.

"Are you aware, Mr. Mercer, of what has just happened?" inquired the minister.

[image]

"ARE YOU AWARE, MR. MERCER, OF WHAT HAS JUST HAPPENED?" Page 34

"I do not take you up, sir," replied the Sergeant.

"Well, then, as I approached your house a crowd of children were gathered round that cage, laughing and singing, with evident enjoyment, and disturbing the neighbourhood by their riotous proceedings, thus giving pain and grief to their parents, who have complained loudly to me of the injury done to their most sacred feelings and associations by *you*—please, please, don't interrupt me, Mr.

Mercer; I have a duty to perform, and shall finish presently.”

The Sergeant bowed, folded his arms, and stood erect. Katie covered her face with her hands, and exclaimed ”Tuts, tuts, I’m real sorry–tuts.”

”I went up to the cage,” said Mr. Porteous, continuing his narrative, ”and narrowly inspected the bird. To my–what shall I call it? astonishment? or shame and confusion?–I heard it utter such distinct and articulate sounds as convinced me beyond all possibility of doubt–yet you smile, sir, at my statement!–that--”

”Tuts, Adam, it’s dreadful!” ejaculated Katie.

”That the bird,” continued the minister, ”*must* have been either taught by you, or with your approval: and having so instructed this creature, you hang it out on this, the Sabbath morning, to whistle and to speak, in order to insult–yes, sir, I use the word advisedly--”

”Never, sir!” said the Sergeant, with a calm and firm voice; ”never, sir, did I intentionally insult mortal man.”

”I have nothing to do with your intentions, but with *facts*; and the fact is, you did insult, sir, every feeling the most sacred, besides injuring the religious habits of the young. *You* did this, an elder–*my* elder, this day, to the great scandal of religion.”

The Sergeant never moved, but stood before his minister as he would have done before his general, calm, in the habit of respectful obedience to those having authority. Poor Katie acted as a sort of *chorus* at the fireside.

”I never thocht it would come to this,” she exclaimed, twisting her fingers. ”Oh! it’s a pity! Sirs a day! Waes me! Sic a day as I have lived to see! Speak, Adam!” at length she said, as if to relieve her misery.

The silence of Adam so far helped the minister as to give him time to breathe, and to think. He believed that he had made an impression on the Sergeant, and that it was possible things might not be so bad as they had looked. He hoped and wished to put them right, and desired to avoid any serious quarrel with Mercer, whom he really respected as one of his best elders, and as one who had never given him any trouble or uneasiness, far less opposition. Adam, on the other hand, had been so suddenly and unexpectedly attacked, that he hardly knew for a moment what to say or do. Once or twice the old ardent temperament made him feel something at his throat, such as used to be there when the order to charge was given, or the command to form square and prepare to receive cavalry. But the habits of ”drill” and the power of passive endurance came to his aid, along with a higher principle. He remained silent.

When the steam had roared off, and the ecclesiastical boiler of Mr. Porteous was relieved from extreme pressure, he began to simmer, and to be more quiet about the safety valve. Sitting down, and so giving evidence of his being at once fatigued and mollified, he resumed his discourse. ”Sergeant”–he had hitherto

addressed him as Mr. Mercer—"Sergeant, you know my respect for you. I will say that a better man, a more attentive hearer, a more decided and consistent Churchman, and a more faithful elder, I have not in my parish--"

Adam bowed.

"Be also seated," said the minister.

"Thank you, sir," said Adam, "I would rather stand."

"I will after all give you credit for not intending to do this evil which I complain of; I withdraw the appearance even of making any such charge," said Mr. Porteous, as if asking a question.

After a brief silence, the Sergeant said, "You have given me great pain, Mr. Porteous."

"How so, Adam?"—still more softened.

"It is great pain, sir, to have one's character doubted," said Adam.

"But have I not cause?" inquired the minister.

"You are of course the best judge, Mr. Porteous; but I frankly own to you that the possibility of there being any harm in teaching a bird never occurred to me."

"Oh, Adam!" exclaimed Katie, "I ken it was aye *your* mind that, but it wasna mine, although at last--"

"Let me alone, Katie, just now," quietly remarked Adam.

"What of the scandal? what of the scandal?" struck in the minister. "I have no time to discuss details this morning; the bells have commenced."

"Well, then," said the Sergeant, "I was not aware of the disturbance in the street which you have described; I never, certainly, could have intended *that*. I was, at the time, in the bedroom, and never knew of it. Believe me when I say't, that no man lives who would feel mair pain than I would in being the occasion of ever leading anyone to break the Lord's day by word or deed, more especially the young; and the young about our doors are amang the warst. And as to my showing disrespect to you, sir!—that never could be my intention."

"I believe you, Adam, I believe you; but--"

"Ay, weel ye may," chimed in Katie, now weeping as she saw some hope of peace; "for he's awfu' taen up wi' guid, is Adam, though I say it."

"Oh, Katie; dinna, woman, fash yersel' wi' me," interpolated Adam.

"Though I say't that shouldna say't," continued Katie, "I'm sure he has the greatest respec' for you, sir. He'll do onything to please you that's possible, and to mak' amends for this great misfortun'."

"Of that I have no doubt—no doubt whatever, Mrs. Mercer," said Mr. Porteous, kindly; "and I wished, in order that he should do so, to be faithful to him, as he well knows I never will sacrifice my principles to any man, be he who he may—never!

"There is no difficulty, I am happy to say," the minister resumed, after a moment's pause, "in settling the whole of this most unpleasant business. Indeed I promised to the neighbours, who were very naturally offended, that it should never occur again; and as you acted, Adam, from ignorance—and we must not blame an old soldier *too* much," the minister added with a patronising smile,— "all parties will be satisfied by a very small sacrifice indeed—almost too small, considering the scandal. Just let the bird be forthwith destroyed—that is all."

Adam started.

"In any case," the minister went on to say, without noticing the Sergeant's look, "this should be done, because being an elder, and, as such, a man with grave and solemn responsibilities, you will I am sure see the propriety of at once acquiescing in my proposal, so as to avoid the temptation of your being occupied by trifles and frivolities—contemptible trifles, not to give a harsher name to all that the bird's habits indicate. But when, in addition to this consideration, these habits, Adam, have, as a fact, occasioned serious scandal, no doubt can remain in any well-constituted mind as to the *necessity* of the course I have suggested."

"Destroy Charlie—I mean, the starling?" enquired the Sergeant, stroking his chin, and looking down at the minister with a smile in which there was more of sorrow and doubt than of any other emotion. "Do you mean, Mr. Porteous, that I should kill him?"

"I don't mean that, necessarily, *you* should do it, though *you* ought to do it as the offender. But I certainly mean that it should be destroyed in any way, or by any person you please, as, if not the best possible, yet the easiest amends which can be made for what has caused such injury to morals and religion, and for what has annoyed myself more than I can tell. Remember, also, that the credit of the eldership is involved with my own."

"Are you serious, Mr. Porteous?" asked the Sergeant.

"Serious! Serious!—Your minister?—on Sabbath morning!—in a grave matter of this kind!—to ask if I am serious! Mr. Mercer, you are forgetting yourself."

"I ask pardon," replied the Sergeant, "if I have said anything disrespectful; but I really did not take in how the killing of my pet starling could mend matters, for which I say again, that I am really vexed, and ax yer pardon. What has happened has been quite unintentional on my part, I do assure you, sir."

"The death of the bird," said the minister, "I admit, in one sense, is a mere trifle—a trifle to *you*: but it is not so to *me*, who am the guardian of religion in the parish, and as such have pledged my word to your neighbours that this, which I have called a great scandal, shall never happen again. The least that you can do, therefore, I humbly think, as a proof of your regret at having been even the innocent cause of acknowledged evil; as a satisfaction to your neighbours, and a security against a like evil occurring again; and as that which is due to yourself

as an office-bearer, to the parish, and, I must add, to *me* as your pastor, and *my* sense of what is right; and, finally, in order to avoid a triumph to Dissent on the one hand, and to infidelity on the other,—it is, I say, beyond all question your clear duty to remove the *cause* of the offence, by your destroying that paltry insignificant bird. I must say, Mr. Mercer, that I feel not a little surprised that your own sense of what is right does not compel you at once to acquiesce in my very moderate demand—so moderate, indeed, that I am almost ashamed to make it.”

No response from the Sergeant.

“Many men, let me tell you,” continued Mr. Porteous, “would have summoned you to the Kirk Session, and rebuked you for your whole conduct, actual and implied, in this case, and, if you had been contumacious, would then have libelled and deposed you!” The minister was warming as he proceeded. “I have no time,” he added, rising, “to say more on this painful matter. But I ask you now, after all I have stated, and before we part, to promise me this favour—no, I won’t put it on the ground of a personal favour, but on *principle*—promise me to do this—not to-day, of course, but on a week-day, say to-morrow—to destroy the bird,—and I shall say no more about it. Excuse my warmth, Adam, as I may be doing you the injustice of assuming that you do not see the gravity of your own position or of mine.” And Mr. Porteous stretched out his hand to the Sergeant.

“I have no doubt, sir,” said the Sergeant, calmly, “that you mean to do what seems to you to be right, and what you believe to be your duty. But—” and there was a pause, “but I will not deceive you, nor promise to do what I feel I can never perform. *I* must also do *my* duty, and I daurna do what seems to me to be wrang, cruel, and unnecessar’. I canna’ kill the bird. It is simply impossible! Do pardon me, sir. Dinna think me disrespectful or prood. At this moment I am neither, but verra vexed to have had ony disturbance wi’ my minister. Yet—”

“Yet what, Mr. Mercer?”

“Weel, Mr. Porteous, I dinna wish to detain you; but as far as I can see my duty, or understand my feelings—”

“Feelings! forsooth!” exclaimed Mr. Porteous.

“Or understand my feelings,” continued Adam, “I canna—come what may, let me oot with it—I *will not* kill the bird!”

Mr. Porteous rose and said, in a cold, dry voice, “If such is your deliverance, so be it. I have done my duty. On you, and you only, the responsibility must now rest of what appears to me to be *contumacious* conduct—an offence, if possible, worse than the original one. You sin with light and knowledge—and it is, therefore, heinous by reason of several aggravations. I must wish you good-morning. This matter cannot rest here. But whatever consequences may follow, you, and you alone, I repeat, are to blame—my conscience is free. You will hear more of

this most unfortunate business, Sergeant Mercer." And Mr. Porteous, with a stiff bow, walked out of the house.

Adam made a movement towards the door, as if to speak once more to Mr. Porteous, muttering to himself, "He canna be in earnest!—The thing's impossible!—It canna be!" But the minister was gone.

CHAPTER VI

THE STARLING ON HIS TRIAL

Adam was left alone with his wife. His only remark as he sat down opposite to her was: "Mr. Porteous has forgot himself, and was too quick;" adding, "nevertheless it is our duty to gang to the kirk."

"Kirk!" exclaimed Katie, walking about in an excited manner, "that's a' ower! Kirk! pity me! hoo can you or me gang to the kirk? Hoo can we be glowered at and made a speculation o', and be the sang o' the parish? The kirk! waes me; that's a' by! I never, never thocht it wad come to this wi' me or you, Adam! I think it wad hae kilt my faither. It's an awfu' chasteesement."

"For what?" quietly asked the Sergeant.

"Ye needna speer—ye ken weel eneuch it's for that bird. I aye telt ye that ye were ower fond o't, and noo!—I'm real sorry for ye, Adam. It's for *you*, for *you*, and no' for mysel', I'm sorry. Sirs me, what a misfortun'!"

"What are ye sae sorry for?" meekly inquired Adam.

"For everything!" replied Katie, groaning; "for the stramash amang the weans; for the clish-clash o' the neebors; for you and me helping to break the Sabbath; for the minister being sae angry, and that nae doubt, for he kens best, for gude reasons; and, aboon a', for you, Adam, my bonnie man, an elder o' the kirk, brocht into a' this habble for naething better than a bit bird!" And Katie threw herself into the chair, covering her face with her hands.

The Sergeant said nothing, but rose and went outside to bring in the cage. There were signs of considerable excitement in the immediate neighbourhood. The long visit of the minister in such circumstances could mean only a conflict with Adam, which would be full of interest to those miserable gossips, who never thought of attending church except on rare occasions, and who were glad of something to occupy their idle time on Sunday morning. Sundry heads were thrust from upper windows, directing their gaze to the Sergeant's house. Some

of the boys reclined on the grass at a little distance, thus occupying a safe position, and commanding an excellent retreat should they be pursued by parson or parents. The cage was the centre of attraction to all.

The Sergeant at a glance saw how the enemy lay, but without appearing to pay any attention to the besiegers, he retired with the cage into the house and fixed it in its accustomed place over his boy's empty cot. When the cage was adjusted, the starling scratched the back of his head, as if something annoyed him; he then cleaned his bill on each side of the perch, as if present duties must be attended to; after this he hopped down and began to describe figures with his open bill on the sanded floor of the cage, as if for innocent recreation. Being refreshed by these varied exercises, he concluded by repeating his confession and testimony with a precision and vigour never surpassed.

Katie still occupied the arm-chair, blowing her nose with her Sunday pocket-handkerchief. The Sergeant sat down beside her.

"It's time to gang to the kirk, gudewife," he remarked, although, from the bells having stopped ringing, and from the agitated state of his wife's feelings, he more than suspected that, for the first time during many years, he would be obliged to absent himself from morning worship—a fact which would form another subject of conversation for his watchful and thoughtful neighbours.

"Hoo can we gang to the kirk, Adam, wi' this on our conscience?" muttered Katie.

"I hae naething on *my* conscience, Katie, to disturb it," said her husband; "and I'm sorry if onything I hae done should disturb yours. What can I do to lighten 't?"

Katie was silent.

"If ye mean," said the Sergeant, "that the bird should be killed, by a' means let it be done. I'll do onything to please *you*, though Mr. Porteous has, in my opinion, nae richt whatever to insist on my doin't to please *him*; for *he* kens naething about the cratur. But if you, that kens as weel as me a' the bird has been to us baith, but speak the word, the deed will be allooed by me. I'll never say no."

"Do yer duty, Adam!" said his wife.

"That is, my duty to *you*, mind, for I owe it to nane else I ken o'. But that duty shall be done—so ye've my full leave and leeberty tae kill the bird. Here he is! Tak' him oot o' the cage, and finish him. I'll no interfere, nor even look on, cost what it may." And the Sergeant took down the cage, and held it near his wife. But she said nothing, and did nothing.

"I'm Charlie's bairn!" exclaimed the starling.

"Dinna tell me, Adam, tae kill the bird! It's no' me, but you, should do sic wark. Ye're a man and a sodger, and it was you teachd him, and got us into this

trouble.”

”Sae be’t!” said the Sergeant. ”I’ve done mair bluidy jobs in my day, and needna fear tae spill, for the sake o’ peace, the wee drap bluid o’ the puir h airmless thing. What way wid ye like it kilt?”

”Ye should ken best yersel’, gudeman; killin’ is no woman’s wark,” said Katie, in a low voice, as she turned her head away and looked at the wall.

”Aweel then, since ye leave it to me,” replied Adam, ”I’ll gie him a sodger’s death. It’s the maist honourable, and the bit mannie deserves a’ honour frae our hands, for he has done his duty pleasantly, in fair and foul, in simmer and winter, to us baith, and tae—Never heed—I’ll shoot him at dawn o’ day, afore he begins whistlin’ for his breakfast; and he’ll be buried decently. You and Mr. Porteous will no’ be bothered wi’ him lang. Sae as that’s settled and determined, we may gang to the kirk wi’ a guid conscience.”

Adam rose, as if to enter his bedroom.

”What’s your hurry, Adam?” asked Katie, in a half-peevish tone of voice. ”Sit doon and let a body speak.”

The Sergeant resumed his seat.

”I’m jist thinking,” said Katie, ”that ye’ll maybe no’ get onybody to gie ye a gun for sic a cruel job; and if ye did, the noise sae early in the morning wad frichten folk, and mak’ an awfu’ clash amang neeboors, and luik dreadfu’ daft in an elder.”

”Jock Hall has a gun I could get. But noo that I think o’t, Jock himsel’ will do the job, for he’s fit for onything, and up tae everything except what’s guid. I’ll send him Charlie and the cage in the morning, afore ye rise; sae keep your mind easy,” said the Sergeant, carelessly.

”I wadna trust Charlie into Jock Hall’s power—the cruel ne’er-do-weel that he is! Na, na; whatever has to be done maun be done decently by yersel’, gudeman,” protested Katie.

”Ye said, gudewife, to Mr. Porteous,” replied Adam, ”that ye kent I wad do onything to please him and to gie satisfaction for this misfortun’, as ye ca’ed it; and sin’ you and him agree that the bird is to be kilt, I suppose I maun kill him to please ye baith; I see but ae way left o’ finishing him.”

”What way is that?” asked Katie.

”To thraw his bit neck.”

”Doonricht cruelty,” suggested Katie, ”to thraw the neck o’ a wee thing like that! Fie on ye, gudeman! Ye’re no like yersel’ the day.”

”It’s the *only* way left, unless we burn him; so I’ll no’ argue mair about it. There’s nae use o’ pittin’ ’t aff ony langer; the better day, the better deed. Sae here goes! It will be a’ ower wi’ him in a minute; and syne ye’ll get peace—”

The Sergeant rose and placed the cage on a table near the window where

the bird was accustomed to be fed. Charlie, in expectation of receiving food, was in a high state of excitement, and seemed anxious to please his master by repeating all his lessons as rapidly and correctly as possible. The Sergeant rolled up his white shirt-sleeves, to keep them from being soiled by the work in which he was about to be engaged. Being thus prepared, he opened the door of the cage, thrust in his hand, and seized the bird, saying, "Bid fareweel to yer mistress, my wee Charlie."

Katie sprang from her chair, and with a loud voice commanded the Sergeant to "haud his han' and let the bird alane!"

"What's wrang?" asked the Sergeant, as he shut the door of the cage and went towards his wife, who again sank back in her chair, and covered hef eyes with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Oh, Adam!" she said, "I'm a waik, waik woman. My nerves are a' gane; my head and heart are baith sair. A kind o' glamour, a temptation has come ower me, and I dinna ken what's richt or what's wrang. I wuss I may be forgie'n if I'm wrang, for the heart I ken is deceitfu' aboon a' things and desperately wicked:—but, richt or wrang, neither by you nor by ony ither body can I let that bird be kilt! I canna thole't! for I just thocht e'eenoo that I sead plainly afore me our ain wee bairn that's awa'—an' oh, Adam!—"

Katie burst into a fit of weeping, and could say no more. The Sergeant hung up the cage in its old place; then going to his wife, he gently clapped her shoulder, and bending over her whispered in her ear, "Dinna ye fear, Katie, aboot Charlie's bairn!"

Katie clasped her hands round his neck and drew his grey head to her cheek, patting it fondly.

"Dry yer een, wifie," said Adam, "and feed the cratur, and syne we'll gang to the kirk in the afternoon."

He then retired to the bedroom, shut the door, and left Katie alone with her starling and her conscience—both at peace, and both whistling, each after its own fashion.

CHAPTER VII

THE SERGEANT ON HIS TRIAL

The Sergeant went to church in the afternoon, but he went alone. Katie was

unable to accompany him. "She didna like," she said. But this excuse being not quite satisfactory to her conscience, she had recourse to that accommodating malady which comes to the rescue of universal Christendom when in perplexity—a headache. In her case it really existed as a fact, for she suffered from a genuine pain which she had not sufficient knowledge or fashion to call "nervous", but which, more than likely, really came under that designation. Her symptoms, as described by herself, were that "her head was bizzin' and bummin' like a bees' skep".

As the Sergeant marched to church, with his accustomed regular pace and modest look, he could, without seeming to remark it, observe an interest taken in his short journey never manifested before. An extra number of faces filled the windows near his house, and looked at him with half smile, half sneer.

There was nothing in the sermon of Mr. Porteous which indicated any wish to "preach to the times",—a temptation which is often too strong for preachers to resist who have nothing else ready or more interesting to preach about. Many in a congregation who may be deaf and blind to the Gospel, are wide-awake and attentive to gossip, from the pulpit. The good man delivered himself of an excellent sermon, which, as usual, was sound in doctrine and excellent in arrangement, with suitable introduction, "heads of discourse", and practical conclusion. His hearers, as a whole, were not of a character likely either to blame or praise the teaching, far less to be materially influenced by it. They were far too respectable and well-informed for that. They had "done the right thing" in coming to church as usual, and were satisfied. There was one remark often made in the minister's praise, that he was singularly exact in preaching forty-five minutes, and in dismissing the congregation at the hour and a half.

But there were evident signs of life in the announcement which he made at the end of this day's service. He "*particularly* requested a meeting of Kirk Session in the vestry after the benediction, and expressed a hope that *all* the elders would, if possible, attend".

Adam Mercer snuffed the battle from afar; but as it was his "duty" to obey the summons, he obeyed accordingly.

The Kirk Session, in spite of defects which attend all human institutions, including the House of Lords, with its Bench of Bishops, is one of the most useful courts in Scotland, and has contributed immensely in very many ways to improve the moral and physical condition of the people. Its members, as a rule, are the strength and comfort of the minister, and it is, generally speaking, his own fault if they are not. In the parish of Drumsylie the Session consisted of seven elders, with the Minister as "Moderator". These elders represented very fairly, on the whole, the sentiments of the congregation and parish on most questions which could come before them.

As all meetings of Kirk Session are held in private, reporters and lawyers being alike excluded, we shall not pretend to give any account of what passed at this one. The parish rumours were to the effect that the "Moderator", after having given a narrative of the occurrences of the morning, explained how many most important principles were involved in the case as it now stood—principles affecting the duty and powers of Kirk Sessions; the social economy of the parish; the liberties and influence of the Church, and the cause of Christian truth; and concluded by suggesting the appointment of two members, Mr. Smellie and Mr. Menzies, to "deal" with Mr. Mercer, and to report to the next meeting of Session. This led to a sharp discussion, in which Mr. Gordon, a proprietor in the neighbourhood, protested against any matter which "he presumed to characterise as trifling and unworthy of their grave attention", being brought before them at all. He also appealed the whole case to the next meeting of Presbytery, which unfortunately was not to take place for two months.

The Sergeant, strange to say, lost his temper when, having declared "upon his honour as a soldier" that he meant no harm, and could therefore make no apology, he was called to order by the Moderator for using such a word as "honour" in a Church court. Thinking his honour itself called in question, Adam abruptly left the meeting. Mr. Gordon, it was alleged, had been seen returning home, at one moment laughing, and the next evidently crying because of these proceedings; and more than one of the elders, it was rumoured, were disposed to join him, but were afraid of offending Mr. Porteous—a fear not unfrequently experienced in the case of many of his parishioners. The minister, it may be remarked, was fond of quoting the text, "*first pure, then peaceable*". But he never seemed to have attained the "first" in theory, if one might judge from his neglect of the second in practice.

It was after this meeting of Session that Mr. Smellie remarked to Mr. Menzies, as we have already recorded, that "the man was aince a poacher!" a fact which, by the way, he had communicated to Mr. Porteous also for the sake of "edification". Mr. Smellie bore a grudge towards the Sergeant, who had somehow unwittingly ruffled his vanity or excited his jealousy. He was smooth as a cat; and, like a cat, could purr, fawn, see in the dark, glide noiselessly, or make a sudden spring on his prey. The Sergeant, from certain circumstances which shall be hereafter noticed, understood his character as few in the parish did. Mr. Menzies was a different, and therefore better man, his only fault being that he believed in Smellie.

The Sergeant was later than usual in returning home. It was impossible to conceal from the inquiring and suspicious look of his wife that something was out of joint, to the extent at least of making it allowable and natural on her part to ask, "What's wrang noo, Adam?"

"Nothing particular, except wi' my honour," was the Sergeant's cool reply.

"Yer honour! What's wrang wi' that?"

"The minister," said the Sergeant, "doots it, and he tells me that it was wrang to speak about it."

On this, Katie, who did not quite comprehend his meaning, begged to know what had taken place. "What did they say? What did they do? Wha spak'?" And she poured out a number of questions which could not speedily be answered. We hope it will not diminish the reader's interest in this excellent woman if we admit that for a moment she, too, became the slave of gossip. We deny that this prostration of the heart and head to a mean idol is peculiar to woman—this craving for small personal talk, this love of knowledge regarding one's neighbours in those points especially which are not to their credit, or which at least are naturally desired by them to be kept secret from the world. Weak, idle, and especially vain men are as great traffickers as women in this dissocial intercourse. Like small insects, they use their small stings for annoyance, and are flattered when they make strong men wince.

Katie's fit was but momentary, and in the whole circumstances of the case excusable.

The Sergeant told her of his pass at arms, and ended with an indignant protest about his honour.

"What do they mak'," partly asserted, partly inquired Katie, "o' 'Honour to whom honour?'—and 'Honour all men?'—and 'Honour the king?'—and 'Honour faither and mither?'—what *I* did a' my life! I'll maintain the word is Scriptoral!"

But the Sergeant, not being critical or controversial, did not wish to contend with his wife on the connection which, as she supposed, existed between the word honour, and his word of honour. His mind was becoming perplexed and filled with painful thoughts. This antagonism into which he had been driven with those whom he had hitherto respected and followed with unhesitating confidence, was growing rapidly into a form and shape which was beyond his experience—alien to his quiet and unobtrusive disposition, and contrary to his whole purpose of life. He sat down by the fireside, and went over all the events of the day. He questioned himself as to what he had said or done to give offence to mortal man. He recalled the history of his relationship to the starling, to see, if possible, any wrong-doing in it. He reviewed the scene in the Kirk Session; and his conclusion, on the one hand, was a stone blindness as to the existence of any guilt on his part, and on the other, a strong suspicion that his minister *could* not do him a wrong—*could* not be so displeased upon unjust, ignorant, or unrighteous grounds, and that consequently there was a something—though what it was he could neither discover nor guess—which Mr. Porteous had misunderstood and had been misled by. He went over and over again the several items of

this long account of debit and credit, without being able to charge aught against himself, except possibly his concealment from his minister of the reason why the starling was so much beloved, and also the fact perhaps of his having taken offence, without adequate cause, at the meeting of Session. The result of all these complex cogitations between himself and the red embers in the grate, was a resolution to go that evening to the Manse, and by a frank explanation put an end to all misunderstanding. In his pure heart the minister was reflected as a man of righteousness, love, and peace. He almost became annoyed with the poor starling, especially as it seemed to enjoy perfect ease and comfort on its perch, where it had settled for the night.

By and by he proceeded to call on the minister, but did not confide the secret to Katie.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONFERENCE IN THE MANSE

The manse inhabited by Mr. Porteous, like most of its parochial companions at that time—for much improvement in this as in other buildings has taken place since those days—was not beautiful, either in itself or in its surroundings. Its three upper windows stared day and night on a blank hill, whose stupid outline concealed the setting, and never welcomed the rising sun. The two lower windows looked into a round plot of tawdry shrubs, surrounded by a neglected boxwood border which defended them from the path leading from the small green gate to the door; while twenty yards beyond were a few formal ugly-looking trees that darkened the house, and separated it from the arable land of the glebe. No blame to the minister for his manse or its belongings! On £200 per annum, he could not keep a gardener, or afford any expensive ornaments. And for the same reason he had never married, although his theory as to "feelings" may have possibly hindered him from taking this humanising step. And who knows what effect the small living and the bachelor life may have had on his "principles"!

His sister lived with him. To many a manse in Scotland the minister's sister has been a very angel in the house, a noble monument of devoted service and of self-sacrificing love—only surpassed by that paragon of excellence, if excellent at all, the minister's wife. But with all charity, Miss Porteous—Thomasina she was called by her father, after his brother in the West Indies, from whom money was

expected, but who had left her nothing—was not in any way attractive, and never gave one the impression of self-sacrifice. She evidently felt her position to be a high one. Being next to the Bishop, she evidently considered herself an Archdeacon, Dean, or other responsible ecclesiastical personage. She was not ugly, for no woman is or can be that; but yet she was not beautiful. Being about fifty, as was guessed by the most charitable, her looks were not what they once were, nor did they hold out any hope of being improved, like wine, by age. Her hair was rufous, and the little curls which clustered around her forehead suggested, to those who knew her intimately, the idea of screws for worming their way into characters, family secrets, and similar private matters. She was, unfortunately, the minister's newspaper, his remembrancer, his spiritual detective and confidential informant as to all that belonged to the parish and its passing history.

Miss Thomasina Porteous, in the absence of the servant, who was "on leave" for a day or two, opened the door to the Sergeant. Mr. Porteous was in his study, popularly so called,—a small room, with a book-press at one end, and a table in the centre, with a desk on it, a volume of *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, *Cruden's Concordance*, an *Edinburgh Almanac*, and a few *Reports*. Beside the table, and near the fire, was an arm-chair, in which the minister sat reading a volume of sermons. No sooner was the Sergeant announced than Mr. Porteous rose, looked over his spectacles, hesitated, and at last shook hands, as if with an icicle, or in conformity with Act of Parliament. Then, motioning Mr. Mercer to a seat, he begged to inquire to what he owed this call, accompanying the questioning with a hint to Thomasina to leave the room. The Sergeant's first feeling was that he had made a great mistake, and he wished he had never left the army.

"Well, Mr. Mercer?" inquired the minister, as he sat opposite to the Sergeant.

"I am sorry to disturb you, sir," replied the Sergeant, "but I wished to say that I think I was too hot and hasty this afternoon in the Session."

"Pray don't apologise to *me*, Mr. Mercer," said the minister. "Whatever you have to say on that point, had better be said publicly before the Kirk Session. Anything else?"

The Sergeant wavered, as military historians would say, before this threatened opposition, as if suddenly met by a square of bristling bayonets.

"Well, then," he at last said, "I wish to tell you frankly, and in as few words as possible, what no human being kens but my wife. I never blame ignorance, and I'm no gaun to blame yours, Mr. Porteous, but—"

"My ignorance!" exclaimed the minister. "It's come to a pretty pass indeed, if *you* are to blame it, or remove it! Ignorance of what, pray?"

"Your ignorance, Mr. Porteous," continued the Sergeant, "on a point which I should have made known to you, and for which I alone and not you are in fault."

The minister seemed relieved by this admission.

The Sergeant forthwith told the story of the starling as the playmate of his child, the history of whose sickness and death was already known to Mr. Porteous; and having concluded, he said, "That's the reason, sir, why I couldna kill the bird. I wadna tell this to ony man but to yersel', for it's no' my fashion tae sen' the drum aboot the toon for pity or for sympathy; but I wish *you*, sir, to ken what's fac, for yer ain guidance and the guidance o' the Session."

"I remember your boy well," remarked Mr. Porteous, handing his snuff-box in a very kindly way to his visitor.

The Sergeant nodded. "Ye did *your* duty, minister, to us on that occasion, or I wadna have come here the nicht. I kent ye wad like onything Charlie was fond o'."

"I quite understand your feelings, Sergeant, and sympathise with them."

The Sergeant smiled, and nodded, and said, "I hope ye do, sir; I was sure ye would. I'm thankfu' I cam', and sae will Katie be." The burden was lifting off his heart.

"But," said Mr. Porteous, after a pause and a long snuff, "I must be faithful with you, Adam: '*First* pure, *then* peaceable,' you know."

"And I hope, sir," said Adam, "'easy to be entreated.'"

"*That*," replied Mr. Porteous, "depends on circumstances. Let us, therefore, look at the whole aspects of the case. There is to be considered, for example, your original delinquency, mistake, or call it by what name you please; then there is to be taken into account my full explanation, given ministerially in your own house, of the principles which guided my conduct and ought to guide yours; then there is also the matter of the Kirk Session—the fact that they have taken it up, which adds to its difficulty—a difficulty, however, let me say, Mr. Mercer, which has not been occasioned by me. Now, review all these—especially that with which you have personally most to do—the *origo mali*, so to speak—the fact that a bird endeared to you by very touching associations was, let me admit it, accidentally, and unintentionally,—let this also be granted for the sake of argument,—made by you the occasion of scandal. We are agreed on this point at least?"

"It was on that point," interrupted the Sergeant, "I thought you doubted my honour."

"No!" said Mr. Porteous; "I only declared that 'honour' was a worldly, not a Christian phrase, and unfit therefore for a Church court."

The Sergeant was nonplussed. Thinking his ignorance sinful, he bowed, and said no more.

"I am glad you acquiesce so far," continued Mr. Porteous. "But further:—carefully observe," and he leant forward, with finger and thumb describing an argumentative enclosure out of which Adam could not escape—"observe that the

visible, because notorious, *fact* of scandal demands some reparation by a fact equally visible and notorious; you see? What kind of reparation I demanded, I have already told you. I smile at its amount, in spite of all you have said, and said so well, in explaining your difficulties in not at once making it; nay I sympathise with your kindly, though, permit me to say, your weak *feeling*, Adam. But, is feeling principle?" Here Mr. Porteous paused with a complacent smile to witness the telling effect of his suggestive question. "Were our Covenanting forefathers," he went on to say, "guided by feeling in giving their testimony for truth by the sacrifice of their very lives? Were the martyrs of the early Church guided by feeling? But I will not insult an elder of mine by any such arguments, as if he were either ignorant of them, or insensible to their importance. Let me just add," concluded the minister, in a low, emphatic, and solemn voice, laying one hand on Adam's knee, "what would your dear boy *now* think—supposing him to be saved—if he knew that his father was willing to lose, or even to weaken his influence for good in the parish—to run the risk of being suspended, as you now do, from the honourable position of an elder—and all for what?" asked the minister, throwing himself back in his chair, and spreading out his hands—"all for what! a toy, a plaything, a bird! and because of your *feeling*—think of it, Adam—your *feeling*! All must yield but you: neighbours must yield, Session must yield, and I must yield!—no sacrifice or satisfaction will you make, not even of this bird; and all because *your* feelings, forsooth, would suffer! *That's* your position, Adam. I say it advisedly. And finally, as I also hinted to you, what would the Dissenters say if we were less pure in our discipline than themselves? Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Askelon—the Philistines would rejoice! Take any view of the case you please, it is bad—very bad." And the minister struck his thigh, turned round in his chair, and looked at the roof of the room.

Adam at that moment felt as if he was the worst man in the parish, and given over to the power of evil.

"I dinna understand," he said, bending down his head, and scratching his whisker.

"I thought you did not, Adam—I thought you did not," said Mr. Porteous, turning towards him again; "but I am glad if you are beginning to see it at last. Once you get a hold of a principle, all becomes clear."

"It's a sharp principle, minister; it's no' easy seen. It has a fine edge, but cuts deep—desperate deep," remarked Adam, in an undertone.

"That is the case with most principles, Adam," replied Mr. Porteous. "They have a fine edge, but one which, nevertheless, separates between a lie and truth, light and darkness. But if you have it—hold it fast."

The minister's principles seemed unanswerable; Adam's sense of right unassailable. Like two opposing armies of apparently equal strength they stood,

armed, face to face, and a battle was unavoidable. Could both be right, and capable of reconciliation? Could right principle and right feeling, or logical deductions from sound principles, ever be really opposed to the strongest instincts of the heart, the moral convictions of a true and loving nature? A confused medley of questions in casuistry tortured Adam's simple conscience, until they became like a tangled thread, the more knotted the more he tried to disentangle the meshes.

The Sergeant rose to depart, saying, "I have a small Sabbath class which meets in my house, and I must not be too late for it; besides, there's nae use o' my waiting here langer: I have said my say, and can say nae mair."

"You will return to your class with more satisfaction," said Mr. Porteous, "after this conversation. But, to prevent all misunderstanding or informality, you will of course be waited upon by your brethren; and when they understand, as I do, that you will cheerfully comply with our request, and when they report the same, no more will be said of the matter, unless Mr. Gordon foolishly brings it up. And if—let me suggest, though I do not insist—if, next Sunday, you should hang the cage where it was this morning when it gave rise to such scandal, but without the bird in it, the neighbours would, I am sure, feel gratified, as I myself would, by such an unmistakable sign of your good-will to all parties."

The Sergeant had once or twice made an effort to "put in a word", but at last thought it best to hear the minister to the end. Then, drawing himself up as if on parade, he said, "I fear you have ta'en me up wrang, Mr. Porteous. My silence wasna consent. Had my auld Colonel—ane o' the best and kindest o' men—ordered me to march up to a battery, I wad hae done't, though I should hae been blawn the next moment up to the moon; but if he had ordered me, for example, tae strike a bairn, or even tae kill my bird, I wad hae refused, though I had been shot the next minute for't. There are things I canna do, and winna do, for mortal man, as long as God gies me my heart: and this is ane o' them—I'll never kill 'Charlie's bairn'. That's my last word—and ye can do as you and the Session please."

The minister stood aghast with astonishment. The Sergeant saluted him soldier-fashion, and walked out of the room, followed by Mr. Porteous to the front door. As he passed out, the minister said, "Had you shot fewer birds, sir, in your youth, you might have escaped the consequences of refusing to shoot this one now. 'Be sure your sin will find you out,'" he added, in a louder voice, as he shut the door with extra force, and with a grim smile upon his face.

Smellie had informed him that forenoon of Mercer's poaching days.

"Capital!" exclaimed Miss Thomasina, as she followed him into the study out of a dark corner in the lobby near the door, where she had been ensconced, listening to the whole conversation. "Let his proud spirit take that! I wonder you had such patience with the upsetting, petted fellow. Him and his bird, forsooth,

to be disturbing the peace of the parish!"

"Leave him to me," quietly replied Mr. Porteous; "I'll work him."

CHAPTER IX

CHARLIE'S COT ONCE MORE OCCUPIED

As the Sergeant returned home the sun set, and the whole western sky became full of glory, with golden islands sleeping on a sea in which it might seem a thousand rainbows had been dissolved; while the holy calm of the Sabbath eve was disturbed only by the "streams unheard by day", and by the last notes of the strong blackbird and thrush,—for all the other birds, wearied with singing since daybreak, had gone to sleep. The beauty of the landscape, a very gospel of "glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and goodwill to men", did not, however, lift the dull weight off Adam's heart. He felt as if he had no right to share the universal calm.

"Be sure your sin will find you out!" So his minister had said. Perhaps it was true. He had sinned in his early poaching days; but he thought he had repented, and become a different man. Was it indeed so? or was he now suffering for past misconduct, and yet too blind to see the dealings of a righteous God with him? It is twilight with Adam as well as with the world!

He expected to meet his small evening class of about a dozen poor neglected children who assembled every Sunday evening in his house, and which, all alone, and without saying anything about it, he had taught for some years, after his own simple and earnest fashion. He was longing to meet them. It would give him something to do—something to occupy his disturbed mind—a positive good about which there was no possible doubt; and it would also prevent Katie from seeking information that would be painful for him to give and for her to receive.

To his astonishment he found one girl only in attendance. This was Mary Semple, or "Wee Mary", as she was generally called; a fatherless and motherless orphan, without a known relation on earth, and who was boarded by the Session, as being the only poor-law guardians in the parish, with a widow in the immediate neighbourhood, to whom two shillings weekly were paid for her. Adam and his wife had taken a great fancy to Mary. She was nervous and timid from constitutional temperament, which was aggravated by her poor upbringing as an infant, and by the unkind usage, to say the least of it, she often received from

Mrs. Craigie, with whom she lived. Adam had more than once expostulated with the Kirk Session for boarding Mary with this woman; but as Mrs. Craigie was patronised by Mr. Smellie, and as no direct charge against her could be "substantiated on sufficient evidence", such as Mr. Smellie demanded, Mary was not removed. But she often crept into the Sergeant's house to warm herself and get a "piece" with Charlie; for she was so meek, so kind, so playful, as to have been always welcomed as a fit companion for the boy. This was, perhaps, the secret of the attachment of Adam and his wife to her after their boy's death.

But where were the other children of the class? Mrs. Mercer could not conjecture. Could Mary? She hung her head, looked at her fingers, and "couldna say", but yet seemed to have something to say, until at last she confessed, saying: "Mrs. Craigie flyted on me for wantin' to come to the Sabbath-nicht skule, and said she wad gie me a thrashing if I left the house when she gaed to the evenin' sermon; but I ran awa' to the class, and I'm feared to gang hame."

"What for are ye feared, Mary?" asked the Sergeant.

"Jist because--" replied Mary, with her head down.

"Because o' what, bairn?" persistently asked the Sergeant.

"Because o' the bird," said Mary, driven to a corner. And being further urged, she went on to tell in her own way how "a' the weans had been ordered by their folk no' to come to the class, as--"

But Mary hung down her head again, and was silent.

"As what, Mary?"

"As--" And she wept as if her heart would break.

"As what, Mary?"

"As the Sergeant was an awfu' bad man," she added, in her sobs.

"Don't cry, Mary--be calm," said Adam.

"But I've com'd, as I kent it was a lee," the child said, looking up to Adam's face.

Mary had faith! But if the Sergeant had any doubt as to Mary's story, it was soon dispelled by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Craigie, demanding the child in a very decided tone of voice, and without making any apology for the sudden intrusion, or offering any explanation. "Did I no' tell ye to bide at hame, ye guid-for-nothing lassie? Come awa' wi' me this minute!" she said, advancing to take hold of Mary.

Mary sprang to the Sergeant and hid herself behind his back.

"Not so hasty, Mrs. Craigie," said the Sergeant, protecting her; "not so hasty, if you please. What's wrong?"

"Dinna let her tak' me! Oh, dinna let her tak' me!" cried Mary, from behind the Sergeant, and holding fast by his coat-tails. "She struck me black and blue; look at my arm," she continued, and she showed him her little thin arm, coloured

by Mrs. Craigie.

"Ye leein' cuttie!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "I'll mak' ye that ye'll no clipe fibs on me!" shaking her clenched fist at the unseen Mary. Then, looking the Sergeant in the face, with arms akimbo, she said, "I'll mak' you answer for this, ye hypocrite! that hae tried, as I ken, mony a time to beguile Mary frae me. But I hae freens, ay, hae I, freens that wull see justice dune to me, and to *you* too—that wull they, faix! Black and blue! She fell running frae your ain wicked bird, whan ye were corrupting the young on this verra Sabbath morning. And I said to Mr. Smellie at the kirk-door in the afternoon, when the Session was by, 'Mr. Smellie,' says I, 'ye gied me a bairn to keep,' says I, 'and to be brocht up in the fear o' religion,' says I; 'but it's ill to do that,' says I, 'beside yon Sergeant,' says I. I did that, that did I; and Mr. Smellie telt me he wad see justice dune me, and dune you, and that ye war afore the Session, and I'm thankfu' to a kind Providence that's what *I never was*. Gie me my bairn, I say!" and she made another pounce at Mary, followed by another cry from the child for protection.

Katie had retired to the bedroom and shut the door.

The Sergeant said, "I'll keep Mary. Gang hame, Mrs. Craigie. I'll answer to the Session for you. Nae mair scauldin' here." And he pressed forward with outstretched arms, gently compelling Mrs. Craigie to retreat towards the door, until she finally vanished with exclamations, and protestations, and vows of vengeance, which need not be here repeated.

[image]

'I'LL KEEP MARY' Page 66

"Sirs, me!" ejaculated Katie, as she came out of her retreat; "that's awfu'!"

"Dinna be frichtened, my wee woman," said the Sergeant, as he led Mary to the fireside. "Warm yer bit feet, and get yer supper, and I'll gie ye a lesson afore ye gang to yer bed."

Mary blew her nose, dried her eyes, and did as she was bid.

The Sergeant motioned to his wife to come to the bedroom. He shut the door, and said, "I'll never part wi' Mary, come what may. My heart tells me this. Get Charlie's bed ready for her; she'll lie there, and be our bairn. God has sent her."

"I was thinking that mysel'," said Katie; "I aye liked the wee thing, and sae did Charlie."

The Sergeant's lesson was a very simple one, as, indeed, most of his were. He took the child on his knee, and putting on his spectacles, made her read one

or two simple verses of Scripture. This night he selected, from some inner connexion, the verse from the Sermon on the Mount:—"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

And he said, "Mary, dear, did you come and hear my bird whistle?"

"Oo, ay," replied Mary. "It was real bonnie; and I thocht a' the time o' wee Charlie."

"But why did ye run awa' and mak' a noise on the Sabbath morning? Ye shouldna hae been sporting on the Lord's day."

"I was frichtened for the minister," replied Mary.

"Why were ye frichtened for the good man?"

"I dinna ken," said Mary; "but the boys ran, and I ran, and Archy Walker fell ower me and hurled me. I wasna meaning ony ill;" and Mary threatened to give way again.

"Whisht, Mary," said the Sergeant. "I wasna blaming you; but ye ken I didna hang Charlie's bird oot to harm you, or mak' sport, but only because he wasna weel."

"What was wrang wi' him?" asked Mary. "There's an awfu' heap o' measles gaun about."

"Not that," said the Sergeant, smiling; "but it was to mak' him weel, no' to mak' you play, that I pit him oot. But ye see God kens aboot the bird, and it was Him that made him, and that feeds him; and see hoo he sleeps ower your new bed,—for that's whaur Charlie used to sleep; and ye'll sleep there, dear, and bide wi' me; and God, that takes care o' the wee birds, will tak' care o' you."

Mary said nothing, but turned her face and hid it in the Sergeant's bosom, next his heart; and he was more than ever persuaded that his heart was not wrong in wishing the orphan to lie there.

"Mary," the Sergeant whispered to her after a while, "ye maun aye ca' me faither."

Mary lay closer to his heart.

Katie, who had been sitting in the same arm-chair which she had occupied in the morning, heard her husband's words, and rising, bent over the child, and added, "And, Mary, ye maun aye ca' me mither."

The starling, who was asleep, suddenly awoke, as if startled, shook himself, elevated his yellow bill above the round ball of feathers, turned his head and looked at the group with his full bright eye, and although too drowsy to say "I'm Charlie's bairn," he evidently remembered the relationship, and would have expressed it too—partly from jealousy, partly from love—had he not been again overpowered by sleep.

"We'll hae worship," said the Sergeant, as he put Mary down, and placed

her in a little chair which had never been occupied since his boy died. After reading the Scriptures—the portion chosen was the 23rd Psalm—the Sergeant prayed, Mary concluding at his request by repeating the Lord's Prayer aloud. They then retired to rest—Charlie's cot once more occupied; and the quiet stars never shone on a more peaceful home.

CHAPTER X

THE SERGEANT ALONE WITH THE STARLING

Mr. Smellie called upon the Sergeant next forenoon. His manner was cold and formal, as that of one who had power, if not right, on his side, and whose pride was flattered by the conviction that his real or supposed opponent was in the wrong. His reception was equally cold, for although Adam had respect for his minister, and also for Mr. Menzies, he had, as we have already said, none whatever for Mr. Smellie.

"Mr. Mercer," said Smellie, "I have called on you, in order first of all to correct a grave error you have committed in regard to Mary Semple, the child boarded by the Kirk Session with Mrs. Craigie."

"I'm not aware, Mr. Smellie," replied the Sergeant, "that *you* are the Kirk Session, or have any richt whatsoever to correct my error, as ye ca't, in this matter."

Smellie smiled sarcastically, and added, "In a friendly way, at least, Mr. Mercer. You, of course, ken that the whole expense of the bairn must be borne by yersel', for I don't believe that the Session will pay one farthing to you—not a farthing!—as you have ta'en her from Mrs. Craigie on your ain responsibility."

"I ken a' that; and I ken also that I mean to keep her frae Mrs. Craigie, unless the Session and the law hinder me, and compel me to gie her up; which is no' likely; but if they do, on them be the curse of injuring the orphan. Understan' then that I mean to keep her at my ain expense, even should the Session offer to pay for her. Anything else, Mr. Smellie?"

"Weel then, Mr. Mercer," said Smellie, "see til't, see til't; for there will be determined opposition to you."

"I have had worse in my day, Mr. Smellie," drily replied the Sergeant, "and I'm no' feared. In the meantime Mary remains here, and I'm determined she'll never return to Mrs. Craigie—that's settled. An' if the Session kent the woman

as I do, and maybe as ye do, they wad be thankfu', as I am, that Mary is wi' me and no' wi' her. Onything mair to complain o' in what ye ca' a freendly way?"

"Oh, naething, naething!" said Mr. Smellie, with pent-up annoyance, "except that the committee which the Session appointed—that's me and Mr. Menzies—to deal with you about this scandal—a most unpleasant business—mean to ca' upo' you this evening at six, if that hour will suit."

"As weel, or as ill, as any other hour, Mr. Smellie," replied Adam, "for I dinna mean to be dealt wi', either by you or by Mr. Menzies."

"No' to be dealt with, Mr. Mercer! Do ye mean to say that ye won't even receive the committee?" he asked with amazement.

"That's jist exactly what I mean, Mr. Smellie!" replied Adam; "I don't mean to receive your committee, that's plain, and you may tak' a minute o't. If ye wish to ken why, ye had better speer at Mr. Porteous. But ye needna trouble yoursel' wi' me. What I have said I'll stan' to like a man; what I have promised I'll perform like a Christian; and what I canna do, I winna do! If ye need mair explanation, this maybe will suffice:—that I'll no' kill my bird for you, nor for the Session, nor yet for the minister, nor for the hail parish; and that ye may as well try tae kill me wi' blank cartridge, as try yer han' in persuading me to kill the starling. Sae, Mr. Smellie, as far as that business is concerned, ye may gang hame, and no wat yer shoon to come my gait ony mair."

"Sae be't, sae be't!" replied Smellie, with a cackle of a laugh, as much as to say, "I have him!" He then bowed and departed, walking silently like a cat along the street, but not purring. Yet he seemed to be feeling for something with the long hairs which projected from his whiskers like bristles.

Poor Adam! Now began such a week in his history as he never had experienced before. Oh! it was cold, dark, and dreary! He had to drink the cup of loneliness in the midst of his fellowmen—the bitterest cup which can be tasted by anyone who loves his brother. But all his suffering was kept within his own heart, and found "no relief in word, or sigh, or tear".

What a sinner he had become in the opinion of many of the respectable inhabitants of Drumsylie! What a double distilled spirit of evil!—far over proof, for no *proofs* are ever applied to such evil spirits. Drumsylie was all agog about him. He was as interesting as a shipwreck to a seaport town; as a great swindle to a stock exchange; or as a murder to a quiet neighbourhood! What had he done! What had he been guilty of! Some said, or at least heard that some one else had said, that he had insulted the minister and the Kirk Session; others, that he had secretly supported himself as a poacher; others that he had been heard to declare, that rather than kill the bird, he would, out of mere spite and obstinacy, give up the eldership, the Church, ay, even Christianity itself; others, that he had stolen a child from Mrs. Craigie, whom, though a woman, he, a soldier, had threatened

to strike in his own house. He was a terror even to evil doers!

Most marvellous is this birth and upbringing of lies! Who lays the first egg? How does it multiply so rapidly? And how singular is the development of each of the many eggs—through all the stages of evil thoughts, suspicious hints, wondering *if's* and *maybe's*, perversions, exaggerations, fibs, white lies—until it is fully hatched into out-and-out lies repeated with diligence, malice, and hate! We can give no account of this social phenomenon except the old one, of the devil being first the parent of the whole family, and his then distributing and boarding out each to trustworthy friends to be hatched and trained up in the way it should go in order to please him, its parent.

In Drumsylie, as in other towns, there were some who so indulged the self-pleasing habit of confessing and mourning over the sins and shortcomings of their neighbours, that they had little time or inclination to confess their own. Some of these confessors might be heard during this week in Adam's history lamenting:—"Oh! it's a dreadful place this! Eh! it's eneuch to keep ane sleepless to think o't! Whan a man like Adam Mercer, wi' a' his knowledge and profession, becomes a scoffer, and despises ordinances, and," &c. &c.

But it would be unjust to Drumsylie and the Sergeant to affirm that this state of public feeling had not very many marked exceptions. Some, chiefly among the poor, truly loved him and sympathized with him, and openly confessed this. Many protested, in private at least, against his treatment. But such is, alas! the moral cowardice, or maybe the thoughtlessness only, of even good men, that few expressed to Adam himself their goodwill towards him, or their confidence in his righteousness. It is indeed remarkable, in a free country of brave men, how very many there are who, before taking any decided part in questions which distract communities, small or great, attentively consider on which side the hangman is, or seems likely to be. The executioner's cord seen in the possession of this or that party has a wonderful influence on the number of its adherents. As far as appearances went, this sign of authority and power was supposed for the time being to be in the possession of the Rev. Daniel Porteous. And so the cautious and prudent consoled themselves by saying: "It is not our business", or "Least said soonest mended", or "Why quarrel with the minister?" or "Why displease my aunt, or my uncle, who are so bigoted and narrow?" or "Mr. Porteous and the majority of Session may be wrong, but that is their affair, not ours". Such were some of the characteristic sayings of the men who were doubtful as to the side which possessed Calcraft and his cord of office.

Mr. Smellie had communicated Adam Mercer's resolution to Mr. Menzies, and this had deterred him from attempting to follow in the track of expostulation with Adam, which it was evident would lead to nothing. Smellie had failed—who could succeed? Mr. Menzies ought to have *tried*. Some success by one good man

in dealing with another good man, is certain.

The Session met on the next Sunday after Adam's quarrel with his minister, or rather of his minister with him. The court was, as usual, "constituted by prayer". But whether the spirit of prayer constitutes the spirit of every meeting opened by it, may, without offence, be questioned. It is unnecessary to condense the debates—for debates there were at this meeting. Adam, with a soldier's gentlemanly feeling, did not attend, lest it might be supposed that he wished to influence the court. Smellie, in spite of some opposing murmurs of dissent, ascribed his absence to "contumacious pride", and the minister did not contradict him.

Mr. Porteous addressed the court. He asked whether it was possible for them to stop proceedings in the case of Mr. Mercer without stultifying themselves? Had they not taken the very mildest and most judicious course, and considered both what was due to themselves and also to their erring brother? Yet they had not only failed to obtain the slightest concession from him, but he had gone so far as even to refuse to receive or confer with their own committee! The case was no doubt most distressing to them all, but, as far as he could see, it would bring well-merited ridicule on all Church discipline if they dropped it at this stage. To appoint another deputation would be disrespectful to the dignity of the court; and as for himself, he had done all he could since their last meeting to bring about an amicable settlement: for, on the previous Sabbath evening, he had had a private interview in the manse with Mr. Mercer, which had terminated, he grieved to say, in a most unsatisfactory manner.

Such was the general tenor of the minister's harangue. It was in vain that Mr. Gordon, backed by William Simpson, farmer, of Greenfield, and Andrew Grainger, watchmaker, argued against the minister—the latter declaring that the Session were putting back the hands of the clock, and falling behind time.

But all in vain! Adam, by the casting vote of the Moderator, was "suspended" from the eldership; that is, deprived for a time of his official position. Mr. Gordon and the two elders who supported him, vehemently protested against what they called the "tyrannical proceeding of the majority". Most fortunately for the cause of justice, the Rev. Daniel was not a bishop who could rule his parish presbyters as his own "principles", whims, or—pardon the irreverent insinuation—his indigestion, might dictate. There was a higher court, and there was the law of the land, higher than the court, to curb the minister's will, or as he always called it when in a passion—his conscience. The sentence of the Session might be, as was confidently anticipated, reversed by the Presbytery, though the district was notoriously narrow and prejudiced, and some of the clergy fancied that moving straws showed how the winds of heaven blew, when they were only stirred by their own breath.

When Adam returned on that Sunday afternoon from church, he fortunately did not know, though he more than suspected, what the decision of the Kirk Session had been. He knew certainly that his case must not only have come before the court, but must also, from its nature, have caused such a division of opinion as would make his position as an elder one of remark, of suspicion, and, to him, of personal pain. It was a temporary comfort, however, that he had no certain bad news to communicate to Katie, and that he could say, as he did with truth, "It wasna for me to be present, or to interfere. They have done their duty nae doot, an' I have done mine as far as I could."

When his humble Sunday meal was over, and before sunset, Adam went to visit one or two of the sick, infirm, or bedridden, who were on his list to attend to as an elder. Not until he was on his way to their homes did he realise the fact that, for the present at least, he was probably no longer an elder. But as he never had formed the habit of visiting the sick as a mere official, but had made his office only a better means, given him in God's providence, for gratifying his benevolent and Christian feelings, he went, as he was wont to do, with a peaceful spirit and loving heart. The poor and suffering whom he visited received him with their usual kindness and gratitude. They *felt* that Adam could not be a bad or false man; that in him was love—love in its meekness, calmness, self-possession, sympathy, and forgiveness of others. They could not, perhaps, explain the grounds of their perfect and unreserved confidence in him, yet they could not—it was impossible—entertain any doubts of his Christian character which could hinder their hearts from feeling what they in many cases expressed with their lips, that "A *real* guid man is Adam Mercer! It's me that should say't, for he has been aye kind and guid to me. I'm no saying wha's richt or wrang; I ken this only, that I'll stan' by Adam! I wish we had mair like him!"

CHAPTER XI

THE OLD SOLDIER AND HIS YOUNG PUPIL ON SUNDAY EVENING

On his return home after these visits, he placed Mary on Charlie's chair, beside himself, resolving, although the other members of the class were still absent, that he would nevertheless teach Mary as their representative, as well as for her own sake. There had come into his possession one of those small books of guidance and instruction which many intellectual people—so called by men, but probably

not so recognized by the angels, who minister even to children—affect to despise, just as they would despise any “still small voice” when compared with the loud storm, the brilliant fire, and the powerful, rock-moving earthquake. This book was but a number of texts wisely arranged by a bedridden Christian, for each day of the year, with one of special and deeper import for its Sabbaths. The text for this Lord’s Day was—“They who know thy name will put their trust in thee”; and Adam said to Mary, when she had repeated it as the lesson for the day, “Do ye understand what is meant, my dearie, by trusting God?”

“I’m no sure,” she replied.

“But ye surely ken what it wad be to trust *me*, Mary?” continued the Sergeant.

Mary looked up and smiled. She made no reply, but was evidently puzzled by an attempt she was unconsciously making to understand the possibility of want of trust in the Sergeant. So, finding no response, he again asked, “Wad ye trust me, my wee woman?”

Mary seemed vexed, and said, “What wrang hae I dune? Ye telt me aye to ca’ you faither; I canna help; sae ye maunna be angry, for I hae nae faither but you.”

“Richt! verra richt!” said the Sergeant; “but, Mary dear, wad ye trust God as weel as me?”

“No!” said Mary, very decidedly.

“What for no’?” asked the Sergeant, kindly.

“I’m awfu’ frichtened for him,” said Mary.

“Why are ye frichtened for *Him*?” asked Adam.

Mary seemed to be counting the buttons on his coat.

“Tell me, bairn!” he continued.

“Because,” said Mary, sorrowfully, yet encouraged by his tone, “Mrs. Craigie aye telt me He wad sen’ me to the bad place; and when I got my fit burned she said that I wad be a’ burnt thegither some day, as I was a bad lassie; and I’m sure I wasna’ doing her ony ill to mak’ her say that.”

“God will never,” remarked the Sergeant, reverently, “send ye to the bad place, unless ye gang yersel’.”

“I’ll never do that!” exclaimed Mary.

“I hope no’, my lassie,” said Adam, “for I wish you no’ to be bad, but to be good; and to trust God is the way to be good. Noo tell me, Mary, why wad ye trust me?”

“Because—jist because,” said Mary, looking up to his face, “ye’re faither.”

“Weel dune, Mary!” continued the Sergeant. “Noo tell me what’s the beginning o’ the Lord’s Prayer?”

“Our Faither which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy—”

"That'll do, Mary," interrupted Adam. "But can ye tell me noo wha's yer Faither as weel as me?"

After a pause, Mary said, as if she had made a discovery, "Our Faither in heaven!"

"That's a clever woman! *Faither!* that's God's *Name*. And noo that ye ken his Name, ye maun trust Him faur mair than me: for He lo'es ye mair than I can do, and is aye wi' ye; and never will forsake ye, and can aye help ye; and He has said that when faither and mither forsake you, he will tak' ye up. That will He, my lassie!"

"But," said Mary, "my mither and faither, they tell me, dee'd wi' fever, but didna forsake me."

"That's true; but I mean, my bairn," said Adam, "that ye can never be an orphan lassie wi' God as yer Faither."

"But," said Mary, "for a' that, ye maun aye be my faither as weel. Oh! dinna sen' me back to Mrs. Craigie."

"Dinna fear, Mary," replied Adam; "but maybe I maun hae to leave you. God may tak' me awa', and tak' yer mither there awa' too; and then when ye're alane in the world, ye maun trust God."

"I'll no' trust Him," replied Mary; "if you and mither dees, I'll dee tae, and gang wi' ye." And she fairly broke down, and clung to him as if he was about to leave her.

The Sergeant took Mary on his knee. "Be cheerie, Mary—be cheerie!" he said. "If ye kent God, ye wad aye be cheerie, my lassie. Mrs. Craigie has frichted ye."

"Ay, awfu'!" said Mary.

The Sergeant felt as if Mary had not quite learned her lesson, and he continued:—"D'ye mind what I telt ye ae nicht aboot mithers bringing their bairns to Christ?—and hoo some folk that didna ken Him were for keeping them awa'?—and hoo Jesus was angry at them?—and hoo the bairns gaed till Him—"

"And did they no' squeel wi' fricht?" asked Mary.

"Did ye squeel, Mary," asked the Sergeant, with a smile, "when I took ye into *my* arms?"

"No. What for should I?" replied Mary.

"Aweel, my lassie," argued Adam, "why do ye think that bairns like yersel' should be frichted to trust that same Jesus wha was Himsel' a bairn and kens a bairn's heart? He wad be unco sorry, Mary, if ye didna trust Him, when He dee'd, as ye ken, on the cross to save you and me and ilka body, and aye thinks aboot us and prays for us."

Mary sighed, and crept closer to the Sergeant.

Adam, taking her little hand in his, said, "Mind what I tell ye, my bairn.

Learn ye to speak aye to God and tell Him yer heart in yer ain prayer, and never gang ony road He wadna like; and stick till Him as ye wad to me if we were gaun ower the muir thegither at nicht, or through a burn in a spate; and never, Mary, in the hour o' distress think that He doesna care for you or has forgotten you. For nae doot whan ye grow up to be big ye'll hae mony a distress, like ither folk, ye dinna ken aboot yet."

Mary turned her face to his bosom as if to sleep, but never was she less inclined to sleep.

The Sergeant added, with a sigh, "Think, my wee dearie, on what I tell ye noo, after I'm dead and gane."

Katie, seated on the opposite side of the fire, had been reading Boston's *Crook in the Lot*. She seemed not to have heard a word of her husband's lesson; but her ears drank in the whole of it. The Sergeant had evidently forgotten her presence, so quiet was she, and so absorbed was he with Mary, who was to him a new life—his own child restored. But as Katie caught his last words, she put down her book, and looking almost in anger at her husband—could she have felt jealous of Mary?—said, "Tuts, Adam! what's the use o' pitting me and Mary aboot wi' discoorsin' in that way! It's really no' fair. I declare ane wad think that Andra Wilkie, the bederal, was diggin' yer grave! What pits deein' in yer head e'eno? An' you an auld sodger! Be cheerie yersel', man!"

"I daursay ye're richt, gudewife," said Adam, with a smile, and rather a sheepish look, as if he had been caught playing the woman with an unmanly expression of his feelings and dim forebodings. "Gie Mary her piece," he added, "and sen' her to her bed. She has dune unco weel." He passed into the bedroom, closing the door while Katie was putting Mary to rest.

It was a peaceful night. He sat down near the small window of the bedroom, from which was a pleasant peep of trees, their underwood now hid in darkness, but their higher branches, with every leafy twig, mingling with the blue of the starry sky, partially illumined by a new moon. He had felt during these last days an increasing dulness of spirits. But this evening he had been comforting himself while comforting Mary; and remembering the lesson he had given her, he said to himself, "Blessed are all they who put their trust in Thee". And somehow there came into his mind pictures of the old war-times in which, amidst the trampling of armed men and words of command, the sudden rush to the charge or up the scaling-ladder, the roar and cries of combat, the volcano of shot and shell bursting and filling the heavens with flame and smoke and deadly missile, he had trusted God, and felt calm at his heart, like a child in the arms of a loving parent. These pictures flashed on him but for a second, yet they were sufficient to remind him of what God had ever been to him, and to strengthen his faith in what He would

ever be.

CHAPTER XII

ADAM MERCER, SERGEANT, BUT NOT ELDER

Next morning the announcement of the Sergeant's suspension from the eldership was conveyed to him by an official document from Mr. Mackintosh, the Session clerk and parish schoolmaster;—a good, discreet man, who did his duty faithfully, loyally voted always with the minister from an earnest belief that it was right to do so, and who made it his endeavour as a member of society to meddle with nobody, in the good hope that nobody would meddle with him. Every man can find his own place in this wide world.

Katie heard the news, but, strange to say, was not so disconcerted as Adam anticipated. In proportion as difficulties gathered round her husband, she became more resolute, and more disposed to fight for him. She was like many women on their first voyage, who in calm weather are afraid of a slight breeze and the uneasy motion of the ship, yet who, when actual danger threatens, rise up in the power and dignity of their nature, and become the bravest of the brave—their very feeling and fancy, which shrank from danger while it was unseen, coming to their aid as angels of hope when danger alone is visible.

"Aweel, aweel," remarked Katie; "it's their ain loss, Adam, no' yours; ye hae naething to charge yersel' wi'."

But she would sometimes relapse into a meditative mood, as the more painful side of the case revealed itself. "Ay noo—ay—and they hae suspended ye?—that's hanged ye, as I suppose, like a dog or cat! Bonnie-like Session!—my word!—and for what? Because ye wadna kill the bird! Teuch! It micht pit a body daft tae think o't!" And so on.

But this did little good to Adam, who felt his character, his honour, at stake. Things were daily getting worse to bear. The news had spread over the town, "Adam Mercer has been rebuked and suspended by the Kirk Session!" From that moment he became a marked man. Old customers fell away from him; not that any openly declared that they would not employ him as a shoemaker merely because the minister and Kirk Session were opposed to him:—Oh no! Not a hint was given of that, or anything approaching to it; but, somehow, new shoes seemed to have gone out of fashion in Drumsylie.

The cold unfeeling snowball increased as it rolled along the street in which Adam lived, until it blocked up his door, so that he could hardly get out. If he did go, it was to be subjected to constant annoyance. The boys and girls of the lowest class in his neighbourhood, influenced by all they heard discussed and asserted in their respective homes, where reserve was not the characteristic of the inmates, were wont to gather round his window, and to peer into the interior with an eager gaze, as if anxious to discover some fitting fuel to enlighten their domestic hearths at night. It was as impossible to seize them as to catch a flock of sparrows settled down upon a seed plot in a garden. When the Sergeant therefore ventured to go abroad, the nickname of "The Starling" was shouted after him by the boys, who adopted all the various modes of concealing their ringleaders which evidence such singular dexterity and cunning. The result was that Adam was compelled, as we have said, to keep within doors. He thus began to feel as if he was alone in the world. Everyone seemed changed. Those on whom he had hitherto relied failed him. He or the world was worse than he had ever imagined either to be, and it was little comfort to him to know which of the two was wrong.

The Sergeant, however, enjoyed much inward peace though little happiness. For how different is peace from happiness! Happiness is the result of harmony between our wants as creatures and the world without: peace is the harmony between us as spiritual beings and the Father of our spirits. The one is as changeable as the objects or circumstances on which it for the moment relies; the other is as unchangeable as the God on whom it eternally rests. We may thus possess at once real happiness and real peace; yet either may exist without the other. Nay more, happiness may be destroyed by God in order that the higher blessing of peace may be possessed; but never will He take away peace to give happiness! Happiness without peace is temporal, but peace along with happiness is eternal.

Adam, as we have said, enjoyed little happiness in the conflict in which he was engaged, but he was kept in "perfect peace".

When another Sunday came round, the old sense of duty induced him to go, as usual, to church. His absence might be supposed to indicate that he feared the face of man, because fearing the face of God. Katie accompanied him. Her courage rose to the occasion. Let not the reader who, moving in a larger sphere of life, has learned to measure his annoyances by a larger standard, smile at these simple souls, or think it an exaggeration thus to picture their burden as having been so heavy.

Adam and Katie walked along the street, knowing all the time that they did so under the gaze of the cold and criticising eyes of some who were disposed to say to them, "Stand back, I am holier than thou!" Yet more persons than they themselves were aware of felt towards them kindness, pity, and respect, mingled

with very opposite feelings to those of the minister and the members of Kirk Session who had made so much ado about so small an affair. Others forgot the sympathy due to a suffering, good man, apart from its immediate cause. Many of his worthy friends said afterwards that they "did not think of it!" Alas! this *not* thinking is often the worst form of thought.

Adam and Katie passed Smellie, as he stood at "the plate", without the slightest recognition on either side. They occupied their accustomed seat, but sat alone. Those who ordinarily filled the pew suffered from cold or conscience, and so were either absent or seated elsewhere. One may guess what sort of sermon Mr. Porteous preached from the text, "Beware of evil doers". The personal reference to the Sergeant was like a theme pervading his overture; or as an idea not so much directly expressed as indirectly insinuated from first to last. The argument was a huge soap-bubble of what he called "principle" blown from his pipe until he could blow no longer, and which when fully developed he contemplated with admiration, as if it were a glorious globe of thought that must necessarily be heavenly because reflecting to his eyes the colours of the rainbow. His picture of the danger of the times in which he lived was very vivid, and his hopes of any improvement very small. The history of society seemed but a record of degeneracy since the first century of the Christian era. But whoever proved a traitor, he himself, he said, would still earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; and *his* trumpet, at least, should never give an uncertain sound; and *he* would hold fast the form of sound words:—and so on he went until his forty-five minutes were ended.

That the preacher was perfectly sincere, no one could doubt. He was no coward, or make-believe, but was thoroughly convinced. He would at any time have given up his "all" for his "principles", and given his body even to be burned for them without fear—yet possibly "without charity".

We do not condemn Mr. Porteous's "principles". They were, most of them, what might be called Christian truisms, which no one believing in the supreme authority of the Bible, far less any parish minister, could dispute. But the practical application of his principles by the minister on certain occasions, as on this one, might be questioned. He might also have considered whether there were not many other Bible and Christian principles of wider import and deeper spiritual meaning, than those he contended for, and gave such prominence to, not excluding but including his special favourites, which he required to know before he could really understand or truly apply those even which he so tenaciously held and so frequently expounded. Half truths are untruths. A man who always tried to stand on his head might be as well without one.

Adam accepted the heavy fire from the pulpit with calm submission. He knew that very many in the congregation while listening to the minister were

looking at himself; but, knowing also how much depends in every battle on the steadiness and self-possession of the non-commissioned officers, he looked the enemy in the face and never winced. Katie seemed inspired by his example—so far, at least, that she neither fled nor fainted; and though not daring to gaze on the foe, she braved his charge as if kneeling in the rear rank, with a calm countenance, but with eyes cast down to the ground.

Poor Katie! What would Waterloo have been to her in comparison with that day's mental battle in the kirk! The one was an honourable conflict; but this was reckoned by those whom she respected as one of dishonour. In the one was danger of wounds and of death; but in this were deeper wounds, and danger possibly beyond the grave! How often did the form of her old "faither" come before her—though she thought it strange that he did not seem to frown. But she never communicated her fears or feelings to her husband. "He has eneuch to carry wi'oot me," she said.

As they left the church, more than one person took an opportunity of addressing the Sergeant, and, to the credit of all, not one uttered an unkindly word. Some shook him warmly by the hand, but said nothing. Others added, "God bless ye! Dinna heed, Mr. Mercer. It'll come a' richt yet." Mr. Gordon and one or two of the elders were marked in their kindness. It would not have conduced to the comfort of the minister, though it might have made him doubt how far his people really sympathised with him or his "principles", had he heard some of the remarks made after the sermon by the more intelligent and independent of his congregation. But his ignorance was to him a kind of bliss; and whatever tended or threatened to disturb his self-satisfaction would have been recognised by him as folly, not wisdom.

Adam could not shut his ears, but he could hold his tongue; and he did so.

The worthy couple walked home in silence, and arm-in-arm too! for the first time probably in their lives. Mary, whom we forgot to mention, followed them in new shoes, a new bonnet, a new shawl, with her Bible wrapped up in a clean pocket-handkerchief. As they entered their home, the starling received them with quite a flutter of excitement. Shaking his feathers, hopping violently about his cage, or thrusting his bill, as if for a kiss, between the bars, he welcomed Mary, as she approached him with some food, and made the room ring with various declarations as to his being Charlie's bairn, his hopes of being yet a king, and his belief in genuine manhood.

"I think," quoth the Sergeant, "he is ane o' the happiest and maist contented bit cratur in the parish."

Mary, as if feeling that it was right to say something good on Sunday, archly put in, "I mind what ye telt me about the bird."

"What was't, my bairn?" asked Adam.

"It was aboot the fowls—I dinna mind a' the verse, but a bit o't was, 'Are not ye better than the fowls?'"

"Thank ye for the comfort, Mary dear," said Adam, gravely.

From some common instinct of their hearts, Mr. Porteous's sermon was not spoken of. Was it because Mary was present? or only because Katie was so anxious to see the cheese well toasted for their tea? or because—yet why go on conjecturing! But at evening worship, which closed the day, Adam, as usual, prayed for his minister, and for God's blessing on the preached word; and he prayed to be delivered from evil-doing, and from fretting at evil-doers, and to be enabled to put his trust in God and do good. Katie on rising from her knees did what she never did before—kissed her husband, saying, "God bless you, my best o' men!"

"Gae awa', gae awa'!" said the Sergeant; "ye want to gaur me greet like yersel', do ye? But na, lass, I'm ower auld a sodger for that!" With all his boasting, however, he was very nearly betrayed into the weakness which he professed to despise. But he seemed greatly pleased with his good wife's kindness, and he added, "Bless you, my braw leddy, a' the same. And," in a whisper, "ye needna let on to Mary that I'm fashed. It micht vex the lassie."

CHAPTER XIII

JOCK HALL, THE NE'ER-DO-WEEL

We must go back for a few days in our story. During the lonely week which we have but very partially and inadequately described—for how few would believe that a man with a good conscience and good sense could suffer so much in such circumstances!—the Sergeant received a visit from Jock Hall, who has been already mentioned, and whom Katie described as "a ne'er-do-weel".

Katie's estimate of Jock's character was that of Drumsylie. Most parishes, indeed, have their quota of weaklings in intellect and weaklings in morals. Jock belonged to the latter class. He was a thin, sallow-faced man, of a nervous temperament, and with lank black hair, and sharp piercing unrestful eyes. He might be aged thirty, although he looked liker forty. His jacket was made of fustian, which might have been clean some years before; his corduroy trousers had ragged endings, beneath which were revealed old boots and worn-out stockings; while a tattered bonnet covered his capacious head—a head that, phrenologically,

was of a superior type. How Hall lived no one knew, nor cared to know. His lodging, when under a roof, varied with the means at his disposal for paying rent. If any unknown householder in the unknown recesses of the small towns which Jock visited, permitted him to sleep gratis on the floor near the fire, it was a secret known and appreciated by himself only.

Jock had never presumed to enter so aristocratic a house as Adam's. But now that public report had brought the Sergeant down somewhat nearer to his own level, and that he had a pair of boots to mend, without having any credit with even the most drunken cobbler in Drumsylie, Jock thought that, under the whole circumstances of the case, moral and commercial, he might visit the Sergeant without any offence. He did so, to the astonishment of Adam, and much more to that of his wife. "What do ye want wi' Mr. Mercer?" was her question, as she opened the door to Jock's knock.

"Business!" was his short and decided reply. When he entered the small but cleanly kitchen, his only remark was, "Like a new preen!" Looking round with a half-vacant, half-curious gaze, he fixed his eyes on the Sergeant for a moment, then walking up to the starling's cage, he muttered, "Deevils!"

This brief exclamation arrested the attention of Adam, who asked, "What do ye mean, my man? D'ye ken what ye're saying?"

"Fine!" replied Jock. "Deevils! again say I!"

The Sergeant rose, tapped him on the shoulder, and pointed to the door.

"I understand," said Jock; "ye wad hae me gang oot. Ye're no' the first that has sent Jock Hall that gait! Maist folk like to see his back a hantle better than his face. But I'm no' gaun oot at present, Sergeant. That stirlin' o' yours 'll no' let me. I'm fond o' birds—in fac, they're the only leevin' things I care for. I never liked canaries, they're ower genteel and ower particklar about bein' coodled, to please a tramp like me that never was in that way mysel'. But our ain birds—that's maavies, linties, and laverocks, or even gooldies, that can stan' a' wathers, and sing for a' folk, specially for them that's obleeged to lie oot in wuds, or on the heather—they's the singers for Jock Hall! But I'm no weel acquaint wi' thae stirlin's. I'm telt that yours is no canny, an' that it speaks like an auld-farrant bairn. Eh?" And Jock turned to the cage from which his attention had for a moment been diverted; and while the Sergeant was earnestly studying his strange guest, the guest was as earnestly studying the strange bird. The starling was singularly still, and seemed to sympathise with his master in his study of Hall. He then leaped up to his perch, turned his back to Jock, shook his feathers, turned round and again looked at his visitor with a steady gaze.

"That's a fearsome bird!" said Hall, without moving. "As sure as I'm leevin, I see'd his ee gettin' bigger and bigger, till it was like a saxpence as it glowered at me. I was frichtened it kent a' things I was doing or thinking aboot!"

"Let the bird alane!" said the Sergeant, "and come here to the window if ye hae ony business wi' me, Hall."

Jock obeyed; but twice, between the cage and the window, he looked over his shoulder at the starling, as if he was afraid of him.

"What do ye want wi' me?" inquired the Sergeant.

"Hoo lang," asked Hall, in a low voice, "hae ye had that bird? Hoo auld is he? Whaur did ye get him? What does he say when—"

"Never heed the bird," interrupted the Sergeant: "he's doin' ye nae ill."

"I'm no sae sure but he *could* do't if he took a thraw at me," said Jock; "I'll wager he has seen me afore, an' kens me—for he's no canny."

"Nonsense!" said Adam.

"If it's nonsense," replied Jock, "what way has he brocht you into this habble? What for do ye loe him sae weel? Why wad ye gie up, as I hear ye wad, yer verra saul and body for this world and the neist, for the sake o' the bird? What way do they say he's a witch?"

"Haud yer tongue, Hall," said the Sergeant, "and speak about yer ain business, no' mine."

"My business!" exclaimed Jock; "at yer service, Mr. Mercer, at yer service!"

"Oot wi't, then, and be done wi't," said Adam.

"It's my business, then," said Hall, "to come here an' abuse a' thae deevils,—Porteous, Smellie, and the lave—that abused that bird! that's my business—the chief part o't," continued Hall, in rather an excited manner; "an' the bird kens that, I'm certain,—just see hoo he's glowerin' at me! I'se warrant he has watched me in the woods afore he was caught; an' if he if a witch, and kens about me, then—"

"Haud yer tongue, Hall, this moment," said the Sergeant, with a loud voice of command, "or I'll pit ye oot like a doug! If ye hae a message to deliver, say it and be aff."

Jock was suddenly quiet, as if arrested by some strong power. Then in a more natural tone of voice he said, "It's no' worth the while o' an auld sodger to kick a man like me. But let sleepin' dougs lie! Dougs hae teeth, and their bite is bad when mad—when mad!" Then, after a pause, he went on, in a laughing mood, "But I *hae* business, important business wi' ye, Sergeant; an' afore we proceed to consider it, ye'll tak' a snuff! It pits brains into a bodie's head;" and Jock produced a small tin snuff-box, and opening the lid he looked into it with an expression of anxiety. "There's twa, I'm sure,—twa snuffs; an' I consider a man is no' poor wha has ae snuff for himsel' and anither for a neebor. Sae tak' a snuff!" and he handed the box to the Sergeant, as he himself leant back in his chair, crossed one leg over another, and pointing to his boots said, "That's some business, since ye insist on it! I want to gie ye a job, Mr. Mercer, for I hear ye're idle." Then turning

up the soles of his wretched boots, which looked like a kind of leather vegetable about to rot into earth mould, he said, "They'll be ill to patch, or to fit new soles on, but I ken ye're a gude tradesman. Try."

Adam only smiled.

"Ye'll be like the lave," Jock continued, "ower prood to work for a man like me. I wadna wunner if ye're no sure o' payment. Sae maybe it's as weel to tell ye, that as far as I ken, ye'll never get a bawbee frae me! For Jock Hall is a braw customer to them that'll ser' him—though, faix, there's no mony o' that kind noo!—but he's a bad payer. In fac, he has clean forgot hoo to pay an account."

Sorrow softens the hearts of good men; and if it is in any degree occasioned by unjust treatment, it prompts charitable sympathies towards others who are condemned as wicked by society without a fair hearing ever having been afforded them. When the streams of their affection have been frozen by the cold reception given where a warm welcome was anticipated, it is a relief to let them flow into other and dried-up cisterns where, in despair, from a long drought, such blessings were never expected, and are joyfully appreciated.

So Adam felt kindly towards Jock, though he only said, "I'll men' your boots for that fine pinch o' snuff, and they'll cost ye nae mair, except guidwill, and that's cheap."

Jock Hall looked rather perplexed, and cleared out his box with his long finger, pressing his last snuff vehemently into his nostril. Then resuming, as if with difficulty, his careless manner, he said, "Hae the boots ready by Friday nicht, as I maun fish the East Muir water on Saturday."

"Ye may depend on them, Jock! And noo, as yer business is done, ye may gang." The Sergeant did not wish him to resume his wild talk, as he had threatened to do.

Jock crossed his arms, and gazed on the Sergeant as if he would look him through. Then grasping his own throat, and looking wildly, he said: "It's come! it's come! The evil speerit is chokin' me! He is here like a cannon ball! I maun speak, or my head will rive! I maun curse Porteous, and the kirk, and religion, and elders, and Sabbath days, and a' thing guid!" and his eyes flashed fire.

The Sergeant could not make him out, as they say. He was disposed to think him insane, though he had never heard Jock's name associated with anything save recklessness of character. He therefore did nothing but return the gaze of the excited man. Katie, unwilling to sit in the same room with him, had retired to her bedroom. Mary sat at the fireside with her book in evident alarm.

"I hate them!" repeated Jock, almost grinding his teeth.

"What do ye mean, Jock?" asked Adam, quietly but firmly. "Do you want to quarrel wi' me?"

"I mean," said Jock, bending towards the Sergeant, "that noo the fingers o'

religion are grippin' yer windpipe and chokin' ye, as the evil speerit is grippin' and chokin' me—that noo ye hae ministers an' elders o' religion kicking ye in the glaur, lauchin at ye, bizzin at ye as a blackguard—that noo when e'en Luckie Craigie an' Smellie ca' ye bad, as a' folks hae ca'ed me a' my days—I thocht," he continued, with a sarcastic grin, "that ye wad like ane waur than yersel' to speak wi' ye, and, if ye liked, to curse wi' ye! Aha, lad! I'm ready! Say the word, and Jock Hall's yer man. I ha'e poower noo in me for ony deevilry. Begin!"

The Sergeant experienced what is called in Scotland a *grew*—the sort of shiver one feels in a nightmare—as if a real demoniac was in his presence. Fascinated as by a serpent, he said, "Say awa', Jock, for I dinna understan' ye."

On this Jock became apparently more composed. But when with a suppressed vehemence he was again beginning to speak, it struck the Sergeant to interrupt the current of his passionate thoughts, on the plea that he wished to hear Mary her lesson. His object was, not only to calm Jock, but also to get the child out of the room.

"Mary," he said, after having assured her there was no cause of fear, and placing her between his knees, "wha should we trust?"

"God!" replied Mary.

"Why?" asked the Sergeant.

"Because his name is Love, and He is our Faither."

"Richt, Mary; and we ought a' to love our Faither, for He loves us, and to love our neebour as ourselves. Gang awa' ben to your mither noo. Ye hae done weel."

When the door of the bedroom was shut, Jock Hall said, "That's Luckie Craigie's lassie? Fine woman, Luckie! Kindly bodie! A gude hoose is hers to sen' a puir orphan to. Ha! ha! ha! Keep us a'!—it's a warld this, far ower guid for me! But Luckie is like the lave, and Smellie, to do him justice, as he has mony a time done tae me, is no waur than Luckie:

'When hungry gledds are screichin',
An' huntin' for their meat,
If they grip a bonnie birdie,
What needs the birdie greet?'

An' ye're to pay yersel' for the lassie, Smellie says; an' ye're to teach her! A fine lesson yon! Ha! ha! ha! Jock Hall lauchs at baith o' ye!"

The Sergeant was getting angry. Hall seemed now to be rather a free-and-easy blackguard, although there was a weird gleam in his eye which Adam did not understand; and in spite of his self-respect, he felt a desire to hear more from Jock. So he only remarked, looking steadily at him, "Jock! tak' care what ye

say-tak' care!"

"Oo ay," said Hall. "I'm lang eneuch in the warld to ken *that* advice! But what care I for the advice o' you or ony man? It was for me, nae doot, ye intended that lesson? I'm as gleg as a fish rising to a flee! The lassock said we should love our faither! Hoo daur you or ony man say that tae me?" Then, leaning forward with staring eyes and clenched fist, he said, "I hated my faither! I hated my mither! They hated me. My faither was a Gospel man; he gaed to the kirk on Sabbath-wha but him!-and he drank when he could get it the rest o' the week; an' he threshed my mither and us time aboot-me warst o' a', as I was the youngest. I focht mony a laddie for lauchin' at him and for ca'in him names when he was fou, and mony a bluidy nose I got; but he threshed me the mair. My mither, tae, gaed to the kirk, and begged claes for me and my brithers and sisters frae guid folk, and said that my faither wasna weel and couldna work. Oh, mony a lee I telt for them baith! And she drank, as weel, and focht wi' my faither and us time aboot. And syne they selt a' their claes and a' their blankets, and left us wi' toom stomachs and toom hearts, cowerin' about a toom grate wi' cauld cinders. I never was at skule, but was cuffed and kickit like a doug; and my wee brithers and sisters a' dee'd-I dinna ken hoo: but they were starved and threshed, puir things! But they were waik, and I was strang. Sae I leaved-waes me! I leaved! I hae sat oot in the plantin' mony a nicht greetin' for my brither Jamie, for he had a sair cough and dwinde awa', naked and starved. He aye gied me his bit bread that he stealt or beggit"-and Jock cleared his throat and wiped his forehead with a scrap of a ragged handkerchief. "But my faither and mither dee'd, thank God! I hate them noo, and they hated me-they hated me, they did"-and he fell into a sort of dream. His vehemence sank into a whisper; and he spoke as one in sleep-"An' a' folks hate me-hate me. An' what for no'? I hate *them!*-God forgive me! Na, na! I'll no' say *that*. There's nae God! But I believe in the Deevil-that I do, firmly."

Jock sank back in his chair, as if wearied, and closed his eyes, his chest heaving. Then opening his eyes, he said in a low tone, "The bird kens that! Wha' telt him?" and his eyes were again closed.

"Jock, my man," said the Sergeant, perplexed, yet kindly, "I dinna hate ye."

But Jock went on as in a dream. "I hae led an awfu' life o't! I hae starved and stealt; I hae poached and robbed; I hae cursed and drank; I hae 'listed and deserted; I hae lain oot on muirs and in mosses. I'm Jock Hall! a'body kens me, and a' hate me as I do them! And what guid did yer ministers and elders, yer Sabbath days and yer preachings, do for me? Curse them a', I say! what's Jock Hall's saul worth! It's no' worth the burnin'! What care I?

'Cock-a-Bendy's lying sick,

Guess what'll mend him?
 Hang the blackguard by the throat,
 And that'll soon end him!"

"Be quiet, my puir fellow," said the Sergeant, "and listen to me. *I* never harmed you, Jock; I couldna harm you! I never wull harm you. I'll feed ye noo; I'll gie ye shoon; I'll stan' yer frien'."

Jock looked up, and in a calm tone said, "My head is spinnin' and my heart is sick! I havena eaten a bit since yesterday. Dinna flyte on me e'eno, I'm no mysel'; wait a wee, Mr. Mercer, and then ye can abuse me, or kick me." With still greater calm he added in a few seconds, and looking round like one waking up more and more into life, "I hae been dreaming or raving! Man, Mercer, I think I tak' fits sometimes—especially when I'm lang wi'oot meat. What was I saying e'eno?"

"Naething particular," said Adam, wishing not to rouse him, but to feed him; "never heed, Jock. But bide a wee, I'll gie ye a nice cup of tea and a smoke after it, and we'll hae a crack, and ye'll comfort me in yer ain way, and I'll comfort you in mine."

Jock, like a man worn out with some great exertion, sat with his head bent down between his hands—the veins of his forehead swollen. The Sergeant, after some private explanation with Katie, got tea and wholesome food ready for Jock; and that he might take it in peace, Adam said that he had to give Mary another lesson in the bedroom.

Hall was thus left alone with his food, of which he ate sparingly. When Adam again entered the kitchen, Jock was calm. The Sergeant soon engaged him in conversation after his own method, beginning by telling some of his soldier stories, and then bit by bit unfolding the Gospel of Peace to the poor man, and seeking to drop a few loving words from his own softened heart to soften the heart of the Prodigal.

The only remark Jock made was, "I wish I'd been in a battle, and been shot, or dee'd wi' oor Jamie! But what for did I tell *you* a' this? I never spak' this way to mortal man! It's that bird, I tell ye. What's wrang wi't?"

"Naething!" replied the Sergeant; "it's a' nonsense ye're talking. I'll let ye see the cratur, to convince ye that he is jist as natural and nice as a mavis or laverock."

"Stop!" said Jock, "I dinna like him. He is ower guid for me! I tell ye I'm a deevil! But bad as I am—and I'll never be better, nor ever do ae haun's turn o' guid in this world—never, never, never!—"

The Sergeant rose and took down the cage, placing it before Hall, saying,

"Jist look at his speckled breest and bonnie ee! Gie him this bit bread yersel', and he'll be cheerie, and mak' us a' cheerie."

Jock took the bread and offered it to Charlie, who, seeing the gift, declared "A man's a man for a' that!" "Guid be about us!" said Hall, starting back; "hear what he says to me! If that's no' a witch, there's nane on yirth! I said I was a deevil, he says I'm a man!"

"And sae ye *are* a man for a' that, and no sic a bad ane as ye think. Cheer up, Jock!" said Adam, extending his hand to him.

Jock took the proffered hand, and said, "I dinna understan' a' this—but—but—I was gaun to say, God bless ye! But it's no' for me to say that; for I never was in a decent hoose afore—but only in jails, and amang tramps and ne'er-do-weels like mysel'. I'm no' up tae menners, Sergeant—ye maun excuse me."

Jock rose to depart. Before doing so he looked again round the comfortable clean room—at the nice fire and polished grate—at Charlie's bed with its white curtains—and at the bird, so happy in its cage—then, as if struck by his own ragged clothes and old boots, he exclaimed, "It wasna for me to hae been in a hoose like this." Passing the bedroom door, he waved his hand, saying, "Fareweel, mistress; fareweel, Mary," and turning to the Sergeant, he added, "and as for you, Sergeant—" There he stopped—but ending with a special farewell to the starling, he went to the door.

"Come back soon and see me," said the Sergeant. "I'll be yer freen', Jock. I hae 'listed ye this day, and I'll mak' a sodger o' ye yet, an' a better ane, I hope, than mysel'."

"Whisht, whisht!" said Jock. "I have mair respec' for ye than to let ye be *my* freen'. But for a' that, mind, I'm no gaun to pay ye for my boots—and ye'll hae them ready 'gin Friday nicht, for Saturday's fishin'—fareweel!"

"A' richt, Jock," said Adam.

No sooner had Hall left the house than the Sergeant said to himself, "God have mercy on me! I to be unhappy after that! I wi' Katie and Mary! I wi' mercies temporal and spiritual mair than can be numbered! Waes me! what have I done! Starling, indeed! that's surely no' the question—but starvation, ignorance, cruelty, hate, despair, hell, at our verra doors! God help puir Jock Hall, and may He forgive Adam Mercer!"

Jock got his boots on Friday night, well repaired. He said nothing but "Thank ye," and "Ye'll get naething frae me." But on Saturday evening a fine basket of trout was brought by him to the Sergeant's door. Jock said, "There's beauties! Never saw better trout! splendid day!" But when the Sergeant thanked him, and

offered him a sixpence, Jock looked with wonder, saying, "Dinna insult a bodie!"

CHAPTER XIV

JOCK HALL'S CONSPIRACY

On the Sunday, when the Sergeant went to church, as we have already described, Jock Hall was quartered for the day with Mrs. Craigie. To do Smellie justice, he did not probably know how very worthless this woman was, far less did the Kirk Session. She was cunning and plausible enough to deceive both. Her occasional attendance at church was sufficient to keep up appearances. The custom of boarding out pauper children with widows, except when these are not respectable, has on the whole worked well, and is infinitely superior to the workhouse system. Mrs. Craigie belonged to the exceptional cases. She accommodated any lodger who might turn up.

Jock and Mrs. Craigie were at the window, a second story one, criticising the passers-by to church, as one has seen the loungers at a club window do the ordinary passers-by on week-days. The Sergeant and his wife, with Mary following them, suddenly attracted their attention.

"The auld hypocrite!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "there he gangs, as prood as a peacock, haudin' his head up when it should be bowed doon wi' shame to the dust! An' his wife, tae!—eh! what a ban net! sic a goon! Sirs me! Baith are the waur o' the wear. Ha! ha! ha! And Mary! as I declare, wi' new shoon, a new bannet, and new shawl! The impudent hizzy that she is! It's a' to spite me, for I see'd her keekin' up to the window. But stealt bairns can come to nae guid; confoond them a'!—though I shouldna say't on the Sabbath day."

Hall stood behind her, and watched the group over her shoulder. "Ye're richt, Luckie," he said, "he *is* an auld hypocrite. But they are a' that—like minister, like man. 'Confoond them,' *ye* say; 'Amen,' *I* say; but what d'ye mean by stealt bairns?"

Ah, Jock, art thou not also a hypocrite!

Mrs. Craigie had left the window, and sat down beside the fire, the churchgoers having passed, and the church bell having ceased to ring. Jock then lighted his pipe opposite Mrs. Craigie. "What d'ye mean," he asked again, "by stealt bairns?"

"I mean this," replied she, "that yon auld hypocrite, sodger, and poacher,

Adam Mercer, stealt Mary Semple frae me!” and she looked at Hall with an expression which said, “What do ye think of that?” Then having been invited by Hall to tell him all about the theft, she did so, continuing her narrative up to the moment when she was ordered out of the house by Adam; saying now as on that occasion, “But I hae freen’s, and I’ll pit Smellie to smash him yet! I’ll get my revenge oot o’ him, the auld bitin’ brock that he is. Smellie is my freen, and he has mair power, far, than Adam wi’ the minister.” So thought Mrs. Craigie.

“Is Smellie yer freen’?” asked Hall, without taking his pipe out of his mouth, “and does *he* hate Adam? and does *he* want Mary back tae you?”

“That does he,” replied Mrs. Craigie; “and he wad gie onything to get Mary back tae me?”

“Then, my certes, Smellie *has* pooer! nae doot o’ *that*,” remarked Hall, with a grim smile; “for he has helpit to pit me mony a time into the jail. Wad it obleege him muckle tae get Mary back frae the Sergeant? Wad he befreen’ me if I helped him?” asked Jock confidentially.

“It wad be a real treat till him!” exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; “and he wad befreen’ ye a’ yer life! An’, Hall—”

“But,” asked Jock, interrupting her, “what did ye say about poachin’? Was Adam in that line?”

“Him!” exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; “I’se warrant he was—notorious!”

“Hoo d’ye ken?” inquired Jock.

“Smellie telt me! but mind ye, he said I was to keep it quait till he gied me the wink, ye ken;” and Mrs. Craigie gave a knowing wink. She did not know that Smellie had already *peached*. “For hoo Smellie kent was this, that he had some sort o’ business in the place whaur Mercer leaved—that’s north in Bennock parish, afore he was a sodger; and Smellie picked up a’ the story o’ his poachin’, for Smellie is awfu’ shairp; but he wad never tell’t till he could pit it like a gag into the prood mouth o’ Adam; and Smellie says he’ll pit it in noo, and let Adam crunch his teeth on’t,” said Mrs. Craigie, gnashing the few she had herself.

Hall manifested a singular inquisitiveness to know as much as possible about those poaching days, and their locality, until at last being satisfied, and having learned that the old keeper of Lord Bennock was still alive, though, as Mrs. Craigie said, “clean superannuat”, and that he was, moreover, Adam’s cousin, Jock said, “What an awfu’ blackguard Adam maun be! If I had kent what I ken noo, I never wad hae gi’en him my boots to men’”

“Yer boots to men’!” exclaimed Mrs. Craigie, with astonishment; “what for did ye do that?”

“He had nae wark.”

“Ser’ him richt!” said Mrs. Craigie.

“And I patroneesed him,” continued Jock.

"Ha! ha! It was far ower guid o' ye, Jock, tae patronese him," said Mrs. Craigie. "Ye'll no pay him, I houp? But he's sic a greedy fallow, that he micht expect' even a puir sowl like you tae pay."

"Me pay him!" said Jock, with a laugh, "maybe—when I hae paid the debt o' natur'; no till then."

"But, Jock," asked Mrs. Craigie, almost in a whisper, "did ye see Mary, the wee slut?"

"I did that," replied Jock, "an' it wad hae broken yer feelin' heart, Luckie, had ye seen her!—no lying as a puir orphan paid for by the Session ocht to lie, on a shake-doon, wi' a blanket ower her,—my certes, guid enuch for the like o' her, and for the bawbees paid for her—"

"Guid?—ower guid!" interpolated Mrs. Craigie.

"But," continued Hall, with a leer, "she was mair like a leddy, wi' a bed till hersel', an' curtains on't; and sitting in a chair, wi' stockin's and shoon, afore the fire—learning her lesson, too, and coddled and coddled by Adam and his wife. What say ye to that, Luckie? what say ye to that?"

"Dinna mak' me daft!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie; "it's enuch to mak' a bodie swear e'en on the Sabbath day!"

"Swear awa'!" said Hall; "the day maks nae difference to *me*. Sae ca' awa', woman, if it wull dae ye ony guid, or gie ye ony comfort."

Mrs. Craigie, instead of accepting the advice of her "ne'er-do-weel" lodger, fell into a meditative mood. What could she be thinking about? Her Sabbath thoughts came to this, in their practical results—a proposal to Jock Hall to seize Mary as she was returning from church, and to bring her again under the protection of her dear old motherly friend. She could not, indeed, as yet take her from under the Sergeant's roof by force, but could the Sergeant retake her if by any means she were brought back under *her* roof?

Jock, after some consideration, entertained the proposal, discussed it, and then came to terms. "What wull ye gie me?" he at last asked.

"A glass o' whuskey and a saxpence!" said Mrs. Craigie.

"Ba! ba!" said Jock; "I'm nae bairn, but gleg and cannie, like a moudiewart! Saxpence! Ye ken as weel as I do, that if the Shirra—for, losh me! I ken baith him an' the law ower weel!—if he heard ye were plottin' an' plannin' to grip a bairn that way on the Sabbath, and paying me for helpin' ye—my word! you and me wad be pit in jail; and though this micht be a comfort tae *me*—lodgings and vittals for naething, ye ken, and a visit to an auld hame—it wadna dae for a Christian woman like you, Luckie! Eh, lass? it wad never dae! What wad the minister and Smellie say? no' to speak o' the Sergeant?—hoo *he* wad craw! Sae unless ye keep it as quait as death, an' gie me half-a-crown, I'll no pit my han' on the bairn."

"The bargain's made!" said Mrs. Craigie. "But ye maun wait till I get a

shilling mair frae Mrs. D'rymple, as I've nae change."

"Tell her to come ben," said Jock. "Can ye trust her wi' the secret? Ye should get her tae help ye, and tae swear, if it comes tae a trial, that the bairn cam' tae ye o' her ain free consent, mind. I'm ready, for half-a-crown mair, to gie me yith to the same effec'."

"Ye're no far wrang; that's the plan!" said Mrs. Craigie. "I can trust Peggy like steel. An' I'm sure Mary *does* want to come tae me. That's the truth and nae lee. Sae you and Peggy D'rymple may sweer a' that wi' a guid conscience."

"But *my* conscience," said Jock, "is no sae guid as yours or Peggy's, an' it'll be the better o' anither half-crown, in case I hae to sweer, to keep it frae botherin' me. But I'll gie ye credit for the money, an' ye'll gie me credit for what I awe ye for my meat and lodgin' sin' Monday."

"A' richt, a' richt, Jock; sae be't," replied Mrs. Craigie, as she went to fetch her neighbour, who lived on the same flat.

Mrs. Dalrymple was made a member of the privy council which met in a few minutes in Mrs. Craigie's room, the door being bolted.

"I'm nae hypocrite," confessed Jock. "I scorn to be ane, as ye do; for ye dinna preten' to be unco guid, and better than ither folk, like Adam Mercer, or that godly man Smellie. I tell ye, then, I'm up to onything for money or drink. I'll steal, I'll rob, I'll murder, I'll--"

"Whisht, whisht, Jock! Dinna speak that wild way an' frichten folk!--Be canny, man, be canny, or the neebours 'll hear ye," said the prudent Mrs. Craigie, who forthwith explained her plan to her confidential and trustworthy friend, who highly approved of it as an act of justice to Mrs. Craigie, to Mary, and the Kirk Session. Half-a-crown was to be Mrs. Dalrymple's pay for her valued aid. Hall arranged that the moment the women saw the Sergeant coming from church, they were to give him a sign; and then they--leaving the window, and retiring behind the door--were to be ready to receive Mary and hold her fast when brought to the house. To enable Hall to execute the plot more easily, Mrs. Craigie gave him, at his own suggestion, in order to entice Mary, a few spring flowers she had got the evening before from a neighbour's garden, as a "posey" for the church--which she had not, however attended, being deprived of the privilege, as she meant to assure Smellie, by illness. Jock had already accepted of a glass of whisky. But as the exciting moment approached, and as the two women had helped themselves to a cheerer, as they called it, he got a second glass to strengthen his courage. His courage, however, did not seem to fail him, for he once or twice whistled and hummed some song--to the great horror of his good friends; and, strange to say, he also fell into a fit of uncontrollable laughter--at the thought, so he said, of how the old hypocrite and his wife would look when Mary was missed and found to be with Mrs. Craigie! Much hearty sympathy was expressed with his strange

humour.

The service in the "auld kirk", as the parish church is called, being over, the congregation were walking home. One or two of its members had already passed the window where sat the eager and expectant conspirators. Jock Hall, with a bunch of flowers, was ready to run down-stairs, to the close mouth, the moment the appointed signal was given. Very soon the Sergeant and his wife made their appearance a little way off, while Mary—how fortunate for the plotters!—followed at some distance. No sooner were they discovered, than the two women retired from the window, and gave the signal to Hall to "be off!" They then ensconced themselves, as previously arranged, at the back of the door, with eager and palpitating hearts.

Jock sprang out, shutting the door after him, and rattling down-stairs reached the street just as Mary was within a few yards. When she was passing the close, he stepped out, and with a kind voice, said: "I hae a message for your faither, Mary dear! Jist speak to me aff the street." Mary, no longer associating Hall with the thought of a wild man, but of one who had been a guest of the Sergeant's, entered the close. Jock Hall gave her the flowers and said: "Gie this posey to your mither, for the gran' tea she made for me; and gie this half-croon to yer faither for the braw boots he patched for me. Noo run awa', my bonnie lassie, and be guid, and do whatever yer faither and mither bid ye, or Jock Hall will be angry wi' ye—run!"

Mrs. Craigie, in her excitement and curiosity, could not resist the temptation of going again to the window, and no sooner had she seen Mary enter the close than she ran to her retreat behind the door, whispering joyfully to Mrs. Dalrymple, "The wee deevil is catched, and coming!"

In a moment Jock was at the door, and while he firmly held the key outside, he opened it so far as to let in his head. Then addressing the women, he said in an under-breath, or rather hiss: "Whisht! dinna speak! I caught her! I gied her the posey for Mrs. Mercer—I gied her the half-croon to pay Mr. Mercer for my boots!—and she's hame!—an' ye'll never get her!—You twa limmers are cheated! If ye cheep, I'll tell the Shirra. Jock Hall is nae hypocrite! Deil tak' ye baith, and Smellie likewise! I'm aff!" and before a word could be spoken by the astonished conspirators, Jock locked the door upon them, and flinging the key along the passage he sprang down-stairs and fled no one knew whither!

Mary gave the bouquet of flowers to Mrs. Mercer, whose only remark was: "Wha wad hae thocht it!" and she gave the half-crown to Adam, who said: "I never hae been as thankfu' for a day's wage! Pit it in the drawer, and keep it for Jock. I'm no feared but wi' God's help I'll mak' a sodger o' him yet! For as

Charlie's bairn weel remarks: 'A man's a man for a' that'."

CHAPTER XV

JOCK HALL'S JOURNEY

John Spence, who, as we have seen, was connected with the early history of Adam Mercer, had now reached an extreme old age, somewhere between eighty and ninety years. As he himself for a considerable time had stuck to the ambiguous epoch of "aboon fourscore", it was concluded by his friends that his ninth decade had nearly ended. He was hale and hearty, however,—"in possession of all his faculties", as we say—with no complaint but "the rheumatics", which had soldered his joints so as to keep him generally a prisoner in the large chair "ayont the fire", or compel him to use crutches, when he "hirpled" across the floor. He was able, however, in genial weather, to occupy the bench at his cottage door, there to fondle the young dogs, and to cultivate the acquaintance of the old ones. He had long ago given up all active work, and was a pensioner on his Lordship; but he still tenaciously clung to the title of "Senior Keeper". The vermin even which he had killed, and nailed, as a warning to evil-doers, over the gable-ends and walls of outhouses, had, with the exception of a few fragments of bleached fossils, long since passed away, giving place to later remains.

John was a great favourite with his master; and his advice was asked in all matters connected with the game on the estate of Castle Bennock. His anecdotes and reminiscences of old sporting days which he had spent with three generations of the family, and with generations of their friends and relations, were inexhaustible. And when the great annual festival of "the 12th" came round, and the Castle was crowded, and the very dogs seemed to snuff the game in the air and became excited, then John's cottage, with its kennels and all its belongings, was a constant scene of attraction to the sportsmen; and there he held a sort of court, with the dignity and gravity of an old Nimrod.

The cottage was beautifully situated in a retired nook at the entrance of a glen, beside a fresh mountain stream, and surrounded by a scattered wood of wild birches, mountain ash, and alder. The first ridge of Benturk rose beyond the tree tops, with an almost perpendicular ascent of loose stones, ribbed by wintry floods, and dotted by tufts of heather and dots of emerald-green pasture, up to the range of rocks which ramparted the higher peaks, around which in every

direction descended and swept far away the endless moorland of hill and glen.

John had long been a widower, and now resided with his eldest son Hugh, whose hair was already mingled with white, like brown heather sprinkled with snow.

Although the distance which separated John Spence from Adam Mercer was only about thirty miles, there had been little intercourse between the cousins. A ridge of hills and a wild district intervened without any direct communication. The mail coach which passed through Drumsylie did not come within miles of Castle Bennock. Letters, except on business, were rare between the districts, and were very expensive at that time to all but M.P.'s, who could frank them for themselves or their friends. And so it was that while John and Adam occasionally heard of each other, and exchanged messages by mutual friends, or even met after intervals of years, they nevertheless lived as in different kingdoms.

It was late on the Tuesday after his flight that Jock Hall, for reasons known only to himself, entered the cottage of John Spence and walked up to the blazing fire, beside which the old keeper was seated alone.

"Wat day, Mr. Spence!" said Jock, as his clothes began to smoke almost as violently as the fire which shone on his wet and tattered garments.

John Spence was evidently astonished by the sudden appearance and blunt familiarity of a total stranger, whose miserable and woebegone condition was by no means prepossessing. Keeping his eye fixed on him, John slowly drew a crutch between his knees, as if anxious to be assured of present help.

"Wha the mis-chief are ye?" asked Spence in an angry voice.

"A freen', Mr. Spence—a freen'!" replied Jock, quietly. "But let me heat mysel' awee—for I hae travelled far through moss and mire, and sleepit last nicht in a roofless biggin, an' a' to see you—and syne I'll gie ye my cracks."

Spence, more puzzled than ever, only gave a growl, and said, slowly and firmly, "A freen' in need is nae doot a freen' indeed, and I suppose ye'll be the freen' in need, and ye tak' me for the freen' indeed, but maybe ye're mista'en!"

Hall remaining silent longer than was agreeable, Spence at last said impatiently, "Nane o' yer nonsense wi' me! I'll ca' in the keepers. Ye're ane o' thae beggin' ne'er-do-weel tramps that we hae ower mony o'. Gang to the door and cry lood for Hugh. He's up in the plantin'; the guidwife and bairns are doon at the Castle. Be quick, or be aff aboot yer business."

Jock very coolly replied, "My business is wi' you, an' I'm glad I hae gotten ye by yersel' an' naebody near. I'll *no* ca' Hugh, an' I ken ye canna do't. Sae I'll jist wait till he comes, an' tell ye my business in the meantime. Wi' your leave, Mr. Spence, I'll tak' a seat;" on which he drew a chair to the side of the fire opposite old John, who partly from fear and partly from a sense of his own weakness, and also from curiosity, said nothing, but watched Hall with a look

of childish astonishment, his under lip hanging helplessly down, and his hand firmly grasping the crutch. His only remark was—"My certes, ye're a cool ane! I hae seen the day--" but what he had seen vanished in another growl, ended by a groan.

"Tak' a snuff, Mr. Spence," said Hall, as he rose and offered his tin box to the keeper. "Snuff is meat and music; it's better than a bite o' bread when hungry, and maist as gude as a dram when cauld, and at a' times it is pleasant tae sowl and body. Dinna spare't!"

There was not, as usual, much to spare of the luxury, but Spence refused it on the ground that he had never snuffed, and "didna like to get a habit o't".

"I think," said Jock, "ye might trust yersel' at fourscore for no' doing that."

The keeper made no reply, but kept his small grey eyes under his bushy eyebrows fixed on his strange visitor.

When Jock had resumed his seat, he said, "Ye'll ken weel, I'se warrant, Mr. Spence, a' the best shootin' grun' about Benturk? Ye'll nae doot ken the best bits for fillin' yer bag when the win' is east or wast, north or south? And ye'll ken the Lang Slap? and the Craigdarroch brae? and the short cut by the peat moss, past the Big Stane, and doon by the whins to the Cairntupple muir? And ye'll ken--"

Old Spence could stand this no longer, and he interrupted Jock by exclaiming, "Confoond yer gab and yer impudence! dauring to sit afore me there as if ye were maister and I servant! What do ye mean?"

"I was but axin' a ceevil question, Mr. Spence; and I suppose ye'll no' deny that ye ken thae places?"

[image]

"I WAS BUT AXIN' A CEEVIL QUESTION, MR. SPENCE" Page 117

"An' what if I do? what if I do?" retorted the keeper.

"Just this," said Jock, without a movement in the muscles of his countenance, "that I ken them tae for mony a year; and sae baith o' us hae common freens among the hills."

"What do ye ken aboot them?" asked Spence, not more pacified, nor less puzzled.

"Because," said Jock, "I hae shot ower them a' as a poacher—my name is Jock Hall, parish o' Drumsylie—and I hae had the best o' sport on them."

This was too much for the Senior Keeper. With an exclamation that need not be recorded, Spence made an attempt to rise with the help of his crutches, but was gently laid back in his chair by Jock, who said—

"Muckle ye'll mak' o't! as the auld wife said to the guse waumlin' in the glaur. Sit doon—sit doon, Mr. Spence; I'll be as guid to you as Hugh; an' I'll ca' in Hugh ony time ye like: sae be easy. For I wish atween oorsels to tell ye about an auld poacher and an auld acquaintance o' yours and mine, Sergeant Adam Mercer; for it's about him I've come." This announcement induced John to resume his seat without further trouble, on which Jock said, "Noo, I'll ca' Hugh to ye, gin ye bid me, as ye seem feared for me;" and he motioned as if to go to the door.

"I'm no feared for you nor for mortal man!" replied Spence, asserting his dignity in spite of his fears; "but, my fac! ye might be feared, pittin' yer fit into a trap like this! and if Hugh grips ye!—" He left the rest to be inferred.

"Pfuff!" said Jock. "As to that, gudeman, I hae been in every jail roon' about! A jail wad be comfort tae me compared wi' the hole I sleepit in the nicht I left Drumsylie, and the road I hae travelled sinsyne! But wull ye no' hear me about Adam Mercer?"

Spence could not comprehend the character he had to deal with, but beginning to think him probably "a natural", he told him to "say awa', as the titlin' remarked tae the gowk".

Jock now gathered all his wits about him, so as to be able to give a long and tolerably lucid history of the events which were then agitating the little world of Drumsylie, and of which the Sergeant was the centre. He particularly described the part that Mr. Smellie had taken in the affair, and, perhaps, from more than one grudge he bore to the said gentleman, he made him the chief if not the only real enemy of the Sergeant.

The only point which Jock failed to make intelligible to the keeper was his account of the starling. It may have been the confusion of ideas incident to old age when dealing with subjects which do not link themselves to the past; but so it was that there got jumbled up in the keeper's mind such a number of things connected with a bird which was the bairn of the Sergeant's bairn, and whistled songs, and told Jock he was a man, and disturbed the peace of the parish, and broke the Sabbath, and deposed the Sergeant, that he could not solve the mystery for himself, nor could Jock make it clear. He therefore accepted Spence's confusion as the natural result of a true estimate of the facts of the case, which few but the Kirk Session could understand, and accordingly he declared that "the bird was a kin' o' witch, a maist extraordinar' cratur, that seemed to ken a' things, and unless he was mista'en wad pit a' things richt gin the hinner en". The keeper declared "his detestation o' a' speaking birds"; and his opinion that "birds were made for shootin', or for ha'ain' their necks thrawn for eatin'—unless when layin' or hatchin'".

But what practical object, it may be asked, had Hall in view in this volunteer

mission of his? It was, as he told the keeper, to get him to ask his Lordship, as being the greatest man in the district, to interfere in the matter and by all possible means to get Smellie, if not Mr. Porteous, muzzled. "Ye're Adam's coosin, I hear," said Jock, "and the head man wi' his Lordship, and ye hae but tae speak the word and deliver the Sergeant an' his bird frae the grips o' these deevils."

Jock had, however, touched a far sorer point than he was aware of when he described Smellie as the propagator of the early history of the Sergeant as a poacher. This, along with all that had been narrated, so roused the indignation of Spence, who had the warmest regard for the Sergeant, apart from his being his cousin and from the fact of his having connived in some degree at his poaching, that, forgetting for a moment the polluted presence of a confessed poacher like Hall, he told him to call Hugh; adding, however, "What wull he do if he kens what ye are, my man? It's easy to get oot o' the teeth o' an auld doug like me, wha's a guid bit aboon fourscore. But Hugh!—faix he wad pit baith o' us ower his head! What *wad* he say if he kent a poacher was sitting at his fireside?"

"I didna say, Mr. Spence, that I *am* a poacher, but that I was ane; nor did I say that I wad ever be ane again; nor could Hugh or ony ane else pruve mair than has been pruve a'ready against me, and paid for by sowl and body to jails and judges: sae let that flee stick to the wa'!" answered Jock; and having done so, he went to the door, and, with stentorian lungs, called the younger keeper so as to wake up all the dogs with howl and bark as if they had been aware of the poaching habits of the shouter.

As Hugh came to the door, at which Jock calmly stood, he said to him in a careless tone, like one who had known him all his life: "Yer faither wants ye;" and, entering the kitchen, he resumed his former seat, folding his arms and looking at the fire.

"Wha the sorrow hae ye gotten here, faither, cheek by jowl wi' ye?" asked the tall and powerful keeper, scanning Jock with a most critical eye.

"A freen' o' my cousin's, Adam Mercer," replied old Spence. "But speer ye nae questions, Hugh, and ye'll get nae lees. He has come on business that I'll tell ye about. But tak' him ben in the meantime, and gie him some bread and cheese, wi' a drap milk, till his supper's ready. He'll stay here till morning. Mak' a bed ready for him in the laft."

Hugh, in the absence of his wife, obeyed his father's orders, though not without a rather strong feeling of lessened dignity as a keeper in being thus made the servant of a ragged-looking tramp. While Jock partook of his meal in private, and afterwards went out to smoke his pipe and look about him, Old Spence entered into earnest conference with his son Hugh. After giving his rather confused and muddled, yet sufficiently correct, edition of Mercer's story, he concentrated his whole attention and that of his son on the fact that Peter Smellie was the

enemy of Adam Mercer, and had been so for some time; that he had joined the minister to persecute him; and, among other things, had also revealed the story of Adam's poaching more than thirty years before, to raise prejudice against his character and that of Spence as a keeper.

"Wha's Smellie? I dinna mind him," asked Hugh.

"Nae loss, Hugh!—nae loss at a'. I never spak' o't to onybody afore, and ye'll no clipe about it, for every dog should hae his chance; and if a man should miss wi' ae barrel, he may nevertheless hit wi' the tither; and I dinna want to fash the man mair than is necessar'. But this same Smellie had a shop here at the clachan aboon twenty years syne, and I got him custom frae the Castle; an' didna the rogue—Is the door steekit?" asked the old man in a whisper. Hugh nodded. "An' didna the rogue," continued old John, "forge my name tae a bill for £50? That did he; and I could hae hanged him! But I never telt on him till this hour, but made him pay the half o't, and I paid the ither half mysel'; and Adam see'd me sae distressed for the money that he gied me £5 in a present tae help. Naebody kent o't excep' mysel' and Adam, wha was leevin' here at the time, and saw it was a forgery; and I axed him *never* to say a word aboot it, and I'll wager he never did, for a clean-speerited man and honourable is Adam Mercer! Weel, Smellie by my advice left the kintraside for Drumsylie, and noo he's turning against Adam! Isna that awfu'? Is't no' deevilish? Him like a doug pointing at Adam! As weel a moose point at a gled!"

"That's a particular bonnie job indeed," said Hugh. "I wad like to pepper the sneaky chiel wi' snipe-dust for't. But what can be dune noo?"

"Dune! Mair than Smellie wad like, and enouch to mak' him lowse his grip o' Adam!" said the old man. "I hae a letter till him bamboozlin' my head, and I'll maybe grip it in the mornin' and pit it on paper afore breakfast-time! Be ye ready to write it doon as I tell ye, and it'll start Smellie ower his wabs and braid claith, or I'm mista'en!"

Hugh was ordered to meet his father in the morning to indite the intended epistle.

CHAPTER XVI

FISHERS AND FISHING

As the evening drew on, the family who occupied the keeper's house gathered

together like crows to their rookery. Mrs. Hugh, who had been helping at a large washing in "the big house", returned with a blythe face, full of cheer and womanly kindness.

"Hech! but I hae had sic a day o't! What a washing! an' it's no' half dune! But wha hae we here?" she asked, as she espied Jock seated near the fire. "Dae I ken ye?" she further inquired, looking at him with a sceptical smile, as if she feared to appear rude to one whom she ought, perhaps, to have recognised.

Jock, with a sense of respect due to her, rose, and said, "I houp no', for maybe I wad be nae credit tae ye as an aqua'ntance."

"A freen' o' my cousin's, Adam Mercer, o' Drumsylie," remarked old Spence. "Sit doon, my man!"

"I'm glad tae see ye," said the happy sonsy wife, stretching out her hand to Jock, who took it reluctantly, and gazed in the woman's face with an awkward expression.

"It's been saft weather, and bad for travellin', and ye hae come a far gait," she continued; and forthwith began to arrange her house. Almost at her heels the children arrived. There were two flaxen-haired girls, one ten and the other about twelve, with bare feet, and their locks tied up like sheaves of ripe golden grain. Then came in a stout lad of about seven, from school and play. All looked as fresh and full of life as young roe from the forest.

"Gang awa', bairns, and snod yersels," said Mrs. Hugh.

"This man," said old Spence, who was jealous of his authority over the household, pointing to Jock, "wull tak' his supper wi' us. He's tae sleep in the stable-laft."

"He's welcome, he's welcome," said Mrs. Hugh. "The bed's nae braw, but it's clean, and it's our best for strangers."

The last to enter, as the sun was setting, was John, the eldest, a lad of about fourteen, the very picture of a pure-eyed, ruddy-complexioned, healthy, and happy lad. He had left school to assist his father in attending to his duties.

"What luck, Johnnie?" asked his father, as the boy entered with his fishing basket over his shoulder.

"Middlin' only," replied John; "the water was raither laigh, and the tak' wasna guid. There were plenty o' rises, but the troots were unco shy. But I hae gotten, for a' that, a guid wheen;" and he unslung his basket and poured out from it a number of fine trout.

Jock's attention was now excited. Here was evidence of an art which he flattered himself he understood, and could speak about with some authority.

"Pretty fair," was his remark, as he rose and examined them; "whaur got ye them?"

"In the Blackcraig water," replied the boy.

"Let me luik at yer flee, laddie?" asked Jock. The boy produced it. "Heckle, bad!—ye should hae tried a teal's feather on a day like this."

Johnnie looked with respect at the stranger. "Are ye a fisher?" he asked.

"I hae tried my han'," said Jock. And so the conversation began, until soon the two were seated together at the window. Then followed such a talk on the mysteries of the craft as none but students of the angle could understand:—the arrangement and effect of various "dressings", of wings, bodies, heckles, &c., being discussed with intense interest, until all acknowledged Jock as a master.

"Ye seem tae understan' the business weel," remarked Hugh.

"I wad need," replied Jock. "When a man's life, no' to speak o' his pleasure, depen's on't, he needs tae fish wi' a watchfu' e'e and canny han'. But at a' times, toom or hungry, it's a great diverteement!"

Both Johnnie and his father cordially assented to the truth of the sentiment.

"Eh, man!" said Jock, thus encouraged to speak on a favourite topic, "what a conceit it is when ye reach a fine run on a warm spring mornin', the wuds hotchin' wi' birds, an' dauds o' licht noos and thans glintin' on the water; an' the water itsel' in trim order, a wee doon, after a nicht's spate, and wi' a drap o' porter in't, an' rowin' and bubblin' ower the big stanes, curlin' into the linn and oot o't; and you up tae the hanches in a dark neuk whaur the fish canna see ye; an' than to get a lang cast in the breeze that soughs in the bushes, an' see yer flee licht in the vera place ye want, quiet as a midge lights on yer nose, or a bumbee on a flower o' clover, an'—"

Johnnie was bursting with almost as much excitement as Jock, but did not interrupt him except with a laugh expressive of his delight.

"An' than," continued Jock, "whan a muckle chiel' o' a salmon, wi'oot time tae consider whether yer flee is for his wame or only for his mooth—whether it's made by natur' or by Jock Hall—plays flap! and by mistak' gangs to digest what he has gotten for his breakfast, but spec's he canna swallow the line alang wi' his mornin' meal till he taks some exercise!—an' then tae see the line ticht, and the rod bendin' like a heuk, and tae fin' something gaun frae the fish up the line and up the rod till it reaches yer verra heart, that gangs *pit pat* at yer throat like a tickin' watch; until the bonnie cratur', efter rinnin' up and doon like mad, noo skulkin' aside a stane tae cure his teethache, then bilkin' awa' wi' a scunner at the line and trying every dodge, syne gies in, comes tae yer han' clean beat in fair play, and lies on the bank sayin' 'Wae's me' wi' his tail, an' makin' his will wi' his gills and mooth time aboot!—eh, man, it's splendid!" Jock wearied himself with the description.

"Whaur hae ye fished?" asked Hugh, after a pause during which he had evidently enjoyed Jock's description.

"In the wast water and east water; in the big linn an' wee linn, in the Loch

o' the Whins, in the Red Burn, an' in--"

"I dinna ken thae waters at a'," remarked the keeper, interrupting him, "nor ever heard o' them!"

"Nor me," chimed in old John, "though I hae been here for mair than fifty year."

"Maybe no'," said Jock with a laugh, "for they're in the back o' the beyonts, and that's a place few folk hae seen, I do assure you--ha! ha! ha!" Jock had, in fact, fished the best streams watched by the keepers throughout the whole district. Young John was delighted with this new acquaintance, and looked up to him with the greatest reverence.

"What kin' o' flee duve ye fish wi'?" asked Johnnie. "Hae ye ony about ye e'eno?"

"I hae a few," said Hall, as he unbuttoned his waistcoat, displaying a tattered shirt within, and, diving into some hidden recess near his heart, drew forth a large old pocket-book and placed it on the table. He opened it with caution and circumspection, and spread out before the delighted Johnnie, and his no less interested father, entwined circles of gut, with flies innumerable.

"That's the ane," Jock would say, holding up a small, black, hairy thing, "I killed ten dizzen wi'-thumpers tae, three pun's some o' them--afore twa o'clock. Eh, man, he's a murderin' chiel this!" exhibiting another. "But it was this ither ane," holding up one larger and more gaudy, "that nicked four salmon in three hours tae their great surprise! And thae flees," taking up other favourites, "wi' the muirfowl wing and black body, are guid killers; but isna this a cracker wi' the wee touch o' silver? it kilt mair salmon--whaur, ye needna speer--than I could carry hame on a heather wuddie! But, Johnnie," he added after a pause, "I maun, as yer freen', warn ye that it's no' the flee, nor the water, nor the rod, nor the win', nor the licht, can dae the job, wi'oot the watchfu' e'e and steady han', an' a feelin' for the business that's kin' o' born wi' a fisher, but hoo that comes about I dinna ken--I think I could maist catch fish in a boyne o' water if there were ony tae catch!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE KEEPER'S HOME

While the preparations for supper were going on within doors, Jock went out to

have a "dauner", or saunter, but, in truth, from a modest wish to appear as if not expecting to be asked to partake of supper with the family.

The table was spread with a white home-made linen cloth, and deep plates were put down, each with a horn spoon beside it. A large pot, containing potatoes which had been pared before they were placed on the fire, was now put on the floor, and fresh butter with some salt having been added to its contents, the whole was beat and mashed with a heavy wooden beetle worked by Hugh and his son—for the work required no small patience and labour—into a soft mass, forming an excellent dish of "champed potatoes", which, when served up with rich milk, is "a dainty dish to set before a king", even without the four-and-twenty blackbirds. Then followed a second course of "barley scones" and thick crisp oatmeal cakes, with fresh butter, cheese, and milk.

Before supper was served Jock Hall was missed, and Johnnie sent in search of him. After repeated shouts he found him wandering about the woods, but had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to join the family. Jock said, "It wasna for him tae gang ben",—"he had had eneuch tae eat in the afternoon",—"he wad hae a bite efter hin", &c. But being at last persuaded to accept the pressing invitation, he entered, and without speaking a word seated himself in the place allotted to him.

"Tak' in yer chair, Maister Hall,"—Jock could hardly believe his ears!—"and mak' what supper ye can," said Mrs. Hugh. "We're plain kintra folk hereawa",—"an apology to Jock for their having nothing extra at supper to mark their respect for a friend of the Sergeant's! What were his thoughts? The character of an impostor seemed forced upon him when he most desired to be an honest man.

Then the old man reverently took off his "Kilmarnock cool", a coloured worsted night-cap, and said grace, thanking God for all His mercies, "of the least of which," he added, "we are unworthy". After supper Mrs. Hugh gave a long account of the labours of the day, and of the big washing, and told how she had met Lady Mary, and Lady Caroline, and Lord Bennock, and how they had been talking to the children, and "speering for faither and grandfaither".

A happy family was that assembled under the keeper's roof. The youngest child, a boy, was ever welcome on old John's knee, who never seemed able to exhaust the pleasure he derived from his grandson's prattle. His large watch, which approached in size to a house clock, with its large pewter seal, was an endless source of amusement to the child; so also was the splendid rabbit shadowed on the wall, with moving ears and moving mouth, created by John's hands; and his imitation of dogs, cats, and all other domestic animals, in which he was an adept;—nay, his very crutches were turned to account to please the boy, and much more to please himself. The elder daughters clung round their mother in a group, frankly talking to her in mutual confidence and love. The boys enjoyed

the same liberty with their father, and indulged unchecked in expressions of affection. All was freedom without rudeness, play without riot, because genuine heartfelt affection united all.

Jock did not join in the conversation, except when he was asked questions by Mrs. Hugh about Drumsylie, its shops and its people. On the whole he was shy and reserved. Anyone who could have watched his eye and seen his heart would have discovered both busy in contemplating a picture of ordinary family life such as the poor outcast had never before beheld. But Jock still felt as if he was not in his right place—as if he would have been cast out into the darkness had his real character been known. His impressions of a kind of life he never dreamt of were still more deepened when, before going to bed, the large Bible was placed on the table, and Hugh, amidst the silence of the family, said, "We'll hae worship." The chapter for the evening happened to be the fifteenth of St. Luke. It was as if written expressly for Jock. Are such adaptations to human wants to be traced to mere chance? Surely He who can feed the wild beasts of the desert, or the sparrow amidst the waste of wintry snows, can give food to the hungry soul of a Prodigal Son, as yet ignorant of the food he needs and of the Father who alone can supply it.

They did not ask Jock if he would remain for evening worship. "The stranger within the gate" was assumed to be, for the time, a member of the household. It was for him to renounce his recognised right, not for the family to question it. But Jock never even argued the point with himself. He listened with head bent down as if ashamed to hold it up, and following the example set to him by the family, knelt down—for the first time in his life—in prayer. Did he pray? Was it all a mere form? Was it by constraint, and not willingly? What his thoughts were on such an occasion, or whether they were gathered up in prayer to the living God, who can tell? But if the one thought even, for the first time, possessed him, that maybe there was a Person beyond the seen and temporal, to whom the world and man belonged, whose Name he could now associate with no evil but with all good, who possibly knew him and wished him to be good like Himself;—if there was even a glimmer in his soul, as he knelt down, that he might say as well as others, and along with them, "Our Father, which art in Heaven", then was there cast into his heart, though he knew it not, the germ of a new life which might yet grow into a faith and love which would be life eternal.

The prayer of Hugh the keeper was simple, earnest, and direct, a real utterance from one person to another—yet as from a man to God, couched in his own homely dialect to Him whom the people of every language and tongue can worship. The prayer was naturally suggested by the chapter which was read. He acknowledged that all were as lost sheep; as money lost in the dust of earth; as miserable prodigals lost to their Father and to themselves, and who were poor and

needy, feeding on husks, having no satisfaction, and finding no man to give unto them. He prayed God to bring them all into the fold of the Good Shepherd, who had given His life for the sheep, and to keep them in it; to gather them as the lost coins into the treasury of Him who was rich, yet who for our sakes became poor; he prayed God to help them all to say, "I will arise and go to my Father", in the assured hope that their Father would meet them afar off, and receive them with joy. After remembering the afflicted in body and mind, the orphan and widow, the outcast and stranger, he asked that God, who had mercy on themselves who deserved nothing, would make them also merciful to others; and he concluded with the Lord's Prayer.

Had any one seen poor Hall that night as he lay in the hay-loft, a clean blanket under him and more than one over him, they might have discovered in his open eyes, and heard in his half-muttered expressions, and noticed even from his wakeful tossings to and fro, a something stirring in his soul the nature or value of which he himself could not comprehend or fully estimate.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE KEEPER'S LETTER

Old John Spence was an early riser. He did not share Charles Lamb's fears of indulging in the ambition of rising with the sun. The latter part of the day was to him a period of repose, a siesta of half-sleepy meditation, which not unfrequently passed into a deep-toned sleep in his arm-chair. In a lucid interval, during the evening of Jock's arrival, he had been considering how he might best help the Sergeant out of his difficulties. He had not for a moment accepted of Jock's policy suggesting his lordship's interference in the great Drumsylie case. With the instinct of an old servant, he felt that such presumption on his part was out of the question. So he had informed Jock, bidding him not to think of his lordship, who would not and could not do anything in the matter. He assured him at the same time that he would try what could be done by himself to muzzle Smellie. Having accordingly matured his plans, he was ready at daybreak to execute them. He embraced therefore the first opportunity of taking Hugh into a small closet, where the little business which required writing was generally transacted, and where a venerable escritoire stood, in whose drawers and secret recesses were carefully deposited all papers relating to that department of his lordship's estate

over which John was chief.

The door having been carefully barred, the old keeper seated in an arm-chair, and his son Hugh at the escritoire, John said, "Get the pen and paper ready."

"A' richt," said Hugh, having mended his pen and tried it on his thumb-nail, looking at it carefully as he held it up in the light.

"Weel, then, begin! Write—'Sir;' no' 'Dear Sir,' but jist 'Sir'. Of coorse ye'll pit the direction 'To Mr. Peter Smellie'. Eh?—halt a wee—should I say Mr. or plain Peter? Jist mak' it plain Peter—say, 'To Peter Smellie'."

"To Peter Smellie," echoed Hugh.

"John Spence, keeper—or raither John Spence, senior keeper—wishes tae tell ye that ye're a scoondrill."

After writing these words with the exception of the last, Hugh said, "Be canny, faither, or maybe he micht prosecute you."

"Let him try't!" replied John; "but let scoondrill stan'. It's the vera pooder and shot o' my letter; wi'oot that, it's a' tow and colfin."

"I'm no' sure, faither, if I can spell't," said Hugh, who did not like the more than doubtful expression, and put off the writing of it by asking, "Hoo, faither, d'ye spell scoondrill?"

"What ither way but the auld way?"

"But I never wrote it afore, for I hae had little to dae wi' ony o' the squad."

"Weel, I wad say—s, k, oo, n, d, r, i, l, l, or to that effec'. Keep in the *drill* whatever ye dae, for that's what I mean tae gie him!"

Having written this very decided introduction, Hugh went on with his letter, which when completed ran as follows:—

"John Spence, Senior Keeper, Castle Bennock, to Peter Smellie, Draper, Drumsylie.

"You are a skoondrill, and you kno it! But nobody else knos it but my son and me and Serjent Mercer. I wuss you to understan' that he knos all about yon black business o' yours, 20 year back. This comes to let you kno that unless you leve him alone, and don't molest him, I will send you to Botany Bay, as you deserve. Medle not with the Sergeant, or it wull be to your cost. Attend to this hint. I wull have you weel watched. You are in Mr. Mercer's power. Bewar!

"Your servt., "JOHN SPENCE."

"I houps," said John, as he had the letter read over to him, "that will mak the

whitrat leave aff sookin' the Sergeant's throat! If no', I'll worry him like a brock, or hunt him like a fox aff the kintra side. But no' a word o' this, mind ye, tae ony leevin' cratur, mair especial tae yon trampin' chiel. Gie Smellie a chance, bad as he is. Sae let the letter be sent aff this verra nicht wi' Sandy the Post. The sooner the better. The nesty taed that he is! Him to be preaching tae a man like Adam oot o' his clay hole!"

The letter was despatched that night by the post. It was not thought discreet to intrust Jock with the secret, or to let Adam Mercer know in the meantime anything about this counter-mine.

Breakfast being over, Hall proposed to return to Drumsylie. Before doing so he wished some positive assurance of obtaining aid in favour of the Sergeant from Spence. But all he could get out of the keeper was to "keep his mind easy—no' to fear—he wad look efter the Sergeant".

Old Spence would not, however, permit of Jock's immediate departure, but invited him to remain a day or two "and rest himsel'". It was benevolently added, that "he could help Johnnie to fish at an odd hour, and to sort the dogs and horses in ordinar' hours". The fact was, old Spence did not wish Hall to return immediately to Drumsylie, until events there had time to be affected by his letter to Smellie. Jock was too glad of the opportunity afforded him of proving that he might be trusted to do whatever work he was fitted for, and that he was not "a lazy tramper" by choice.

As the week was drawing to an end, Jock made up his mind to return to his old haunts, for home he had none. He had also an undefined longing to see the Sergeant, and to know how it fared with him.

But when the day arrived for his departure, Hugh suggested that perhaps Jock would like to see the Castle. It was not, he said, every day he would have such a chance of seeing so grand a place, and maybe he might even see his lordship!—at a distance. Besides, it would not take him far out of his road; and Hugh would accompany him a part of the way home, as he had to visit a distant part of the estate in the discharge of his professional duties.

Jock's curiosity was excited by the thought of seeing the great house not as a beggar or a poacher, but under the genteel protection of a keeper and confidential servant, and when a live lord might be scanned from afar without fear.

When Jock came to bid farewell to old Spence, he approached him bonnet in hand, with every token of respect. He said little but "Thank ye—thank ye, Mr. Spence, for yer guidness;" and whispering, added, "I'm sorry if I offended ye. But maybe ye could get a job for me if I canna fa' in wi' honest wark at Drumsylie? I'll break my back, or break my heart, tae please you or ony dacent man that 'll help me to feed my body—it's no mickle buik—and to cover't—and little will keep the cauld oot, for my hide is weel tanned wi' win' and weather."

Spence looked with interest at the poor but earnest pleader at his elbow, and nodded encouragingly to him.

"Eh, man!" said Jock, "what a pity ye dinna snuff! I wad lee ye my auld snuff-box gin ye wad tak' it."

Spence smiled and thanked him—ay even shook hands with him!—an honour which went to Jock's heart; and Spence added, "My compliments to my cousin Adam, and tell him to stan' at ease and keep his pooder dry."

Mrs. Spence had prepared a good "rung" of bread and cheese, which she stuffed into Jock's pocket to support him in his journey.

"Awfu' guid o' ye—maist awfu'!" said Jock, as he eyed the honest woman pressing the food into its ragged receptacle.

Jock looked round, and asked for Johnnie. On being told that he was at the stables, he went off to find him, and, having succeeded, took him aside and said—"Johnnie, laddie, I hae been treated by yer folk like a lord, tho' efter a' I dinna weel ken hoo a lord is treated; but, howsomdever, wi'oot ony clavers about it, here's a present for you o' the best buik o' flees in the haill kintra side. Tak' them, and welcome." And Jock produced his "Book of Sports", which had been his most cheerful companion for many a year, and almost forcing John to take it, added, "I hae a obligation to ax: never tell yer folk about it till I'm awa', and never tell ony stranger atween this and Drumsylie that ye got it frae Jock Ha'." And before the astonished boy could thank him as the generous giver of so many keys to unlock every pool of its treasures, on every day in the year and at all seasons, Jock ran off to join Hugh.

CHAPTER XIX

EXTREMES MEET

In a short time Hugh was conducting Jock towards the Castle. After they passed the lodge, and were walking along the beautiful avenue and beneath the fine old trees, with the splendid park sweeping around, and the turrets of the Castle in sight, Hugh said, "Now, Hall, dinna speak to onybody unless they speak to you, and gie a discreet answer. Dae my biddin'; for I'm takin' a great responsibility in bringin' ye in here. His lordship maybe wadna be pleased to see a trampin' chiel like you here. But I'll tak' care he doesna see ye, nor if possible hear tell o' ye."

"Never fear me," said Jock; "I'll be as quaet as a dead rabbit. But, Hugh man,

I hae seen his lordship afore.”

”Whaur?” asked Hugh, with an expression of astonishment.

”He ance tried me, as a maugistrat,” replied Jock, equally placid.

”Tried ye!” exclaimed Hugh, pausing in his walk as if he had got into one scrape and was about to enter a second—”tried ye for what?”

”Oh, never heed,” said Jock; ”dinna be ower particular. It was a job that ended in a drucken habble I got into wi’ twa tailor chappies that struck me, and my head and e’e were bun’ wi’ a bluidy napkin at the trial, and his lordship wull no’ mind on me; tho’ faix! I mind on him, for he sent me tae jail.”

”Was that a’?” carelessly remarked Hugh. ”Ye nicht hae thrashed nine tailors and no’ got yersel’ hurt; I gripped three o’ them mysel’ when poachin’.”

But Jock did not tell the whole history of one of his own poaching affrays along with the tailors.

Hugh ensconced Jock in the shrubbery until he ascertained from one of the servants that his lordship had gone out to walk in the grounds, that the ladies were taking an airing in the carriage, and that it was quite possible to get a peep into the great hall and the public rooms opening from it, without being discovered. As Hugh, accompanied by Jock, crept almost noiselessly along the passages, he directed with underbreath Jock’s attention to the noble apartments, the arms and suits of mail hung round the wall of the great entrance-hall, the stags’ heads, the stuffed birds, and one or two fine paintings of boar-hunts. But when the drawing-room door was opened, and there flashed upon Jock’s eyes all the splendour of colour reflected from large mirrors, in which he saw, for the first time, his own odd figure from crown to toe, making him start back as if he had seen a ghost, and when through the windows he beheld all the beauty of flowers that filled the parterres, dotted with *jets d’eaux*, white statues and urns, and surrounded by bowery foliage, a vision presented itself which was as new to him as if he had passed into Eden from the lodgings of Mrs. Craigie.

He did not speak a word, but only remarked it was ”nae doubt unco braw, and wad hae cost a heap o’ siller”. But, as they were retreating, suddenly the inner door of the hall opened, and his lordship stood before them!

”Heeven be about us!” ejaculated Spence, and in a lower voice added, ”Dune for,—dune for life!” He looked around him, as if for some means of concealing himself, but in vain. The door by which they had entered was closed. There was no mode of exit. Jock, seeing only a plain-looking little gentleman in a Glen-garry bonnet and tweed suit, never imagined that this could be a lord, and was accordingly quite composed. Spence, with his eyes fixed on the ground and his face flushed to the roots of his hair, seemed speechless.

His lordship was a slight-built man, of about forty, with pleasing hazel eyes and large moustache. He had retired from the army, and was much liked for his

frank manner and good humour. Seeing his keeper in such perplexity, accompanied by so disreputable-looking a person, he said, "Hollo, Spence! whom have you got here? I hope not a poacher, eh?"

"I humbly beg your lordship's pardon; but, my lord, the fac' is—" stammered Hugh.

"Is that his lordship?" whispered Jock.

"Haud yer tongue!" replied Hugh in an undertone of intense vehemence. Then addressing his lordship, he said, "He's no poacher, my lord; no, no, but only—"

"Oh! an acquaintance, I suppose."

"No' that either, no' that either," interrupted Hugh, as his dignity was frying on account of his companion, whom he wished a hundred miles away, "but an acqu'a'ntance o' an acqu'a'ntance o' my faither's lang syne—a maist respectable man—Sergeant Mercer, in Drumsylie, and I took the leeberty, thinking yer lordship was oot, to—"

"To show him the house. Quite right, Spence; quite right; glad you did so." Then addressing Jock, he said, "Never here before, I suppose?"

Jock drew himself up, placed his hands along his sides, heels in, toes out, and gave the military salute.

"Been in the army? In what regiment? Have you seen service?"

"Yes, sir—yes, my lord," replied Jock; "as yer honour says, I ha'e seen service."

This was information to Spence, who breathed more freely on hearing such unexpected evidence of Jock's respectability.

"Where?" inquired his lordship, seating himself on one of the lobby chairs, and folding his arms.

"In the berrick-yaird o' Stirlin', yer honour," replied Jock; "but in what regiment I dinna mind. It was a first, second, or third something or anither; but I hae clean forgotten the name and number."

"The barrack-yard?" said his lordship, laughing; "pray how long did you serve his Majesty in that severe campaign?"

"About a fortnicht," said Jock.

"What!" exclaimed his lordship; "a fortnight only? And what after that?"

"I ran aff as fast as I could," said Jock; "and never ran faster a' my days, till I reached Drumsylie."

Hugh turned his back as if also to run away, with sundry half-muttered exclamations of horror and alarm. His lordship burst into a fit of laughter, and said,—"On my honour, you're a candid fellow!" But he evidently assumed that Jock was probably a half-witted character, who did not comprehend the full meaning of his admission. He was confirmed in his supposition by Jock going on

to give a history of his military life in the most easy and simple fashion,—

"I 'listed when I was fou'; and though I had nae objections at ony time to fire a gun at a bird or a Frenchman, or tae fecht them that wad fecht me, yet the sodjers at Stirlin' made a fule o' me, and keepit me walkin' and trampin' back and forrid for twa weeks in the yaird, as if they were breakin' a horse; and I could dae naething, neither fish, nor e'en shoot craws, wi'oot the leave o' an ill-tongued corporal. I couldna thole that, could I? It wasna in the bargain, and sae I left, and they didna think it worth their while to speer after me."

"Egad!" said his lordship, laughing, "I dare say not, I dare say not! Do you know what they might have done to you if they had caught you, my man?" asked his lordship.

"Shot me, I expec'," said Jock; "but I wasna worth the pooder; and, tae tell the truth, I wad raither be shot like a gled for harryin' a pairrick's nest, than be kept a' my days like a gowk in a cage o' a berricks at Stirlin'! But I didna heed atweel whether they shot me or no'," added Jock, looking round him, and stroking his chin as if in a half dream.

"The black dog tak' ye!" said Spence, who lost his temper. "My lord, I declare—"

"Never mind, Spence, never mind; let him speak to me; and go you to the servants' hall until I send for you."

Spence bowed and retired, thankful to be released from his present agony. His lordship, who had a passion for characters which the keeper could not comprehend, gave a sign to Jock to remain, and then went on with the following catechism.

"What did your parents do?"

"Little guid and mickle ill."

"Were you at school?"

"No' that I mind o'."

"How have ye lived?"

"Guid kens!"

"What have you been?"

"A ne'er-do-weel—a kin' o' cheat-the-widdie. Sae folk tell me, and I suppose they're richt."

"Are you married?"

"That's no' a bad ane, efter a'!" said Jock, with a quiet laugh, turning his head away.

"A bad what?" asked his lordship, perplexed by the reply.

"I jist thocht," said Jock, "yer honour was jokin', to think that ony wumman wad marry me! He! he! Lassies wad be cheaper than cast-awa' shoon afore ony o' them wad tak' Jock Ha'—unless," he added, in a lower tone, with a laugh, "ane

like Luckie Craigie. But yer lordship 'ill no' ken her, I'se warrant?"

"I have not that honour," said his lordship, with a smile. "But I must admit that you don't give yourself a good character, anyhow."

"I hae nane to gie," said Jock, with the same impassible look.

"On my word," added his lordship, "I think you're honest!"

"It's mair," said Jock, "than onybody else thinks. But if I had wark, I'm no' sure but I wad be honest!"

His lordship said nothing, but stared at Hall as if measuring him from head to foot. Jock returned his gaze. It was as if two different portions of a broken-up world had met. His lordship felt uncertain whether to deal with Jock as a fool or as a reprobate. He still inclined to the opinion that he had "a want", and accordingly continued his catechism, asking, —

"What would you like to have?"

"It's no' for me tae say," replied Jock; "beggars shouldna be choosers."

"Perhaps you would have no objection to have this fine house—eh?" asked his lordship, with a smile.

"I'll no' say that I wad," replied Jock.

"And what would you make of it?"

"I wad," replied Jock, "fill't fu' wi' puir ne'er-do-weel faitherless and mitherless bairns, and pit Sergeant Mercer and his wife ower them—that's Mr. Spence's cousin, ye ken."

"Hillo!" said his lordship, "that would make a large party! And what would you do with them, when here assembled, my man?"

"I wad feed them," said Jock, "wi' the sheep and nowt in the park, and the birds frae the heather, and the fish frae the burns, and gie them the flowers aboot the doors—and schule them weel, and learn them trades: and shoot them or hang them, if they didna dae weel efter hin."

"Ha! ha! ha! And what would you do with me and my wife and daughters?" asked his lordship.

"I wad mak' you their faither, and them their mither and sisters. Ye never wad be idle or want pleasure, yer honour, among sic a hantle o' fine lads and lasses."

"Never idle—never idle! I should think not! But as to the pleasure! Ha! ha! ha!" And his lordship laughed with much glee at the idea of his being master of such an establishment.

"Eh! sir," said Jock, with fire in his eyes, "ye dinna ken what poverty is! Ye never lay trimblin' on a stair-head on a snawy nicht; nor got a spoonfu' or twa o' cauld parritch in the mornin' tae cool ye, wi' curses and kicks tae warm ye, for no' stealin' yer ain meat; nor see'd yer wee brithers an' sisters deein' like troots, openin' their mooths wi' naethin' to pit in them; or faix ye wad be thankfu' tae

help mitherless and faitherless bairns, and instead o' sendin' young cratur's like them tae the jail, ye wad sen' aulder folk that ill-used and neglected them; ay, and maybe some rich folk, and some ministers and elders as weel, for helpin' naebody but themsel's!"

His lordship looked in silence with wide-open eyes at Jock; and for a moment, amidst his ease and luxury, his fits of *ennui* and difficulty in killing time, his sense of the shallowness and emptiness of much of his life, with the selfishness of idle society, there flashed upon his naturally kind heart a gleam of noble duties yet to perform, and noble privileges yet to enjoy, though not perhaps in the exact form suggested by Jock Hall. But this was not the time to discuss these. So he only said, "You are not a bad fellow—not at all. Wiser men have said more foolish things," he added, as if thinking to himself; and then approaching Jock with a kindly smile, offered him some money.

"Na! na!" said Jock, "I didna come here to beg; I'll no' tak' onything."

"Come! come!" said his lordship, "you won't disoblige me, will you?" and he thrust the money into Jock's hand; and ringing a bell, he ordered the servant who appeared in reply to it to take him to the servants' hall, and to send Hugh Spence to the business room.

Jock made a low bow and salaam, and retired.

"William," said his lordship to another servant, who happened to be passing, "go to the old clothes press, and select a complete suit for that poor fellow. Be kind to him: see that he has some food and a glass of beer."

When Hugh was summoned into the presence of his lordship, he had sad misgivings as to the object of the interview, and had carefully prepared a long apologetic speech, which however he had hardly begun when he was cut short by his lordship saying, "You have picked up a rare character, Spence, upon my honour! But I like the fellow. He is an original, and has something good in him. I can't quite make him out."

"Nor me either, my lord, I do assure you," interrupted Spence.

"But I have taken rather a fancy to him," continued his lordship. "He is neither knave nor fool; but seems to have been ill-used, and to have had a hard time of it. There is something about him which takes me, and if any friend of your father's has an interest in him, I won't object—quite the reverse—to your getting him something to do about the kennels. I really would like it. So look to him."

Hugh having made a low bow and remained discreetly silent, according to his own prudential aphorism of "least said being soonest mended", his lordship conversed on some business matters connected with the game, with which we

have nothing to do, and then dismissed him.

CHAPTER XX

JOCK HALL'S RETURN

When Jock and Spence returned along the avenue, not a word was spoken for some time. Jock carried a large bundle, with the general contents of which both were acquainted. After a while Spence remarked, as if to break the silence, "Weel, what do ye think o' his lordship?"

"He looks a fine bit decent 'sponsible bodie," said Jock, as if speaking of a nobody.

"I should think sae!" remarked Hugh, evidently chagrined by the cool criticism of his companion.

"Were ye no' frightened for him?" asked Hugh.

"Wha?-me?" replied Jock. "Frichted for what? He said naethin' tae fricht me. Certes, I was mair frichted when I stood afore him for threshing the tailors! The man didna molest me, but was unco ceevil, as I was tae him, and he gied me siller and claes as I never got frae mortal man afore, no' tae speak o' a lord. Frichted! I was ower proud to be frichted."

"Aweel, aweel," said the keeper, "ye're a queer cratur, Jock! and if ye haena' gowd ye hae brass. I was trimblin' for ye!"

"Nae wunner," said Jock; "ye had somethin' tae lose, but I had naethin'. What could he dae to me but put me oot o' the hoose? and I was gaun oot mysel'. Jock Ha' is ower far doon for ony mortal man tae pit him doon farther. He may be better, but he canna be waur. Naebody can hurt a dead doug, can they?"

"Tuts, Jock, my puir fallow," said Hugh, "I didna mean to flyte on ye. I ax yer pardon."

"Gae awa, gae awa wi' yer nonsense, Mr. Spence!" replied Jock—"that's what naebody ever did, to ax my pardon, and it's no' for a man like you tae begin. Ye micht as weel ax a rattan's pardon for eatin' a' yer cheese! In troth I'm no gi'en mysel tae that fashion o' axin' pardons, for it wad be a heap o' trouble for folk to grant them. But, man, if I got wark, I would maybe be able to ax pardon o' a dacent man, and tae get it tae for the axin'!"

"I'll no' forget ye, I do assure ye," said Spence, kindly. "You and me if I'm no mista'en 'ill meet afore lang up the way at the cottage. His lordship is willin'

tae gie ye wark, and sae am I and my faither."

Jock could not resist the new emotion which prompted him to seize the keeper's hand and give it a hearty squeeze. On the strength of the renewed friendship, he offered him a snuff.

The keeper, from commands received from his lordship, found that he could not accompany Jock as far on his road as he had anticipated, but was obliged to part with him where his path to Drumsylie led across the moorland. Here they sat down on a heathery hill, when Spence said, "Afore we part, I wad like tae ken frae yersel', Jock, hoo ye are a freen' tae Adam Mercer?"

"I never said I was a freen' tae Adam Mercer," replied Jock.

Hugh, as if for the first time suspecting Hall of deception, said firmly, "But ye did that! I declare ye did, and my faither believed ye!"

"I never did sic a thing!" said Jock, as firmly, in reply. "For I couldna do't wi'oot a lee, and *that* I never telt tae you or yours, although in my day I hae telt ither folk an unco' heap tae ser' my turn. What I said was that Adam Mercer was a freen' tae me."

Hugh, not quite perceiving the difference yet, asked, "Hoo was he a freen' tae you?"

"I'll tell ye," said Jock, looking earnestly at Hugh. "Had a man ta'en ye into his hoose, and fed ye whan stervin', and pit shoon on ye whan barefitted, and spak' to ye, no' as if ye war a brute beast, and whan naebody on yirth ever did this but himsel', I tak' it ye wad understan' what a freen' was! Mind ye, that I'm no sic a gomeril-bad as I am—or sae wantin' in decency as to even tae mysel' to be the Sergeant's freen'; but as I said, and wull say till I dee, he was *my* freen'!"

"What way war ye brocht up that ye cam to be sae puir as to need Adam's assistance or ony ither man's? Ye surely had as guid a chance as ony o' yer neebors?"

Jock's countenance began to assume that excited expression which the vivid recollection of his past life, especially of his youth, seemed always to produce. But he now tried to check himself, when the symptoms of his hysteria began to manifest themselves in the muscles of his throat, by rising and taking a few paces to and fro on the heather, as if resolved to regain his self-possession, and not to leave his newly-acquired friend the keeper under the impression that he was either desperately wicked or incurably insane. A new motive had come into play—a portion of his heart which had lain, as it were, dormant until stimulated by the Sergeant's kindness, had assumed a power which was rapidly, under benign influences, gaining the ascendancy. In spite of, or rather perhaps because of, his inward struggle, his face for a moment became deadly pale. His hands were clenched. He seemed as if discharging from every muscle a stream of suddenly-generated electricity. Turning at length to Hugh, he said, with knit brow and

keenly-piercing eyes, "What made ye ax me sic a question, Mr. Spence?—What for? I'll no' tell ye, for I canna tell you or ony man hoo I was brocht up!"

But he did tell him—as if forced to do so in order to get rid of the demon—much of what our readers already know of those sad days of misery. "And noo," he added, "had ye been like a wild fox and the hoonds after ye, or nae mair cared for than a doug wi' a kettle at its tail, hidin' half mad up a close ayont a midden; or a cat nigh staned to death, pechin' its life awa' in a hole; and if ye kent never a man or woman but wha hated ye, and if ye hated them; and, waur than a', if ye heard your ain faither and mither cursin' ye frae the time ye war a bairn till they gaed awa' in their coffins, wi' your curses followin' after them,—ye wad ken what it was to hae ae freend on yirth;—and noo I hae mair than ane!" And poor Jock, for the first time probably in his life, sobbed like a child.

Spence said nothing but "Puir fellow!" and whiffed his pipe, which he had just lighted, with more than usual vehemence.

Jock soon resumed his usual calm,

"As one whose brain demoniac frenzy fires
Owes to his fit, in which his soul hath tost,
Profounder quiet, when the fit retires,—
Even so the dire phantasma which had crost
His sense, in sudden vacancy quite lost,
Left his mind still as a deep evening stream".

The keeper, hardly knowing what to say, remarked, "It's ae consolation, that your wicked faither and mither will be weel punished noo for a' their sins. Ye needna curse them! They're beyond ony hairm that ye can do them. They're cursed eneuch, I'se warrant, wi'oot your meddlin' wi' them."

"Guid forbid!" exclaimed Jock. "I houpe no'! I houpe no'! That wad be maist awfu'!"

"Maybe," said the keeper; "but it's what they deserve frae the han' o' justice. And surely when their ain bairn curses them, *he* can say naethin' against it."

"I never cursed them, did I?" asked Jock, as if stupefied.

"Ye did that, and nae mistak'!" replied the keeper.

"Losh, it was a bad job if I did!" said Jock. "I'm sure I didna want to hairm them, pur bodies, though they hairmed me. In fac'," he added, after a short pause, during which he kicked the heather vehemently, "I'm willin' tae let byganes be byganes wi' them, and sae maybe their Maker will no' be ower sair on them. Ye dinna think, Mr. Spence, that it's possible my faither and mither are baith in the bad place?"

"Whaur else wad they be, if no' there?" asked the keeper.

"It's mair than I can say!" replied Jock, as if in a dream. "I only thocht they were dead in the kirkyard. But—but—ken ye ony road o' gettin' them oot if they're yonner—burnin' ye ken?"

"Ye had better," said Hugh, "gie ower botherin' yersel' to take *them* oot; rather try, man, to keep yersel' oot."

"But I canna help botherin' mysel' about my ain folk," replied Jock; "an' maybe they warnae sae bad as I mak' them. I've seen them baith greetin' and cryin' tae God for mercy even whan they war fou; an' they aince telt me, after an awfu' thrashin they gied me, that I wasna for my life to drink or swear like them. Surely that was guid, Mr. Spence? God forgie them! God forgie them!" murmured Jock, covering his face with his hands; "lost sheep!—lost money!—lost ne'er-do-weels! an' I'm here and them there! Hoo comes that about?" he asked, in a dreamy mood.

"God's mercy!" answered Hugh; "and we should be merciful tae ither folk, as God is mercifu' to oorsel's."

"That's what I wish thae puir sowls to get oot o' that awfu' jail for! But I'll never curse faither or mither mair," said Jock. "I'll sweer," he added, rising up, muttering the rhyme as solemnly as if before a magistrate:

"If I lee, let death
Cut my breath!"

"Dinna fash yersel' ower muckle," said the keeper, "for them that's awa'. The

Bible says, 'Shall not the Judge o' a' the yirth dae richt?' I wad think sae! Let us tak' care o' oorsel's and o' them that's leevin', an' God will do what's richt tae them that's ayont the grave. He has mair wisdom and love than us!"

Jock was engaged outwardly in tearing bits of heather, and twisting them mechanically together; but what his inward work was we know not. At last he said, "I haena heard an aith sin' I left Drumsylie, and that's extraordinar' to me, I can assure you, Mr. Spence!"

The keeper, who, unconsciously, was calmly enjoying the contemplation of his own righteousness, observed that "the kintra was a hantle decenter than the toon". But in a better and more kindly spirit he said to Jock, "I'll stan' yer friend, Hall, especially sin' his lordship wishes me to help you. Ye hae got guid claes in that bundle, I'se warrant—the verra claes, mark ye, that were on himsel'! Pit them on, and jist think *what's* on ye, and be dacent! Drop a' drinkin', swearin', and sic trash; bend yer back tae yer burden, ca' yer han' tae yer wark, pay yer way, and keep a ceevil tongue in yer head, and then 'whistle ower the lave o't'!

There's my han' to ye. Fareweel, and ye'll hear frae me some day soon, whan I get a place ready for ye aboot mysel' and the dougs."

"God's blessin' be wi' ye!" replied poor Jock.

They then rose and parted. Each after a while looked over his shoulder and waved his hand.

Jock ran back to the keeper when at some distance from him, as if he had lost something.

"What's wrang?" asked Spence.

"A's richt noo!" replied Jock, as again he raised his hand and repeated his parting words, "God's blessin' be wi' ye"; and then ran off as if pursued, until concealed by rising ground from the gaze of the keeper, who watched him while in sight, lost in his own meditations.

One of the first things Jock did after thus parting with Hugh was to undo his parcel, and when he did so there was spread before his wondering eyes such a display of clothing of every kind as he had never dreamt of in connexion with his own person. All seemed to his eyes as if fresh from the tailor's hands. Jock looked at his treasures in detail, held them up, turned them over, laid them down, and repeated the process with such a grin on his face and exclamations on his lips as can neither be described nor repeated. After a while his resolution seemed to be taken: for descending to a clear mountain stream, he stripped himself of his usual habiliments, and, though they were old familiar friends, he cast them aside as if in scorn, stuffing them into a hole in the bank. After performing long and careful ablutions, he decked himself in his new rig, and tying up in a bundle his superfluous trappings, emerged on the moorland in appearance and in dignity the very lord of the manor! "Faix," thought Jock, as he paced along, "the Sterlin' wasna far wrang when it telt me that 'a man's a man for a' that!"

Instead of pursuing his way direct to Drumsylie, he diverged to a village half-way between Castle Bennock and his final destination. With his money in his pocket, he put up like a gentleman at a superior lodging-house, where he was received with the respect becoming his appearance. Early in the morning, when few were awake, he entered Drumsylie, with a sheepish feeling and such fear of attracting the attention of its *gamins* as made him run quickly to the house of an old widow, where he hoped to avoid all impertinent inquiries until he could determine upon his future proceedings. These were materially affected by the information which in due time he received, that Adam Mercer had been suddenly seized with illness on the day after he had left Drumsylie, and was now confined

to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE QUACK

It was true, as Jock Hall had heard, that Sergeant Mercer was very unwell. The events of the few previous weeks, however trivial in the estimation of the great world, had been to him very real and afflicting. The ecclesiastical trials and the social annoyances, with the secret worry and anxiety which they had occasioned, began to affect his health. He grew dull in spirits, suffered from a sense of oppression, and was "head-achy", "fashionless", and "dowie". He resolved to be cheerful, and do his work; but he neither could be the one nor do the other. His wife prescribed for him out of her traditional pharmacopoeia, but in vain. Then, as a last resort, "keeping a day in bed" was advised, and this was at once acceded to.

At the risk of breaking the thread of our narrative, or—to borrow an illustration more worthy of the nineteenth century—of running along a side rail to return shortly to the main line, we may here state, that at the beginning of the Sergeant's illness, a person, dressed in rather decayed black clothes, with a yellowish white neckcloth, looking like a deposed clergyman, gently tapped at his door. The door was opened by Katie. The stranger raised his broad-brimmed hat, and saluted her with a low respectful bow. He entered with head uncovered, muttering many apologies with many smiles. His complexion was dark; his black hair was smoothly combed back from his receding forehead, and again drawn forward in the form of a curl under each large ear, thus directing attention to his pronounced nostrils and lips; while his black eyes were bent down, as if contemplating his shining teeth. His figure was obese; his age between forty and fifty.

This distinguished-looking visitor introduced himself as Dr. Mair, and inquired in the kindest, blandest, and most confidential manner as to the health of "the worthy Sergeant", as he condescendingly called him. Katie was puzzled, yet pleased, with the appearance of the unknown doctor, who explained that he was a stranger—his residence being ordinarily in London, except when travelling on professional business, as on the present occasion. He said that he had devoted all his time and talents to the study of the complaint under which the Sergeant,

judging from what he had heard, was evidently labouring; and that he esteemed it to be the highest honour—a gift from Heaven, indeed—to be able to remedy it. His father, he stated, had been a great medical man in the West Indies, and had consecrated his life to the cure of disease, having made a wonderful collection of medicines from old Negroes, who, it was well known, had a great knowledge of herbs. These secrets of Nature his father had entrusted to him, and to him alone, on the express condition that he would minister them in love only. He therefore made no charge, except for the medicine itself—a mere trifle to cover the expense of getting it from the West Indies. Might he have the privilege of seeing the Sergeant? One great blessing of his medicines was, that if they did no good—which rarely happened—they did no harm. But all depended—he added, looking up towards heaven—on *His* blessing!

After a long unctuous discourse of this kind, accompanied by a low whine and many gestures expressive of, or intended to express, all the Christian graces, added to Nature's gifts, the doctor drew breath.

Kate was much impressed by this self-sacrificing philanthropist, and expressed a cordial wish that he should see the Sergeant. Adam, after some conversation with his wife, saw it was best, for peace' sake, to permit the entrance of the doctor. After he had repeated some of his former statements and given assurances of his skill, the Sergeant asked him: "Hoo do I ken ye're speaking the truth, and no' cheatin' me?"

"You have my word of honour, Sergeant!" replied Dr. Mair, "and you don't think *I* would lie to you? Look at me! I cannot have any possible motive for making you unwell. Horrible thought! I hope I feel my sense of responsibility too much for that!" Whereupon he looked up to heaven, and then down into a black bag, out of which he took several phials and boxes of pills, arranging them on a small table at the window. He proceeded to describe their wonderful qualities in a style which he intended for the language of a scholarly gentleman, interlarding his speech with Latinized terms, to give it a more learned colouring.

"This medicine," he said, "acts on the spirits. It is called the *spiritum cheerabilum*. It cures depression; removes all nervous, agitating feelings—what we term *depressiones*; soothing the anxious mind because acting on the vital nerves—going to the root of every painful feeling, through the gastric juice, heart, and liver, along the spinal cord, and thence to the head and brain. This view is according to common-sense, you must admit. A few doses of such a medicine would put you on your legs, Sergeant, in a week! I never once knew it fail when taken perseveringly and with faith—with faith!" he added, with a benignant smile; "for faith, I am solemnly persuaded, can even yet remove mountains!"

"Doctor, or whatever ye are," said the Sergeant, in an impatient tone of voice, "I want nane o' yer pills or drugs; I hae a guid eneuch doctor o' my ain."

"Ha!" said Dr. Mair; "a regular practitioner, I presume? Yes, I understand. Hem! College bred, and all that."

"Just so," said the Sergeant. "Edicated, as it were, for his wark, and no' a doctor by guess."

"But can you believe his word?" blandly asked Dr. Mair.

"As muckle, surely, as yours," replied the Sergeant; "mair especial' as guid and learned men o' experience agree wi' him, but no' wi' you."

"How do you know they are good and learned?" asked Dr. Mair, smiling.

"Mair onyhoo than I ken *ye're* good and learned, and no' leein'," said Adam.

"But God might surely reveal to me the truth," replied Mair, "rather than to ten thousand so-called learned men. Babes and sucklings, you know, may receive what is concealed from the great and self-confident."

"My word! *ye're* neither a babe nor a sucklin', doctor, as ye ca' yersel'; and, depen' on't, neither am I!" said the Sergeant. "Onyhoo, I think it's mair likely the Almighty wad reveal himsel' to a' the sensible and guid doctors rather than to you alane, forbye a' yer niggers!"

"But I have testimonials of my cures!" continued Dr. Mair.

"Wha kens about yer testimonials?" exclaimed Adam. "Could naebody get testimonials but you? And hae ye testimonials frae them ye've kill't? I'se warrant no'! I tell ye again ye'll never pruve tae me that *ye're* richt and a' the edicated doctors wrang."

"But it's possible?" asked Dr. Mair, with a smile.

"Possible!" said the Sergeant; "but it's ten thousand times mair possible that *ye're* cheatin' yersel' or cheatin' me. Sae ye may gang."

"But I charge nothing for my attendance, my dear sir, only for the medicine."

"Just so," replied the Sergeant; "sae mony shillings for what maybe didna cost ye a bawbee—pills o' aitmeal or peasebrose. I'm an auld sodger, and canna be made a fule o' that way!"

"I do not depend on my pills so much as on my prayers for the cure of disease," said the quack solemnly. "Oh, Sergeant! have you no faith in prayer?"

"I houpe I hae," replied the Sergeant; "but I hae nae faith in you—nane whatsoever! sae guid day tae ye!"

Dr. Mair packed up his quack medicine in silence, which was meant to be impressive. He sighed, as if in sorrow for human ignorance and unbelief; but seeing no favourable effect produced on the Sergeant he said: "Your blood be on your own unbelieving head! I am free of it."

"Amen!" said the Sergeant; "and gang about yer business to auld wives and idewits, that deserve to dee if they trust the like o' you."

And so the great Dr. Mair departed in wrath—real or pretended—to pursue his calling as a leech, verily sucking the blood of the credulous, of whom there

are not a few among rich and poor, who, loving quackery, are quacked.[#]

[#] It may be added as an instructive fact, that such leeches suck at least £300,000 a year out of the people of this country.

Having disposed of the Quack, we now back into the main line, and resume our journey.

CHAPTER XXII

CORPORAL DICK

Corporal Dick, who lived in the village of Darnic, several hours' journey by the "Highflyer" coach from Drumsylie, came at this time to pay his annual visit to the Sergeant.

The Corporal, while serving in the same regiment with Adam, had been impressed, as we have already indicated, by the Christian character of his comrade. Those early impressions had been deepened shortly after his return home from service. We need not here record the circumstances in which this decided change in his sentiments and character had taken place. Many of our Scotch readers, at least, have heard of the movement in the beginning of this century by the devoted Haldanes, who, as gentlemen of fortune, and possessing the sincerest and strongest Christian convictions, broke the formality which was freezing Christian life in many a district of Scotland. They did the same kind of work for the Church in the North which Wesley and Whitfield had done for that in the South, though with less permanent results as far as this world is concerned. Dick joined the "Haldanites". Along with all the zeal and strictness characteristic of a small body, he possessed a large share of *bonhomie*, and of the freedom, subdued and regulated, of the old soldier.

At these annual visits the old veterans fought their battles over again, recalling old comrades and repeating old stories; neither, however, being old in their affections or their memories. But never had the Corporal visited his friend with a more eager desire to "hear his news" than on the present occasion. He had often asked people from Drumsylie, whom he happened to meet, what all

this disputing and talk about Adam Mercer meant? And every new reply he received to his question, whether favourable or unfavourable to the Sergeant, only puzzled him the more. One thing, however, he never could be persuaded of—that his friend Adam Mercer would do anything unbecoming to his "superior officer", as he called the minister; or "break the Sabbath", an institution which, like every good Scotchman, he held in peculiar veneration; or be art or part in any mutiny against the ordinances or principles of true religion. And yet, how could he account for all that been told him by "decent folk" and well-informed persons? The good he heard of the Sergeant was believed in by the Corporal as a matter of course; but what of the evil, which seemed to rest upon equally reliable authority?

Dick must himself hear the details of the "affair", or the battle, as it might turn out.

It was therefore a glad day for both Adam and the Corporal when they again met;—to both a most pleasant change of thought—a glad remembrance of a grand old time already invested with romance—a meeting of men of character, of truth and honour, who could call each other by the loyal name of Friend.

We must allow the reader to fill up the outline which alone we can give of the meeting—the hearty greetings between the two old companions in arms; the minute questions by the one, the full and candid answers by the other; the smiling Katie ever and anon filling up the vacancies left in the narrative of ecclesiastical trials by the Sergeant, from his modesty or want of memory; the joyous satisfaction of Dick, as he found his faith in his comrade vindicated, and saw how firm and impregnable he was in his position, without anything to shake any Christian's confidence in his long-tried integrity, courage, and singleness of heart.

The Corporal's only regret was to see his friend wanting in his usual elasticity of spirits. The fire in his eye was gone, and the quiet yet joyous laugh no longer responded to the old jokes,—a smile being all he could muster. But the Corporal was determined to rouse him. "The wars" would do it if anything would. And so, when supper came piping hot, with bubbling half-browned toasted cheese, mutton pie, tea and toast, followed by a little whisky punch, and all without gluttony or drunkenness, but with sobriety and thankfulness felt and expressed—then did the reminiscences begin! And it would be difficult to say how often the phrase, "D'ye mind, Sergeant?" was introduced, as old officers and men, old jokes and old everything—marches, bivouacs, retreats, charges, sieges, battles—were recalled, with their anxieties and hardships passed away, and their glory alone remaining.

"Heigho!" the Corporal would say, as he paused in his excitement, "it's growing a dream already, Adam! There's no mony I can speak tae about these

auld times;—no' auld to you and me. Folks' heads are taen up w' naething but getting money oot o' the peace we helped to get for the kintra: and little thanks for a' we did—little thanks, little thanks, atweel!" the Corporal would ejaculate in a die-away murmur.

But this was not a time to complain, but to rouse—not to pile arms, but to fire. And so the Corporal said, "Did I tell ye o' the sang made by Sandie Tamson? Ye'll mind Sandie weel—the schulemaster that listed? A maist clever chiel!"

"I mind him fine," said the Sergeant. "Curious eneuch, it was me that listed him! I hae heard a hantle o' his sangs."

"But no' this ane," said Dick, "for he made it—at least he said sae—for our auld Colonel in Perth. It seems Sandie, puir fallow, took to drink—or rather ne'er gied it ower—and sae he cam' beggin' in a kin' o' private genteel way, ye ken, to the Colonel; and when he got siller he wrote this sang for him. He gied me a copy for half-a-crown. I'll let ye hear 't—altho' my pipe is no sae guid as yer Sterlin's."

As the Corporal cleared his voice, the Sergeant lifted the nightcap from his ear, and said, "Sing awa'."

Dost thou remember, soldier, old and hoary,
 The days we fought and conquered side by side,
 On fields of battle famous now in story,
 Where Britons triumphed, and where Britons died?
 Dost thou remember all our old campaigning,
 O'er many a field in Portugal and Spain?
 Of our old comrades few are now remaining—
 How many sleep upon the bloody plain!
 Of our old comrades, &c.

Dost thou remember all those marches weary,
 From gathering foes, to reach Corunna's shore?
 Who can forget that midnight, sad and dreary,
 When in his grave we laid the noble Moore!
 But ere he died our General heard us cheering,
 And saw us charge with vict'ry's flag unfurled;
 And then he slept, without his ever fearing
 For British soldiers conquering o'er the world.
 And then he slept, &c.

Rememb'rest thou the bloody Albuera!
 The deadly breach in Badajoz's walls!
 Vittoria! Salamanca! Talavera!

Till Roncesvalles echoed to our balls!
 Ha! how we drove the Frenchmen all before us,
 As foam is driven before the stormy breeze!
 We fought right on, with conquering banners o'er us,
 From Torres Vedras to the Pyrenees.
 We fought right on, &c.

Dost thou remember to the war returning,
 –Long will our enemies remember too!–
 We fought again, our hearts for glory burning,
 At Quatre Bras and awful Waterloo!
 We thought of home upon that Sabbath morning
 When Cameron's pibroch roused our Highland corps,
 Then proudly marched, the mighty Emperor scorning,
 And vowed to die or conquer as of yore!
 Then proudly marched, &c.

Rememb'rest thou the old familiar faces
 Of warriors nursed in many a stormy fight,
 Whose lonely graves, which now the stranger traces,
 Mark every spot they held from morn till night?
 In vain did Cuirassiers in clouds surround them,
 With cannon thundering as the tempest raves;
 They left our squares, oh! just as they had found them,
 Firm as the rocks amidst the ocean's waves!
 They left our squares, &c.

Those days are past, my soldier, old and hoary,
 But still the scars are on thy manly brow;
 We both have shared the danger and the glory,
 Come, let us share the peace and comfort now.
 Come to my home, for thou hast not another,
 And dry those tears, for thou shall beg no more;
 There, take this hand, and let us march together
 Down to the grave, where life's campaign is o'er!
 There, take this hand, &c.

While the song was being sung the Sergeant turned his head on his pillow
 away from the Corporal. When it was finished, he said, "Come here, Dick."

The Corporal went to the bed, and seized the Sergeant's proffered hand.

"That sang will do me mair guid than a' their medicine. The guidwife will gie ye half-a-croon for puir Sandie Tamson."

Then asking Katie to leave him alone for a few moments with the Corporal, the Sergeant said, retaining his hand—

"I'm no dangerously ill, my auld friend; but I'm no' weel—I'm no' weel! There's a weight on my mind, and an oppression aboot my heart that hauds me doun extraordinar'."

"Dinna gie in, Adam—dinna gie in, wi' the help o' Him that has brocht ye thro' mony a waur fecht," replied the Corporal as he sat down beside him. "D'ye mind the time when ye followed Cainsh up the ladder at Badajoz? and d'ye mind when that glorious fallow Loyd was kill't at Nivelle! Noo—"

"Ah, Dick! thae days, man, are a' by! I'm no' what I was," said the Sergeant. "I'm a puir crippled, wounded veteran, no' fit for ony mair service—no' even as an elder," he added, with a bitter smile.

"Dinna fash yer thoomb, Adam, aboot that business," said Dick. "Ye deserved to hae been drummed oot o' the regiment—I mean the kirk—no' your kirk nor mine, but the kirk o' a' honest and sensible folk, gif ye had swithered aboot that bird. I hae had a crack wi' the cratur, and it's jist extraordinar' sensible like—sae crouse and canty, it wad be like murder tae thraw a neck like that! In fac', a bird is mair than a bird, I consider, when it can speak and sing yon way."

"Thank ye, Corporal," said Adam.

"It's some glamour has come ower the minister," said Dick, "just like what cam' ower oor Colonel, when he made us charge twa thousand at Busaco, and had, in coorse, tae fa' back on his supports in disgrace—no' jist in disgrace, for we never cam' tae that, nor never wull, I hope—but in confusion!"

"God's wull be done, auld comrade!" replied Adam; "but it's His wull, I think, that I maun fa' on the field, and if so, I'm no' feared—na, na! Like a guid sodger, I wad like tae endure hardness."

"Ye're speakin' ower muckle," interrupted Dick, "and wearyin' yersel'."

"I maun hae my say oot, Corporal, afore the forlorn hope marches," continued the Sergeant; "and as I was remarkin', and because I dinna want tae be interrupted wi' the affairs o' this life, so as to please Him wha has ca'd me to be a sodger—I maun mak' my last wull and testament noo or never, and I trust you, Dick, mair than a' the lawyers and law papers i' the worl', tae see't carried oot." And he held out a feverish hand to the Corporal, who gave it a responsive squeeze.

"Ye see, Corporal," said the Sergeant, "I hae nae fortun' to leave; but I hae laid by something for my Katie—and what *she* has been tae me, God alane kens!" He paused. "And then there's wee Mary, that I luvae amaist as weel as my Charlie;

and then there's the bird. Na, Corporal, dinna blame me for speakin' about the bird! The Apostle, when aboot to be offered up, spak' about his cloak, and nae dead cloak was ever dearer to him than the leevin' bird is tae me, because it was, as ye ken, dear tae the wee fallow that was my ain flesh and bluid, wha's waiting for me. Duve ye mind Charlie?"

"Mind Charlie!" exclaimed the Corporal. "Wait awee, Adam!" and he drew out an old pocket-book from his breast-pocket, from which he took a bit of paper, and, unfolding it, held up a lock of silken hair. The Sergeant suddenly seized the relic and kissed it, and then returned it to the Corporal, who, without saying a word, restored it to its old place of safety.

But Dick now began to see that the Sergeant seemed to be rather excited, and no longer able to talk in his usual slow and measured manner, and so he said to him—

"Wait till the morn, Adam, and we'll put a' richt to yer satisfaction."

"Na, na, Corporal!" replied Adam, "I never like pittin' aff—no' a fecht even. What ought to be dune, should be dune when it can—sae listen to me:—Ye'll help Katie tae gaither her siller and gear thegither—it's no muckle atweel!—and see that she and Mary, wi' the bird, are pit in a bit hoose near yersel'. They can fen' on what I'll lea' them, wi' their ain wark tae help. Ye'll stan' their freen'—I ken, I ken ye wull! And oh, man, when ye hear folk abuse me, dinna say a word in my defence! Let gowans grow frae my grave, and birds sing ower't, and God's sun shine on't, but let nae angry word, against even an enemy, ever be heard frae't, or be conneckit wi' my memory."

Dick was silent. He felt too much to speak. The Sergeant continued—"Gie a' my boots and shoon tae Jock Hall. Katie wull tell ye about him."

After a pause, he said—"I ask forgiveness o' the minister, if I hae wranged him in ignorance. But as to Smellie——" and the Sergeant turned his head away. "The heart, Corporal," he added, "is hard! I'm no' fit for that yet. God forgie me! but I canna wi'oot hypocrisy say—"

"I'll no' let ye speak another word, Adam!" said Dick. "Trust me as to yer will. I'll be faithfu' unto death!" and he drew himself up, and saluted the Sergeant, soldier fashion.

There was not a bit of the consciously dramatic in this; but he wished to accept the trust given him in due form, as became a soldier receiving important orders from a dying friend.

Adam did not like to confess it; but he was so wearied that he could speak

no more without pain, and so thanking the Corporal, he turned round to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

CORPORAL DICK AT THE MANSE

Adam had received his pension-paper, which required to be signed by the parish minister, as certifying that the claimant was in life. Dick was glad of this opportunity of calling upon the minister to obtain for his friend the required signature. He was known to Mr. Porteous, who had met him once before in Adam's house, and had attacked him rather sharply on his Haldanite principles, the sect being, as he alleged, an uncalled-for opposition to the regular parish clergy.

A short walk brought Dick to the manse. After a few words of greeting he presented the Sergeant's paper. Mr. Porteous inquired, with rather a sceptical expression on his countenance—

"Is Mr. Mercer really unwell, and unable to come?"

"I have told you the truth, sir," was the Corporal's dignified and short reply.

Mr. Porteous asked what was wrong with him? The Corporal replied that he did not know, but that he was feverish, he thought, and was certainly confined to bed.

"Your friend, the Sergeant, as you are probably aware," remarked the minister, signing the paper and returning it to the Corporal, "has greatly surprised and annoyed me. He seems quite a changed man—changed, I fear, for the worse. Oh! yes, Mr. Dick," he continued in reply to a protesting wave of the Corporal's hand, "he is indeed. He has become proud and obstinate—very."

"Meek as a lamb, sir, in time of peace, but brave as a lion in time of war, I can assure you, Mr. Porteous," replied the Corporal.

"I know better!" said the minister.

"Not better than me, sir," replied Dick; "for tho' ye have kent him as well as me, perhaps, in peace, yet ye didna ken him at all in war, and a truer, better, nobler sodger than Adam Mercer never raised his arms to fight or to pray, for he did baith—that I'll say before the worl', and defy contradiction!"

"Remember, Corporal, you and I belong to different Churches, and we judge men differently. We must have discipline. All Churches are not equally pure."

"There's nane o' them pure, wi' your leave, neither yours nor mine!" exclaimed the Corporal. "I'm no' pure mysel', and accordingly when I joined my

kirk it was pure nae langer; and, wi' a' respec' to you, sir, I'm no' sure if your ain kirk wasna fashed wi' the same diffeeculty when ye joined it."

"Discipline, I say, must be maintained—*must* be," said Mr. Porteous; "and Adam has come under it most deservedly. *First* pure, *then* peaceable, you know."

"If ever a man kept discipline in a regiment, he did! My certes!" said Dick, "I wad like to see him that wad raggle the regiment when Adam was in't!"

"I am talking of *Church* discipline, sir!" said the minister, rather irate. "*Church* discipline, you observe; which—as I hold yours to be not a properly constituted Church, but a mere self-constituted sect—you cannot have."

"We're a kin' o' volunteers, I suppose?" interrupted Dick with a laugh; "the Haldanite volunteers, as ye wad ca' us; but maybe after a' we'll fecht agin the enemy, an' its three corps o' the deevil, the worl', and the flesh, as weel as yours."

"You are not the regular army, anyhow," said the minister, "and I do not recognise your Church."

"The mair's the pity," replied the Corporal, "for I consider it a great blin'ness and misfortin' when ae regiment dislikes anither. An army, minister, is no' ae regiment, but mony. There's cavalry and artillery, light troops and heavy troops, field guns and siege guns in an army, and ilka pairt does its ain wark sae lang as it obeys the commander-in-chief, and fechts for the kingdom. What's the use, then, o' fechtin' agin each ither? In my opinion it's real daft like!"

The minister looked impatiently at his watch, but Dick went on to say—

"In Spain, I can tell ye, we were a hantle the better o' thae wild chieles the guerillas. Altho' they didna enlist into the gand or ony regular drilled regiment, Scotch or English, the Duke himsel' was thankfu' for them. Noo, Mr. Porteous, altho' ye think us a sort o' guerillas, let us alane,—let us alane!—dinna forbid us tho' we dinna follow *your* flag, but fecht the enemy under oor ain."

"Well, well, Dick, we need not argue about it. My principles are too firm, too long made up, to be shaken at this time of day by the Haldanites," said Mr. Porteous, rising and looking out of the window.

"Weel, weel!" said Dick. "I'm no' wantin' to shake your principles, but to keep my ain."

At this stage of the conversation Miss Thomasina entered the room, with "I beg pardon", as if searching for something in the press, but yet for no other purpose, in her eager curiosity, than to ascertain what the Corporal was saying, as she knew him to be a friend of the Sergeant's. Her best attention, with her ear placed close to the door, had made out nothing more than that the rather prolonged conversation had something to do with the great ecclesiastical question of the passing hour in Drumsylie.

Almost breathless with indignation that anyone, especially a Haldanite,—for she was quite as "High Church" as her brother,—should presume to take the

part of the notorious heretic in the august presence of his great antagonist, she broke in, with what was intended to be a good-humoured smile, but was, to ordinary observers, a bad-natured grin, saying, "Eh! Mr. Dick, *you* to stand up for that man—suspended by the Session, and deservedly so—yes, most deservedly so! Him and his starling, forsooth! It's infidelity at the root."

"It's what?" asked the Corporal, with amazement. "Infidelity did you say, my lady?"

The "my lady" rather softened Miss Thomasina, who returned to the charge more softly, saying, "Well, it's pride and stubbornness, and that's as bad. But I hope his illness will be sanctified to the changing of his heart!" she added, with a sigh, intended to express a very deep concern for his spiritual welfare.

"I hope not, wi' your leave!" replied the Corporal.

"Not wish his heart changed?" exclaimed Miss Thomasina.

"No!" said Dick, emphatically, "not changed, for it's a good Christian heart, and, if changed at all, it wad be changed for the worse."

"A Christian heart, indeed! a heart that would not kill a starling for the sake of the peace of the Session and the Kirk! Wonders will never cease!"

"I hope never," said Dick, "if that's a wonder. Our Lord never killed in judgment man nor beast; and I suppose they were both much about as bad then as now; and His servants should imitate His example, I take it. He was love."

"But," said Mr. Porteous, chiming in, "love is all very well, no doubt, and *ought* to be, where possible; but justice *must* be, love or no love. The one is a principle, the other a feeling."

"I tak' it, with all respect to you, sir, and to madam," said Dick, "that love will aye do what's right, and will, therefore, aye do what's just and generous. We may miss fire pointing the gun wi' the eye o' justice, but never wi' the eye o' love. The sight is then always clearer; anyhow to me. Excuse me, Mr. Porteous, if I presume to preach to you. The Haldanites do a little in that line, tho' they're no' a' ministers! I'm a plain man that speaks my mind, and sin' ye hae gi'en me liberty to speak, let me ax if ye wad hae killed yon fine bird, that was wee Charlie's, wi' yer ain han', minister?"

"Ay, and all the birds under heaven!" replied Mr. Porteous, "if the law of the Church required it."

"I should think so! and so would I," added Miss Thomasina, walking out of the room.

"It wad be a dreich warl' wi'oot a bird in the wuds or in the lifts!" said the Corporal. "Maybe it's because I'm a Haldanite, but, wi' a' respect, I think I wad miss the birds mair oot o' the warl' than I wad a' the kirk coorts in the kintra!"

"Drop the subject, drop the subject, Mr. Dick!" said the minister, impatiently; "you are getting personal."

The Corporal could not see how that was, but he could see that his presence was not desired. So he rose to depart, saying—"I'm feared I hae been impudent, an' that my gun has got raither het firing, but, in candid truth, I wasna meanin't. But jist let me say ae word mair; ye'll alloo this, that a fool may gie an advice tae a wise man, and this is my advice tae you, sir—the advice o' an auld sodger and a Haldanite; no' muckle worth, ye may think:—Dinna hairm Adam Mercer, or ye'll hairm yer best freen', yer best elder, and yer best parishioner. I beg pardon for my freedom, sir," he added, with a deferential bow.

The minister returned it stiffly, remarking only that Mr. Dick was ignorant of all the facts and history of the case, or he would have judged otherwise.

Something, however, of what the Corporal had said fell on the heart of the minister, like dew in a cloudy night upon dry ground.

CHAPTER XXIV

DR. SCOTT AND HIS SERVANT

The Corporal was obliged, on family or on Haldanite business, we know not which, to return by the "Highflyer" next morning. As that slow but sure conveyance jolted along the road but twice a week, he could not, in the circumstances in which he was placed, remain until its next journey.

On leaving the Manse, he proceeded at once to the house of Dr. Scott, the well-known doctor of the parish, and of a district around it limited only by the physical endurance of himself and of his brown horse, "Bolus". When the Corporal called, the Doctor was absent on one of his constantly recurring professional rides. Being a bachelor, his only representative was his old servant Effie, who received the visitor. She kept the surgery as well as the house, and was as well known in the parish as her master. Indeed she was suspected by many to have skill equal to her master's, very likely owing to the powerful effects produced by her suggestive prescriptions. On learning the absence of the doctor, the Corporal inquired when he was likely to return.

"Wha i' the warl' can tell that? Whatna quastion tae speer at me!" exclaimed Effie.

"I meant nae offence," replied the Corporal; "but my freend, Sergeant Mercer—"

"I beg yer pardon," interrupted Effie; "I wasna awar that ye were a freen'

o' the Sergeant's, honest man! Sae I may tell *you* that the doctor may be here in a minute, or may be no' till breakfast-time the morn; or he may come at twal', at twa, or Gude kens whan! But if it's an *ordinar'* thing ye want for yersel' or Adam, I can gie't to ye:—sic as a scoorin' dose o' sauts or castur-ile, or rubhard pills, or seena leaf, or even a flee blister; or a few draps o' lodamy for the grips."

The Corporal listened with all respect, and said, "I want naething for mysel' or Adam; but Dr. Scott is requested to veesit him on his return hame, or as soon after as convenient."

"Convenient!" exclaimed Effie, "that's no' a word kent in Drumsylie for the doctor! He micht as well ax every gudewife in the parish if it was convenient for them to hae a son or a dochter at twal' hours i' the day or at twal' at nicht on a simmer's day or on a snawy ane; or tae ax whan it was convenient for folk tae burn their fit, break their leg, or play the mishanter wi' themsels efter a fair. Convenient! Keep us a'! But depen' on't he'll mak' it convenient tae atten' Mr. Mercer, nicht or mornin', sune or early."

"I'm sorry to trouble him, for I am sure he is unco' bothered and fashed," said the Corporal, politely.

"Fashed!" exclaimed Effie, thankful for the opportunity of expressing sympathy with her master, and her indignation at his inconsiderate patients; "naebody kens that but him and me! Fashed! the man haesna the life o' a streyed dog or cat! There's no' a lameter taylor wi' his waik fit, nor a bairn wi' a sair wame frae eatin' ower mony cruds or grosats, nor an auld wife hostin' wi' a grew o' cauld, nor a farmer efter makin' ower free wi' black puddins and haggis when a mairt is kill't—but a' maun flee tae the doctor, ilka ane yam, yam, yammerin', as if *he* had the poower o' life and death! Puir cratur! I could maist greet if I wasna sae angry, to wauk him in his first sleep in a winter's nicht to ride aff on auld Bolus—that's his auld decent horse, ye ken—and for what? Maybe for naething! I assure you he has a taughy fleece tae scoor in this parish!" Effie stopped, not from want of illustration, but from want of breath.

"A hard life, a hard life, nae doot," remarked the Corporal; "but it's his duty, and he's paid for't."

"Him paid for't!" said Effie, "I wad like tae see the siller; as the watchmaker said—The Doctor, quo' he, should let them pay the debt o' natur' if they wadna pay his ain debts first. He wasna far wrang! But I was forgettin' the Sergeant—what's wrang wi' him? That's a man never fashes the doctor or onybody; and wha pays what he gets. But ither folk fash the Sergeant—I wuss I had the doctorin' o' some o' them I ken o'l Feggs, I wad doctor them! I wad gie them a blister or twa o' Spanish flees that they wadna forget in a hurry I—but what's wrang?" she asked, once more halting in her eloquence.

"That's just what we want tae ken," replied the Corporal, quietly.

"I'll tell the Doctor," said Effie. "I think ye said yer name was Dick-Cornal Dick?"

"No, no! not Cornal yet," replied Dick, smiling, "I'm sorry tae say, my braw woman, but Corporal only."

The epithet "braw" drew down a curtsy from Effie in reply to his "Gude day; ye'll be sure to send the Doctor."

Dr. Scott, whom Effie represented, was a man of few words, who never attempted to explain the philosophy, if he knew it, of his treatment, but prescribed his doses as firmly and unfeelingly as the gunner loads his cannon. He left his patients to choose life or death, apparently as if their choice was a matter of indifference to him: yet nevertheless he possessed a most kind and feeling heart, revealed not in looks or words, but in deeds of patience and self-sacrifice, for which, from too many, he got little thanks, and less pay, as Effie had more than insinuated. Every one in the parish seemed to have a firm conviction as to the duty of the Doctor to visit them, when unwell, at all hours, and at all distances, by day or night; while *their* duty of consideration for his health was dim, and for his pocket singularly procrastinating. "I do not grudge," he once said, "to give my professional aid gratis to the poor and needy, and even to others who could pay me if they would; nay, I do not grudge in many cases to send a bag of meal to the family, but I think I am entitled, without being considered greedy, and without my sending for it, to get my empty bag returned!"

The Doctor was ever riding to and fro, his face red with winter's cold and summer's heat, nodding oftener on his saddle than at his own fire-side, watching all sorts of cases in farmhouses and lowly cottages, cantering for miles to the anxiety and discomforts of the sick-room.

All liked the Doctor, and trusted him; though, alas! such men as Dr. Mair-herbalists, vendors of wonderful pills and "saws", bone-setters, and that whole race of ignorant and presuming quacks, resident or itinerant, could always impose on the credulous, and dispose of their marvellous cures for such prices as seldom entered honest Scott's pocket.

The Doctor in due time visited Adam.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?" was his abrupt question; and he immediately proceeded to examine tongue and pulse, and other signs and symptoms. He then prescribed some simple medicine, rather gentler than Effie's; and said little, except that he would call back soon. The case was at last declared to be of a bad

type of typhoid fever.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. SMELLIE'S DIPLOMACY

Mr. Smellie was not only a draper, but was the greatest in that line in the parish of Drumsylie. His shop had the largest display of goods in the village. Handkerchiefs, cravats, Paisley shawls, printed calicoes, &c., streamed in every variety of colour from strings stretched across the large window, dotted with hats and bonnets for male and female customers. He was looked upon as a well-to-do, religious man, who carefully made the most of both worlds. He was a bachelor, and lived in a very small house, above his shop, which was reached by a screw stair. A small charity boy, with a singularly sedate countenance—he may for aught I know be now a rich merchant on the London Exchange—kept the shop. I mention his name, Eben or Ebenezer Peat, to preserve for some possible biographer the important part which the as yet great unknown played in his early life. The only domestic was old Peggy; of whom, beyond her name, I know nothing. She may have been great, and no doubt was, if she did her duty with zeal and love to Peter Smellie. Peggy inhabited the kitchen, and her master the parlour, attached to which was a small bed-closet. The parlour was cold and stiff, like a cell for a condemned Pharisee. There was little furniture in it save an old sofa whose hard bony skeleton was covered by a cracked skin of black haircloth, with a small round cushion of the same character, roughened by rather bristly hairs, which lay in a recess at the end of it. A few stuffed mahogany chairs were ranged along the wall; while a very uncomfortable arm-chair beside the small fire, and a round table with a dark wax-cloth cover, completed the furniture of the apartment. There were besides, a few old books of theology—which guaranteed Mr. Smellie's orthodoxy, if not his reading; a copy of *Buchan's Domestic Medicine*; and a sampler which hung on the wall, sewed by his only sister, long dead, on which was worked a rude symbol of Castle Bennock with three swans floating under it, nearly as large as the castle, and beneath what was intended to represent flowers were the symbols, "For P. S. by M. S."

Mr. Smellie, near a small fire, that twinkled like a yellow cairngorm amidst basalt, sat reading his newspaper, when a letter was laid upon the table by Peggy without any remark except "A letter."

"From whom, Peggy?" asked Smellie.

"Dinna ken; was left on the coonter."

Mr. Smellie opened it. No sooner did he recognise the signature, than he laid aside the paper—the *Edinburgh Courant*, even then best known and long established.

He read the letter over and over again, very possibly a hundred times if one might judge from the time it remained in his hands. At last he put it down quietly, as if afraid it would make a noise, and stared at the small embryo fire. He then paced across the room; lay down on the sofa; resumed his seat at the fire; took up the letter, again perused it, and again slowly laid it down. He alone could decipher his own thoughts while doing all this. For a time he was confused and bewildered, as if endeavouring to comprehend his altered position. It was to him as if some one whom he had hanged or murdered had come to life again. What was he to do now with reference to the Sergeant? This was what puzzled him—what could be done to save himself? He had felt safe in the hands of an honourable man—at a distance. He had in fact, during many years of comparative ease as to worldly things, almost forgotten his old attempt at cheating. He had long ago repented, as he thought, of his crime; but that which was past had now risen from the dead, and God seemed to require it at his hands!

Had not his own continued sinfulness thus restored the dead past to life?

It was a great shock for him to learn for the first time that his enemy, as he looked upon Adam, knew it all, and had him in his power. And then to learn also that the Sergeant had never divulged the secret! What could Smellie now do? Would he provoke Adam to blast his character, to triumph over him, to expose him to the Kirk Session and the parish? nay, to—banish him? Or would he repent truly of all that false, hollow past which was now being dimly revealed to him; confess his evil-doing to the Sergeant, and ask his forgiveness, as well as that of God; trust his mercy, bless him for his generosity, acknowledge that he was the better man, and seek by a new and true life to imitate him? O Mr. Smellie! this is indeed one of those moments in thy life in which a single step to the right or left may lead thee to light or to darkness, to heaven or to hell. Thy soul, of immeasurable littleness estimated by the world, but of infinite greatness estimated by eternal truth and righteousness, is now engaged in a battle in which its eternal destiny is likely to be determined! Confront then the good and evil masters, God and Mammon, who are contending for the mastery; serve the one and despise the other, and even thou mayest yet be great because good. But if not!—then in a few minutes mayest thou be irrecoverably on the road to thine own place; and though this will be nothing to Drumsylie, it will be everything to thee!

The battle went hard against Saul, and the Philistines of vanity, pride, and

a wicked consistency were pressing hard upon him! One thing only, the easiest for the time, he determined to do, and that was to get out of the scrape—as his bad angel soothingly suggested—as speedily and as easily as possible. He must not keep up the quarrel longer with the Sergeant; this at least seemed clear: for such a course was dangerous. He must also immediately assure John Spence of obedience to his commands. So, without delay, he wrote to the keeper, imploring him, as he himself expected mercy from God, to be silent regarding the old crime; assuring him that he had mistaken the part which he had taken as an elder in this most painful case, as he called it, and promising him to do all he could to deliver the Sergeant out of trouble, which would be at once his duty and his pleasure. This letter, when written and despatched, was a great relief to his mind: it delivered him, as he hoped, from immediate danger at least, and enabled him to concentrate his acute faculties on the carrying out of his plans for securing his own safety.

His thoughts were for the moment broken by Eben announcing, as he was wont to do, a superior customer whom it was expedient for the master himself to serve. The customer on the present occasion was Miss Thomasina Porteous, who had come to purchase some article for herself, and a cheap shawl, out of the Session Charity Fund, for their poor, persecuted, common friend, as she called Mrs. Craigie.

Mr. Smellie was unusually silent: he did not respond to the order for Mrs. Craigie with his accustomed smile. After a little, Miss Thomasina blandly remarked:—"Sergeant Mercer is very ill, and I have no doubt from a bad conscience—there's no peace, you know, Mr. Smellie, to the wicked."

"I am aware!" said Mr. Smellie, drily. "This cheap shawl," he added, selecting and spreading out one before her, "is good enough, I suppose, for a pauper?"

"Considering all she has suffered from that man, I think she should get a better one, or something in addition, Mr. Smellie," said the lady.

"Eben!" said Smellie, "go up-stairs. I wish to speak to Miss Porteous alone." The boy disappeared.

"As a friend, Miss Porteous," whispered Smellie, "permit me to say, *in strictest confidence*—you understand?—"

"Quite!" replied Miss Thomasina, with a look of intense curiosity.

"That I have learned some things about Mrs. Craigie," continued Mr. Smellie, "which should make us *extremely* cautious in helping or trusting her."

"Indeed!" said Miss Thomasina.

"And as regards the Sergeant," said Mr. Smellie, "there is—rightly or wrongly is not the question—a strong sympathy felt for him in the parish. It is human nature to feel, you know, for the weak side, even if it is the worst side; and from my profound respect for our excellent minister, over whom you exer-

cise such great and useful influence, I would advise—”

”That he should yield, Mr. Smellie?” interrupted Miss Thomasina, with an expression of wonder.

”No, no, Miss Porteous,” replied the worthy Peter, ”that may be impossible; but that we should allow Providence to deal with Adam. He is ill. The Doctor, I heard to-day, thinks it may come to typhus fever. He is threatened, at least.”

”And may die?” said the lady, interpreting the elder’s thoughts. ”But I hope not, poor man, for his own sake. It would be a solemn judgment.”

”I did not say die,” continued Smellie; ”but many things may occur—such as repentance—a new mind, &c. Anyhow,” he added with a smile, ”he should, in my very humble opinion, be dealt wi’ charitably—nay, I would say kindly. Our justice should be tempered wi’ mercy, so that no enemy could rejoice over us, and that we should feel a good conscience—the best o’ blessings,” he said with a sigh—”as knowing that we had exhausted every means o’ bringing him to a right mind; for, between us baith, and knowing your Christian principles, I do really houp that at heart he is a good man. Forgie me for hinting it, as I would not willingly pain you, but I really believe it. Now, if he dees, we’ll have no blame. So I say, or rather suggest, that, wi’ your leave, we should in the meantime let things alone, and say no more about this sad business. I leave you to propose this to our worthy minister.”

”I think *our* kindness and charity, Mr. Smellie,” replied Miss Porteous, ”are not required at present. On my word, no! My poor brother requires both, not Mercer. See how *he* is petted! Those upstart Gordons have been sending him, I hear, all sorts of good things: wine and grapes—grapes, that even I have only tasted once in my life, when my mother died! And Mrs. Gordon called on him yesterday in her carriage! It’s absolutely ridiculous! I would even say an insult! tho’ I’m sure I don’t wish the man any ill—not I; but only that we must not spoil him, and make a fool of my brother and the Session, as if Mercer was innocent. I assure you my brother feels this sort of mawkish sympathy very much—very much. It’s mean and cowardly!”

”It is quite natural that he should feel annoyed,” replied Mr. Smellie; ”and so do I. But, nevertheless, I again say, we must be merciful; for mercy rejoiceth over judgment. So I humbly advise to let things alone for the present, and to withdraw our hand when Providence begins to work;—in the meantime, in the meantime.”

Miss Thomasina was not prepared for these new views on the part of the high-principled, firm, and consistent elder. They crossed her purpose. She had no idea of giving up the battle in this easy way. What had she to do with Providence? To stand firm and fast to her principles was, she had ever been taught, the one thing needful; and until the Sergeant confessed his fault, it seemed to her, as she

said, that "he should be treated as a heathen and a publican!"

Mr. Smellie very properly put in the saving clause, "But no waur—no waur, Miss Porteous." He also oiled his argument by presenting his customer with a new pair of gloves out of a parcel just received from Edinburgh, as evidence of his admiration for her high character.

The lady smiled and left the shop, and said she would communicate the substance of their conversation to her brother.

"Kindly, kindly, as becomes your warm heart," said Mr. Smellie, expressing the hope at the same time that the gloves would fit her fingers as well as he wished his arguments would fit the mind of Mr. Porteous.

Another diplomatic stroke of Mr. Smellie in his extremity was to obtain the aid of his easy brother-elder, Mr. Menzies, to adjust matters with the Sergeant, so as to enable Mr. Porteous, with some show of consistency, to back out of the ecclesiastical mess in which the Session had become involved: for "consistency" was a great idol in the Porteous Pantheon.

"I hae been thinking, my good freen'," said Smellie to Menzies, as both were seated beside the twinkling gem of a fire in the sanctum over the draper's shop, "that possibly—possibly—we nicht men' matters atween the Session and Sergeant Mercer. He is verra ill, an' the thocht is neither pleasant nor satisfactory to us that he should dee—a providential event which *nicht* happen—an' wi' this scandal ower his head. I am willin', for ane, to do whatever is reasonable in the case, and I'm sure sae are ye; for ye ken, Mr. Menzies, there's nae man perfec'—nane! The fac' is, I'm no' perfec' mysel'!" confessed Mr. Smellie, with a look intended to express a humility of which he was profoundly unconscious.

Mr. Menzies, though not at all prepared for this sudden outburst of charity, welcomed it very sincerely. "I'm glad," said he, "to hear a man o' your influence in the Session say sae." Menzies had himself personally experienced to a large degree the *dour* influence of the draper over him; and though his better nature had often wished to rebel against it, yet the logical meshes of his more astute and strong-willed brother had hitherto entangled him. But now, with the liberty of speech granted in so genial a manner by Smellie, Mr. Menzies said, "I wull admit that Mr. Mercer was, until this unfortunate business happened, a maist respectable man—I mean he was apparently, and I wad fain houp sincerely—a quiet neebour, and a douce elder. I never had cause to doot him till the day ye telt me in confidence that he had been ance a poacher. But we mauna be ower hard, Mr. Smellie, on the sins o' youth, or even o' riper years. Ye mind the paraphrase—

"For while the lamp holds on to burn,
The greatest sinner may return'.

I wad do onything that was consistent to get him oot o' this job wi' the minister an' the Session. But hoo can it be managed, Mr. Smellie?"

"I think," said Smellie, meditatively, "that if we could only get the minister pleased, things wad richt themsel's."

"Between oorsel's, as his freen's," said Menzies, with a laugh, "he's no' easy to please when he tak's a thraw! But maybe we're as muckle to blame as him."

"That bird," remarked Smellie, as he poked up his almost extinguished fire, "has played a' the mischief! Could we no' get it decently oot o' the way yet, Mr. Menzies?"

"What d'ye mean, neebour?" asked Menzies, looking puzzled.

"Weel, I'll tell ye," replied the draper. "The Sergeant and me, ye ken, cast oot; but you and him, as well as the wife, are freendly. Noo, what do ye say to seeing them in a freendly way; and as the Sergeant is in bed—"

"They say it's fivver," interrupted Menzies, "and may come to be verra dangerous."

"Weel a-weel," said Smellie, "in that case what I propose micht be easier dune: the wife micht gie you the bird, for peace' sake—for conscience' sake—for her guidman's sake—and ye micht do awa' wi't, and the Sergeant ken naething about it; for, ye see, being an auld sodger, he's prood as prood can be; and Mr. Porteous wad be satisfied, and maybe, for peace' sake, wad never speer hoo it was dune, and we wad hae a guid excuse for sayin' nae mair about it in the Session. If the Sergeant dee'd, nae hairm would be done; if he got weel, he wad be thankfu' that the stramash was a' ower, and himsel' restored, wi'oot being pit aboot for his bird. Eh?"

"I wadna like to meddle wi' the cratur," said Menzies, shaking his head.

"But, man, do ye no' see," argued Smellie, "that it wad stultify yersel' tae refuse doing what is easier for you than for him? Hoo can ye, as a member o' Session, blame him for no' killing a pet o' his dead bairn, if ye wadna kill it as a strange bird?"

"Can ye no' kill't then?" asked Menzies.

"I wad hae nae difficulty in doing that—nane," said Smellie, "but they wadna trust me, and wadna lippen to me; but they wad trust *you*. It's surely your duty, Mr. Menzies, to do this, and mair, for peace."

"Maybe," said Menzies. "Yet it's a cruel job. I'm sweir tae meddle wi't. I'll think about it."

"Ay," said Smellie, putting his hand on his shoulder; "an' ye'll do't, too, when ye get the opportunity—I dinna bid ye kill't, that needna be; but jist tae let it flee awa'—that's the plan! Try't. I'm awfu' keen to get this job by, and this stane o' offence oot o' the road. But mind, ye'll never, never let on I bade ye, or it will blaw up the mercifu' plan. Will ye keep a quiet sough aboot me, whatever

ye do? And, moreover, never breathe a word about the auld poaching business; I hae reasons for this, Mr. Menzies—reasons.”

Such was Smellie’s ”game”, as it may be called. For his own ends he was really anxious that Mr. Porteous should feel kindly towards the Sergeant, so far at least as to retrace the steps he had taken in his case. He was actuated by fear lest Adam, if crushed, should be induced to turn against himself, and, in revenge, expose his former dishonest conduct. He did not possess necessarily any gratitude for the generous part which Adam had played towards him;—for nothing is more hateful to a proud man, than to be under an obligation to one whom he has injured. It was also very doubtful how far Mr. Porteous, from the strong and public position he had taken in the case, would, or could yield, unless there was opened up to him some such back-door of escape as Smellie was contriving, to save his consistency. If this could be accomplished without himself being implicated, Smellie saw some hope of ultimate reconciliation, and the consequent removal on the Sergeant’s part of the temptation to ”peach”.

Mr. Menzies, however, was ill at ease. The work Smellie had assigned to him was not agreeable, and he was only induced to attempt its performance in the hope that the escape of the starling would lead ultimately to the quashing of all proceedings against Adam.

With these feelings he went off to call upon Mrs. Mercer.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STARLING AGAIN IN DANGER

Mrs. Mercer received her visitor very coldly. She associated his name with what she called ”the conspiracy”, and felt aggrieved that he had never visited her husband during those previous weeks of trial. He was, as she expressed it, ”a sight for sair een”. Mr. Menzies made the best excuse he could, and described the circumstances in which he had been placed towards Adam as ”the reason why he had not visited her sooner. He said, also, that however painful it was to him, he had nevertheless been obliged by his ordination vows to do his duty as a member of Session, and he hoped not in vain, as he might now be the means of making peace between his friend, Mr. Mercer, and the minister.

”I’m Charlie’s bairn,” said the starling, just as Menzies had given a preliminary cough, and was about to approach the question which had chiefly brought

him to the cottage. "I'm Charlie's bairn—a man's a man—kick, kur—whitt, whitt."

The starling seemed unable or unwilling to end the sentence; at last it came out clear and distinct—"a man's a man for a' that".

Mr. Menzies did not feel comfortable.

"I dinna wunner, Mrs. Mercer," at last he said, "at you and Adam likin' that bird! He is really enticing, and by ordinar, I maun confess."

"There's naething wrang wi' the bird," said Katie, examining the seam of her apron, adding in an indifferent tone of voice, "If folk wad only let it alane, it's discreet, and wad hairm naebody."

"I'm sure, Mrs. Mercer," he said, "I'm real sorry about the hale business; and I'm resolved, if possible, to get Adam oot o' the han's o' the Session, and bring peace atween a' parties."

Katie shook her foot, twirled her thumbs, but said nothing.

"It's a pity indeed," the elder continued, "that a *bird* should come atween an office-bearer like Adam and his minister and the Session! It's no richt—it's no richt; and yet neither you nor Adam could pit it awa, e'en at the request o' the Session, wi' yer ain haun's. Na, na—that *was* askin' ower muckle."

"Ye ken best, nae doot," said Katie, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice. "You and the Session hae made a bonnie job o' the guidman noo!"

"I'm real vexed he's no' weel," said Menzies; "but to be candid, Mrs. Mercer, it wasna a' the faut o' the Session at the warst, but pairtly his ain. He was ower stiff, and was neither to haud nor bin'."

"A bairn could haud him noo, and bin' him tae," said Katie.

"There's a chasteesement in 't," remarked Menzies, becoming slightly annoyed at Katie's cool reception of him. "He should hear the voice in the rod. Afflictions dinna come wi'oot a reason. They spring not from the grun'. They're sent for a purpose; and ye should examine and search yer heart, Mrs. Mercer, in a' sincerity and humility, to ken *why* this affliction has come, and *at this time*," emphatically added Mr. Menzies.

"Nae doot," said Katie, returning to the hem of her apron.

The way seemed marvellously opened to Mr. Menzies, as he thought he saw Katie humbled and alive to the Sergeant's greater share of wrong in causing the schism. He began to feel the starling in his hand,—a fact of which the bird seemed ignorant, as he whistled, "Wha'll be king but Charlie?"

Mr. Menzies continued—"If I could be ony help to ye, Mrs. Mercer, I wad be prood and thankfu' to bring aboot freen'ship atween Adam and Mr. Porteous; and thus gie peace to puir Adam."

"Peace tae Adam?" exclaimed Katie, looking up to the elder's face.

"Ay, peace tae Adam," said Mr. Menzies, encouraged to open up his plan; "but, I fear, as lang as that bird is in the cage, peace wull never be."

Katie dropped her apron, and stared at Mr. Menzies as if she was petrified, and asked what he meant.

"Dinna think, dinna think," said Mr. Menzies, "that I propose killin' the bit thing"—Katie dropped her eyes again on her apron—"but," he continued, "I canna see what hairm it wad do, and I think it wad do a hantle o' guid, if ye wad let me tak' oot the cage, and let the bird flee awa' tae sing wi' the lave o' birds. In this way, ye see—"

Katie rose up, her face pale with—dare we say it?—suppressed passion. This call of Menzies was to give strength and comfort, forsooth, to her in her affliction! She seized the elder by his arm, drew him gently to the door of the bedroom, which was so far open as to enable him to see Adam asleep. One arm of the Sergeant was extended over the bed, his face was towards them, his grey locks escaped from under his night-cap, and his expression was calm and composed. Katie said nothing, but pointed to her husband and looked sternly at Menzies. She then led him to the street door, and whispered in his ear—

"Ae word afore we pairt:—I wadna gie that man, in health or sickness, life or death, for a' the Session! If *he's* no' a Christian, an' if *he* hasna God's blessing, wae's me for the warl'! I daur ony o' ye to come here again, and speak ill o' him, as if he was in a faut! I daur ony o' ye to touch his bird! Tell that to Smellie—tell't to the parish, and lee me alane wi' my ain heart, wi' my ain guidman, and wi' my ain Saviour, to live or dee as the Almighty wills!"

Katie turned back into her kitchen, while poor Menzies walked out into the street, feeling no anger but much pain, and more than ever convinced that he had been made a tool of by Smellie, contrary to his own common-sense and better feeling.

Menzies made a very short report of the scene to the draper, saying that he would wash his hands clean of the whole business; to which Smellie only said to himself thoughtfully, as Menzies left his shop, "I wish I could do the same—but I'll try!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SERGEANT'S SICKNESS AND HIS SICK-NURSE

Dr. Scott, as the reader knows, had visited Adam, and felt a great interest in his patient. The Doctor was a man of few words, very shy, and, as has been indicated,

even abrupt and gruff, his only affectation being his desire to appear devoid of any feeling which might seem to interfere with severe medical treatment or a surgical operation. He liked to be thought stern and decided. The fact was that his intense sympathy pained him, and he tried to steel himself against it. When he scolded his patients, it was because they made him suffer so much, and because, moreover, he was angry with himself for being angry with them. He therefore affected unconcern at the very time when his anxiety for a patient made him sleepless, and compelled him often, when in bed, to read medical journals with the aid of a long yellow candle, instead of spending in sleep such portions of his night-life as the sick permitted him to enjoy. He had watched Adam's whole conduct as an elder—had heard much about his labours from his village patients—and, as the result of his observations, had come to the conclusion that he was a man of a rare and right stamp. When the "disturbance", as it was called, about the starling agitated the community, few ever heard the Doctor express his opinion on the great question; but many listened to his loud laugh—wondering as to its meaning—when the case was mentioned, and how oddly he stroked his chin, as if to calm his merriment. Some friends who were more in his confidence heard him utter such phrases, in alluding to the matter, as "only ministerial indigestion", "ecclesiastical hysteria",—forms of evil, by the way, which are rarely dealt with in Church courts.

His attendance on the Sergeant was, therefore, a duty which was personally agreeable to him. He was not very hopeful of success, however, from the time when the fever developed into typhoid of a malignant and extremely infectious type.

The first thing which the Doctor advised, as being necessary for the Sergeant's recovery, was the procuring of a sick-nurse. Poor Katie protested against the proposal. What could any one do, she argued, that she herself was not fit for? What cared she for sleep? She never indeed at any time slept soundly—so she alleged—and could do with very little sleep at all times; she was easily wakened up—the scratch of a mouse would do it; and Adam would do *her* bidding, for he was always so good and kind: a stranger, moreover, would but irritate him, and "put hersel' about". And who could be got to assist? Who would risk their life? Had not others their own family to attend to? Would they bring the fever into their own house? &c. "Na, na," she concluded, "lee Adam tae me, and God will provide!"

So she reasoned, as one taught by observation and experience; for most people in country villages—now as then—are apt to be seized with panic in the presence of any disease pronounced to be dangerous and contagious. Its mystery affects their imagination. It looks like a doom that cannot be averted; very purpose of God, to oppose which is vain. To procure, therefore, a nurse for the

sick, except among near relations, is extremely difficult; unless it be some worthless creature who will drink the wine intended for the patient, or consume the delicacies left for his nourishment. We have known, when cholera broke out in a county town in Scotland, a stranger nurse refused even lodgings in any house within it, lest she should spread the disease!

It was a chill and gusty evening, and Katie sat beside the fire in the Sergeant's room, her mind full of "hows" and "whens", and tossed to and fro by anxiety about her Adam, and questionings as to what she should or could do for his comfort. The rising wind shook the bushes and tree-tops in the little garden. The dust in clouds hurried along the street of the village. The sky was dark with gathering signs of rain. There was a depressing sadness in the world without, and little cheer in the room within. The Sergeant lay in a sort of uneasy restless doze, sometimes tossing his hands, starting up and asking where he was, and then falling back again on his pillow with a heavy sigh. Although his wife was not seriously alarmed, she was nevertheless very miserable at heart, and felt utterly lonely. But for her quiet faith in God, and the demand made upon her for active exertion, she would have yielded to passionate grief, or fallen into sullen despair.

Her thoughts were suddenly disturbed by little Mary telling her that someone was at the street door. Bidding Mary take her place, she hastened to the kitchen and opened the door. Jock Hall entered in his usual unceremonious way.

"Ye needna speak, Mrs. Mercer," he said as he sat down on a chair near the door; "I ken a' about it!"

Katie was as much startled as she was the first time he entered her house. His appearance as to dress and respectability was, however, unquestionably improved.

"Jock Hall, as I declare!" exclaimed Katie in a whisper.

"The same, at yer service; and yet no' jist the same," replied Jock, in as low a voice.

"Ye may say sae," said Katie. "What's come ower ye? Whaur hae ye been? Whaur got ye thae claes? Ye're like a gentleman, Jock!"

"I houp sae," replied Hall; "I oucht to be sae; I gat a' this frae Adam."

"The guidman?" inquired Katie; "that's impossible! He never had claes like thae!"

"Claes or no claes," said Jock, "it's him I got them frae."

"I dinna understan' hoo that could be," said Katie.

"Nor me," said Jock, "but *sae* it is, and never speer the noo *hoo* it is. I'm come, as usual, on business."

"Say awa'," said Katie, "but speak laigh. It's no' shoon ye're needin', I houp?"

But we must here explain that Jock had previously called upon Dr. Scott, and thrusting his head into the surgery—his body and its new dress being concealed by the half-opened door—asked—

”Is’t true that Sergeant Mercer has got a smittal fivver?”

The Doctor, who was writing some prescription, on discovering who the person was who put this question, said no more in reply than—”Deadly! deadly! so ye need not trouble them, Jock, by begging at their door—be off!”

”Mrs. Mercer,” replied Jock, ”wull need a nurse—wull she?”

”You had better go and get your friend Mrs. Craigie for her, if that’s what you are after. She’ll help Mary,” replied the Doctor, in derision.

”Thank ye!” said Jock, and disappeared.

But to return to his interview with Mrs. Mercer—”I’m telt, Mrs. Mercer,” he said, ”that the Sergeant is awfu’ ill wi’ a smittal fivver, and that he needs some nurse—that is, as I understan’, some ane that wad watch him day and nicht, and keep their een open like a whitrat; somebody that wadna heed haein’ muckle tae do, and that could haud a guid but freen’ly grip o’ Mr. Mercer gif his nerves rise. An’ I hae been thinkin’ ye’ll fin’t a bother tae get sic a bodie in Drumsylie—unless, maybe, ane that wad wark for a hantle o’ siller; some decent woman like Luckie Craigie, wha micht—

”Dinna bother me the noo, Jock, wi’ ony nonsense,” said Katie, ”I’m no fit for’t. If ye need onything yersel’, tell me what it is, and, if possible, I’ll gie ye’t. But I maun gang back tae the room.”

”Ay,” said Jock, ”I want something frae ye, nae doot, and I houp I’ll get it. I want an extraordinar’ favour o’ ye; for, as I was sayin’, ye’ll fin’t ill tae get ony ane to watch Mr. Mercer. But if I get ane that doesna care for their life—that respects and loes Adam—that wadna take a bawbee o’ siller—”

”As for that o’t, I’ll pay them decently,” interrupted Katie.

”And ane that,” continued Jock, as if not interrupted, ”has strength tae watch wi’ leevin’ man or woman,—what wad ye say tae sic a canny nurse as that?”

”If there’s sic a bodie in the toon,” replied Katie, ”I wad be blythe tae *try* them; no’ tae fix them, maybe, but to *try*, as the Doctor insists on’t.”

”Weel,” said Jock, ”the favour I hae to ax, altho’ it’s ower muckle maybe for you tae gie, is to let *me* try my han’—let me speak, and dinna lauch at me! I’m no’ feered for death, as I hae been mony a time feered for life: I hae had by ordinar’ experience watchin’, ye ken, as a poacher, fisher, and a’ that kin’ o’ thing, sin’ I was a bairn; sae I can sleep wi’ my een open; and I’m strong, for I hae thrashed keepers, and teylors, and a’ sorts o’ folk; fac’, I was tempted tae gie a blue ee tae Smellie!—but let sleepin’ dogs lie—I’ll mak’ a braw nurse for the gudeman.”

Katie was taken so much aback by this speech as to let Jock go on without

interruption; but she at last exclaimed—"Ye're a kind cratur, Jock, and I'm muckle obleeged to you; but I really canna think o't. It'll no' work; it wad pit ye aboot, an' mak' a cleish-me-claver in the toon; an'-an'--"

"I care as little for the toon," said Jock, "as the toon cares for me! Ye'll no be bothered wi' me, mind, gif ye let me help ye. I hae got clean pease strae for a bed frae Geordie Miller the carrier, and a sackfu' for a bowster; and I ken ye hae a sort o' laft, and I'll pit up there; and it's no' aften I hae sic a bed; and cauld parritch or cauld praties wull dae for my meat, an' I need nae mair; an' I hae braw thick stockin's—I can pit on twa pair if necessar', tae walk as quiet as a cat stealin' cream; sae gif ye'll let me, I'll do my best endeavour tae help ye."

"Oh, Jock, man!" said Mrs. Mercer, "ye're unco guid. I'll think o't—I'll think o't, and speer at the Doctor—I wull, indeed; and if sae be he needs—Whisht! What's that?" ejaculated Katie, starting from her chair, as little Mary entered the kitchen hurriedly, saying—

"Come ben fast, mither!"

Katie was in a moment beside her husband, who for the first time manifested symptoms of violent excitement, declaring that he must rise and dress for church, as he heard the eight o'clock bells ringing. In vain she expostulated with him in the tenderest manner. He ought to rise, he said, and would rise. Was he not an elder? and had he not to stand at the plate? and would he, for any consideration, be late? What did she mean? Had she lost her senses? And so on.

This was the climax of a weary and terribly anxious time for Katie. For some nights she had, as she said, hardly "booed an ee", and every day her lonely sorrow was becoming truly "too deep for tears". The unexpected visit of even Jock Hall had helped for a moment to cause a reaction and to take her out of herself; and now that she perceived beyond doubt, what she was slow hitherto to believe, that her husband "wasna himsel"—nay, that even *she* was strange to him, and was addressed by him in accents and with expressions betokening irritation towards her, and with words which were, for the first time, wanting in love, she became bewildered, and felt as if God had indeed sent her a terrible chastisement. It was fortunate that Hall had called—for neither her arguments nor her strength could avail on the present occasion. She immediately summoned Jock to her assistance. He was already behind her, for he had quickly cast off his boots, and approached the bed softly and gently, on perceiving the Sergeant's state. With a strong hand he laid the Sergeant back on his pillow, saying, "Ye will gang to the kirk, Sergeant, but I maun tell ye something afore ye gang. Ye'll mind Jock Hall? him that ye gied the boots to? An' ye'll mind Mr. Spence the keeper? I hae got an erran' frae him for you. He said ye wad be glad tae hear aboot him."

The Sergeant stared at Jock with a half-excited, half-stupid gaze. But the chain of his associations had for a moment been broken, and he was quiet as a

child, the bells ringing no more as he paused to hear about his old friend Spence.

Jock's first experiment at nursing had proved successful. He was permitted, therefore, for that night only, as Katie said, to occupy the loft, to which he brought his straw bed and straw bolster; and his presence proved, more than once during the night, an invaluable aid.

The Doctor called next morning. Among his other causes for anxiety, one, and not the least, had been the impossibility of finding a respectable nurse. He was therefore not a little astonished to discover Jock Hall, the "ne'er-do-weel", well dressed, and attending the Sergeant. He did not at first ask any explanations of so unexpected a phenomenon, but at once admitted that he was better than none. But before leaving, and after questioning Jock, and studying his whole demeanour, and, moreover, after hearing something about him from Mrs. Mercer, he smiled and said, "Keep him by all means—I think I can answer for him," and muttering to himself, "Peculiar temperament—hysterical, but curable with diet—a character—will take fancies—seems fond of the Sergeant—contagious fever—we shall try him by all means."

"Don't drink?" he abruptly asked Jock.

"Like a beast," Jock replied; "for a beast drinks jist when he needs it, Doctor, and sae div I; but I dinna need it noo, and winna need it, I think, a' my days."

"You'll do," said the Doctor; and so Jock was officially appointed to be Adam's nurse.

Adam Mercer lay many weary days with the fever heavy upon him—like a ship lying to in a hurricane, when the only question is, which will last longest, the storm or the ship? Those who have watched beside a lingering case of fever can alone comprehend the effect which intense anxiety, during a few weeks only, caused by the hourly conflict of "hopes and fears that kindle hope, an undistinguishable throng" produces on the whole nervous system.

Katie was brought into deep waters. She had never taken it home to herself that Adam might die. Their life had hitherto been quiet and even—so like, so very like, was day to day, that no storm was anticipated to disturb the blessed calm. And now at the prospect of losing him, and being left alone in the wide, wide wilderness, without her companion and guide; her earthly all—in spite of the unearthly links of faith and love that bound them—lost to her; no one who has thus suffered will wonder that her whole flesh shrunk as from the approach of a terrible enemy. Then it was that old truths lying in her heart were summoned to her aid to become practical powers in this her hour of need. She recalled all she had learned as to God's ends in sending affliction, with the corresponding duties of a Christian in receiving it. She was made to realize in her experience the gulf which separates *knowing* from *being* and *doing*—the right theory from the right practice. And thus it was that during a night of watching she fought a

great battle in her soul between her own will and God's will, in her endeavour to say, not with her lips, for that was easy, but from her heart, "Thy will be done!" Often did she exclaim to herself, "Na, God forgie me, but I *canna* say't!" and as often resolved, that "say't she wad, or dee". At early morn, when she opened the shutters, after this long mental struggle, and saw the golden dawn spreading its effulgence of glory along the eastern sky, steeping the clouds with splendours of every hue from the rising sun of heaven, himself as yet unseen; and heard the birds salute his coming—the piping thrush and blackbird beginning their morning hymn of praise, with the lark "singing like an angel in the clouds"—a gush of holy love and confidence filled her heart, as if through earth and sky she heard the echo of her Father's name. Meekly losing herself in the universal peace, she sank down on her knees, beside the old arm-chair, and with a flood of quiet tears, that eased her burning heart, she said, "Father! Thy will be done!"

In a short time she rose with such a feeling of peace and freedom as she had never hitherto experienced in her best and happiest hours. A great weight of care seemed lifted off as if by some mighty hand; and though she dared not affirm that she was now prepared for whatever might happen, she had yet an assured confidence in the goodness of One who *would* prepare her when the time came, and whose grace would be sufficient for her in any hour of need.

The interest felt by the parish generally, on the Sergeant's dangerous state becoming known, was great and sincere. In the presence of his sufferings, with which all could more or less sympathise—whether from their personal experience of sorrow, from family bereavements, or from the consciousness of their own liability to be at any moment visited with dangerous sickness—his real or supposed failings were for the time covered with a mantle of charity. It was not for them to strike a sorely wounded man.

Alas! for one that will rejoice with those who rejoice, many will weep with those who weep. Sympathy with another's joy is always an unselfish feeling; but pity only for another's suffering may but express the condescension of pride towards dependent weakness.

But it is neither gracious nor comforting to scrutinise too narrowly the motives which influence human nature in its mixture of good and evil, its weakness and strength. We know that we cannot stand such microscopic examination ourselves, and ought not, therefore, to apply it to others. Enough that much real sympathy was felt for Adam. Some of its manifestations at an earlier stage of his illness were alluded to by Miss Thomasina in her conversation with Mr. Smellie. It was true that Mrs. Gordon had called in her carriage, and that repeatedly, to inquire for him—a fact which greatly impressed those in the neighbourhood who had treated him as a man far beneath them. Mr. Gordon, too, had been unremitting in quiet attentions; and Mrs. Mercer was greatly softened, and her heart

delivered from its hard thoughts of many of her old acquaintances, by the kind and constant inquiries which day by day were made for her husband. Little Mary had to act as a sort of daily bulletin as she opened the door to reply to those who "speeked for the Sergeant"; but no one entered the dwelling, from the natural fears entertained by all of the fever.

Many, too, spoke well of the Sergeant when he was "despaired of", who would have been silent respecting his merits had he been in health. Others also, no doubt, would have waxed eloquent about him after his burial. But would it not be well if those who act on the principle of saying all that is good about the dead, were to spend some portion of their charity upon the living? Their *post-mortem* store would not be diminished by such previous expenditure. No doubt it is "better late than never"; but would it not be still better if never so late? Perhaps not! So far as the good man himself is concerned, it may be as well that the world should not learn, nor praise him for, the many premiums he has paid day by day for the good of posterity until these are returned, like an insurance policy, in gratitude after he is screwed down in his coffin.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. PORTEOUS VISITS THE SERGEANT

But what was the minister thinking about during the Sergeant's illness? Miss Thomasina had told him what had taken place during her interview with Smellie. Mr. Porteous could not comprehend the sudden revolution in the mind of his elder. But his own resolution was as yet unshaken; for there is a glory often experienced by some men when placed in circumstances where they stand alone, that of recognising themselves as being thereby sufferers for conscience' sake—as being above all earthly influences, and firm, consistent, fearless, true to their principles, when others prove weak, cowardly, or compromising. Doubts and difficulties, from whatever source they come, are then looked upon as so many temptations; and the repeated resistance of them, as so many evidences of unswerving loyalty to truth.

"I can never yield one jot of my principles," Mr. Porteous said to Miss Thomasina. "The Sergeant ought to acknowledge his sin before the Kirk Session, before I can in consistency be reconciled to him!" And yet all this sturdy profession was in no small degree occasioned by the intrusion of better thoughts, which

because they rebuked him were unpleasant. His irritation measured on the whole very fairly his disbelief in the thorough soundness of his own position, and made him more willing than he had any idea of to be reconciled to Adam.

We need not report the conversation which immediately after this took place in the Manse between Smellie and Mr. Porteous. The draper was calm, smiling, and circumspect. He repeated all he had said to Miss Thomasina as to the necessity and advantage of leniency, forgiveness, and mercy; dwelling on the Sergeant's sufferings and the sympathy of the parish with him, the noble testimony which the minister had already borne to truth and principle; and urged Mr. Porteous to gratify the Kirk Session by letting the case "tak' end": but all his pleadings were apparently in vain. The minister was not verily "given to change!" The case, he said, had been settled by the Session, and the Session alone could deal with it. They were at perfect liberty to reconsider the question as put by Mr. Smellie, and which he had perfect liberty to bring before the court. For himself he would act as principle and consistency dictated. And so Smellie returned to his room above the shop, and went to bed, wishing he had left the Sergeant and his bird to their own devices; and Mr. Porteous retired to his room above the study with very much the same feelings.

In the meantime one duty was clear to Mr. Porteous, and that was to visit the Sergeant. He was made aware of the highly contagious character of the fever, but this only quickened his resolution to minister as far as possible to the sick man and his family. He was not a man to flinch from what he saw to be his duty. Cowardice was not among his weaknesses. It would be unjust not to say that he was too real, too decided, too stern for that. Yielding to feelings of any kind, whether from fear of consequences to himself, physically, socially, or ecclesiastically, was not his habit. He did not suspect—nor would he perhaps have been pleased with the discovery had he made it—that there was in him a softer portion of his being by which he could be influenced, and which could, in favourable circumstances, dominate over him. There were in him, as in every man, holy instincts, stronger than his strongest logic, though they had not been cultivated so carefully. He had been disposed rather to attribute any mere *sense* or feeling of what was right or wrong to his carnal human nature, and to rely on some clearly defined rule either precisely revealed in Scripture, or given in ecclesiastical law, for his guidance. But that door into his being which he had often barred as if against an enemy could nevertheless be forced open by the hand of love, that love itself might enter in and take possession.

Mr. Porteous had many mingled thoughts as one Saturday evening—in spite of his "preparations"—he knocked at the cottage door. As usual, it was opened by Mary. Recognising the minister, she went to summon Mrs. Mercer from the Sergeant's room; while Mr. Porteous entered, and, standing with his back to

the kitchen fire, once more gazed at the starling, who again returned his gaze as calmly as on the memorable morning when they were first introduced.

Mrs. Mercer did not appear immediately, as she was disrobing herself of some of her nursing-gear—her flannel cap and large shawl—and making herself more tidy. When she emerged from the room, from which no sound came save an occasional heavy sigh and mutterings from Adam in his distress, her hair was dishevelled, her face pale, her step tottering, and years seemed to have been added to her age. Her eyes had no tear to dim their earnest and half-abstracted gaze. This visit of the minister, which she instinctively interpreted as one of sympathy and good-will—how could it be else?—at once surprised and delighted her. It was like a sudden burst of sunshine, which began to thaw her heart, and also to brighten the future. She sat down beside Mr. Porteous, who had advanced to meet her; and holding his proffered hand with a firm grasp, she gazed into his face with a look of silent but unutterable sorrow. He turned his face away. "Oh! sir," at last she said, "God bless you!—God bless you for comin'! I'm lanely, lanely, and my heart is like tae break. It's kind, kind o' ye, this;" and still holding his hand, while she covered her eyes with her apron as she rocked to and fro in the anguish of her spirit, "the loss," she said, "o' my wee pet was sair—ye ken what it was tae us baith," and she looked at the empty cot opposite, "when ye used tae sit here, and he was lyin' there—but oh! it was naething tae this, naething tae this misfortun'!"

The minister was not prepared for such a welcome, nor for such indications of unbounded confidence on Katie's part, her words revealing her heart, which poured itself out. He had expected to find her much displeased with him, even proud and sullen, and had prepared in his own mind a quiet pastoral rebuke for her want of meekness and submissiveness to Providence and to himself.

"Be comforted, Mrs. Mercer! It is the Lord! He alone, not man, can aid," said Mr. Porteous kindly, and feelingly returning the pressure of her hand.

Katie gently withdrew her hand from his, as if she felt that she was taking too great a liberty, and as if for a moment the cloud of the last few weeks had returned and shadowed her confidence in his good-will to her. The minister, too, could not at once dismiss a feeling of awkwardness from his mind, though he sincerely wished to do so. He had seldom come into immediate contact, and never in circumstances like the present, with such simple and unfeigned sorrow. Love began to knock at the door!

"Oh, sir," she said, "ye little ken hoo Adam respeckit and lo'ed ye. He never, never booded his knee at the chair ye're sittin' on wi'oot prayin' for a blessin' on yersel', on yer wark, an' on yer preaching. I'm sure, if ye had only heard him the last time he cam' frae the kirk"—the minister recollected that this was after Adam's deposition by the Session—"hoo he wrestled for the grace o' God tae be

wi' ye, it wad hae dune yer heart guid, and greatly encouraged ye. Forgie me, forgie me for sayin' this: but eh, he was, and is, a precious man tae me; tho' he'll no' be lang wi' us noo, I fear!" And Katie, without weeping, again rocked to and fro.

"He is a good man," he replied; "yes, a very good man is Adam; and I pray God his life may be spared."

"O thank ye, thank ye!" said Katie. "Ay, pray God his life may be spared—and mine too, for I'll no' survive him; I canna do't! nae mair could wee Mary!"

Mary was all the while eagerly listening at the door, which was not quite closed, and as she heard those words and the low cry from her "mother" beseeching the minister to pray, she ran out, and falling down before him, with muffled sobs hid her face in the folds of his great-coat, and said, "Oh, minister, dinna let faither dee! dinna let him dee!" And she clasped and clapped the knees of him who she thought had mysterious power with God.

The minister lifted up the agonised child, patted her fondly on the head, and then gazed on her thin but sweet face. She was pale from her self-denying labours in the sick room.

"Ye maun excuse the bairn," said Katie, "for she haesna been oot o' the hoose except for an errand sin' Adam grew ill. I canna get her tae sleep or eat as she used to do—she's sae fond o' the guidman. I'm awfu' behadden till her. Come here, my wee wifie." And Katie pressed the child's head and tearful face to her bosom, where Mary's sobs were smothered in a large brown shawl. "She's no' strong, but extraordinar' speerity," continued Katie in a low voice and apologetically to Mr. Porteous; "and ye maun just excuse us baith."

"I think," said the minister, in a tremulous voice, "it would be good for us all to engage in prayer."

They did so.

Just as they rose from their knees, the slight noise which the movement occasioned—for hitherto the conversation had been conducted in whispers—caused the starling to leap up on his perch. Then with clear accents, that rung over the silent house, he said, "I'm Charlie's bairn!"

Katie looked up to the cage, and for the first time in her life felt something akin to downright anger at the bird. His words seemed to her to be a most unseasonable interruption—a text for a dispute—a reminiscence of what she did not wish then to have recalled.

"Whisht, ye impudent cratur!" she exclaimed; adding, as if to correct his rudeness, "ye'll disturb yer maister."

The bird looked down at her with his head askance, and scratched it as if puzzled and asking "What's wrong?"

"Oh," said Katie, turning to the minister as if caught in some delinquency,

"it's no' my faut, sir; ye maun forgie the bird; the silly thing doesna ken better."

"Never mind, never mind," said Mr. Porteous, kindly, "it's but a trifle, and not worthy of our notice at such a solemn moment; it must not distract our minds from higher things."

"I'm muckle obleeged to ye, sir," said Katie, rising and making a curtsy. Feeling, however, that a crisis had come from which she could not escape if she would, she bid Mary "gang ben and watch, and shut the door". When Mary had obeyed, she turned to Mr. Porteous and said, "Ye maun excuse me, sir, but I canna thole ye to be angry about the bird. It's been a sore affliction, I do assure you, sir."

"Pray say nothing more of that business, I implore you, Mrs. Mercer, just now," said Mr. Porteous, looking uneasy, but putting his hand kindly on her arm; "there is no need for it."

This did not deter Katie from uttering what was now oppressing her heart more than ever, but rather encouraged her to go on.

"Ye maun let me speak, or I'll brust," she said. "Oh, sir, it has indeed been an awfu' grief this—just awfu' tae us baith. But dinna, dinna think Adam was to blame as muckle as me. I'm in faut, no' him. It wasna frae want o' respec' tae you, sir; na, na, that couldna be; but a' frae love tae our bairn, that was sae uncommon ta'en up wi' yersel'."

"I remember the lovely boy well," said Mr. Porteous, not wishing to open up the question of the Sergeant's conduct.

"Naebody that ever see'd him," continued Katie, "but wad mind him—his bonnie een like blabs o' dew, and his bit mooth that was sae sweet tae kiss. An' ye mind the nicht he dee'd, hoo he clapped yer head when ye were prayin' there at his bedside, and hoo he said his ain wee prayer; and hoo—" Here Katie rose in rather an excited manner, and opened a press, and taking from it several articles, approached the minister and said—"See, there's his shoon, and there's his frock; and this is the clean cap and frills that was on his bonnie head when he lay a corp; and that was the whistle he had when he signed tae the bird tae come for a bit o' his piece; and it was the last thing he did, when he couldna eat, to insist on me giein' a wee bit tae his bairn, as he ca'ed it, ye ken; and he grat when he was sae waik that he couldna whistle till't. O my bairn, my bonnie bairn!" she went on, in low accents of profound sorrow, as she returned to the press these small memorials of a too cherished grief.

"You must not mourn as those who have no hope, my friend," said the minister; "your dear child is with Jesus."

"Thank ye, sir, for that," said Katie; who resolved, however, to press towards the point she had in view. "An' it was me hindered Adam frae killin' my bairn's pet," she continued, resuming her seat beside the minister. "He said he

wad throttle it, or cast it into the fire."

The minister shook his head, remarking, "Tut, tut! that would never have done! No human being wished that."

"That's what I said," continued Katie; "an' whan he rowed up the sleeves o' his sark, and took haud o' the bit thing tae thraw its neck, I wadna let him, but daured him to do it, that did I; and I ken't ye wad hae dune the same, fur the sake o' wee Charlie, that was sae fond o' you. Oh, forgie me, forgie him, if I was wrang! A mither's feelings are no easy hauden doon!"

Was this account the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Perhaps not. But then, good brother or sister, if you are disposed to blame Katie, we defend not even this weary mourner from thee. Take the first stone and cast it at her! Yet we think, as you do so, we see the Perfect One writing on the ground; and if He is writing her condemnation, 'tis in the dust of earth, and the kindly rain or winds of heaven will soon obliterate the record.

"No more about this painful affair, I beseech of you," said the minister, taking a very large and long pinch of snuff; "let us rather try and comfort Adam. This is our present duty."

"God Himsel' bless ye!" said Katie, kissing the back of his hand; "but ye maunna gang near him; dinna risk yer valuable life; the fivver is awfu' smittal. Dr. Scott wull let naebody in."

"And have you no nurse?" inquired Mr. Porteous, not thinking of himself.

This question recalled to her mind what seemed another mysterious stumbling-block. She knew not what to say in reply. Jock Hall was at that moment seated like a statue beside the bed, and what would the minister think when he saw this representative of parish wickedness in an elder's house?

She had no time for lengthened explanations; all she said, therefore, was, "The only nurse Dr. Scott and me could get was nae doot a puir bodie, yet awfu' strang and fit tae haud Adam doon, whan aside himsel'; and he had nae fear o' his ain life—and was a gratefu' cratur—and had ta'en a great notion o' Adam, and is kin' o' reformed—that—that I thoct—weel, I maun jist confess, the nurse is Jock Hall!"

"Jock Hall!" exclaimed the minister, lifting his eyebrows with an expression of astonishment; "is it possible? But I leave to you and the Doctor the selection of a nurse. It is a secular matter, with which officially I have nothing to do. My business is with spiritual things; let me therefore see the Sergeant. I have no fear. I'm in God's hands. All I have to do is my duty. That is my principle."

"Jist let me ben a minute first," asked Katie.

She went accordingly to the room and whispered to Jock, "Gang to the left; the minister is comin' ben—Aff!"

"Mind what ye're baith aboot!" said Jock, pointing to his patient. "Be canny

wi' him—be canny—nae preachin' e' enoo, mind, or flytin', or ye'll rue't. Losh, I'll no stan't!"

As the minister entered the room he saw Jock Hall rapidly vanishing like a spectre, as he stole to his den among the straw.

Mr. Porteous stood beside the Sergeant's bed, and Katie said to her husband, bending over him—

"This is the minister, Adam, come tae see you, my bonnie man."

"God bless you and give you his peace!" said Mr. Porteous, in a low voice, drawing near the bed as Katie retired from it.

The Sergeant opened his eyes, and slowly turned his head, breathing hard, and gazing with a vacant stare at his pastor.

"Do you know me, Adam?" asked the minister.

The Sergeant gave the military salute and replied, "We are all ready, Captain! Lead! we follow! and, please God, to victory!"

He was evidently in the "current of the heady fight", and in his delirious dreams fancied that he was once more one of a forlorn hope about to advance to the horrors of the breach of a beleaguered city, or to mount the ladder to scale its walls. Closing his eyes and clasping his hands, he added with a solemn voice, "And now, my God, enable me to do my duty! I put my trust in Thee! If I die, remember my mother. Amen. Advance, men! Up! Steady!"

The minister did not move or speak for a few seconds, and then said, "It is peace, my friend, not war. It is your own minister who is speaking to you."

Suddenly the Sergeant started and looked upward with an open, excited eye, as if he saw something. A smile played over his features. Then in a tone of voice tremulous with emotion, and with his arms stretched upwards as if towards some object, he said, "My boy—my darling! You there! Oh, yes, I'm coming to you. Quick, comrades! Up!" A moment's silence, and then if possible a steadier gaze, with a look of rapture. "Oh, my wee Charlie! I hear ye! Is the starling leevin'? Ay, ay—that it is! I didna kill't! Hoo could ye think that? It was dear to you, my pet, an'——" Then covering his face with his hands he said, "Oh! whatna licht is that? I canna thole't, it's sae bricht! It's like the Son o' Man!"

He fell back exhausted into what seemed an almost unconscious state.

"He's gane—he's gane!" exclaimed Katie.

"He's no' gane! gie him the brandy!" said Jock, as he slipped rapidly into the room from the kitchen; for Jock was too anxious to be far away. In an instant he had measured out the prescribed quantity of brandy and milk in a spoon, and, lifting the Sergeant's head, he said, "Tak' it, and drink the king's health. The day is oors!" The Sergeant obeyed as if he was a child; and then whispering to Katie, Jock said, "The Doctor telt ye, wumman, to keep him quaet; tak' care what ye're about!" and then he slipped again out of the room.

The Sergeant returned to his old state of quiet repose.

Mr. Porteous stood beside the bed in silence, which was broken by his seizing the fevered hand of the Sergeant, saying fervently, "God bless and preserve you, dear friend!" Then turning to Mrs. Mercer, he motioned her to accompany him to the kitchen. But for a few seconds he gazed out of the window blowing his nose. At length, turning round and addressing her, he said, "Be assured that I feel deeply for you. Do not distrust me. Let me only add that if Mary *must* be taken out of the house for a time to escape infection, as I am disposed to think she should be, I will take her to the Manse, if I cannot find another place for her as good as this—which would be difficult."

"Oh, Mr. Porteous! I maun thank ye for—"

"Not a word, not a word of thanks, Mrs. Mercer," interrupted the minister; "it is my duty. But rely on my friendship for you and yours. The Lord has smitten, and it is for us to bear;" and shaking her hand cordially, he left the house.

"God's ways are not our ways," said Katie to herself, "and He kens hoo to mak' a way o' escape out o' every trial."

Love ceased to knock for an entrance into the minister's heart; for the door was open and love had entered, bringing in its own light and peace.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MINISTER PURE AND PEACEABLE

As the minister walked along the street, with the old umbrella, his inseparable companion in all kinds of weather, wet or dry, under his arm, and with his head rather bent as if in thought, he was met by Mrs. Craigie, who suddenly darted out—for she had been watching his coming—from the "close" in which she lived, and curtsied humbly before him.

"Beg pardon, sir," she said, "it's a fine day—I houp ye're weel. Ye'll excuse me, sir."

"What is it? what is it?" asked Mr. Porteous, in rather a sharp tone of voice, disliking the interruption at such a time from such a person.

"Weel," she said, cracking her fingers as if in a puzzle, "I just thoct if my dear wee Mary was in ony danger frae the fivver at the Sergeant's, I wad be willint—oo ay, real willint—for freendship's sake, ye ken, tae tak' her back tae mysel'."

"Very possibly you would," replied Mr. Porteous, drily; "but my decided opinion at present is, that in all probability she won't need your kindness."

"Thank ye, sir," said the meek Craigie, whose expression need not be analysed as she looked after Mr. Porteous, passing on with his usual step to Mr. Smellie's shop.

No sooner had he entered the "mercantile establishment" of this distinguished draper, than with a nod he asked its worthy master to follow him up to the sanctum. The boy was charged to let no one interrupt them.

When both were seated in the confidential retreat,—the scene of many a small parish plot and plan,—Mr. Porteous said, "I have just come from visiting our friend, Adam Mercer."

"Indeed!" replied Smellie, as he looked rather anxious and drew his chair away. "I'm tellt the fever is maist dangerous and deadly."

"Are *you* afraid? An elder? Mr. Smellie!"

"Me! I'm not frightened," replied the elder, drawing his chair back to its former position near the minister. "I wasn't thinking what I was doing. How did ye find the worthy man? for worthy he is, in spite o' his great fauts—in fact, I might say, his sins."

"I need not, Mr. Smellie," said Mr. Porteous, "now tell you all I heard and witnessed, but I may say in general that I was touched—very much touched by the sight of that home of deep sorrow. Poor people!" and Mr. Porteous seemed disposed to fall into a reverie.

If there is anything which can touch the heart and draw it forth into brotherly sympathy towards one who has from any cause been an object of suspicion or dislike, it is the coming into personal contact with him when suffering from causes beyond his will. The sense is awakened of the presence of a higher power dealing with him, and thus averting our arm if disposed to strike. Who dare smite one thus in the hands of God? It kindles in us a feeling of our own dependence on the same omnipotent Power, and quickens the consciousness of our own deserts were we dealt with according to our sins. There is in all affliction a shadow of the cross, which must harden or soften—lead us upward or drag us downward. If it awakens the feeling of pity only in those who in pride stand afar off, it opens up the life-springs of sympathy in those who from good-will draw nigh.

Mr. Smellie was so far off from the Sergeant that he had neither pity nor sympathy: the minister's better nature had been suddenly but deeply touched; and he now possessed both.

"I hope," said Smellie, "ye will condescend to adopt my plan of charity with him. Ye ken, sir, I aye stand by you. I recognise you as my teacher and guide, and it's not my part to lead, but to follow. Yet if ye *could* see—oh, if ye *could* see your way, in consistency, of course, with principle—ye understan', sir?—to restore

Adam afore he dees, I wad be unco prood—I hope I do not offend. I'm for peace."

And if Adam should recover, Mr. Smellie, thy charity might induce him to think well of thee. Is that thy plan?

"The fever," said Mr. Porteous, with a sigh, "is strong. He is feeble."

"Maybe, then, it might be as well to say nothing about this business until, in Providence, it is determined whether he lives or dies?" inquired the elder.

Did he now think that if the Sergeant died he would be freed from all difficulty, as far as Adam was concerned? Ah, thou art an unstable because a double-minded man, Mr. Smellie!

"I have been thinking," Mr. Porteous went on to say, "that, as it is a principle of mine to meet as far as possible the wishes of my people—as far as *possible*, observe, that is, in consistency with higher principles—I am quite willing to meet *your* wishes, and those of the Session, should they agree with yours, and to recognise in the Sergeant's great affliction the hand of a chastening Providence, and as such to accept it. And instead, therefore, of our demanding, as we had a full right to do in our then imperfect knowledge of the case, any personal sacrifice on the part of the poor Sergeant—a sacrifice, moreover, which I now feel would be—But we need not discuss again the painful question, or open it up; it is so far *res judicata*. But if you feel yourself free at our first meeting of Session to move the withdrawal of the whole case, for the several reasons I have hinted at, and which I shall more fully explain to the Session, and if our friend Mr. Menzies is disposed to second your motion, I won't object."

Mr. Smellie was thankful, for reasons known to the reader, to accept Mr. Porteous's suggestion. He perceived at once how his being the originator of of such a well-attested and official movement as was proposed, on behalf of the Sergeant, would be such a testimonial in his favour as would satisfy John Spence should the Sergeant die; and also have the same good results with all parties, as far as his own personal safety was concerned, should the Sergeant live.

With this understanding they parted.

Next day in church Mr. Porteous offered up a very earnest prayer for "one of our members, and an office-bearer of the congregation, who is in great distress", adding the petition that his invaluable life might be spared, and his wife comforted in her great distress. One might hear a pin fall while these words were being uttered; and never did the hearts of the congregation respond with a truer "Amen" to their minister's supplications.

At the next meeting of Session, Mr. Smellie brought forward his motion in most becoming and feeling terms. Indeed, no man could have appeared more feeling, more humble, or more charitable. Mr. Menzies seconded the motion with real good-will. Mr. Porteous then rose and expressed his regret that duty, principle, and faithfulness to all parties had compelled him to act as he had hitherto

done; but from the interview he had had with Mrs. Mercer, and the explanations she had given him,—from the scene of solemn and afflicting chastisement he had witnessed in the Sergeant's house, and from his desire always to meet, as far as possible, the wishes of the Kirk Session, he was disposed to recommend Mr. Smellie's motion to their most favourable consideration. He also added that his own feelings had been much touched by all he had seen and heard, and that it would be a gratification to himself to forget and forgive the past.

Let us not inquire whether Mr. Porteous was consistent with his former self, but be thankful rather if he was not. Harmony with the true implies discord with the false. Inconsistency with our past self, when in the wrong, is a condition of progress, and consistency with what is right can alone secure it.

The motion was received with equal surprise and pleasure by the minority. Mr. Gordon, in his own name, and in the name of those who had hitherto supported him, thanked their Moderator for the kind and Christian manner in which he had acted. All protests and appeals to the Presbytery were withdrawn, and a minute to that effect was prepared with care by the minister, in which his "principles" were not compromised, while his "feelings" were cordially expressed. And so the matter "took end" by the restoration of Adam to his position as an elder.

No one was happier at the conclusion come to by the Session than the watchmaker. He said:—that he took the leeberty o' just makin' a remark to the effect that he thocht they wad a' be the better o' what had happened; for it was his opinion that even the best Kirk coorts, like the best toon clocks, whiles gaed wrang. Stoor dried up the ile and stopped the wheels till they gaed ower slow and dreich, far ahint the richt time. An' sae it was that baith coorts and clocks were therefore a hantle the better o' bein' scoored. He was quite sure that the Session wad gang fine and smooth after this repair. He also thanked the minister for his motion, without insinuating that he had caused the dust, but rather giving him credit for having cleared it away, and for once more oiling the machine. In this sense the compliment was evidently understood and accepted by Mr. Porteous. Even the solemn Mr. Smellie smiled graciously.

CHAPTER XXX

"A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT"

It would only weary the reader to give a narrative of the events which happened

during the period of the Sergeant's tedious recovery. Dr. Scott watched by him many a night, feeling his pulse, and muttering to himself about the twitching of the muscles of the fingers, as indicating the state of the brain. Often did he warn Katie, when too hopeful, that "he was not yet out of the wood", and often encouraged her, when desponding, by assuring her that he "had seen brokener ships come to land". And just as the captain steers his ship in a hurricane, adjusting every rag of sail, and directing her carefully by the wind and compass, according to the laws of storms, so did the Doctor guide his patient. What a quantity of snuff he consumed during those long and dreary days! What whisky toddy— No! he had not once taken a single tumbler until the night when bending over the Sergeant he heard the joyful question put by him, "Is that you, Dr. Scott? What are you doing here?" and when, almost kissing Katie, he said, "He is oot o' the wood at last, thank God!"

"The Almighty bless you!" replied Katie, as she, too, bent over her husband and heard him once more in calmness and with love utter her name, remarking, "This has surely been a lang and sair fecht!" He then asked, "Hoo's wee Mary? Is the bird leevin'?" Seeing Jock Hall at his bedside, he looked at his wife as if questioning whether he was not still under the influence of a delirious dream. Katie interpreting his look said, "It was Jock that nursed ye a' through." "I'm yer nurse yet, Sergeant," said Jock, "an' ye maun haud yer tongue and sleep." The Sergeant gazed around him, turned his face away, and shutting his eyes passed from silent prayer into refreshing sleep.

One evening soon after this, Adam, pale and weak, was seated, propped up with pillows, in his old armchair near the window in his kitchen. The birds and the streams were singing their old songs, and the trees were in full glory, bending under the rich foliage of July; white fleecy clouds were sailing across the blue expanse of the sky; the sun in the west was displaying its glory, ever varying since creation; and all was calm and peaceful in the heavens above, and, as far as man could see, on the earth beneath.

Jock Hall was seated beside Adam, looking up with a smile into his face, and saying little except such expressions of happiness as, "I'm real prood to see you this length, Sergeant! Ye're lookin' unco' braw! It's the wifie did it, and maybe the Doctor, wi' that by ordinar' lassock, wee Mary;—but keep in your haun's, or ye'll get cauld and be as bad as ever." Jock never alluded to the noble part he himself had taken in the battle between life and death.

Katie was knitting on the other side of her husband. Why interpret her quiet thoughts of deepest peace? Little Mary sat on her chair by the fire.

This was the first day in which Adam, weak and tottering, had been brought, by the Doctor's advice, out of the sick room.

Mr. Porteous unexpectedly rapped at the door, and, on being admitted,

gazed with a kindly expression on the group before him. Approaching them he shook hands with each, not omitting even Jock Hall, and then sat down. After saying a few suitable words of comfort and of thanksgiving, he remarked, pointing to Jock, that "he was snatched as a brand from the burning". Jock, as he bent down, and counted his fingers, replied that the minister "wasna maybe far wrang. It was him that did it"; but added, as he pointed his thumb over his shoulder, "an' though he wasna frichted for the lowe, I'm thinkin' he maybe got his fingers burned takin' me oot o't."

"Eh, Mr. Porteous," said Katie, "ye dinna ken what the puir fallow has been tae us a' in our affliction! As lang as I leeve I'll never forget--"

"Assure's I'm leevin'," interrupted Jock, "I'll rin oot the hoose if ye gang on that way. It's really makin' a fule o' a bodie." And Jock seemed thoroughly annoyed.

Katie only smiled, and looking at him said, "Ye're a guid, kind cratur, Jock."

"Amen," said Adam.

After a minute of silence, Mr. Porteous cleared his throat and said, "I am glad to tell you, Mr. Mercer, that the Session have unanimously restored you to the office of elder."

The Sergeant started, and looked puzzled and pained, as if remembering "a dream within a dream".

"Unanimously and heartily," continued Mr. Porteous; "and when you are better, we shall talk over this business as friends, though it need never be mentioned more. Hitherto, in your weakness, I requested those who could have communicated the news to you not to do so, in case it might agitate you: besides, I wished to have the pleasure of telling it to you myself. I shall say no more, except that I give you full credit for acting up to your light, or, let me say, according to the feelings of your kind heart, which I respect. Let me give you the right hand of fellowship."

A few quiet drops trickled down Adam's pale cheek, as in silence he stretched out his feeble and trembling hand, accepting that of his minister. The minister grasped it cordially, and then gazed up to the roof, his shaggy eyebrows working up and down as if they were pumping tears out of his eyes, and sending them back again to his heart. Katie sat with covered face, not in sorrow as of yore, but in gratitude too deep for words.

"Will ye tak' a snuff, sir?" said Jock Hall, as with flushed face he offered his tin box to the minister. "When I fish the Eastwater, I'll sen' ye as bonnie a basketfu' as ever ye seed, for yer kindness to the Sergeant; and ye needna wunner muckle if ye see me in the kirk wi' him sune."

The starling, for some unaccountable reason, was hopping from spar to spar of his cage, as if leaping for a wager.

Mary, attracted by the bird, and supposing him to be hungry, mounted a chair, and noiselessly opened the door of the cage. But in her eagerness and suppressed excitement she forgot the food. As she descended for it, the starling found the door open, and stood at it for a moment bowing to the company. He then flew out, and, lighting on the shoulder of the Sergeant, looked round the happy group, fluttered his feathers, gazed on the minister steadily, and uttered in his clearest tones, "I'm Charlie's bairn—'A man's a man for a' that!"

* * * * *

Perhaps some of the readers of this village story, in their summer holidays, may have fished the streams flowing through the wide domain of Castle Bennock, under the guidance of the sedate yet original underkeeper, John Hall; and may have "put up" at the neat and comfortable country inn, the "Bennock Arms", kept by John Spence and his comely wife Mary Semple—the one working the farm, and the other managing the house and her numerous and happy family. If so, they cannot fail to have noticed the glass case in the parlour, enclosing a stuffed Starling, with this inscription under it—

"I'M CHARLIE'S BAIRN".

* * * * *

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